

The Crimean Khanate's relations with the Romanian Principalities

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The study of the history, politics and relations between vassals in the Ottoman Empire often encounters both methodological disillusionment and scientific challenges. The peculiarity of this space resides in the existence of multiple specific dimensions (ideological, religious, ethnic, customary, political, and geopolitical) which influence one another in a mixture of heterogeneous elements which presupposes their extensive comprehension in order to provide a coherent theoretical perspective at the time the interrelational aspect is being tackled.

Heir to the Empire of the Steppes, The Crimean Khanate was a semi-autonomous state under Ottoman suzerainty and a player in its own right throughout the eastern parts of Europe. Characterized by a hybrid form of socio-political organization, the Khanate had developed a society with an exceptionally diverse cultural, political and economic life. Though not an Ottoman province, from a military, political and economical standpoint, the Khanate was essential for the Ottoman power in Eastern Europe, and the sovereignty of the Giray dynasty, which ruled Crimea for over three centuries, was the last bastion which stood in front of the Russian expansion and delayed the transformation of the Black Sea from a „Turkish lake” into a „Russian lake”.

Because of the genealogic importance of their dynasty, of all the vassals of the Ottoman Sultan, the Crimean Khans were the only ones to constantly hold privileged positions within the Empire. In the geopolitical space of Eastern and Central Europe, the relations between the Khan and the Sultan also played a crucial role. In the XVIth and XVIIth centuries, the steppes north of the Black Sea were disputed both by Russia and by the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom. Moscow claimed to be the inheritor of the Golden Horde’s traditions, thus challenging both the Ottoman Empire and its Crimean vassal for the monopoly of the steppes.

Without eluding chronological restitution and hoping to make a novel and original contribution to the field, we have chosen a thematic approach to Tatar-Romanian relations, one that we feel is missing from current historiography. Our analysis attempted to ascertain the role and importance of the Crimean Khanate in the context of the new political and economical reconfigurations taking place around the Black Sea and at the same time provide a substantive study of the evolution of socio-political relations between the Tatar Khanate of Crimea and the Romanian territories.

Generally speaking, the guiding principle of the paper is the effort to study the political, ideological, diplomatic, social and economic characteristics of the Khanate and the Romanian Principalities which shaped the ideological and territorial map of intervassalic relations in the expanse of the Ottoman Empire. Only by taking into account the decisive

nature of the imperial lineage traditions on the part of the Crimean Khanate and the unequivocal status, mental framework and religious traditions specific to the Romanian countries together with the entire history of the region can we paint a more ample picture of the way the political decision field in Eastern Europe has come into being.

Adhering to a pluralistic perspective, the statal entity is not the only significant actor involved. The relations between states entail taking into consideration a vast array of interdependences and connections in which the states are just one of the multiple agents taking part in this collection of relations. It is our hope that the analyses of vassalic dependencies of both statal entities, of the Crimean aristocratic groups, of the Boyards in the Voievode's entourage and of the economic circumstances have drawn a realistic picture of the relations between the Crimean Khanate and the Romanian Principalities.

The Khanate's preeminent status in relation to the Romanian Principalities in their vassalic dynamic within the Ottoman Empire is apparent throughout the entire study. Almost as easily to discern is the persistence of an independent, authentic, relational, ideological and institutional culture which proves that the assimilation of different elements of Ottoman culture was selective and that the dominant assumption of an „Ottomanization” of the Khanate during this time is in need of further archival evidence. The particular nature of the juridic status of the Crimean Khanate stems from the way the political structure of the Khanate itself was organized, in which multiple executive poles coexisted. The Khan shared part of his authority and sovereignty with all his potential heirs and the Tatar aristocratic clans. The importance of the Genghis lineage, which endowed the Khans with a unique prestige in the Ottoman world, is well documented.

