A few years ago, a group of Crimean Tatar PhD students from Simferopol attended the East-Central European School in the Humanities held at the University of Warsaw. One of them announced that the aim of her future PhD thesis was to prove that the Crimean Khanate had been a sovereign state, independent from the Ottoman Empire. She had not started the research yet, but her final conclusion was already there. I was not her supervisor, so I could only express my reservations regarding a methodology in which conclusions preceded the actual research. At the same time, inwardly, I thought I was simply witnessing a natural process in which one scholarly abuse triggers an abuse in the opposite direction. If I were a Marxist, I could console myself that sooner or later such extreme views would result in a more cautious Hegelian synthesis.

Over a century ago, when Vasilii Dmitrievich Smirnov published his seminal monograph on the history of the Crimean Khanate, he gave it the title *The Crimean Khanate under the Suzerainty of the Ottoman Porte*. The title was anything but innocent, as Smirnov was neither a dispassionate antiquarian nor a passive witness of historical events. He did great service for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and even catalogued Oriental manuscripts arriving as spoils in St. Petersburg after the Russian–Ottoman War of 1877–1878. In fact, Smirnov perfectly fit the Saidian notion of a European nineteenth-century Orientalist, though Edward Said did not include Russia in his critique of Western academia. By stressing the Crimean Khanate’s lack of sovereignty and its primitive economy, Smirnov consciously exposes its “immature” status and thus convinces the reader that the Russian annexation of the Crimea in the late eighteenth century was a blessing both to its inhabitants and to human civilization. It is no

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1 Vasilii Smirnov, *Krymskoe khanstvo pod verkhovenstvom Otomanskoi porty do nachala XVIII veka* [The Crimean Khanate under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Porte until the beginning of the eighteenth century] (St. Petersburg, 1887); recently republished in Moscow in 2005.
wonder that the vision of the khanate as a parasite entity, totally dependent on the Porte, proposed by some—but certainly not all—Russian historians, provoked some Tatar historians to idealize its past and stress its sovereignty.

The correspondence between the Polish and Ottoman courts on the aspect of the khan’s sovereignty demonstrates that the matter was equally confusing in the sixteenth century. In 1531, Süleyman the Magnificent notified the Polish court that the Poles did not need to negotiate separately with Sa’adet Giray, since the khan was not a sovereign ruler, he owed his position to the sultan, and was obliged to obey him.² The same question arose with the accession of a new khan, Sahib Giray. In January 1533, Süleyman issued an ‘ahdname confirming the first “permanent” treaty between the Ottoman Empire and Poland–Lithuania. Since the Polish court pressed the Porte to include the khan in the treaty and oblige him to obey the peace, the sultan’s instrument stipulated that Sahib Giray should behave in a friendly manner toward King Sigismund, but the latter should withdraw his assistance toward the Crimean malcontents in return (a clear allusion to İslam Giray, Sahib’s nephew and contender for the throne, who enjoyed support at Sigismund’s court and among Polish–Lithuanian border commanders).³

The Polish king was still unsatisfied and asked İbrahim Pasha, Süleyman’s powerful grand vizier, to strongly order the khan to keep peace

² “(. . .) calchularete che talle han non sia principe da per si ne in dyparate”; see Warsaw, Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych [hereafter, AGAD], Archiwum Koronne Warszawskie [hereafter, AKW], Dział turecki, karton 66, teczka 29, no. 66; cf. Zygmunt Abrahamowicz, Katalog dokumentów tureckich: Dokumenty do dziejów Polski i krajów ościennych w latach 1455–1672 [Catalogue of Turkish documents: Documents concerning the history of Poland and its neighboring countries in the years 1455–1672] (Warsaw, 1959), 41. The letter is preserved only in Italian and Latin translations; for the Latin, see Acta Tomiciana, vol. 13 (Poznań, 1915), 150–153. On the Polish embassy to Istanbul, headed by Jan Ocieski in 1531, see Andrzej Dziubiński, Stosunki dyplomatyczne polsko-tureckie w latach 1500–1572 w kontekście międzynarodowym [Polish–Turkish diplomatic contacts in the years 1500–1572 in an international context] (Wroclaw, 2005), 82–85.

³ “Al prezente lo inperator di Tartaria, potensissimo, nominato Sachip Cheraichan, el qual è cresuto a la nostra felicissima Porta e ne le nostre inpreze ett operation suefato tanto, che li è nostro fiol, ett esendo tra noi l’amicitia, li avemo dito che ancor li vi sia amicho, bisogna che voi eciam teniati con lui bona amicitia ett operar di sorte, che Tartari over parenti del dito inperator che non li siano obedienti ett scanpando da lui abino da voi recapito e cercando aiuto, non li ascoltareti anci schazarli del vostro paeze e perseguitarli.” The document, preserved only in Italian translation, is published in Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, Ottoman–Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th–18th Century): An Annotated Edition of ‘Ahdnames and Other Documents (Leiden, 2000), 230–231. An analogous clause was entered in the royal document, issued in Cracow, in May 1533; see ibid., 232–233.