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Source: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Nov., 2001), pp. 329-348

Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25188176>

Accessed: 26-04-2016 14:16 UTC

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The Ethnogenesis of the Crimean Tatars.

An Historical Reinterpretation

BRIAN GLYN WILLIAMS

With the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe the west has been confronted with the existence of several, little-understood Muslim ethnic groups in this region whose contested histories can be traced back to the Ottoman period and beyond. Previously overlooked Muslim ethnies, such as the Bulgarian Turks, Bosniaks, Pomaks, Kosovars, Chechens, and Crimean Tatars, have begun to receive considerable attention from both western scholars and the general public. Much of the interest revolves around the question of the identity of these Muslim communities and the history of their formation as distinct ethnic groups. The history of the formation of these groups has in many cases been contested terrain as Bulgarian authorities, for example, attempted in the 1980s to prove that the Bulgarian Turks were actually “Turkified Bulgarians”, as the Greek government sought to demonstrate that the Pomaks (Slavic Muslims) were actually Islamicized Greeks, and as Bosniaks were labelled “Turks” by their Serbian nationalist foes in spite of their Slavic background.

This sort of debate has also swirled around the issue of the ethnic identity of one of Europe’s most misunderstood Muslim ethnic groups, the Crimean Tatars. While the Crimean Tatars (who were exiled *in toto* from their homeland from 1944–1989 by Stalin) see themselves as the indigenous people (*korennoi narod*) of their cherished peninsular homeland, with origins traceable to the pre-Mongol period, they have long been portrayed in western and Soviet sources as thirteenth-century “Mongol invaders”.

In his work entitled *Essays on the History of the Crimea* (*Ocherkii po Istorii Kryma*), P. N. Nadinskii claims “the Crimea had been reduced to a predatory nest acting under the wings of the Turkish emperor”.¹ Nadinskii then goes on obliquely to refute the Crimean Tatars’ claims to legitimate statehood and civilized socio-economic activity. According to Nadinskii, “The Crimean Tatars applied themselves to peaceful economic activity in small numbers and unwillingly. The majority of them engaged in endless wars and predatory raids with the aim of robbing and acquiring profit”.²

For much of their history the Crimean Tatars were, like Muslims and nomads, seen as Christian Europe’s “Other” and were associated with both the dreaded Mongol nomads of Chingis Khan and the invading armies of the Ottoman Sultans with whom the Crimean Tatars were allied. Little effort has been made to analyze critically this image of the

¹ P. N. Nadinskii, *Ocherkii po Istorii Kryma* (Simferopol, 1951), vol. 1, p. 78.

² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Crimean Tatar people and most historical accounts simply trace the ethnogenesis of the Crimean Tatars to the thirteenth-century nomadic Mongol invaders of Eastern Europe.

This study aims to shed some new light on the complex, pre-Mongol ethnic and cultural origins of the Crimean Tatars and to present a reinterpretation of this people who have for so long been passed off as nomadic pillagers and the perpetual threat to East European agrarian civilization.

Origins. The Ancient Peoples of the Southern Crimea

It can be argued that the Crimean Tatars are Europe's oldest Turkic ethnies but this people did not develop a modern national identity until the Soviet period. As part of their vast policy of nation-building among ethno-national groups in the USSR during the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviets constructed a theoretically homogenous Crimean Tatar that would take its place in the Socialist "friendships of peoples" (*druzhba narodov*). At this time a Cyrillic alphabet was created for the Crimean Tatars. Crimean Tatar culture (or more accurately a Sovietized version of Crimean Tatar culture) was sponsored in the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and the geographic, linguistic and ethnic differences which had long separated several Crimean Tatar sub-ethnies in the Crimean peninsula began to break down. This homogenizing process was accelerated by the deportation of the entire Crimean Tatar people to Central Asia in 1944. The dispersal of the Crimean Tatar people throughout this distant region led to the break down of many of the regionally-based customs, dialects and taboos that had once divided this heterogeneous people in their homeland. This is best seen in the Crimean Tatars' contemporary hybrid language which is a mixture of previously distinct dialects from the northern and southern Crimea known as the *Orta Yol* (Middle Road).

While the Crimean Tatars of today are comparatively homogenous as a result of their experience during the Soviet period, they actually have a complex ethno-history and were a divided people for centuries. Nowhere is this complexity more visible than in the Crimean Tatars' language which contains elements of both Oghuz Turkic and Kipçak Turkic. Traditionally Crimean Tatars from the northern steppes of the Crimea, known as Nogais or Çöl Halqi (the Steppe People), spoke a pure Kipçak language known as Nogayli which is closely related to Kazakh. Those in the central regions spoke a hybrid language which contained a *melange* of words from both Kipçak Turkic and Oghuz Turkic. Crimean Tatars hailing from the Crimea's rugged southern coast spoke a language known as Qrim Tatar which was purely Oghuz and related to Osmanli (Ottoman).³ The reasons for this complexity lie in the Crimea's unique geography and complex history of settlement.

The northern two thirds of the Crimean peninsula is an extension of the Eurasian steppe and nomadic groups migrating from the East, such as the Scythians, Sarmatians, Huns, Khazars, Pechenegs, Kipçaks (Polovtsians in Russian sources and Cumans in Hungarian

³ S. R. Izidinova, *Iazyki Mira. Tiurkski Iazyki* (Bishkek, 1997), pp. 298–99. Gerhard Doefler actually divides the Crimean Tatar language up into four distinct dialects: Southern Crimean Ottoman, Central Crimean Tatar (found around the Crimean Khanate's capital of Bahçesaray), Northwestern Crimean Tatar and Crimean Nogai. Gerhard Doefler, "Das Krimtatarische", *Philologiae Turicae Fundamenta*, vol. 1, ed. J. Deny et. al. (Wiesbaden, 1959), p. 369.

sources) and Mongols found that it offered excellent pasturage for their herds. As the Crimean plain extends southward, however, it encounters the foothills and mountains of the southern Crimea and this area was less hospitable to the nomads' pastoral way of life. To the steppe herders, who cherished the wide open spaces of the Eurasian plain, the valleys and rugged crags of the southern mountain chain, which makes up a third of the Crimean peninsula, presented a foreboding obstacle. As in the Caucasus mountains, the inhabitants of this highland region wisely avoided open combat with the powerful steppe riders and instead chose to defend themselves from the ramparts of impregnable mountain fortresses.

The Crimean mountain chain's role in Crimean history can thus be compared to that of the Caucasus range which has been described as a "preserve of nations". Myriad ancient tribes and ethnic groups have sought refuge in the Caucasus chain's inaccessible valleys and highland fastness and, in some areas of the Caucasus, every valley is inhabited by a different ethno-linguistic group. For much of its history, this situation predominated in the Crimea as well. The thirteenth-century traveller to the Crimea, Friar William of Rubruck wrote of this area "There are lofty promontories along the sea coast from Kherson (Western Crimea) as far as the mouth of the Tanais (Sea of Azov), and between Kerson and Soldaia (Sudak) lie the Forty Settlements, of which nearly every one has its own dialect: the population includes many Goths, whose language is Germanic".⁴ While this source may have been referring to the mountain fortress known in Tatar as Kirk Yer (Forty Places), his description of the linguistic diversity of this region was certainly intentional.

Much of this diversity came from the fact that nomadic tribes of the steppe were forced to flee into the south Crimean mountains by stronger nomadic groups in search of better pastures. Those who fled into the mountains, such as the Iranian Scythians, often blended with the region's older inhabitants. Like many steppe alliances to come, the Scythians were defeated by a more powerful nomadic group pushing westward in search of grazing lands, the Sarmatians. The Iranian Sarmatians were in turn scattered by the Germanic Goths who were themselves routed by the seemingly invincible Huns.

