

***From Rebellious Allies to Loyal Subjects:***

***The Role of Nogay Hordes in the Russian Annexation of Crimea, 1768-1783***

By

Daniil E. Kabotyanski

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Supervisor: Alfred J. Rieber

Second Reader: Tolga Esmer

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## *Abstract*

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Nogay hordes inhabiting the Black Sea steppes were nominal subjects of the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire, but maintained a nomadic lifestyle and tribal society, as well as unique religious practices. However, during the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774 they became allies of the Russian military and for nearly a decade afterwards, they maintained a complex web of shifting allegiances between the Russians and Ottomans, often rebelling in support of either side's candidates for Crimean Khan. It is difficult to understand why a nomadic Muslim steppe people would ally with a state as different from it as Russia, and indeed previous historians have failed to explain the Nogays' behavior during this period.

This study analyzes Russian imperial political, diplomatic, and military correspondence pertaining to the Nogay hordes in order to identify the various factors that motivated their actions during this period, focusing especially on the reasons for changes in allegiance from one empire to the other. The sources are analyzed with reference to theoretical literature on the borderland peoples living on imperial frontiers and on Russian imperial interactions with steppe nomads.

The Nogay hordes are found to have used a typical borderland strategy of manipulating their imperial neighbors to gain a combination of benefits including material gain, protection from external threats, and internal autonomy, which included both political self-government and cultural accommodation. An important part of this last point was toleration for the Nogays' syncretic variety of Islam. It is also found that in negotiations with the Nogays, the Russian state relied on old practices of steppe diplomacy stemming from the early modern period. The Nogays' unpredictable allegiance and frequent rebellions were a major cause of the Russian annexation of Crimea, which ultimately led to the destruction of the Nogays' own way of life.

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There are too many people to list who deserve my gratitude for the completion of this work, but a few deserve special mention. Foremost among these is my advisor, Professor Alfred Rieber, for his patience with my slow progress and useful suggestions regarding anthropological literature on pastoral nomads, theoretical work on frontier dynamics, and biographical studies of many of the prominent Russian officials involved. A number of other professors also improved my understanding of the dynamics of the Russian and Ottoman empires, and of imperial strategy for expansion and rule more broadly. These include especially Alexei Miller, Mikhail Dmitriev, and Tijana Krstic. Professor Paul Bushkovitch at Yale University deserves my gratitude for his course on the interactions between Russia and the peoples of the Eurasian steppe, which taught an incredible amount on the topic and introduced me to Alan Fisher's work. Many fellow CEU History Department students also provided helpful comments and literature recommendations. My father was always a ready and welcome interlocutor in debates regarding Russian imperial policies in comparative perspective and my mother provided much needed practical and emotional support. Without the proddings of my sister, this work may never have been completed at all.

## *Preface*

An apology must be given for inconsistency in romanization of Russian and Turkic-language words and names. Many personal names are only available in multiple transliterations (from Arabic to Cyrillic to Latin), and romanization in the scholarly literature is inconsistent, leading to a combination of styles. I have tried to use ACA-LC romanization for Russian, but without diacritical marks. For Turkic-language words, I have generally tried to adhere to the orthography of the modern Turkish language, but replacing the letters c, ç, and ş with j, ch, and sh, respectively. Arabic-origin words such as *ulema* and *fetva* have been given Turkic spellings. It must be noted that all dates given in Russian primary sources are in the Old Style.

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## *Introduction*

Recent political events have brought about renewed interest in the history of the Crimean peninsula and southeastern Ukraine: lands that for centuries had formed the Crimean Khanate, a successor state of the Mongol Empire and Golden Horde, and a long-time vassal of the Ottoman Empire. The history of these areas is playing an increasingly major role in the memory politics of the Russian Federation and Ukraine, as well as of ethnic groups such as the Crimean Tatars. For these reasons alone, a sophisticated scholarly study of the Crimean Khanate, especially in the late period starting with its separation from the Ottoman Empire by the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji in 1774 and ending with its incorporation into the Russian Empire in 1783, is indispensable. A new work of this sort would be important for preventing the monopolization of this region's history by nationalistic narratives that frequently resort to anachronism, exaggeration, and speculation in order to justify political claims to territory or otherwise to promote a current political agenda.

Yet there are numerous reasons besides this for studying the Russian imperial annexation of the Crimea. From the perspective of geopolitical history and a comparative study of empires, this was a watershed event in both the decline of the Ottoman Empire and in the expansion of imperial Russia. Crimea was a major trade center as well as a military and strategic lynchpin for control of the entire Black Sea region, and its transfer had great ramifications for the futures of both empires. From the perspective of borderland studies, it is especially important to understand how the local population of the khanate negotiated competition between the two imperial centers and adapted to or resisted its changing political situation. Crimea was the first majority Muslim province lost by the Ottomans and the first time Russia incorporated a large Muslim population since the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, so treatment of the indigenous population would set a vital precedent for Russian policies during future expansion into Muslim lands. For this reason, understanding

the Russian annexation of Crimea is a vital chapter in the history of Christian-Muslim relations, which demonstrates the diverse ways in which Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodoxy have both conflicted and cooperated throughout the past. More broadly, this is an example of an encounter between the so-called “modernizing West” and a society that could be described as “traditional” and “oriental.” It is therefore intimately connected with the vigorous debate begun by Edward Said about the role of historians in promulgating notions “of Oriental backwardness, degeneracy, and inequality with the West.”<sup>1</sup> Hopefully, a study that takes recent literature on the subject into account can provide a more nuanced understanding of interactions between two societies that can easily be glossed as a clash between East and West or as a triumph of modernity over barbarism. In addition, this period bears interest for anthropologists and environmental historians studying the interactions between societies with varying modes of subsistence. It provides examples of the expansion by a sedentary, agrarian, commercial society into lands formerly inhabited by pastoral nomadic tribes and can help social scientists understand the exchanges that can occur between these two very different forms of livelihood and modes of economic and social organization. Finally, the history of these events is fascinating in its own right, and as a subject that is poorly documented by English-language historians, it deserves more attention in order to bring focus to the importance of a vast number of often-neglected individuals and groups as historical actors.

Though the Crimean Khanate is frequently dismissed as a powerless client state of the Ottoman Empire inhabited by barbarous Tatars, it actually had a very complex internal structure and a sophisticated political tradition. While Crimean khans, always belonging to the Chingisid Giray dynasty, needed the Ottoman Porte’s approval in order to rule, they were actually elected and deposed by a combination of the khanate’s religious authorities (the *ulema* and *qadis*) and its nobility, including the leaders of the most powerful clans, who were known as the *karachi beys*.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 206.



One other group also exercised extensive power within the Crimean Khanate but is frequently omitted from discussions of its history: these are the Nogay hordes that inhabited the steppes stretching from the Danube to the Kuban rivers and were nominal subjects of the Crimean khans while exercising effective authority over their own affairs. Comprising a separate ethnic group with origins in the Golden Horde, the Nogays were entirely nomadic pastoralists with traditions and customs distinct from those of the more sedentary Crimean Tatars, with whom they shared a history of conflict and warfare and under whose protection many of them came only following the destruction of their independent polity by the Kalmyks in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> In this way, just as the Ottoman Empire held suzerainty over the Crimean Khanate while granting it extensive autonomy, the Crimean khans themselves held sway over the Nogays as semi-autonomous and frequently troublesome subjects. As Alan Fisher explains, “The Nogay hordes, although after their entrance into the Khanate they were under the nominal leadership of Khan-appointed *seraskers*, never felt themselves closely tied to the Crimeans.” Because of these circumstances, “The Khan had only theoretical sovereignty over the Nogays, who made up about 40 per cent of the claimed Crimean population and who controlled almost all of the Crimean territory outside of the peninsula.”<sup>3</sup> For a group with such vast territorial control and political power, the Nogays left very few written records of their own after their submission to Crimean sovereignty, and their history during this period has not been as thoroughly studied as their status merits. Affirming the influential role of the Nogay hordes in the Crimean Khanate will be a central aim of this study.

Russia’s interactions with the Nogays were extensive and took many forms. During the Muscovite period, the tsars had maintained complex diplomatic relations with the independent

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia’s Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> Alan W. Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea, 1772-1783* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 12.

