The troubled decade of Sa‘adet and Islam Girays (1523–1532)

The violent death of Mehmed Giray was followed by a decade of domestic chaos. Having disposed of the khan, the Nogays invaded and devastated the Crimean peninsula. Mehmed’s teenage son, Ghazi Giray, who was once to be sent as hostage to Vilnius, assumed the throne, but simultaneously Sa‘adet Giray set out from Istanbul to Caffa. Invited by the Shirins already during Mehmed’s life and supported by Sultan Suleyman, Sa‘adet Giray assumed the throne and executed his nephew. The new khan, who had spent many years at the Porte, aimed to strengthen his rule by developing infantry and artillery formations, shaped after the Ottoman models, and modernizing key fortresses, beginning with Ferahkerman (Perekop). A strengthening of the khan’s power was certainly not the Shirins’ aim when they had proposed to Sa‘adet Giray the throne of his brother. Consequently, when Islam Giray, the oldest living son of Mehmed Giray, returned from Nogay captivity late in the year 1523, many nobles gathered around him initiating a new conspiracy. A rift also occurred within the Shirin clan: while most of its members, including the qaraçı bey Memesh, supported Islam Giray, Bakhtiyar remained loyal to Sa‘adet Giray. Sa‘adet Giray promptly notified the Polish court of his accession, expressing his wish to maintain the ancient friendship. Yet, the internal

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195 Hajvoronskyj convincingly dismisses an alternative version, according to which Ghazi Giray ruled until 1524 and then held the post of qalga for another three months; see idem, Poveliteli dvux materikov, vol. 1, p. 182, n. 13. The latter version is also contradicted by the fact that already in 1523 Sa‘adet Giray addressed the Polish court as the new khan; cf. n. 197 below.

196 On Memesh and Bakhtiyar, see Document 22, notes 7–8.

197 Tartarus novus precopensis a Turco constitutus misit huc suam amicitiam offerens et a nobis talem optans, qualis erat cum defuncto; see the letter of Andrzej Krzycki, the bishop of Przemyśl and former royal secretary, to the vice-chancellor Piotr Tomicki, dated 26 July (in crastino S. Jacobi) 1523; published in Acta Tomiciana, vol.
The crisis in the Crimea encouraged Sigismund to reverse his policy. In 1523, Lithuanian troops led by Ostafij Daškovyč, the starosta of Čerkasy and Kaniv, destroyed the Tatar fort of Islamkerman on the lower Dnieper and took along its captured artillery to Čerkasy. Having concluded an armistice with Muscovy in 1522, Sigismund did not fear a rapprochement between Moscow and Qırq Yer, especially as the potential allies were conflicted over the Kazan issue. At the same time, the king received an embassy from the Nogay leaders Agish and Mamay, who had engineered the murder of Mehmed Giray. The Nogays asked Sigismund to release Sheikh Ahmed from Lithuanian custody, offering in return their assistance in a conquest of Očakiv and Islamkerman, whose permanent garrisoning by Lithuanian troops would prevent future Crimean invasions.

In the summer of 1524, the Tatras led by two brothers, Islam and Özbek Girays, raided the Polish Crown’s southeastern provinces. In his later correspondence, Sa’adet Giray presented this raid as a