As was so often the case in the sanguinary struggles for the plains on the edge of Europe, the Huns propelled the defeated Gothic tribes westward where they poured over the weakened defences of the Roman empire and destroyed Roman power in the West. A detached remnant of the Ostrogoths (Eastern Goths), however, migrated southward into the mountains of the Crimea where they intermingled with the remnants of earlier Scythian and Sarmatian tribes (most notably the Sarmatian tribe known as the Alans) who had settled in this region after being forced off the steppe.⁵ From their mountain strongholds, such as Mangup in the south-western Crimea, the Crimean Goths dominated the southern Crimea (a land known in contemporary western sources as *Gothia Maritime*) for a millennium. While the masters of the Crimean plains changed at a bewildering rate (the Huns were followed by Turkic confederations such as the Kok Turks, Khazars, Black Bulgars, and finally the Kipçaks), the Gothic presence in the Crimean mountains remained constant. It was only when the Turkic Kipçak nomads gained control of Crimean plain in

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁵ T. N. Vysotskaia, *Pozdnie Skify v Iugo-Zapadnom Krymu* (Kiev, 1972), pp. 187–88.

the 1000s that the situation on the Western steppe, henceforth known as the *Desht-i Kipçak* (Kipçak Steppe), stabilized.

The Peoples of the South Crimean Coast, the Greeks, Italians, and Armenians

As powerful as the new masters of the Crimean plains were, the Turkic Kipçak nomads exerted very little cultural influence on the mountain Goths who were more profoundly affected by events on the Crimea's southern coast. The dominant influence in this region was exerted by the Greeks who had controlled this warm southern littoral, known to the Greeks as the "*Climata*" since the time of Homer. Seafaring Greeks appeared as colonists on the northern shores of the *Pontus* (Greek "Black Sea") including the south shore of the Crimea during the seventh century BC.⁶ Over the centuries the Greek settlers exerted a tremendous social and cultural influence on their "barbarian" highland neighbours such as the Taurii and Cimmerians (of whom we know very little), the Scythians, Sarmatians and finally the Goths.

From the sixth century onward, the orthodox Christianity of the Byzantine Greek rulers, who gained control of the southern coast, and the Greek language, which was so interwoven in the Eastern orthodox rituals, began to spread among the Goths of the neighbouring mountains. Many grecified, orthodox Goths in fact found themselves under Byzantine control as the expansionist Byzantine emperor Justinian (527–565) and his successors, built coastal fortresses in such towns as Alushton (contemporary Alushta), Gorzuvita (Gurzuf), Bosphoro (Kerch) and Cherson (Balaklava vicinity), to strengthen their control of this strategic region.

In the tenth century, the pagan Russians established a principality at the foot of the Caucasus on the Taman peninsula which faced the Crimea across the narrow straits of Kerch. From this principality, known as Tmutarkhan, the Russians exerted considerable influence on the eastern Crimea (Kerch peninsula) for over a century.⁷ The influence was not, however, one sided. After suppressing a revolt in Byzantine Anatolia, the Russian Grand Prince Vladimir converted to orthodox Christianity in the Crimean city of Cherson after receiving Emperor Basil II's daughter in marriage in 988. The Crimean peninsula has, since this time, had great historical significance for the Christian Russians who followed their ruler's lead in converting to the Eastern rite.

While it is debatable whether the Slavs strongly altered the culture or ethnic makeup of the Crimea during the Middle Ages, the impact of the Greek element on the character of the Crimean population is incontestable. During this period, the southern coast of the Crimea was settled heavily by Greeks from Anatolia seeking religious and political freedom (particularly during the Iconoclast period).⁸ While it would be misleading to include the Crimea in a tenth century map of the Kievan Rus state, the Crimean littoral was an integral part of the Byzantine Greek world for much of the early Medieval period. Cities such as

⁶ Elisaveta Todorova, "The Greeks in the Black Sea Trade During the Late Medieval Period", *Etudes Balkaniques*, III (1992), p. 45.

⁷ George Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia* (New Haven, 1948), p. 37.

⁸ I. A. Baranov, "O Vosstanii Ioanna Gotskogo", *Feodal'naiia Tavrika*, ed. S. N. Bibikov (Kiev, 1974), pp. 151–62, p. 153.

Cherson were in fact directly administered from Constantinople as *themes* (provinces).⁹ Byzantine-Greek influence on the Crimea's southern littoral indeed appeared to be unshakable for half a millennium as Constantinople's frontier soldiers held the lines against a succession of heathen neighbours.

The death knell for Byzantine political influence on the Crimea's southern coast was not in fact sounded by the restless heathen tribes of the Pontic interior, but by fellow Christians from the lands of the Catholic west. In 1204 western Crusaders on their way to fight the infidels in the Holy Land, diverted their efforts to the more profitable task of sacking the capital of the eastern orthodox "heretics", Constantinople. With the collapse of Byzantine authority in the Crimean south, western merchants from the Republic of Venice and Commune of Genoa began to compete for control of the lucrative Black Sea trade.¹⁰ Allying themselves variously with both the western Latin rulers of the conquered capital of Constantinople and the Byzantine emperors who sought to regain control of their former capital, the Italian trading empires gradually gained control of Byzantium's wealthy *entrepôts* on the shores of the Black Sea.¹¹ From walled fortress cities, such as the Venetian port Sudak, and the Genoese port of Kaffa (modern Feodosiia), Lupico (modern Alupka) and Cembalo (Balaklava), the feuding Italians ruled over the Crimea's Greek coastal population and maintained prosperous trading relations with the tribes of the Black Sea hinterland.¹²

For over two hundred years, the Genoese (who eventually gained predominance in the region) and their weaker Venetian rivals maintained a precarious hold over one of the world's first colonial empires and both fought and traded with the neighbouring Orthodox Goths of the mountains and nomadic Kipçak tribes of the Crimea's interior plains.¹³

This hold was not initially threatened when the Mongols gained ascendancy over the Kipçaks of the northern plains. In the 1230s the Mongol armies of Batu Khan (which were largely Turkic in their ethnic makeup) rolled westward and absorbed the older Kipçak tribes of the southern Ukraine and north Crimean plain. As the Mongol ruling strata intermarried with the dominant Turkic-Kipçak element and converted to Islam, the ethnonym Tatar was given to this nomadic people (it is not known how the name of a defeated Mongol tribe, the Tatars, made its way to the western steppes at this time). By the mid-1300s the Islamicized, Kipçak-Turkic speaking Tatar nomads of the steppe had completed their ethnogenesis, and Tatar khanates ruled by descendants of Chingis Khan were formed in Astrakhan and Kazan on the Volga river and the Crimea by the mid 1400s.

Despite the occasional instance of warfare with the neighbouring Kipçak-Tatar nomads, for over two hundred years the Crimean Italians ruled over a polyglot population of Greek farmers, Greco-Gothic mountain shepherds and an increasingly large Armenian population. With the collapse of the Armenian kingdom in Eastern Anatolia under the eleventh-century assaults of the Seljuk Turks, Armenian migrants began to arrive on the shores of

⁹ Dimitri Obolensky, *Byzantium and the Slavs* (New York, 1994), p. 26.

¹⁰ Elie de La Primaudie, *Études sur le Commerce au Moyen Âge. Histoire du Commerce de la Mer Noire et Colonies Génoises de la Crimée* (Paris, 1848), pp. 5–9.

¹¹ *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, vol. 35 (1937), p. 306.

¹² V. V. Badian, "Torgovlia Kaffy v XII–XV vv", *Feodalnaia Tavrika*, ed. S. N. Bibikov (Kiev, 1973), pp. 174–89.