Nogay Horde that primarily pursued the futile aim of preventing nomadic raids on the Russian population. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, this dynamic obtained a new dimension as Russian emperors began to support active agrarian settlement in the Pontic steppe in order to secure their own military frontiers.<sup>4</sup> The capture of Azov by Peter the Great in 1696, the invasion of Crimea by Empress Anne in 1735, and the creation of New Serbia by Empress Elizabeth in 1752 showed the permanent threat to the Nogays' pasturelands now posed by the rapidly Westernizing Russian Empire after so many centuries of stalemate. Events came to a head during the reign of Catherine the Great as a result of the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774. During this war, the Nogays were the first and strongest Russian allies in the Crimean Khanate, paving the way for later Russian annexation of its territory. After several key military victories "in 1770, the Russians were also successful in stirring up a domestic conflict between the khan and his Nogay subjects." Soon, "numerous Nogays led by a powerful leader, Djan Mambet Bey, declared independence from Baghchisaray and joined the Russian troops fighting against the Ottomans and the Crimeans."<sup>5</sup> Over the course of the next 13 years, the Nogays would alternate between ardent support of Russian interests in the region and vicious rebellion against the Russians and their other allies. The complex narrative of their shifting allegiances for and against Russia merits careful analysis.

The fact that pastoral, nomadic, Muslim tribes would fight on the side of an agrarian, sedentary, Christian empire against their co-religionists seems incredibly surprising and even inexplicable. The Nogays' reversal of centuries of antagonism and warfare against Russia during a time when the Empire was becoming particularly threatening to Nogay culture and livelihood is entirely counterintuitive, yet explaining this change will be the central purpose of this account.

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<sup>4</sup> Alfred J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 54-55.

<sup>5</sup> Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania: International Diplomacy on the European Periphery (15th-18th Century): A Study of Peace Treaties Followed by Annotated Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 208-209. Bakhchisaray was the capital of the Crimean Khanate.

Previous historians have usually ignored the role of the Nogays in Russia's annexation of Crimea in favor of focusing on Ottoman-Russian relations, and they have certainly marginalized Nogay cooperation with Russian interests. Recent scholarship often belittles Russian "supporters among the Crimean Tatars and Nogays, some simply bought, others attracted by its might and splendor, and often deeply distrustful towards the Ottoman Porte."<sup>6</sup> Alan Fisher does emphasize the crucial role of Nogay support, but despairs of understanding their motives. He explains their behavior by "the inherent dislike of the Nogay chiefs for any authority which infringed upon their own. They would, and did, pledge allegiance to any side which would help them rebel against their existing sovereigns."<sup>7</sup> Yet this attitude is at best defeatist and at worst reiterates the colonial view of tribal peoples as "irrational" and "savage." A better effort must be made to understand Nogay actions.

My research will argue that there may have been a rational, self-interested reason for the Nogay hordes' temporary alliance with Russian interests. Specifically, I will demonstrate that Nogay leaders utilized the typical strategy of imperial borderland groups by pitting both sides of an imperial rivalry against each other in order to obtain the greatest possible advantages for themselves, even as they faced pressure from changing imperial power dynamics. The Nogays sought to gain political and military protection from a large empire against potential threats while simultaneously securing as much toleration as possible for their traditional privileges, customs, beliefs, and livelihoods. I will also illustrate that the success of Russian policies rested on their utilization of traditional approaches to steppe diplomacy stemming from as early as the Muscovy period, though couched in the new rhetoric of Enlightenment ideas. By revealing these dynamics, my research will extend the theories of earlier scholars to a previously understudied region and time period. It will highlight the Crimean Nogays as a typical but also unique borderland group.

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<sup>6</sup> Kołodziejczyk, p. 220.

<sup>7</sup> Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, p. 122.

## *I. Historiography and Methodology*

### **A. Overview of Previous Scholarly Literature**

As already mentioned above, the lack of historical scholarship on the role of the Nogays in the Russian conquest of Crimea presents both a key motive and a great difficulty for studying this topic. The foremost scholar on the issue is unquestionably Alan Fisher, whose monograph from 1970, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea, 1772-1783*, is still the authoritative work on the subject. Fisher relies on very thorough archival research into Russian, Crimean, and Ottoman political and diplomatic sources supplemented by memoirs, travel accounts, and other materials. His account of the Russian annexation is narrative and chronological, and the Nogay hordes play a key role in his description of events. He summarizes his findings in a chapter of a later work on the history of the Crimean Tatar people from the origins of their khanate until Soviet times. In it, he explains that earlier historical accounts “ignore the Nogays, and they were a major element in the khanate’s demise.”<sup>8</sup> Fisher’s work is fairly successful in highlighting the influence of Nogays on the events in the Crimea during this period, and he will be my primary interlocutor throughout this study. In addition to narrating the course of events, Fisher’s work provides detailed context on the structure of Crimean and Nogay society and on the internal organization of the Khanate. A number of his other articles, many of them later compiled in a single volume, also deal with various topics relevant to Russo-Ottoman relations and the social history of the Black Sea region from the early modern period until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> These were also helpful in my research.

Despite his invaluable contribution, Fisher’s work suffers from some serious drawbacks. For instance, though his source material is very extensive, he is often far too trusting of Russian justifications of the empire’s actions, as well as those of other groups concerned. For instance, he

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<sup>8</sup> Alan W. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars* (Palo Alto: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> See Alan W. Fisher, *A Precarious Balance: Conflict, Trade, and Diplomacy on the Russian-Ottoman Frontier* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1999). Many of the articles collected in this volume were originally published in the 1970s.

consistently refers to the period between 1774 and 1783 as one of Crimean “independence,” and fails to acknowledge the reality, widely accepted at the time, that the supposedly independent state was seen as a Russian protectorate since 1771. A more critical approach to this source material is needed, which takes into account the interests of its authorship and audience, as well as the process of its creation and the difference between rhetoric and action in Russian dealings with nomadic peoples. As noted above, Fisher also dismisses the Nogays as inherently chaotic and anti-authoritarian, and precludes the possibility of rationally explaining their motivations for cooperation with or rebellion against Russian interests. In a typical passage, he states, “Catherine had before called the Nogays ‘legkomyslennye’ (light-headed) and indeed they were. In all of their history they had never completely submitted to any outside authority and had changed their loyalty whenever it suited them.”<sup>10</sup> Yet it will be shown that Catherine seriously misrepresented certain Nogay actions, and that far from rebelling against every authority, the Nogays frequently sought out imperial protection. Fisher’s books were produced prior to the publication of Said’s seminal critique of Western scholarship of Islamic societies, and they fall into the trap of taking Orientalist representations of cultural others at face value. Moreover, his work is very narrative-driven and incorporates little theory about the behavior of borderland peoples or the interactions between steppe nomads and sedentary imperial administrations. Thus, he is able to make general statements like, “Nomadic peoples have always considered their way of life superior to that of the settled populations, and the Nogays were no exception.”<sup>11</sup> It is essential to update Fisher’s account and to bring it in line with recent theoretical literature in order to understand this period.

Unfortunately, more recent historians have done little to build upon the work performed by Fisher in the 1970s, and certainly not at the same level of detail. Dariusz Kołodziejczyk’s

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<sup>10</sup> Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

published volume of diplomatic correspondence between the Crimean Khanate and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth includes a brief but thorough history of both polities, including their parallel dissolutions by Catherine the Great. Kołodziejczyk does emphasize the role of the Nogays in Crimea's subjugation, and provides useful linguistic details about the diplomatic correspondence. But as noted above, he disparages Nogay collaboration with pro-Russian figures as the result of bribery or fascination with the "Western" power. Furthermore, he goes to great lengths in order to draw similarities between the Crimean and Polish-Lithuanian cases, often conflating very different situations. For example, he details "the biographies of the last Polish king, Stanisław Poniatowski, and the last Crimean khan, Shahin Giray," who were "both well educated, ambitious, and full of visions regarding the necessary institutional reforms to be introduced in their states and societies," but were "both infatuated with Catherine, who knew how to play on their sentiments."<sup>12</sup> In a sense, Kołodziejczyk is the opposite of Fisher, being far too cynical toward Russian actions and precluding even the possibility of rational, self-interested Nogay or Crimean support for Russian power. Yet his research is also helpful in many ways.