The core, or the backbone, if you will, of this doctoral thesis is its second chapter (pp.51 – 128) which is also, and not by accident, the lengthiest one in the book. It was only natural that we abandon factual history and the expository method of describing the meandering course of the complex relations established between Tatars and Romanians, though such a scientific enterprise is still an unfulfilled desire of ours, in favor of the validated method of compiling different sources, which we then applied in the investigation of four different issues which seemed to require our special attention. As such, the four subsections of the second chapter examine consecutively: the evolution of the borders between Moldavia and the Budjak Tatars, then, following in the footsteps of professor Gemil Tasin, two controversial but similar subjects, if the Crimean Khans from the period in question have expected and collected tribute from the Romanian countries and its counterpart regarding the dispatching of gifts from the Romanians to the Tatar elite, and finally, an issue which seems to be ignored by the literature, the emergence of permanent representatives of the Romanian Principalities at the Khan's court in Bahçesaray.

Our conclusion is that, although the Romanian kings have paid cash sums to the sovereign in Bahçesaray, those instances, though frequent, were of a special nature and occurred with such discontinuity that we cannot place the Romanian Principalities in the same group as those countries which paid regular tribute to the Crimean Khanate. Despite the fact that we could

not paint the full qualitative and quantitative picture of the gifts received by the Tatar elite from the munificent rulers of Walachia and Moldavia, we were able to highlight the list of regular and special presents that were sent and also the long line of beneficiaries among the Tatar dignitaries. As evidence of the attention and importance given by the Moldavian rulers to their connection with the Khan we reproduce a compelling excerpt. In order to draft the correspondence with the Tatar authorities in Crimea and the Budjak, in the Moldavian Voievodal chancellory a special position of Tatar language secretary had been created. This particular office is mentioned in a description of the Principalities from the second half of the XVIIth century, preserved in Italian, entitled „Relation on the Wallachs (*Relazione sopra i Valacchi*).” Among the dignitaries at the Voievode’s court in Iasi are listed „*Pisar, segretario sono sei; cioè: il primo per la lingua valacha, secondo per la grea, terzo per la turcica, quatro per la Tatar, quinto per la latina, sesto per l’ungara*”.¹

Overwhelming and extremely diverse narrative and diplomatic sources, both European and Oriental – written by chroniclers, travellers, missionaries, diplomats and chancellory clerks – have propelled the Tatars on the stage of history mainly as aggressive warriors who engaged in pillage expeditions called by the Moldavian chroniclers „*ceambuluri*” [„*ceambuls*”]. Without trying to rehabilitate the fluctuating image of the Tatars, whose plundering expeditions cannot be altered, overlooked or diminished in any way, we believe that the Crimean Khanate’s economic framework and social structure were not exclusively based on war and its spoils.

These make the object of the third chapter of our thesis (pp.129 – 158). In the last century of existence of the Crimean Khanate, the traditional archetype of Tatar society, in which the head of the hierarchy, the Khan, was far from corresponding to its image as an all-powerful, authoritarian despot, has known several ruinous transformations. Whole groups, families and clans could not be touched by the Khan’s authority, enjoying immense privileges and immunities. The Tatar society was a predominantly rural one – with very few cities and factions which preserved a seminomadic lifestyle – practicing, in its everyday life, peaceful professions like agriculture, cattle rising, hunting and trade.

Though slaves have played a subsidiary role in the functioning of the different branches of the Crimean economy, the idea that slave trade was a great source of wealth for the Tatar society, however schematic and simplifying, is nonetheless true. The publication of the Kadi records, issued by the judicial authorities in Crimea – known at the moment only in an abridged form – will certainly provide an essential documentary basis for a more in depth and nuanced knowledge of the economical mechanisms and social structures involved in the productive and financial activities, and in the local and international commerce.

Taken separately, the work’s main themes, which we have investigated through a critical analysis of contemporary sources, mindful, at the same time, to avoid descriptive narrative and fact interpretation, seem to have a very precise and restricted character, but there

¹ N.Iorga – *Călători, ambasadori și misionari în țările noastre și asupra țărilor noastre*, București, 1899, p.72

is an underlying thread passing through them all. In other words, the subsections are unifying pieces of a whole, whose constituent elements are only partially known or subjectively and erroneously deciphered out of a pitiful and greatly misunderstood sense of patriotic duty.

We are certain that the study of new sources and the uncovering of documents hidden or locked away in the vaults of the states which maintained diplomatic relations with the Crimean Khanate will be essential in clarifying the tumultuous history of the Crimean Khanate's decline, but also in illuminating the dark spots which cloud the multiseular relations between Tatars and Romanians.