¹³ John Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 49.

the Crimean peninsula seeking refuge.¹⁴ By the 1400s two thirds of the great Genoese emporium on the Crimea's southern coast, Kaffa, for example, were Armenian and the Crimean peninsula was known in various sources from the period as "Armenia Maritime" or "Armenia Magna".¹⁵ Armenian settlers in the Crimea built monasteries, tilled the soil and prospered under Italian rule and, in the process, became an important ethnic component of the south Crimean shore.

The Rise of the Tatar-Ottoman Alliance

The *modus vivendi* between the ruling coastal Italians and the Tatars of the plains who gradually gained ascendancy in the neighbouring mountain regions began to come apart in the early fifteenth century. By the 1400s the Tatar state known as the Great Horde which ruled the lands to the north of the Italian coast, had lost its cohesion as the great Tatar clans fought for dominance and periphery regions, such as the Crimean peninsula, began to break away from the Great Horde's central control. By the 1430s the powerful Crimean Tatar "clans" of the Crimea, in particular the Barin, Argin, Şirin and Kıpçak tribes, had begun to contemplate separation from the declining Great Horde. In order to strengthen their independence, however, the clan *beys* (chieftains) of the Crimea felt obliged to invite an *ak söyük* ("white bone" i.e. a royal descendant of Chingis Khan) to rule over them. An invitation was thus made to a failed contender for the throne of the Golden Horde living in Lithuania, (1443–1460) Giray, to come and rule over the Crimean *yurt* (realm).¹⁶

Hajji Giray Khan sought to gain control of the wealthy coastal settlements of the Genoese to strengthen the new state's position *vis-à-vis* the Great Horde. In particular, he wished to use the wealth of the Genoese port of Kaffa to lure powerful nomadic tribes from the steppes north of the Crimea to his state (these nomads were known by the fourteenth century as Nogais). For the Crimean Tatars, the walls of Kaffa, however, presented an insurmountable obstacle, as the Tatars lacked the siege technology to breach the Italians' formidable defences.

As the Italians tenaciously held on to their colonies, they attempted to play one Tatar political party against another during the frequent civil wars among this people. During one such conflict following the untimely death of Khan Hajji Giray, one party requested the assistance of the Ottoman empire (which was at that time rapidly expanding in the Christian Balkans) against the meddlesome Genoese. It was only natural that the Turkic-Muslim Tatars of the Crimea turned to the most powerful military power in Eastern Europe at this time, the rising empire of the Muslim, Ottoman Turks for assistance in their internal struggles with the still-powerful Italians. The reigning Ottoman Sultan, Fetih Mehemet (Mohammed "The Conqueror") had shown the power of the Ottomans' newly established artillery corps in his conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and the ambitious

¹⁴ Berthold Spuler, "Kirim", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, IV. New Ed., ed. by Bernard Lewis et. al. (Leiden, 1978), p. 136. pp. 136–43.

¹⁵ A. Iakobson, *Krym v Srednie Veka* (Moscow, 1973) p. 112.

¹⁶ Beatrice Forbes Manz, "The Clans of the Crimean Khanate", *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, II and III (1978), pp. 282–309. Uli Schamiloglu, "The Qaraçi Beys of the Later Golden Horde: Notes on the Organization of the Mongol World Empire", *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, IV (1984), pp. 283–99.

Sultan was eager to use his monstrous bombards against the remnants of Christian power in the Black Sea region.

In 1475, the Ottoman *Sadrâzam* (Grand Vizier) himself, Gedik Ahmet Pasha, sailed with a fleet of three hundred vessels to the Crimea to eradicate the last stubborn foothold of Italian colonial authority in the northern Black Sea and to intervene in the succession struggle between several of Hâjî Giray's sons. After disembarking on the shores of the Crimea with Tatar assistance, Gedik Ahmet lost little time in attacking the Christian coastal strongholds. One after another the Italian cities' outdated defences crumbled before the onslaught of the *Vezir*'s powerful new cannons. The majority of the Genoese ruling class were forcefully transferred to Istanbul but many fled to the lands of the Crimean Khan, who had spent much of his life in Caffa.¹⁷ After conquering the Genoese strongholds and deporting the Italian ruling class, the Turkish invaders directly annexed the conquered lands on the southern shore (and other strategic sites on the Crimea's western coast such as the fortresses of Yeni Kale and Kerch) into the Ottoman empire. The embryonic Khanate of the Crimean Giray dynasty henceforth found itself sharing the Crimea with a powerful new neighbour, the Ottoman empire.

In the south-western mountains of the Crimea, the Greco-Gothic dynasty that had long ruled from the walled mountain plateau city of Mangup was not immune to the Sultan's cannons either and this last vestige of the ancient Ostrogoth people also fell to the powerful Ottoman invaders by 1478. Within a short time the green banner of Islam flew over the entire Crimean peninsula as the allied Tatars and Turks held sway over the coast, southern mountains and northern plains of the peninsula. An Ottoman scribe recorded the event writing "In the name of the Sultans the prayer of Islam was recited (in Mangup); so that the house of the infidel became the house of Islam".¹⁸ For the first time in recorded history a sense of political unity prevailed over the disparate lands of the Crimean peninsula as the dominant Turkic Muslims spread their power over the northern plains, the mountains and the southern littoral.

The Tatarization of the Older Crimean Races

The parallel processes of Turkification and Islamization of the ethnically diverse Crimean peoples, which had begun centuries earlier, accelerated with the establishment of Turco-Tatar authority over this divided land. The Greeks, Armenians, and Turkish conquerors of the coast; Goths of the mountains; and Kıpçak Tatars of the plains soon began the process of blending and adapting Islam and this led to the formation of the Crimean Tatar ethnîe. As in the conquered lands of the Ottoman provinces inhabited by Balkan Christian peoples, such as the Serbs and Bulgarians, little pressure, however, was exerted on the Christian Armenian, Greek and Greco-Gothic populations of the Crimea to convert to Islam. Over the succeeding centuries, however, whole villages in the Crimean mountains and on the Ottoman coastal province converted to Islam for a variety of reasons.

In his demographic survey of the Ottoman coastal province which had been established

¹⁷ Halil İnalcık, *Sources and Studies on the Ottoman Black Sea. The Customs Register of Caffa, 1487–1490*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), p. 150.

¹⁸ Alexander Vasiliev, *The Goths in the Crimea* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), p. 255.

on the Crimea's protected southern littoral, Alan Fisher writes, "As there is no indication of a policy of forced conversion (in fact, in the sixteenth century the Ottomans found conversion to Islam an inconvenience because Muslims paid fewer and lighter taxes than did non-Muslims), one can presume that economic and social pressures combined to make conversion attractive."¹⁹

As mentioned previously, Greek religious dissidents from Anatolia had previously migrated to the Crimean littoral to escape religious persecution in Anatolia (especially during the Iconoclast epoch). This dissident element may have been attracted to Islam for the same reason the Bosnian Bogomil heretics converted to Islam at this time . . . to escape the oppression of their Christian co-religionists.

Ottoman *defters* (bureaucratic records) point to an increase in the Muslim population of the Crimea during the sixteenth century. According to Giles Veinstein, the percentage of Muslims in the *Sancak* of Kefe (i.e. the Turkish coastal province of Kaffa, known by its Turkish name Kefe) increased from 20 percent to 47 percent from the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Selim I to that of his successor Suleiman (first half of the sixteenth century).²⁰ The increase in the Muslim population of the coast, in part, reflects the movement of Muslims to the Ottoman empire's new Crimean province from Anatolia (a process that had actually begun during the Seljuk era) but it is also indicative of growing conversion to Islam by the indigenous Greek and Armenian populations of the Ottoman coastal province.²¹ The number of Armenians who converted and became registered as "sons of Abdullah" (Abdullah, signifying servant or convert of Allah) was especially marked at this time.²²

This process was paralleled by the earlier conversion of Greco-Goths in the Crimean mountains who began to convert to Islam and become "Tatars" when the Tatars began to settle in the Crimean highlands. In his history of the Crimean Goths, Alexander Vasiliev writes, "Towards the end of the thirteenth century many peoples in the Crimea including the Goths had become Tatarized." This historian goes on to state that, as early as the mid-thirteenth century, "The Goths were so Tatarized that they could not be readily distinguished from the Tatars".²³ By the time of the Ottoman conquest of the Gothic citadel of Mangup in 1475, many of the previously Orthodox mountain Goths had in effect changed their ethnicity by joining the Tatar ethno-religious community. In this fashion the last traces of the Goths disappeared and went into the making of a new Crimean Islamic people which emerged during the period of the Crimean Khanate (1440–1783).