Brian Williams has also published an ambitious history of the Crimean Tatar people from their origins until the post-Soviet period, including a chapter on the Crimean Khanate's Russian annexation. He is apt to wax poetic about the tragedy of the khanate's downfall, lamenting that "The end of the Crimea's independence was ordained when the Nogai hordes, the khanate's traditional border guards, abandoned the khan and acknowledged Russian suzerainty," a policy which he describes as "their only chance for maintaining control of their steppe pastures."<sup>13</sup> While he acknowledges the importance of the Nogays' role and provides an economic rationale for their actions, Williams uses the ethnonym in a broad sense, including not only the hordes that

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<sup>12</sup> Kołodziejczyk, p. 216.

<sup>13</sup> Brian Glyn Williams, *The Crimean Tatars: The Diaspora Experience and the Forging of a Nation* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 71-72.

inhabited the steppes surrounding the Crimea but even nomadic populations within the peninsula itself. He also oversimplifies the situation of the Nogays confronted with Russian power: as will be shown, their actions did not always coincide with protecting their ancestral pasturelands.

A number of other recent scholars have also made contributions to the English-language historical literature on the Crimean Khanate. For example, Kelly O'Neill has extensively studied the actual methods of by which Russian officials co-opted Crimean elite groups and incorporated them into the Empire. Her research blends the theoretical approach of leading scholars such as Andreas Kappeler with exhaustive primary source analysis in order to prove that the success of Russian overtures in the Crimea rested largely on their recognition of indigenous value systems and traditional cultural assumptions about status and hierarchy. Though the Nogays do not figure prominently in her account, she explains that the loyalty of Nogay chieftains was obtained only because "Crimean and Chingissid geographies of nobility had been successfully integrated into the landscape of imperial nobility."<sup>14</sup> This breakthrough analysis highlights the role of Russian cultural integration in consolidating the gains of the Empire's military conquests. I will use this approach extensively in my research. However, in addition to mentioning the Nogays only in passing, O'Neill begins her narrative only in 1783, immediately after the khanate's annexation. I will extend much of her analysis to an earlier time period, proving that the co-option of regional elites by Russia occurred more than a decade before the territory was formally incorporated.

Aside from the strictly political and diplomatic history of the Crimean Khanate, progress has been made in studying its cultural and intellectual history. On this topic, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele is a leading scholar, and her close analysis of Turkic-language primary sources is indispensable for non-specialists in the field. One of her articles analyzes an autobiographical

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<sup>14</sup> Kelly O'Neill, "Rethinking Elite Integration: Crimean Murzas and the Evolution of Russian Nobility," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 51.2-3 (2010): 412. Unfortunately, her upcoming monograph, *Southern Empire: The Logic and Limits of Russian Rule in Crimea*, was not made available in time for inclusion in this study.

manuscript by Said Giray Sultan, a member of the royal family who was appointed *serasker* (military governor) of a Nogay horde by his brother, the ruler Khan Halim Giray, from 1755 to 1758. By recounting the education in Islamic learning, the natural sciences, and literature among the Nogay clergy during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Said Giray's account helps demolish the common view of the Nogays as uncultured or remote from centers of knowledge creation. Kellner-Heinkele's analysis of Said Giray's life creates "a certain, sometimes even lively, picture of the scholarly and spiritual life in the Crimean Tatar khanate in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>15</sup> This sort of close scholarship in Crimean and Nogay intellectual history must necessarily inform the research of historians seeking to understand the context behind the political choices of Nogay leaders.

Besides only English-language scholarship, of course, a vast body of literature has been published in Russian about the conquest of the Crimea generally and of the Nogays' role in the events especially. Interest in this topic began shortly after the events themselves, with a number of 19<sup>th</sup> century journals featuring both ethnographical research about the Nogays and historical narratives about Crimea's accession into the Russian Empire. The Ukrainian historian Apollon Aleksandrovich Skal'kovskii wrote one particularly notable piece of work in 1843 based largely on no longer extant primary sources, including those of the Zaporozhian Cossacks. He explains his methodology by stating, "But speaking of the history of the Nogay hordes, we will speak not as orientalists, nor as archaeologists." Instead, he focuses "on the Russian period of Nogay Tatar history, of which we can speak positively, on the basis of written acts in our possession."<sup>16</sup> For a 19<sup>th</sup> century European intellectual, Skal'kovskii describes the Nogays with a surprising level of respect and even admiration. He notes many similarities between them and the Zaporozhian

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, "Crimean Tatar and Nogay Scholars of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century," in *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, vol. 1, ed. Michael Kemper, Anke von Kügelgen, and Dmitriy Yermakov (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1996), p. 296.

<sup>16</sup> Apollon Aleksandrovich Skal'kovskii, "O Nogaishkikh Tatarakh, zhivushchikh v Tavricheskoi gubernii," *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnago prosveshcheniia* 40 (1843): 106.



Cossacks, and although he often derides their behavior as “savage” and their “pacification” by Russian forces as “heroic,” he endows them with a certain level of nuance and humanity that makes one recognize a difference between his method and that of a more detached “orientalist.” Although his conclusions should by no means be taken at face value, they provide invaluable information on the chronicle of events. He extensively quotes otherwise unavailable primary sources, making him useful for contemporary historians as a hybrid primary/secondary source.

Soviet scholarship on the Crimean Khanate was fairly limited, given the exile of the Crimean Tatar population to Central Asia and their official elimination as a Soviet nationality. The extant Soviet-era studies focus on the economic history of the area and on the dynamics of agrarian settlement, devoting little space to the geopolitical agency of borderland ethnic groups. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, a large body of historical work has arisen devoted to the plight of the Crimean Tatars, Nogays, and other previously marginalized groups. Much of this material is thoroughly researched and based on sound primary source analysis, but it frequently aims to reestablish the place of oppressed groups in history, and therefore tends to commemorate the atrocities committed by Russian authorities rather explaining the interactions between various groups in a scholarly fashion. A representative example of this trend is a paper from a conference in Makhachkala that concludes, “The elimination and eviction of the Nogays was necessary for the Russian authorities in order to rid themselves once and for all of the Turco-Muslim enclave and conduct Cossack and generally Christian colonization of the strategically important region.”<sup>17</sup> The period of cooperation between Nogays and Russians prior to 1783 is de-emphasized compared to the period of conflict that followed. While studies of this sort may provide useful information on the topic, they are rarely given in a helpful theoretical framework.

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<sup>17</sup> S.I. Alieva and Ali Asker, “Nogaitsy v politike Rossiiskoi imperii” (Paper presented as part of “*Aktual’nye problemy gumanitarnykh i obshchestvennykh nauk*.” *Nauchnye trudy vtoroi mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii*, Makhachkala, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013), p. 29.

In addition to specialized historical literature on the Nogays and the Crimean Khanate, researching this topic requires familiarity with a number of more theoretical works analyzing broader historical concepts. The first of these is the notion of empire and the nature of imperial interactions, both across imperial borders and between the imperial center and its peripheries. One of the foremost authorities in this area is Dominic Lieven, who is at once a theoretician and a specialist in the Russian Empire. Lieven compares the different normative attitudes toward empires in history, traces the etymology of the term, points out problems with the use of the term in various contexts, and contrasts the scholars of commercial maritime and land-based empires. Yet he admits his own definition of empire to be “very simple and unsophisticated,” meaning by it “a polity that rules over wide territories and many peoples, since the management of space and multi-ethnicity is one of the great perennial dilemmas of empire.”<sup>18</sup> While acknowledging other approaches, I will generally use this definition of empire, as management of space and multi-ethnicity was at the core of the struggle between the Ottoman and Russian empires over Crimea.

Certain other theorists also provide helpful insights about writing imperial history. For instance, Andreas Kappeler explains the challenges of writing a history of the Russian Empire from a multi-ethnic perspective. He points out that such a history may remain Russocentric, but should be written so that “the ethnic groups of the periphery will be examined not only as the objects of Russian statecraft, but also as forces that played a significant role in determining the course of historical events.”<sup>19</sup> I will attempt to adopt this strategy in my approach as well, maintaining a focus on the Russian state but also imparting agency to frequently excluded groups such as the Crimean Tatars and Nogays. On the other hand, John LeDonne urges awareness of the motivations and geopolitical aims of the imperial elite and its “grand strategy,” of which each

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<sup>18</sup> Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. xi.

