SOVEREIGNTY AND SUBORDINATION IN CRIMEAN-OTTOMAN RELATIONS (SIXTEENTH–EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES)

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During the last two centuries, Crimean-Ottoman relations attracted moderate attention from European scholars; until World War II, the khanate was treated as a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire. Many scholars believe that Ottoman suzerainty over the Tatars was stipulated in a treaty concluded between Khan Mengli I Giray and Sultan Mehmed II in 1478; however, the existence of this treaty was questioned by Halil İnalcık in the 1940s and effectively disproved by later scholars. One of them, Alan Fisher, points out that the degree of the khanate’s dependency on the

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1 The titles of two well-known nineteenth-century studies epitomize this attitude: see Joseph Hammer-Purgstall, Geschichte der Chane der Krim unter osmanischer Herrschaft vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zum Ende 18. Jahrhundert (Vienna, 1856); Vasilii Smirnov, Krymsko khanstvo pod verkhovenstvom Otomanskoj Porty do nachala XVIII veka [The Crimean Khanate under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Porte] (St. Petersburg, 1887) and the second part entitled “Krymskoe khanstvo pod verkhovenstvom Otomanskoj Porty v XVIII v. do prisoedineniia k Rossii” [The Crimean Khanate under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Porte in the eighteenth century to its incorporation into Russia], Zapiski Odesskogo Obshchestva Istorii i Drevnostii 15 (1889): 152–403. The claim is also well illustrated by the passages quoted below: “Mengli Giray (...) was sent back to the Crimea as khan; nevertheless, from this time onward, the Turks started to control the Perekop Tatars and also positioned their troops on the peninsula. In return, the khans gained assurances of eternal alliance and brotherhood [with the Ottomans].” (“Menglikerey (...) nazad do Tauryki odeslany z tytułem kana; wszelako od tej daty Turcy powzięli mieć najwyższą zwierzchność nad Tatarami Perekopskimi, stawiać na Tauryce swoje garnizony, a kanom tytuł braterstwa i ligi, wieczniej zostawiać.”) See Adam Naruszewicz, Tauryka czyli wiadomości starożytnne o stanie i mieszańcach Krymu do naszych czasów [Tauryka, that is, archaic information about the state and population of the Crimea until our time] (Warsaw, 1805), 90; “Still we cannot but feel a conviction that where the elements of civilized life, of great ability, of rule, of farsighted policy, of taste for the acts of peace, are found in monarchs such as those here instanced (and others might be named), there must be at least the possibility of a civilized community in their subjects. Yet, at the same time, we cannot but ask, what could a country do, whose rulers were subjects to such a tyrannous caprice as these khans suffered at the hands of the degraded Sultans?”; see Anthony Grant, An Historical Sketch of the Crimea (London, 1855), 101.

2 Vasilii Smirnov, Krymskoe khanstvo, 294.

3 Halil İnalcık, “Yeni Vesikalara Göre Kırım Hanlığı’nın Osmanlı Tabiliğine Girmesi ve Ahidnamesi Meselesi” [The subordination of the Crimean Khanate to the Ottomans and
Ottomans was in continual flux between the late fifteenth century and the end of the eighteenth century. He questions the view that the Tatars were servile vassals of the Ottoman Empire during this period. Fisher also argues that they conducted a separate foreign policy, which sometimes differed from that of the Ottomans. The study of Carl Max Kortepeter provides a fascinating example of such an independent Crimean ruler, Gazi II Giray (1588–1596; 1597–1608). The author demonstrates that the different aims of the Ottomans and the Crimean clans made it possible for the khan to seize enough power to control his vassals from one side, and to conduct more independent policies toward the Ottomans from another. The studies of Akmes Nimet Kurat on the early eighteenth century demonstrate that in this period the khans could not act independently of Ottoman influence. To illustrate this, the author draws a moving picture of Khan Devlet II Giray (1699–1702, 1708–1713), yet another outstanding Crimean ruler, who failed in his attempts to conduct an anti-Russian policy independently of the Ottomans. In 1711, during the war with Russia in Moldavia, he was unable to convince the Ottomans to pursue their advantage over Tsar Peter I: going against the khan’s advice, Grand Vizier Baltacı Mehmed Pasha concluded the Prut armistice on the terms proposed by the tsar. As Alan Fisher suggests, “at some undetermined time between 1600 and 1750, the entire configuration of Ottoman-Crimean Tatar political relations changed completely.”

The shifts in Crimean-Ottoman relations can also be seen in the Crimean chronicles. Their authors conceptualized mutual relations, including the status of the khanate versus the Ottoman Empire, in diverse ways. The first chronicle written by Remmal Hoca in the mid-sixteenth century reflects these ambiguities, which are clearly present in his description of...