The "Tats" of the Crimea

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, German historians and nationalists (among them Adolf Hitler) rediscovered the lost history of their Gothic ancestors in the

¹⁹ Alan Fisher, "The Ottoman Crimea in the Sixteenth Century", *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, V (1981), p. 141.

²⁰ Giles Veinstein, "From Italians to Ottomans: The Case of the Northern Black Sea Coast in the Sixteenth Century", *Mediterranean Historical Review*, I (1986), pp. 221–38.

²¹ Ibrahim Kafesoglu, *A History of the Seljuks*, ed. Gary Leiser (Carbondale, 1988), p. 73.

²² Giles Veinstein, "La Population du sud de la Crimée au debut de la domination Ottomane", *Sources and Studies on the Ottoman Black Sea. The Customs Register of Caffa, 1487–1490*, vol. 1, ed. Halil Inalcik (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), p. 150.

²³ Vasiliev, *The Goths*, *op. cit.*, no. 16, pp. 175–76.

Crimean peninsula and there was much speculation concerning the fate of this “lost Aryan tribe”. There is of course no mystery concerning the fate of this eastern branch of the great medieval Gothic migrations. Nineteenth-century Russian and German visitors to the Tatar villages in the shadow of Gothic mountain fortress of Mangup Kale (Tatar, “Mangup Castle”), found their descendants living there among the Tatars. A German source from 1806 points out that the Crimean Tatars of this mountainous region were aware of their Christian origins.²⁴ A nineteenth-century Russian visitor to the Gothic region in the south-western mountains was convinced that, “In all probability their (the Goths) descendants are the Tatars of a series of villages in the Crimea who are sharply delineated from the inhabitants of neighbouring villages by their tall height and other features characteristic of the Scandinavians.”²⁵ More recent works, such as Michel Kazanski’s history of the Goths point out that “In all probability the remnants of the Crimean Goths remain in the ‘Turkic’ base of the Tatar population.”²⁶ Interestingly enough, the contemporary Crimean Tatars see themselves as the descendants of “the Circassians, Goths, ancient Greeks, Italians and Armenians” and do not identify with the Mongols.²⁷

There seems to be little doubt that the mountain Goths did in fact convert to Islam and become “Tatars”, although they were only gradually accepted by the Kıpçak-Tatar nomadic population of the steppe as fellow Muslims. Hans Schiltberger, a Bavarian slave who visited this region in 1396, claimed that the neighbouring Tatars of the plains used the derisive term “Tat” (Thatt) to describe their Islamized Goth and coastal neighbours.²⁸ According to P. Brunn, the term Tat signified a religious “renegade” or “a conquered race” in the local Turkic dialect and “the Crimean Tatars applied the contemptuous term of Tadd to the Tatars of the south coast because they did not consider them of pure descent, in consequence of the intercourse of their ancestors with the Greeks and Genoese”.²⁹ This term has the same root as the pejorative ethnonym “Tat” used by the Turks of the Caucasus to describe earlier non-Turkic populations of this region such as the Jewish Mountain Tats. This term also appeared in Central Asia and was used by nomadic Turks to refer to the sedentary Iranian peoples of this region (i.e. the Tajiks).

In his analysis of the Crimean Tats’ ancestry, Edmond Schutz writes, “The anthropological differences between the Tatars and Tats is conspicuous. The Tatars (proper) are usually round faced, short and dark, among the Tats prevail two types: the most characteristic feature of many of them is their high stature, fair hair and blue eyes”.³⁰ This source points out that the presence of these Caucasoid features among these Tatars, who are erroneously stereotyped as Mongoloid, lay in this Tatar sub-group’s history:

The facts behind their specific anthropological character which sharply distinguishes them from the Tatar people should be looked for in their earlier history in the Crimea. In light of the historical and geographic findings described so far, the Baidar and Icel Tats (Tats from two

²⁴ V. E. Vozgirin, *Istoricheskie Sud'by Krymskikh Tatar* (Moscow, 1992), p. 93.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁶ Michel Kazinski, *Les Goths Ier-VIe Apres J.-C.* (Paris, 1991), p. 124.

²⁷ Etham Feyzi Gozaydin, *Kirim. Kirim. Turklerinin Yerlesme ve Gocmeleri* (Istanbul, 1948), p. 30.

²⁸ J. Buchan Telfer, *The Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger* (London, 1879), pp. 50, 176.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

³⁰ Edmond Schutz, “The Tat People in the Crimea”, *Acta Orientalia, Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, XXXI (1977), p. 96.

valleys in the south-west Crimea) may be classified as an ethnical mixture of the ancient Gothic and Alan population who adopted the language of the ruling class of the local Tatar tribe. This conclusion would solve the problem of the Nordic and Iranian traits of the Tats.³¹

The Soviet anthropologist, B. Kuftin mentions that, with the Turkification and Islamization of the “Greek-aborigines”, “Greco-Goths” and “a portion of the Armenians”, the cultural and linguistic differences between these people and the Tatars lessened.³² In the process, these ancient peoples began to amalgamate and a distinctly *Crimean* version of the “Tatar” ethnic group came into being on the Crimean peninsula that differed in many ways from the Tatar populations of the Tatar Khanates of Kazan, Astrakhan and the pure Tatar nomads of the steppes of the Ukraine and northern Caucasus, known as Nogais. Just as the Bosniaks and Pomaks (Muslims ethnic groups with Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian origins) were forged in the Balkans when the indigenous Slavs converted to Islam during four centuries of Ottoman rule (a process known among the Balkan Christians as “turning Turk”), a new ethnîe was formed on the soil of the Crimea when the older Greek, Gothic, Armenian and Italian Christian populations converted to Islam and “turned Tatar”.³³ One must not, however, make the mistake of seeing the Tatars formed in the Crimean peninsula as a homogenous ethnic group. The sub-ethnic differences in lifestyle, history, dialect, physiognomy, and economic activity between the Tat-Tatars of the coast and mountains and the Kipçak Tatars of the plains (known as Nogais by the fifteenth century) remained right up until the twentieth century. In my interviews with Crimean Tatars in the Crimea and Uzbekistan in 1997, I was told by several Crimean Tatars that Tat-Tatars from the south were often forbidden from marrying Nogai-Tatars from the coast as late as the 1944 deportation of this nation!³⁴

With their light-skinned, European features and an economy based on mountain, step-terracing, and vertical transhumant sheep herding, the mountain Tat-Tatars’ way of life differed, considerably from that of the nomadic Tatar-Nogai cattle herders who roamed the open plains of the northern steppe lands of the Crimea. The Nogais of the north Crimean plains and steppes of the southern Ukraine can be delineated as a separate ethnîe from the Tats to the south. The nomadic Nogais appear to have adapted their ethnonym from Emir Nogai, a powerful Tatar commander who played the role of throne-maker in the Great Horde from 1280–1299.

The name Nogai (Mongol, “dog”) refers to a Mongol totem and the Nogai were Kipçakized Mongols from the great Mongol Mangit clan. Roaming in two vast hordes that could field armies of up to 200 000 riders, the Nogais dominated the Kipçak steppes from the Yaik-Volga Mesopotamia to the Danube estuary for most of the fifteenth and sixteenth

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

³² B. Kuftin, “Iuzhnoberezhnye Tatars Kryma”, *Zabveniiu ne Podlezhit* (Kazan, 1992), p. 241.