<sup>19</sup> Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, trans. Alfred Clayton (London: Pearson Education, 2001), p. 5.

borderland struggle is necessarily only a small part. His succinct account of Russian expansion into the Crimea notes the influence of individuals such as Catherine the Great's chief secretary Alexander Bezborodko and her war minister Grigorii Potemkin, remarking that "both men were men of the frontier."<sup>20</sup> While focusing primarily on events in the Crimean peninsula and Kuban region, I will nevertheless have to be cognizant of the situations in St. Petersburg, Istanbul, and even Paris or Vienna that exert an influence over the strategies employed by the imperial agents.

Alongside the concept of empire, researching the end of the Crimean Khanate requires a theoretical understanding of the history of religious policies, and particularly religious toleration, in the Russian Empire. Because of the importance of cultural and religious difference in Russo-Nogay interactions, attention should be devoted specifically to the history of Orthodox-Muslim relations. Renewed interest in this topic has led to a surge of recent studies noting coexistence alongside conflict between the two faiths. An example of this trend is Bobrovnikov, who points out that Russian "authorities constructed a complicated imperial network of Islamic institutions including Muslim clergy, parishes and four regional muftiates." As he also says, "administration of Muslims differed in central Russia and the borderlands."<sup>21</sup> But the foremost current authority on Islam in imperial Russia is Robert Crews, whose monograph, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia*, argues that Islam was a tool used by the Russian state to administer indigenous populations. His main argument is that Russia enforced institutionalized, "pure" forms of Islam against the more unregulated or syncretic versions espoused by nomadic peoples with little formal Islamic scholarly instruction. Using very thorough archival research, he argues, "Tsarist officials presumed Islam to be useful to imperial administration as a source of

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<sup>20</sup> John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700-1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 107.

<sup>21</sup> Vladimir Bobrovnikov, "Islam in the Russian Empire," in *Imperial Russia: 1689-1917*, ed. Dominic Lieven, vol. 2 of *The Cambridge History of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 223.

stability and morality.”<sup>22</sup> Specifically, he discusses Volga Tatar missionaries sent by Catherine the Great to spread more disciplined forms of Islam among the nomadic Kazakhs. Although he discusses the reversal of this policy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the attempt to replace Islamic law (*sharia*) with customary law (*adat*) among nomadic Muslims, he gives precedence to Catherine’s state support for “civilized,” scholarly forms of Islam.<sup>23</sup> In my research, I hope to challenge this assumption of Russian preference for institutionalized Islam even during Catherine’s reign. I would like to show that Russian policies toward Islam were incredibly pragmatic and variable, even supporting more “savage” religious practices on Russia’s borders when these could be turned against an imperial neighbor like the Porte, which burdened itself with enforcing strict conformity to *sharia* law. This critique of Crews could be a major contribution to the literature.

Aside from Orthodox-Muslim interactions in particular, certain scholars have studied the history of Russian religious tolerance most broadly. Probably the most recent and ambitious such study is by Paul Werth, who documented the imperial center’s changing policies toward all of its non-Orthodox faiths. Werth concludes that the Russian Empire saw a conflict between pragmatic “mere toleration” and more ideological “freedom of conscience.” While the latter notion began to triumph in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, toleration “represented a provisional grant—a privilege for collectivities rather than an inalienable right for the individual.”<sup>24</sup> When studying trends of cultural accommodation and conflict in the Russian context, it is important to realize that tolerant policies did not preclude latent antagonism and an assumption of eventual elimination. This was a very different notion from the contemporary ideal of religious tolerance. Religious policies in imperial Russia were aimed foremost at maintaining order and stability.

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<sup>22</sup> Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 94.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-195.

<sup>24</sup> Paul W. Werth, *The Tsar’s Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 259.

A final area in which a solid theoretical grounding is necessary for a study of this scope is the nature of pastoral nomadic societies and the dynamics of their interactions with sedentary agriculturalists. While researchers from many fields have tackled this issue, a landmark study is Anatoly Khazanov's *Nomads and the Outside World*, which employs data from both historical sources and anthropological fieldwork to detail the complex, multifaceted, and ever-mutable ways in which nomadic societies differ among themselves in their adaptations to opportunities and challenges presented by their sedentary neighbors. His central thesis destroys the myth of nomadic autarky and self-sufficiency, arguing instead, "the important phenomenon of nomadism (while it remains nomadism) really consists in its indissoluble and necessary connection with the outside world; that is to say, with societies which have different economic and social systems."<sup>25</sup> In other words, the traditional Nogay way of life depended on interactions with agrarian societies such as Russia in the form of trade, slave raiding, intermarriage, and occasional sedentarization.

Just as some historians have focused on the livelihoods of pastoral nomads, others have studied the process of Russian colonization that brought this way of life to an end. Prominent among these is Willard Sunderland, who sheds light on the diversity of the colonization process: "Depending on time and place, the colonization process could be hesitant or intense; 'popular' or state-directed; driven by want or ordered by fiat; Russian, foreign, 'alien,' or 'sectarian.' Some nomads and Cossacks resisted the arrival of the migrants and their government; others adjusted themselves to the new limitations and possibilities and acted accordingly."<sup>26</sup> It is important to remember that the Russian state was only one of many actors in a much broader economic and ecological transformation of the Black Sea steppe into a Slavic, Christian, agrarian breadbasket.

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<sup>25</sup> Anatoly M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Julia Crookenden (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 223.

## **B. Methodological Approach and Theoretical Background**

My research will be based primarily on close reading and critical examination of Russian diplomatic and military correspondence, including communication among Catherine the Great, her statesmen and diplomats, and the army officers tasked with Crimean Tatar and Nogay affairs. Although Russian interests and actions are the main concern of these documents, I will attempt to discern what they may say about the actions and beliefs of non-Russian peoples. I will do so by carefully analyzing the hidden motives and agendas behind the statements of Russian officials and peeling these back in order to reveal the actual situation in the Crimean Khanate that these individuals were confronted with, but which they often misrepresented in order to justify their own actions. This will prove a very challenging task, since it will be an attempt to understand a foreign and eventually subjugated people through the eyes of their longtime enemy and eventual colonizer. I will have to assess in which situations the authors of the texts more or less accurately portray the events that took place, in which cases they intentionally distort the events in order to suit their own needs, and in which cases they are simply unaware or mistaken about the truth.

This process will inevitably involve some level of conjecture and speculation. Yet certain generalizations can be made. For instance, it was likely in the interests of officers stationed with the Nogays to secure their firm support for Russian military and political procedures, and they probably would have reported accurate information on such topics in private military dispatches to their commanding officers. Similarly, individuals stationed among the Nogays themselves and having to interact with them frequently were probably better informed of their desires, practices, and beliefs than higher-ranking officials who were more distantly removed from these matters. By contrast, documents issued by the empress or by her close associates, and especially those intended for dissemination or broad circulation, more likely reflect self-justification of Russian

actions and its own intentions rather than the true desires of other groups mentioned in them. Even supposedly “accurate” reports, however, must be viewed with suspicion of unrevealed motives: for example, a certain officer could overstate his success in gaining Nogay support for a policy in order to maintain favor with his superiors or he could demand more money or supplies to distribute to supposedly recalcitrant Nogay leaders, in reality hoping to keep them for himself or his own troops. Each document must be examined on a case-by-case basis, and alignment of the author’s incentives with telling the truth should be ascertained in order to deem information trustworthy. In the rare instances in which Nogay or Crimean Tatar correspondence is available in translation, it must be considered that the translation process may have changed the meaning from the authors’ original intent. Moreover, Nogay authors likely also misrepresented their own views and intentions in order to placate their more powerful Russian correspondents or to gain concessions for themselves. The specific circumstances surrounding the creation of each source will determine the ways in which it can be used and the information that it ultimately contributes.

I will rely almost exclusively on documents compiled in published volumes of sources on the Crimean annexation or Catherine’s reign rather than on materials contained in state archives. Russian soldiers or scholars compiled most of these sources in order to document the conquest. This is a significant disadvantage since it may result in a sample bias, with those documents that favorably portray Russian, Tatar, or Nogay actions more likely to find their way into published compilations. I will constantly have to stay mindful of the archival fallacy that readily available sources represent all, or even the most important, information on the topic in question. Of course, Russian state archives may be incomplete as well, but they are marginally more likely to contain sources hostile to Russian interests due to the sheer large number of documents that they contain. Unfortunately, difficulties in accessing the archives prevented my use of those valuable sources.