³³ Vatro Murvar, *Nation and Religion in Central Europe and the Western Balkans-The Muslims in Bosnia, Hercegovina and Sandzak: A Sociological Analysis* (Brookfield, Wisconsin, 1989), p. 12.

³⁴ The deportation of the Crimean Tatars and their subsequent exile in Central Asia had a homogenizing effect and sub-ethnic distinctions based on dialect, physiognomy and geography became irrelevant to the scattered Tatars in a short period. For an analysis of this process see: Brian Williams, “The Crimean Tatar Exile in Central Asia. A Case Study in Group Destruction and Survival”, *Central Asian Survey*, XVII, 2 (1998); Brian Williams, “A Community Reimagined: The Role of ‘Homeland’ in the Forging of National Identity”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, XVII, 2 (1997), and *A Homeland Lost: Migration, the Diaspora Experience and the Forging of National Identity* (Leiden, 2000).

centuries. The Nogai confederations were in fact so powerful that they were able to defeat and kill the Crimean Khan Mehemed Giray (1515–23) when his expansion beyond the Crimea was perceived as a threat to their independence.³⁵ By the seventeenth century the Nogai hordes had, however, come under pressure from the Buddhist Dzungar Mongols and encroaching Cossacks and had begun to enter the Crimea seeking protection from the Crimean Khan and his powerful Ottoman suzerain. The Nogais in this way became a vital ethnic component in the Crimea but they tended to be looked down upon by the Tatars of the Crimea's south who spoke a more Oghuz-dominated language.

While the language of the coastal Tatars was, after the 1475 Ottoman conquest, Turkish derived from the Oghuz branch of the Turkic language, the language of the mountain Tats was, however, strongly influenced by the Kipçak branch of Turkic spoken by the Nogai nomads of the Crimean steppe and was considered uncouth to those Tats living on the coast. In addition, the inhabitants of the Ottoman coastal province, which was centred on the provincial capital of Kefe (Kaffa), adopted the high Ottoman culture of Turkish Anatolia as waves of Turks settled in this region (especially during the Jelali rebellion which devastated Anatolia in the seventeenth century).

The Islamized shore inhabitants, who maintained many of their ancient Greek and Armenian traditions and agricultural practices, gradually came to be known to the mountain Tats and nomadic Nogais as Yaliboyu (Coastal Dweller) Tats, a term that distinguished them from the neighbouring Tatar groups. Although the Yaliboyu Tatars (or Yaliboyu Tats) did contribute to the ethnic component of the developing Crimean Tatar nation, they sustained the Greek, Italian and Armenian complexions and much of the culture of their ancient seafaring ancestors who had inhabited these shores since the dawn of history.

The Crimean Tatars thus can be seen as a heterogeneous ethnic group having its roots in the deepest Crimean antiquity and claiming descent from a vast array of earlier ethno-religious groups who occupied the diverse terrains of the Crimean peninsula. Indeed the process of breaking down the older geographic identities among the Crimean Tatars had not yet been completed when the Crimean Tatars were torn from their homeland in 1944, but the foundation for a wider sense of Crimean Tatar group identification had been laid with the Islamification of this people in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

An Analysis of the Culture of the Crimean Tats

As becomes apparent a distinct sub-ethnie known as the Tats came into being in the south Crimean mountains and on the protected southern coast from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. Although Muslim, this sub-ethnie did not have much else in common with the Tatar nomads who ranged the Crimea's northern plains and adjacent steppelands on the Ukrainian mainland. While the Kipçak-Tatar nomads of the plains (i.e. Nogais) were known for their plundering and slave raiding into the lands of the neighbouring Ukrainians, Poles, Moldavians and Circassians, the sedentary population of the Crimea's south could not be described as "wolves of the steppe".

³⁵ Peter Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples* (Weisbaden, 1992), pp. 324–28.

Despite the fact that there are no statistics from the Crimean Khanate dealing with this pre-modern state's population, it becomes obvious that the arid, sparsely inhabited nomadic steppe of the Crimea contained a smaller population than the southern coastal mountains and shore of the peninsula. The southern region has been described as "a unique cradle for the formation of a native ethnos."³⁶

The Crimean Tatars are correct in their claims that they were forged in the southern mountains, for it was the settled Crimean Tatars of the mountains, derisively known as Tats by the proud nomadic Nogai-Tatars of the Crimean plain, who provided the Khanate with the majority of its artisans, bureaucrats, farmers and, in a word, gave this sprawling state a stable administrative core. K. Kongonshvili writes, "Islamization of the native population occurred and the mountain-forest zones of the peninsula became the center for the forging of an ethnos, the Crimean Tatars".³⁷ These sedentary Tat-Tatars of Gothic, Alan, Genoese, Armenian, Italian, Greek, Anatolian-Turkish and Kipçak-Tatar descent were aware of their separate identity and were recognized as a distinct people from the Nogai Tatars by the Crimean Khans. In his royal title, the Crimean Khan, Janibeg Giray claimed, for example, to be "Great Padishah (Sultan) of the Great Horde, the great yurt (Tatar "realm" in this sense), the Desht-i Qipcaq, the throne of the Crimea, the right and left wing, many Tatars and numerous Nogays, Tats, Tavḡac (a word of Central Asian origin not understood in this context), and the mountain Cherkes (Circassians)".³⁸ Among the officials in the Crimean Khan's bureaucracy, it is also interesting to note the existence of a minister dealing with Tat affairs known as the *Tat-aḡasi* ("Lord of the Tats").³⁹ The predominance of the Tat element on the southern coast was demonstrated by the fact that this littoral was known as the *Tat-ili* (Land of the Tats) in Tatar and Ottoman sources.⁴⁰

As time passed, the differences between the Tatars who settled in Bahchesaray, Karasubazar, and numerous villages in the southern mountains or Ottoman coast, and the still-nomadic Nogais of the Crimean steppe continued despite their shared Islamic faith. For example, the Nogai steppe clans, such as the Naimans, Qongrats, Karluks, Kereits, Arghuns and Kipçaks, maintained their importance while the Tatars of the south adopted the ways of the settled Greeks, Armenians, Karaim Jews, and Turks and lost many of their clan ties. While the Nogais maintained their "true" steppe patterns, the Islamic traditions of the Ottomans took precedent among the settled Crimean Tatars of the south.

The coastal population of the Ottoman province of Kaffa (known as the Yaliboyu, "Sea Shore") came under strong Anatolian influence during the period of Ottoman dominance in this region (1475–1783) and there was little difference between this sub-group's customs or dialect and that of the Turks. The coastal Tat-Tatars' Anatolian-Oghuz Turkic dialect differed from that of the Kipçak Turkic dialect of the steppe Nogais and this linguistic barrier certainly increased the distance between these two peoples.

³⁶ Ernst Kudusov, *Istoriia Formirovannii Krymskotatarskoi Natsii* (Simferopol, 1996), p. 8.

³⁷ K. Kongonshvili, *Kratkii Slovar' Istorii Kryma* (Simferopol, 1995), pp. 149–50.

³⁸ Mary Ivanics, "Formal and Linguistic Peculiarities of 17th Century Crimean Tatar Letters Addressed to Princes of Transylvania", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, XXIX, 2 (1975), p. 215. The term *tavḡach* or *tabḡach* initially referred to the Turkic or Mongol T'opa Wei dynasty (386–534) of northern China and came to signify China or the East in later periods.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Halil Inalcik, "Giray", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition*, vol. II (Leiden, 1965) p. 113.