My methodology thus seeks to exemplify a new approach to diplomatic history that takes into account the process of a document's composition, its intended use, and its intended effect. This approach has been used to great effect in other areas and time periods, such as in Filippo de Vivo's work on early-modern Venetian *relazioni*. Leopold von Ranke asserted that *relazioni*, which were composed by Venetian ambassadors upon the end of their service and prohibited by law from distribution, showed "how history really was." But as de Vivo reveals, "they were not just means of information, but texts of action in support of particular political visions and policies, useful to rally friends and to expose enemies, and eventually meant to exert influence on policy-making."<sup>27</sup> When dealing with diplomatic correspondence, it is crucial to be mindful of the diplomatic factions within the court and of the ways in which reporting certain facts may imply a call for certain diplomatic actions. The late 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian court was certainly no exception to such intrigues, and it will be necessary to find out in what ways these may infringe upon the veracity of the sources. De Vivo's approach for analyzing Venetian *relazioni* can be adapted for Russian diplomatic and military communications as well, though with modifications.

Of course, my greatest disadvantage in researching this topic is my complete inability to use Ottoman archival sources, Crimean Tatar historical chronicles, or any other sources in Turkic languages. I will mitigate this linguistic barrier by using, whenever available, translated Turkic-language sources or those quoted in secondary literature. While very few sources written by the Nogays themselves survive, a large number of documents dealing with the Russian conquest of Crimea were created by the Ottoman court in Istanbul or by Crimean Tatar historians. Many of these mention the Nogays, and have been used effectively by Fisher and several other historians. However, these sources also present certain methodological challenges. Denise Klein analyzed six Ottoman and Crimean chronicles of a Nogay rebellion to reveal that, far from being objective

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<sup>27</sup> Filippo de Vivo, "How to Read Venetian *Relazioni*," *Renaissance and Reformation* 34.1-2 (2011): 47.



accounts, “each text was shaped in a complex interplay between various, mutually dependent factors.” The chroniclers’ sources, their intended audience, and their political intentions affected the content of their narratives. The Ottoman and Crimean sources had conflicting agendas and gave differing accounts, but each historian “excoriates the Nogays for being ignorant, rebellious, unjust and oppressive.”<sup>28</sup> One must not assume that the Ottomans or Crimean Tatars, from being culturally closer to the Nogays, treated them more objectively or even favorably in their writing. A similar critical approach to the one used with Russian sources must be applied to Turkic ones.

One important method for avoiding the prejudices inherent in the primary sources will be contextualizing them using ethnographic or cultural studies. The previously discussed works by Khazanov and others are very helpful in this regard, as are memoirs and eyewitness reports of Nogay or Crimean Tatar life. Yet memoirs present other difficulties as sources. Their authors often reveal more about themselves and the mental geography of their own culture through their accounts than they do about the peoples they encountered. In the Russian context, this can take on particular dimensions. For instance, a recent study of over 200 travelogues by Russians in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Iran reveals the influence of Russian struggles for self-identification and competition with the West on their portrayals of Iranians. According to the study, “travelogue authors try to hide any feeling of inferiority by attempting to prove that they are equal to the Western Europeans, especially the British,” and “to compensate for their inferiority complex, they overemphasize their Europeaness,” relying on the fact that “one of the ways to do that is to overemphasize the inferiority of their Oriental opponents.”<sup>29</sup> Similar attitudes are also evident among 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian travelers to Crimea and the Black Sea steppes, who were even more

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<sup>28</sup> Denise Klein, “Tatar and Ottoman History Writing: The Case of the Nogay Rebellion (1699-1701),” in *The Crimean Khanate between East and West (15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century)*, ed. Denise Klein (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), pp. 143, 138.

<sup>29</sup> Elena Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 10-11.

eager to prove their European identity. Although the accounts of Western European travelers do not contain this specific goal, they also aim to construct a self-identity against an oriental other.

This observation brings up the problem of Orientalism more generally. In my research, this problem presents itself in at least three ways. First, the Russian officials and soldiers who authored and/or compiled the vast majority of the primary source material perceive the Nogays and Crimean Tatars through an orientalist lens. Second, when reading these sources, it is possible to impart one's own Western assumptions, prejudices, and ideas about non-Western societies to the peoples being studied. And finally, Russian society itself is frequently seen as non-Western, and has been described as subject to the orientalist gaze. In order to overcome all three issues, it is first necessary to examine whether the Orientalist critique applies to the Russian case.

It should be noted that Said himself identified "the Napoleonic expedition (1798-1801) as a sort of first enabling experience for modern Orientalism."<sup>30</sup> His narrative thus begins both chronologically after and geographically far away from the Russian annexation of Crimea, so it could be argued that his analysis does not apply to this case at all. In fact, Said focuses almost exclusively on French and English relations with the Arab world, entirely ignoring Russia and Turkic peoples. Other theorists have extended his analysis, however, and applied them to the groups in question. Adeeb Khalid, in order to refute Nathaniel Knight's arguments about Russian exemption from Said's critique, argues, "In Russia as much as in Britain or France, the state found Orientalist expertise useful for its aims and thus provided Orientalists avenues to power."<sup>31</sup> Against this, Knight retorts that such a relationship did not always occur, and that Orientalist scholars were often at odds with the state and its expansionist policies. He goes further, insisting, "Orientalism should not preclude the possibility of verifiable knowledge and meaningful cross-

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<sup>30</sup> Said, p. 122.

<sup>31</sup> Adeeb Khalid, "Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1.4 (2000): 696.

cultural communication.” Knight’s defense of the historian’s craft against what he calls “Said’s epistemological nihilism” is compelling, and my research will largely rest upon his assumption that “our position as cultural outsiders does not prevent us from producing meaningful and verifiable knowledge.”<sup>32</sup> Though combating the “orientalist gaze” in both primary sources and secondary literature is difficult, being cognizant of these prejudices is the first step toward avoiding them. Maria Todorova enters this debate by positing that the central issue is Russia’s “distinctiveness” from Western Europe. She argues that the Orientalist critique is relevant to the Russian Empire, but with certain peculiarities. She answers Knight by stating that Said’s critique should entail “not relativism, not cynicism, not even the skepticism of despair” but “deep respect for knowledge propelling one to be cognizant of the hazards in the process of accumulating knowledge that brings in a measure of humility and another of stoicism.”<sup>33</sup> I aspire to display the virtues of humility and stoicism in my own research on the difficult topic of Russian borderlands.

A number of historians have provided more empirical support to the theoretical debate about Russian Orientalism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Yuri Slezkine has rigorously traced the categories used by Russian naturalists to describe diverse ethnic groups. He describes how, over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the primary distinctions between Russians and “foreign” peoples shifted from those of language, religion, and customs (primarily relating to food and sex) to those of “enlightenment, roughly analogous, on the national level, to the development of the arts, sciences, trade, and industry,” a category in which Russians felt themselves superior to most but still secretly inferior to others.<sup>34</sup> The Russian belief in its mission to spread enlightenment to

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<sup>32</sup> Nathaniel Knight, “On Russian Orientalism: A Response to Adeeb Khalid,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1.4 (2000): 713-714.

<sup>33</sup> Maria Todorova “Does Russian Orientalism Have a Russian Soul? A Contribution to the Debate between Nathaniel Knight and Adeeb Khalid,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1.4 (2000): 726.

<sup>34</sup> Yuri Slezkine, “Naturalists versus Nations: Eighteenth-Century Russian Scholars Confront Ethnic Diversity,” in *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 39.

“oriental” peoples was at least a self-justification for the actions of its policymakers and at most an actual part of the rationale for conquering neighboring peoples. Downplaying the influence of natural scientists, David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye argues that under Catherine the Great, “Russia’s growing interest in the East after midcentury was shaped by the personality of its energetic ruler, who was intimately involved in her empire’s intellectual and cultural life.” He emphasizes the influence of Voltaire and other French sinophiles on Catherine the Great’s view of the orient, and “it was the Orient that the Crimea most often evoked in Catherine’s day,” even leading her to refer to Bakhchisaray as “a Chinese village.”<sup>35</sup> His analysis is very insightful into the way that both Catherine’s theoretical idealization of the East and her practical disdain for it affected her encounters with Crimean Tatar and Nogay notables and her views of their behavior. Finally, Iver Neumann explains that Russia itself was seen with suspicion by Western Europe in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, as not belonging entirely to the “civilized” world. Though it was powerful, “Russia, however, was also a learner that of its own accord tried to cultivate itself to become part of mannered Europe.”<sup>36</sup> This is a reminder that just as Russian officials and scholars perpetuated a mindset of domination against other peoples, they themselves were also victims of this attitude.