While the Crimean Tatars are generally portrayed as “Wolves of the Steppe”, it would seem that it was the nomadic Nogai-Tatar element that continued to raid the neighbouring lands and provide hardy cavalry for the Crimean Khan during his increasingly limited forays into the heavily defended lands of the Russians and Poles. The Nogais were considered by their contemporaries to be “born horsemen” as a result of their nomadic lifestyle and were a cavalry force *par excellence*, while the long-settled Tats were certainly less adept at raiding and steppe warfare. Later accounts point to the discrepancies in the horsemanship of the Tat-Tatars and the Nogais. According to a nineteenth-century observer:

The mountaineers are clumsy horsemen, in which they resemble the northern Tartars. Their neighbors (the Nogais) ride very boldly, and well. I had an opportunity of seeing two Nogay shepherd-boys, who were galloping their horses near Koslof (Gozleve), and who showed an agility and dexterity which were really surprising.⁴¹

The sources point to the paradox that “the main mass of ‘Crimean Tatars’ during attacks consisted for the most part not of Crimeans but of inhabitants of the Black Sea steppe.”⁴² Similarly it seems that “The peaceful ideology of the farmers, shepherds and ploughman was to become predominate in the Crimea, and the first evidence of this victory was noticeable by the seventeenth century.”⁴³

In the process of settling in and blending with the people of the south Crimean mountains, William McNeill claims a more “pacific” and “aristocratic” society emerged among the Crimean Tatars who felt the lure of sedentary agriculture.⁴⁴ In his nineteenth-century article on the Crimean Tatars, G. N. Levitskii wrote “The Crimean Tatars lost their warlike tendencies, gradually settled on the peninsula and became accustomed to the settled way of life and linked to the soil”.⁴⁵ A. Andreev claims that by the 1700s the majority of the Crimean peninsula’s inhabitants were settled and engaged in agricultural pursuits.⁴⁶ By the time of the Khanate’s conquest by the Russian Empire, Thunmann wrote of the Crimean Tatars, “They are all settled and live in homes, villages and towns, except for several Nogais who recently moved to the Crimea. They are engaged in grain-growing, viniculture, and gardening, although still not as assiduously as they should”.⁴⁷

Russian historian, Elena Druzhinina mentions the discrepancy between socio-economic conditions in northern, Nogai-dominated zones of the Crimea and those in the south during the time of the Khanate. In the mountains and fertile valleys of the south. Druzhinina points out that grain growing reached a very high level of development.⁴⁸ Turkish historian Kemal Karpat also makes this distinction in his work and writes of the Crimean Tatar population during the period of the Khanate:

⁴¹ Edward Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe and Asia. Part one. Russia, Tahtary and Turkey* (London, 1816) p. 313.

⁴² Vozgirin, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ William McNeill, *Europe’s Steppe Frontier 1500–1800* (Chicago, 1964), p. 120.

⁴⁵ G. N. Levitskii, “Pereselenie Tatar iz Kryma v Turtsiiu”, *Vestnik Evropy*, V, pp. 596–39, p. 598.

⁴⁶ A. R. Andreev, *Istoriia Kryma* (Moscow, 1997), p. 168.

⁴⁷ Thunman, *Der Krimische Staat (Krymskoe Khanstvo)* (Simferopol, 1936), p. 24.

⁴⁸ Elena Druzhinina, *Severnoe Prichernomor’e* (Moscow, 1959), p. 111.

This population lived basically in two different geographical regions, and the two populations, although sharing a common language, religion, and culture, showed different social and occupational characteristics. The population of the coastal areas, notably the inhabitants of the eastern littoral, had a well-developed urban life and were engaged in trade as well as intensive agriculture.⁴⁹

The Role of the Tats in Crimean History

While Tatar historian Etham Feyzi Gozaydin describes the Nogais or Kipçak-Tatar nomads of the steppe as closely resembling their kin, the Kazakh nomads of Asia, in their “Mongol” physiognomy, nomadic culture and Kipçak language, he points out that the inhabitants of the southern coast more closely resembled the farming peoples of the Caucasus.⁵⁰ This can be attributed to the historic links between the Caucasus and the Crimea which can be traced back to the migrations of ancient peoples from this mountain range to the peninsula.⁵¹

A more nuanced analysis of the settled Tatar “core” of the Crimean Khanate, and description of the Crimean Tatars’ culture and ties to the land also dispels the notion later propagated by Soviet sources that “The primary occupation of the Crimean Tatars was war and predatory attacks with the aim of plunder and profit”.⁵² In his history of the Crimea, for instance, Russian historian Anatolii Iakobson writes:

Involving themselves in direct and daily intercourse with the aborigines of the region—primarily Greek agriculturists, the settled Tatars not only began to slowly assimilate the village social structure, formed here during the Middle Ages in the form of the village agricultural commune, they adopted important elements of ancient local material culture, village production techniques and, in particular, the techniques of wine growing and fruit growing and artisan techniques as well as the form of planning two-storied houses with the a stone first floor and adobe second floor, with an ancient framework on which a section hangs out over the first floor.⁵³

The ethnos known as the Crimean Tatars was, for the most part, centred in a series of villages along the southern and northern edges of the Crimean mountains (such as Ak Mecit, Kefe, Alushta, Sudak, Karasubazar, and Gurzuf) or in villages perched on the side of mountains and inter-montane valleys. In his study of the economic geography of this region, David Lynch states, “The Khan lived in the mountainous portion of the Crimea, and here his immediate subjects, the Crimean Tatars, supported themselves primarily by irrigated agriculture.”⁵⁴

In the lands inhabited by the Tat-Tatars’ village-communes, peaches, pears, apples and other fruits were skillfully grown, vineyards were cultivated on the warm southern slopes of the Yaliboyu (coast), tobacco was grown for domestic use and for export and honey was produced. An historical account claims of the Crimean Tatars, “They were great masters of

⁴⁹ Kemal Karpat, “The Crimean Emigration of 1856–1862 and the Settlement and Urban Development of Dobruca”, *Turco-Tatar Past, Soviet Present* (Paris, 1986), p. 275.

⁵⁰ Gozaydin, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁵¹ A. M. Leskov, *Gorny Krym v I Tysiacheletii do Nashei Ery* (Kiev, 1965), p. 155–60.

⁵² *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, no. 23, 1953 ed., p. 552.

⁵³ A. Iakobson, *Krym v Srednie Veka* (Moscow, 1973), p. 148.

⁵⁴ David Lynch, *The Conquest, Settlement and Initial Development of New Russia* (New Haven, 1969), p. vii.

agriculture, they developed a 100 sorts of apples and pears, peaches, and quinces, almonds, figs, and they were unsurpassed in melon growing, tobacco raising, and sheep breeding".⁵⁵ Kemal Karpat writes, "The Tatars living along the shore, or the *yaliboyu*, as they called it, were involved in trade and cultivated fruit trees, while the peasants living on the arid lands in the interior and on the steppes north of the Perekop raised a variety of dry-land crops."⁵⁶

The Muslim peasants of the southern mountains were especially skilled in the art of viniculture by means of artificial irrigation. According to a Russian account, "The Tatars and Turks were great masters of irrigation. They were able to finesse the smallest stream of sediment filled water and direct it into earthen channels and wide pools . . . they were able, by means of artery systems, to irrigate gardens and vineyards on the slopes of mountains".⁵⁷ The Tat-Tatars of this region were especially known for their skills in artificial irrigation. A Russian source, Evgenii Markov describes the Tat-Tatars' adaptation to this unique environment as follows:

Only in the mountains, and in particular in hot, rocky mountains such as those in the Crimea is man able to understand what water means for life . . . The Tatars search out springs as if they were gold and value them as if they were gold. They uncover every small wet place in the stone walls and they work them little by little into a spring . . . The Tatar is the master of irrigation and channeling of water.⁵⁸

Among the products produced by the Crimean Tat-Tatars was tobacco. Exported tobacco produced by the Crimean Tatars was smoked in the Cossack *stanitsas* (settlements) of the Ukraine and in the *chaikhanas* (tea-houses) of Istanbul alike. Another indigenous product, honey, was collected from mountain pastures and brought down from the mountains in local carts for export from the southern ports. The main consumers of Crimean honey were the Turks and it is interesting to note that Ottoman sultans would accept no honey other than that produced in the Crimean city of Osmanchik.⁵⁹

Descriptions of the Crimean Tats

While the steppe homeland of the Tatar-Nogais makes up two-thirds of the Crimea, it was the southern mountains and hills that were considered the homeland of the greater portion of the Crimea's Tatar population. Visitors to this mountainous land provide insightful descriptions of the inhabitants of this region that point to the ancient roots of this population and confirm their agrarian ties to its soil. These accounts also paint a picture of a people who, in spite of their shared Turco-Islamic heritage with the Kipçak-speaking Tatar Nogais, continued to maintain strong communal identifications with their Tat-Tatar sub-ethnic groupings.

In his account, just prior to the Crimean War, Charles Scott, clearly delineates the Nogai Tatars of the steppe from the Tats of the south:

⁵⁵ K. Kongonashvili, *Kratkii Slovar Istorii Kryma* (Simferopol, 1995), p. 152.

⁵⁶ Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830-1914* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1985), p. 76.

⁵⁷ M. Voloshin, "Kultura, Isskysstvo, Pamiatniki Kryma", *Zabveniiu ne Podlezhit* (Kazan, 1992), p. 62.

⁵⁸ Evgenii Markov, *Ocherkii Kryma* (Simferopol, 1995), pp. 210-11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

The Crim Tatars are divided into two classes, those of the plain and those of the mountains. Not only do these differ in habits and occupation, but in race; the former are scattered over the steppe of the northern part of the peninsula, cultivating land and breeding cattle and horses, and building rude houses of unburnt clay. They bear on their visages the characteristics of the Mongols.

The latter follow many industrial arts, are fond of gardening, cultivate tobacco, flax and the vine; and display the physiognomies of the Caucasian race. They have more beard than the others, and are above the middle height. They are supposed to be a mixture of races who have inhabited the Crimea, and resemble the Turks, or other Europeans, many of them having brown hair and fair complexions. They are refined in manner, and dignified in bearing, naturally polite and hospitable, honest in dealing, and frugal in eating.⁶⁰

As late as the mid-nineteenth century then, the Crimean Tatars of the steppe and those of the south differed in their dialect, physiognomy, means of production and in their views of one another. Of these mountaineers Pallas writes that the Tatar Nogai nomads did not consider the mountaineers true descendants of their race and called them “by the contemptuous name of Tat”.⁶¹ In his description of the Tatars of the Crimean mountains, another nineteenth-century English source, H. D. Seymour, informs us that:

It is farther remarkable that the hair and beards of these mountaineers are almost uniformly light reddish or even flaxen; a circumstance seldom occurring in the Crimea. It is certain all the inhabitants who at present occupy the villages situated on the southern coast, though regarded as Tatars, are nevertheless the offspring of other nations, who have either landed here or have been driven thither from the interior, and who were strangers to the later race, but especially to that of the Mongols: hence the original natives of Crim Tatory consider them as aliens, and point them out by the contemptible name of Tat.⁶²

In his nineteenth-century account, F. A. Fedorov writes:

The Crimean Tatars should be divided into two groups, the mountain and steppe Tatars. The essence of the mountain people was intermixed with the ancient inhabitants of the Tauride, with the Goths and the Greeks. They are in general of good height, slender and dark haired; their features are regular, their physiognomy and carriage are expressive, they are free and generous in their treatment and in their speech they are thoughtful and sensible.⁶³

Nineteenth-century descriptions of the mountain Tatars frequently delineate the mountain Tatars of the Crimea from the Volga Tatars as well as the Nogais. O. Voroponov wrote of these mountain Tatars, “There was not apparent among them the wide, high cheek bones with narrow eyes which you constantly meet among the Tatars close to the Volga. On the contrary, here there was the oblong face and straight, long nose, i.e. that which is reminiscent of the Aryan tribes.”⁶⁴

All aspects of the Tat-Tatars’ way of life, from their mixed Oghuz-Kipçak Turkic dialect with its traces of older languages, to the specialized farming techniques developed by their ancient forebears, were shaped by the terrain and nature of their dry, mountainous and

⁶⁰ Charles Scott, *The Baltic, the Black Sea and the Crimea* (London, 1854), p. 306.

⁶¹ Peter Pallas, *Travels Through the Southern Provinces of Russia, 1793 and 1794* (London, 1802), p. 346.

⁶² H. D. Seymour, *Russia on the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov* (London, 1885), p. 203.

⁶³ F. A. Fedorov, *Krym s Sevastopolem Baliklavoiu* (St. Petersburg, 1855), p. 37.

⁶⁴ O. Voroponov, “Sredi Krymskikh Tatar”, *Zabveniiu ne Podlezhit* (Kazan, 1992), p. 170.

coastal homeland. Many of the mountain and coastal Tats' customs were distinctly Crimean and had pre-Islamic pagan or Christian roots. The Crimean Tatars of this region, for example, celebrated such spring festivals as *Tepresh*, *Derziva* and *Kedreles*, celebrations of nature and land which have few ties to the great Islamic holidays.⁶⁵ On *Kedreles*, a distinctly Crimean festival with pagan and Christian roots, the venerated souls of the departed killed in battle (known as the "*Aziz Şehitler*", Holy Martyrs) were remembered on the Orthodox St. George's Day, April 25th, by horse racing, wrestling and the eating of specially prepared bread in open fields. The memory of Christian saints also survived in the ancient names of Tatar villages and mountains such as Ai Vasili, Ai Gurzuf and Ai Danil (the villages of St. Vasili, St. Joseph and St. Daniel) or Ai Petri and Ai Todor (the mountains of St. Peter and St. Theodore).

Of the mountain Tat-Tatars' houses, nineteenth-century traveller Edward Clarke wrote "The Tahtars delight to have their houses buried, as it were, in foliage. These dwellings consist each only of one story, with a low flat roof, beneath trees spreading immense branches quite over the whole building; so that a village, at a distance is only known by the tufted grove wherein it lies concealed".⁶⁶ Travellers also mentioned the mountain Tatars' habit of building their houses into the earth on the sides of terraced mountains. In his nineteenth-century account, F. A. Feodorov wrote:

In the southern part of the Crimea, where the mountains are flat, the Crimean Tatars do not like to build their unique dwellings, instead they place them on the side of cliffs and fit them so they only have to build three walls, the fourth consisting of the mountain on which the home leans. By a similar means of construction, the Tatar village is always located on a mountain cliff and is situated in the form of an amphitheater. The roofs of the homes are flat, forming terraces and, as a result of their aversion to leakage, they are built in a most thorough fashion. The terrace forms for the Crimean Tatar almost the entire home; here they rest from work, here they greet guests.⁶⁷

The lands inhabited by the terraced Tat-Tatar villages make up the southern third of the Crimean peninsula and consist of a limestone coastal mountain chain known as the Yaila (Tatar for summer or mountain pasture). The chalky Yaila mountains reach a height of just over 5 000 feet and have a gradual incline on their northern side before dropping off sharply on their southern front.