A major contribution of my research will be to place the chronological narrative partially recounted by Fisher and others into a theoretical framework for understanding the behavior or borderland peoples. Much of this framework is supplied by Alfred Rieber, who explains how “individuals and whole social groups passed from accommodation to resistance and back again, oscillating between resignation and defiance as psychological moods, social conditions, and political pressures altered.” Such forms of behavior “were often misinterpreted or misunderstood

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<sup>35</sup> David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 47-49.

<sup>36</sup> Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: “The East” in European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 86.

by the conquerors and the conquered, being fraught with psychological ambiguity and social complexity.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, an action that was interpreted by an imperial center as gracious acceptance of its suzerainty may in fact have simply been accommodation in the face of internal political fragmentation or social unrest. Rieber gives the Moldavian and Wallachian princes as a typical example of elites among borderland groups, who “were involved in a typically borderland game of playing the Poles, Russians, and Austrians against one another in order to enlist the support of a powerful external ally in order to advance their own interests.”<sup>38</sup> I will show that the Nogays employed similar tactics in playing the Russians and Ottomans against each other. On one hand, these borderland groups desired a strong protector against external threats. At the same time, however, they sought other advantages from such an allegiance, including material rewards as well as a higher level of autonomy, consisting of local self-government, religious and cultural toleration, and the maintenance of social privileges for the ruling elite. Concurrently, though, the borderland groups engaged in a guessing game to figure out the winner in the imperial struggle, knowing that giving their allegiance to the losing side could lead to reprisals or even elimination by the eventual victors. This complex web of often-conflicting motives makes understanding the behavior of borderland peoples quite difficult, since it is always a product of multiple factors.

A very specific set of institutions also characterized the Russian Empire’s interactions with steppe peoples. Michael Khodarkovsky identifies a number of these institutions from the Muscovy period, including *shert’*, which was perceived as a peace treaty by the nomads but an oath of allegiance by the Russian authorities, *amanat*, which was an exchange of hostages to guarantee compliance with the terms of agreements, *yasak*, which was seen as payment of tribute by the Russians but as a form of trade by the nomads, and presents to the nomadic rulers, which

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<sup>37</sup> Rieber, p. 64.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 318.

were claimed to be freely given by the Russian rulers but in fact were often extorted.<sup>39</sup> He traces the ways in which these practices governed Muscovite interactions with the Nogays throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, his narrative ends with the destruction of the Greater Nogay Horde in the 1630s, shifting thereafter to discuss the Kalmyks and the Kazakhs.<sup>40</sup> Yet the Nogays did not disappear after the end of their independence, and their interactions with Russia continued even after they became Crimean subjects. Khodarkovsky shows how “by the middle of the eighteenth century, the same frontier concepts were increasingly expressed through a new political vocabulary.”<sup>41</sup> But his examples of this linguistic transformation are largely confined to the Kazakhs and Kabardinians. I will extend Khodarkovsky’s analysis to the Nogay hordes under Crimean suzerainty just prior to their annexation by Russia in order to show that many of the same practices were followed with regard to them by the Russian state as had been for centuries previously. Although Catherine’s government concealed its use of Muscovite political practices in Enlightenment rhetoric, their actual substance changed little. Ivan the Terrible had claimed to rule over the Nogays while Catherine the Great, conversely, claimed to grant them independence from the Ottoman Porte. But in practice, both rulers struggled in a similar manner to maintain the loyalty of the Nogay through a combination of coercion, enticement, and guaranteed autonomy.

Some attention should also be devoted to a theoretical understanding of religious topics. My research will use a number of concepts from religious studies, including the tension between establishing a unifying “political theology” and tolerating foreign faiths. Most empires feature “attempts by the ruling elites to invent an imperial ideology or political theology to function as a legitimizing force in welding together disparate cultural traditions and social groups.”<sup>42</sup> One tool

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<sup>39</sup> Khodarkovsky, pp. 51-69.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>42</sup> Rieber, p. 78.

for creating political theologies is the concept of confessionalization. This is a term derived from processes that took place in many Western European states during and following the Protestant Reformation, but has been applied to other parts of the world as well, including the Ottoman and Safavid Empires during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> empires. Confessionalization describes the methods by which temporal rulers sought to accumulate greater social control over the spiritual lives of their subjects by dividing them along lines of sect and denomination. It involves “the use of religious indoctrination by both state and church authorities for producing loyal, disciplined, as well as pious, subjects.”<sup>43</sup> This entire process primarily takes place with regard to the empire’s dominant religion, and it means eradicating heresies, schisms, and heterodox practices among adherents of the primary faith. Though studies of this phenomenon are usually confined to the early modern period, I will show how elements of it persisted in the Ottoman borderlands into the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

However, toleration is also necessary for empires to co-opt regional elites and to entice them into serving the geopolitical interests of the center rather than rebelling against it in favor of neighboring imperial rivals. In the Russian context, historians have documented the creation of “a multi-confessional Orthodox state—that is, a polity that established several religions while constitution only one of them as dominant.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, in addition to eliminating schisms and heresies within the Russian Orthodox Church, the imperial authorities often did much the same thing in other religions. Yet as I will show, Russian authorities were also very pragmatic in their treatment of foreign faiths, occasionally promoting certain schisms for geopolitical reasons. To win political allies, they also tolerated religious practices that were condemned elsewhere. I will demonstrate that the theoretical concepts discussed above are useful in certain cases but do not adequately describe the real situation in other instances of Russian relations with the Nogays.

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<sup>43</sup> Derin Terzioglu, “Where *Ilm-i Hal* meets Catechism: Islamic Manuals of Religious Instruction in the Ottoman Empire in the Age of Confessionalization,” *Past and Present* 220 (2013): 80-81.

<sup>44</sup> Werth, p. 3.

## II. *The Nogay Hordes Become Russia's Rebellious Allies: 1768-1771*

### A. *Nogay Unrest under the Ottoman Empire*

By the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Nogays that accepted the suzerainty of the Crimean khans were divided into five distinct hordes, each consisting of a number of tribes and smaller clans, which roamed the steppes surrounding the Crimean peninsula. The Bujak horde inhabited lands between the Danube and Dniester rivers, the Yedisian horde lived between the Dniester and the Bug River, the Jamboyluk horde roamed between the Bug and the start of the Crimean peninsula, the Yedichkul horde lived in the lands north of the Crimea, and the Kuban horde inhabited the region of the northern Caucasian isthmus between the Don and Kuban rivers. Their livelihood was based primarily on herding livestock, but also depended upon supplemental income from raiding Slavic and other sedentary populations for slaves and booty, which brought them into constant conflict with the Zaporozhian Cossacks and with other peoples of the “wild fields.” The Crimean khan appointed a *serasker*, or military governor, from among his own sons or brothers (the khan’s sons and brothers were known as *sultans*, but unlike the Ottoman sultans, they were not rulers) to govern each of the Nogay hordes. Appointment as *seraskers* provided the *sultans* with valuable military experience at the same time as it helped the khans control the Nogays. In reality, however, this control was only nominal and real power rested among the Nogays’ own hereditary clan leaders, called *beys*, and the other members of noble families, known as *mirzas*.<sup>45</sup>

The Nogay hordes chafed under the authority of the Crimean khans and Ottoman sultans, and this antagonism frequently erupted in the form of violent conflict. The reasons for this unrest can help explain their later willingness to accept Russian support. Fisher writes that the Nogays “took part in numerous rebellions against the Khan, at least twice in the eighteenth century, and usually at times when they felt that the Khan was trying to exercise too much authority over

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<sup>45</sup> Skál'kovskii, pp. 109-113.



them, or levying more taxes than they wished to pay.”<sup>46</sup> Yet carefully examining these two last rebellions reveals that there were deeper factors involved than simply Nogay hatred for authority or unwillingness to pay taxes. The earlier rebellion occurred in 1699-1701, immediately after the signing of the Treaty of Karlowitz, which exacted severe concessions from the Ottomans. It is usually attributed to the treaty’s mandate about the Nogays’ “relocation and the ban on raiding neighboring territories.”<sup>47</sup> The latter rebellion took place in 1757-1758, about two decades after the Treaty of Belgrade, and is also ascribed to the treaty’s attempts “to restrain the Nogays from their traditional and economically necessary activity of raiding the Cossack settlements beyond the Bug.”<sup>48</sup> While the economic necessity of raiding was an important factor, it is also critical to consider the tension from religious and legal differences between the Nogays and the Crimeans.

While the Nogays were Muslims alongside the Crimean Tatars and Ottoman Turks, their particular religious beliefs and practices differed sharply from those practiced by their overlords. Unlike the more institutionalized religion of the sedentary populations, “the Islam of the Nogai steppe herders was informal and filled with shamanistic steppe traditions.”<sup>49</sup> Devin DeWeese has written extensively on the syncretism of Nogay religion and the myths that it retained from pre-Islamic steppe religion alongside more traditional Muslim learning well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>50</sup> Because of the close connection between religious teachings and law in Islam (and generally in many pre-modern societies), the special legal system of the Nogays deserves some mention here. The early modern Crimean Khanate presented a curious case of legal pluralism, where Islamic religious law (*sharia*), Ottoman civil law (*kanun*), and customary law (*yasa* or *torë*) coexisted

<sup>46</sup> Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, p. 12.

<sup>47</sup> Klein, p. 125.

<sup>48</sup> C.J. Heywood, Review of *Aus den Aufzeichnungen des Sa’id Giray Sultān: eine zeitgenössische Quelle zur Geschichte des Chanats der Krim um die Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts* by Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 39.2 (1976): 449. I was unable to read the book itself.

<sup>49</sup> Williams, p. 59.

<sup>50</sup> Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), especially pp. 409-490.

side by side.<sup>51</sup> By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Ottoman state initiated a project of enforcing the former two legal systems at the expense of the latter. Reactions to these changes likely affected Nogay attitudes at least as much as concerns about pasturelands, taxes, and raiding opportunities. Although such a cultural history approach toward studying steppe peoples is usually discarded or given little weight in assessing their actions, it actually proves useful for explaining their revolts.

Notably, Ottoman chronicles describe how after the suppression of the 1701 rebellion, a sultan's decree ensured that "the Nogays have to abide by sharia law, follow the sultan's orders," and renounce the "awful behavior they call customary law (*töre*)." In many cases, sharia law actually sanctions the use of local customary law to judge disputes, but in this case, the Ottoman state clearly held the two legal systems to be contradictory. A Crimean historian also condemned the Nogays in religious terms by likening them to "devil and jinn" and "the people of 'Ād." He described in detail how "the Nogays ignored sharia law and the khan's *kānūn*. Even I have seen their injustice (*ẓulm*) and innovations (*bid'at*)."<sup>52</sup> Making innovations upon the teachings of the Prophet was considered an egregious sin in early modern Ottoman Islam, condemned harshly by the revivalist *kadizadeli* movement.<sup>53</sup> As Klein explains, "these accusations may reflect widely held beliefs about the Nogays among the Crimean elite, [and] they were considered the severest offences in Islam."<sup>54</sup> Both the Ottomans and the Crimeans condemned the Nogays as impious for following their customary law and syncretic religious practices instead of *sharia* and *kanun* law. While the Crimean elite may have welcomed the Ottomans' stricter enforcement of religious and legal control during this period, the Nogay hordes vehemently resisted it. The resistance to this enforcement of religious and legal obedience may have explained their desire for new protectors.

<sup>51</sup> Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Klein, pp. 130, 133.

<sup>53</sup> Dina Le Gall, "Kadızadeli, Nakşbandis, and Intra-Sufi Diatribe in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul," *The Turkish Studies Association Journal* 28.1–2 (2004): 1.

<sup>54</sup> Klein, p. 138.

In order to ensure the Nogays' obedience to Islamic law rather than customary law, the Porte ordered that "Mosques and schools will be built, and scholars and judges will be brought. The Nogays should show interest in the religious men ('*ulemā*') and knowledge ('*ilm*') so that, in addition to enjoying peace under the sultan's protection, they will no longer have to fear 'the visitation for their sins in the thereafter.'"<sup>55</sup> This sort of institutionalization of religious control on the part of political authorities by eradicating heterodox practices is a clear example of the practice of confessionalization. The Ottoman center attempted to enforce religious conformity in the periphery in order to aid the empire's political centralization, but this practice was violently rejected by the Nogays. It is unlikely that this was the first attempt to institute of such policies, and it certainly wouldn't be the last. Furthermore, the Islamic judges' "salaries of one thousand *gurūş* per year were paid by these tribes' tithe."<sup>56</sup> While the Porte actually lowered the Nogays' overall tithes after the rebellion as a concession in order to gain their favor, the requirement of paying for their own religious and legal oppressors must have infuriated Nogay leaders. Thus, while Fisher's assertion that Nogay rebelliousness was caused by taxation may have some merit, it ignores the vital cultural element and hence does not reveal the full complexity of the situation.

The later Nogay rebellion of 1757-8 may also have contained similar religious and legal components. Said Giray Sultan, the *serasker* of the Yedisian horde at the time of the rebellion, wrote a detailed description of the education of Islamic scholars and judges in the Crimea proper and among the various Nogay hordes during this period. While he "depicts 19 'ulema and seven shaykhs active in the Crimea," he only describes "two from the Quban area in the Caucasus and ten from the various Nogay tribes." His autobiographical account is replete with "condescending remarks when referring to scholars of the Nogay tribes," reflecting his "traditional education and

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<sup>55</sup> Klein, p. 130

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

Ottoman values.”<sup>57</sup> The disparaging attitude of the Nogay leader from the Crimean capital (who represented the Ottoman center) towards his peripheral subjects makes it easy to understand why they rebelled against central authority. It is very likely that Said Giray excluded important Nogay clerics in his autobiography because he detested their shamanistic practices. This animosity likely raised enmity with the Nogays and may have helped convince them to revolt against him.

The Russian authorities were well aware of the antagonism between the Nogays and their Crimean and Ottoman rulers, often using it to their advantage. According to Kołodziejczyk, “In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Nogays frequently rioted against the khans, asking for Russian assistance. St. Petersburg knew how to benefit from Nogay unrest in the years of Russo-Ottoman wars, but after the Treaty of Belgrade it rather discouraged the Nogays from disobeying the khan.”<sup>58</sup> This policy changed once again, however, once the Russian Empire went to war against the Ottomans in 1768 and the Nogays once more became a useful ally against both Bakhchisaray and the Porte. At first, it is difficult to imagine the Nogays envisioning the Russians as potential allies due to the massive religious and cultural differences between the two societies. Yet keeping in mind the significant religious disparities and history of antagonism between the hordes and their suzerains, it is easier to understand their desire for allies that were not eager to enforce Islamic orthodoxy or conformity to *sharia* law. It is overly simplistic to argue, as Fisher does, that Nogay rebellions occurred because “As steppe nomads, the Nogays had for centuries considered their way of life superior to that of the settled populations represented by the khanate.”<sup>59</sup> Rather, as typical for a borderland people, the Nogays sought aid from an imperial power that was incentivized against infringing upon their religious practices, legal system, and internal political organization. Over the next 15 years, the Russian Empire would portray itself as the best candidate to fit this role.

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<sup>57</sup> Kellner-Heinkele, pp. 280, 296.

<sup>58</sup> Kołodziejczyk, p. 208.

<sup>59</sup> Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, p. 24.

## B. Russian Success in Gaining Nogay Support

The strategy of shifting the allegiances of borderland peoples during the Russo-Turkish War was actually initiated by the Crimean Tatars, but quickly appropriated as Russian official policy. In December 1768, only a couple of months after the outbreak of the war, a *serasker* of one of the hordes named Shahin Giray sent an emissary to the Cossacks of the Zaporozhian Host. He attempted to convince them to rebel against Russia and shift their allegiance to the Porte. However, the Cossacks refused his overture and informed St. Petersburg. Catherine's foremost foreign policy advisor, Count Nikita Ivanovich Panin, thanked the leader of the Zaphorzhains, kosh ataman Kal'nishevskii, for his loyalty. Immediately after this, he asked that the Cossacks, "with the same nets, presented to you by the Tatars, capture them and turn them in our favor, that is, bring them with convincing proofs to such a position that they, rather than cooperating in the current war of ours with the Turks should turn to our side, or at least remain completely neutral, being thus simple observers of the enmity occurring between us and the Turks."<sup>60</sup> The reason for the Russian overture to the Tatars is clearly a reaction to the latter's policy, and was motivated by wartime military concerns. Yet this first attempt at an alliance would establish a precedent for all of the future tropes and rhetorical arguments used in order to win Tatar support for Russia.