This chain forms an abrupt backdrop or "wall" for the narrow coast which has many "amphitheatres" on which the Tatars built terraced villages. Visitors to the Yaliboyu found that the indigenous population of the coast brought to mind the inhabitants of Greece and Italy. The ethnic, linguistic and cultural holdovers of the earlier Christian peoples, such as the Greeks, Genoese, and Armenians, whose blood and culture had gone into the forging of the coastal Tat-Tatars was seen even in the nineteenth century. The Russian traveller, Evgenii Markov, for example, wrote of the Yaliboyu (Coastal) Tat women and children:

Their faces are entirely European; white, straight and sometimes red and full of fire with shady eyelashes. Their children are especially close to our own. In them there is not a drop of Mongol

⁶⁵ B. Kufin, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

⁶⁶ Edward Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

⁶⁷ F. A. Feodorov, *Krym s Sevastopolem Balaklavoiu* (St. Petersburg, 1855), p. 38.

blood. When you recall the customs of the south-coast Tatars; the freedom of their women, their celebration of several Christian festivals and memorials, and their love of settled occupations, one cannot but be convinced that the so-called Tatars are as close to the tribes of the Caucasus as we are.⁶⁸

According to Thunmann, at the time of the Russian annexation of the Crimea, the descendants of the great Genoese families of the coast, the Grimaldis, Dorias, and Spinolas, who had probably accepted Islam, still received special privileges from the Crimean Khan.⁶⁹ Edward Clarke claimed, "In the south of the Crimea, the remains of the Genoese language are not quite extinct. Now and then an expression escapes even the lips of a Tahtar, evidently derived from that people".⁷⁰ For example, that the Tatars of the Yaliboyu-coast used the Italian term *fortuna* to describe a "sea storm", a barber was known by the Italian word *berber*, and the term *macramé* was used for a towel. In his late eighteenth-century account, Peter Pallas points out that such Italian words as *camera* (chamber), *fenner* (lamp), *sciorbi* (to sip), *baril* (barrel) and many more were still in usage among the coastal Tatars. Pallas also mentions that the Tatars employed many Greek words (such as *ufatma* and *katavolat*) in the vocabulary of viniculture.⁷¹ On a cautious note it should be mentioned that in the case of the Italian words, many of these also appear in Osmanli Turkish (*fener* for example meaning lamp in Turkish) and may have entered Crimean Tatar as loan-words from a Mediterranean-Levantine lingua franca based on Italian.

In spite of these linguistic peculiarities, anthropologist B. A. Kuftin claimed that the coastal Tatars of the villages of "Alupka, Yalta and Guzruf speak in almost pure southern-Turkish" (i.e. Anatolian-Oghuz Turkish) and this form of Turkic spread into the surrounding mountains where a Kipçak-Oghuz hybrid language developed.⁷²

While the language of the Yaliboyu Tatars may have had Anatolian origins traceable to the settlement of this region in the period of the Seljuk Sultanate, many traditions here, such as the building of villages on terraced mountain slopes (often described as "amphitheatres"), could be traced to the nearby Caucasus. The Crimea's links to the terraced mountain and coastal *auls* (villages) of the nearby Caucasus range is seen in the following description of the Yaliboyu-coast Tatar villages:

The Tatars of the southern coast live in villages-perched for the most part significantly back from the sea, among wine growing terraces and tobacco plantations open to the hot sun-on the towering slopes of mountains, among which run springs through the rocks which form the main street of the village which is overshadowed here and there by lonesome trees. They are settled in picturesque amphitheatres on the backdrop of the lonely rocky landscape and, in the eastern, more open parts of the south Crimean shore, the villages are placed still further back from the sea in the upper reaches of valleys.⁷³

⁶⁸ Evgenii Markov, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

⁶⁹ Thunmann, *Der Krimische Staat (Krymskoe Khanstvo)* (Simferopol, 1936), p. 36.

⁷⁰ Edward Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

⁷¹ Peter Pallas, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

⁷² B. A. Kuftin, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 244-45.

In the secluded Tatar villages of the Sudak vicinity, where Russian settlement was rather limited, nineteenth-century visitors to the Crimea described a way of life that would have differed little from that existing on this coast for over two millennia:

In every village the traveller, especially if he be not Russian, is received with the most affectionate care. Everywhere the best house, the most beautiful cushions and carpets, are placed at his disposal, and he is installed in a good apartment with coffee and tchibouk (pipe), in a way which can be appreciated only by those who know the inconveniences as well as pleasures of travelling in the East. At Toulouk, Kouz and Otouz, the Tatar dwellings, with their flat roofs, are raised against the hills which border the valley, and by this arrangement the inhabitants communicate generally by terraces of their houses. Nothing can be more picturesque than the appearance of these terraces on an evening: at the moment the whole population, men, women and children, are on the alert, and desert their dark chambers, where they seek refuge against the sun during the day, to install themselves on the roofs of the houses.

The most agreeable animation succeeds the silence of the day, loud conversations are heard on all sides, and a very picturesque effect is produced by the various groups, who, still employed in household occupations, thus enjoy the coolness of the evening.⁷⁴

Summary

One must not of course take this analysis of Crimean Tatar history too far. While there was, as has been demonstrated, a sedentary, agrarian core or sub-ethnie to the Crimean Tatar ethnos whose origin can be traced to the ancient, pre-Mongol ethnic groups inhabiting the Crimea, there was certainly a strong Kipçak nomadic element to the Crimean Khanate dating from the 1000s, which was bolstered by later Nogai migrations to the Crimea, as well. The Crimean Khans, who lived in the southern sedentary region of the Crimea in a valley town known as Bahçesaray (Garden Palace) did actively recruit nomadic Kipçak speaking Tatar-Nogais from the steppes into their realm. While many of the great Tatar clans did sedentarize and blend with the older Crimean populations, the Nogai Tatars maintained a strictly nomadic lifestyle and disdained the settled Tat-Tatar population.

It was the Kipçak-Tatar Nogai element, which was distinguished by its Altaic-“Mongol” features and nomadic lifestyle, with which most westerners came in contact with, not those inhabiting the settled core of the seldom visited Crimean Khanate. The claims by outsiders, such as Giles Fletcher, a sixteenth-century English visitor to Moscow, that the Crimean Tatars lived only in *yurts* (felt tents) as nomads in actuality applied only to the Tatar-Nogai element of the Crimean steppe.⁷⁵

Long after Devlet Giray Khan’s famous raid on Moscow in 1571, this element continued to be a danger to the surrounding sedentary peoples. The surrounding Christian peoples were in fact justified in their fears of the cattle and slave raids of the Nogai inhabitants of the *Dikoe Pole* (Wild Field) as the southern Ukraine was known. It must also be acknowledged that the Crimea was, from the time of its founding to the late seventeenth century a

⁷⁴ Edward Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 234–35.

⁷⁵ Giles Fletcher, *Rude and Barbarous* (Madison, 1968), pp. 197–200.

centre for a thriving slave trade which deprived the neighbouring Russians, Ukrainians, Poles and others of tens of thousands of peasants who were sold to the Ottomans.

As this study indicates, however, the nomadic Tatar-Nogai element of the Crimean Khanate was limited to the Crimean steppe and neighbouring plains of the Ukrainian mainland and formed only a portion of the Crimean Khanate's population. A larger percentage of the Crimea's population actually lived in the coastal hamlets and terraced mountain villages of the south and in many ways ran the Khanate's government, bazaars, Islamic institutions and agrarian sector. Seen in these socio-economic terms, the Crimean Tatars were certainly more than just the "thieving, cattle-lifting, kidnapping neighbours" they have been portrayed by Soviet propaganda and traditional western sources.⁷⁶ The very nature of the southern Crimean Tatars' communal identity and their socio-economic links to the land of the Crimea must, as gradually becomes obvious, be revised. While only a preliminary study, it is hoped that this work will lead to further analysis of the complex ethnology and history of the Crimean Tatars and perhaps produce a more three dimensional interpretation of this understudied ethnos.

⁷⁶ Donald Mackenzie Wallace, *Russia* (New York, 1877), p. 354.