The rest of the letter lists advantages for the Nogays from a Russian alliance, all of which are clear examples of borderland diplomacy. It should be noted that Panin addressed "the Tatars living in proximity to us," who were under "the Turks' and Crimean khans' yoke."<sup>61</sup> This means that he was actually referring to the Nogays, since the Crimean Tatars would never have seen the rule of their own khans as foreign domination. Panin states, "if they, the Tatars, come to their senses and cease to be Turkish slaves, then they themselves will soon see how contemptuous are

<sup>60</sup> Letter of Count Panin to Zaporozhian Kosh Ataman Kalnishevskii, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1768, *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo Istoricheskogo Obshchestva* (hereafter abbreviated "SIRIO"), vol. 87 (St. Petersburg: 1893), pp. 242-243.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

their Turkish lords, who so elevate themselves above them and oppress them under their yoke.”<sup>62</sup>

This comment seems to take into account the disparaging attitude toward the Nogays held by the Crimean elite, which was so evident in the writings of Said Giray. Furthermore, it casts Ottoman suzerainty as oppressive slavery, which prevented the Nogays from living under their own laws and customs. Russian officials already styled themselves the protectors of Nogay freedom. By contrast, Panin paints a rosy picture of many the peoples inhabiting the Russian Empire, paying special attention to its happy Muslim subjects: “Goodwill to peoples of the mahommedan law is extended to such a degree,” that they are free to build mosques even in Moscow, and that many serve with distinction and honor in the Russian armed forces.<sup>63</sup> Panin understood the importance of religious tolerance as a concession for gaining allies, and he contended with the Ottomans for Nogay loyalty even in this sphere. Russia was cast as a land where all peoples equally live under just laws, and this preoccupation with faith/law (*zakon*) would have been enticing for the Nogays facing confessionalization and strict enforcement of previously foreign religious and legal norms.

In order to gain the Nogays’ favor, Panin used a number of practices proven over many centuries of diplomacy with steppe peoples. He asked the Cossacks to assure the Tatars of “Her Imperial Majesty’s protection [*protektsiia*],”<sup>64</sup> and urged the general-governor of Kiev “for this purpose to use a certain sum of money, since it is proven, that for such skittish peoples as the Tatars, the glimmer of gold carries much more force than all reasons giving the best proofs of their future welfare.”<sup>65</sup> By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, *protektsiia* had replaced *shert*’ (i.e. peace treaties) in form but not in content, and gifts to leaders took on characteristics of regular annual salaries,<sup>66</sup> but both of these things were tools in a repertoire that had governed Russian relations with steppe

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>65</sup> Letter of Count Panin to Kiev Governor-General Voeikov, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1768, *SIRIO*, vol. 87, p. 246.

<sup>66</sup> Khodarkovsky, p. 184.

nomads since the 1400s. Catherine's Empire was now much more powerful than the remnants of the once-great Nogay Horde, but it relied on the same diplomatic formulas as in ages long past.

It is obvious that Catherine's government, even its proponents of "soft" policies such as Panin, did not really hold as much sympathy for the Nogays' plight as they professed, but they understood the importance of cultural sensitivity in steppe politics. In a charter to the Cossacks composed just two days later with Panin's help, Catherine called the Tatars "enemies of Christ's name" and cursed "the false prophet Muhammad."<sup>67</sup> Panin himself, after telling Kal'nishevskii to make overtures to the Nogays, also commanded him to pillage and burn their stores of food and livestock fodder that were prepared for raids on Russia.<sup>68</sup> But he ordered that a particular officer be used for negotiations because of "his kinship with the Tatars and consequently his complete knowledge of their mores and tendencies."<sup>69</sup> The presence of such cultural mediators in Russian service makes it likely that the Russians were aware the reasons for Nogay antagonism against the Porte and would be able to exploit these factors in their future attempts to secure an alliance.

It is unclear whether Nikita Panin persuaded Kal'nishevskii to fulfill request, but a year later in 1769, his brother Piotr Panin (who led forces in the area against the Turks) reiterated it as a command. Piotr Panin once again styled Russia as a liberator that fought "to defend and rid any people from the yoke and enslavement of another people compelled into its possession by force." He promised that upon accepting Russian protection from the "Turkish yoke," the Nogays would "remain in all their willfulness and freedom, a special people, under their own separate laws and government; of which they have now obvious evidence, not only from the Kalmyk people, but also all the Kabardinians, who during the current war already having come under the scepter of

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<sup>67</sup> Charter to the Zaporozhian Host, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1768, *SIRIO*, vol. 87, p. 240.

<sup>68</sup> Letter of Count Panin to Zaporozhian Kosh Ataman Kalnishevskii, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1768, *SIRIO*, vol. 87, pp. 244-245.

<sup>69</sup> Letter of Count Panin to Kiev Governor-General Voeikov, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1768, *SIRIO*, vol. 87, pp. 246.

our Most Merciful Sovereign, now take pleasure in all their freedom and safety.”<sup>70</sup> The interplay between freedom and safety implied here is important, and not necessarily intuitive. The Kalmyk and Kabardinian examples, though meant to prove a Russian trend of granting autonomy, may have actually done the opposite: only a few years later, the Kalmyks would try to leave Russian territory due to Russia’s abrogation of their freedoms, and the Kabardinians (a Circassian people from the Caucasus mountains) were in constant rebellion against St. Petersburg. But they, along with the Zaporozhian Cossacks, were all powerful long-term foes of the Nogays, who could be loosed against the latter’s beleaguered homes and livestock during the war if they were to refuse Russian friendship. By forging an alliance with Russia, the Nogays would gain greater protection against raids from their other nomadic or semi-nomadic neighbors than they had under the Porte.

Yet Piotr Panin’s references to freedom should not be entirely dismissed. He understood, “especially of the Bujak Horde, that they maintain the utmost displeasure and resentment for the Porte,” thereby showcasing his shrewd knowledge of the tensions between the Nogays and their suzerains. His emphasis on reviving the Nogays’ “separate laws” must have been meant to breed resentment against the Ottomans’ enforcement of *sharia* and *kanun*. He chose the Cossacks for this task because they knew the Nogays’ “foundations and mores, by their neighborly relations with them in peacetime.”<sup>71</sup> Panin knew that borderland peoples’ loyalties had to be turned both by promises of protection against traditional enemies and with grants of freedom from previous rulers’ attempts at political and cultural assimilation. His strategy would prove highly successful.

By 1770, at least two of the Nogay hordes had become convinced of the advantages of a Russian alliance. In November, Catherine claimed, “The Bujak and Yedisian hordes, having felt the justice and force of our arms, separated now from the Porte and, having become independent,

<sup>70</sup> Letter of Count Pior Panin to Kosh Ataman Kal’nishevskii, October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1769, qtd. in Skal’kovskii, p. 120.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 119.



entered into our patronage. By their assurance, the Jamboyluk and Soltonul [probably meaning Yedichkul] Tatars, their co-generates, will likewise commence this undertaking of theirs.” She bade her subjects “treat with them in friendship, conduct the trade they now require and bring to them everything needed for their sustenance and livelihood, taking money from them [...] as it was before the start of this war.”<sup>72</sup> The Yedisan and Bujak hordes were generously rewarded for their loyalty, hoping thus to inspire the Jamboyluk and Yedichkul hordes to do the same. But the call to trade and take the hordes’ money may be a covert allusion to the practice of *yasak*, which was a traditional symbol of alliance between Russia and steppe peoples. Although previous tsars claimed that *yasak* was a tribute payment, it actually closely resembled trade. Catherine had no need to feign rule over the Nogays, and in fact she actively promoted the myth of their freedom. But in order to communicate in mutually intelligible terms, she employed old, familiar tactics.

An officer named Shcherbinin soon replaced Piotr Panin in negotiations with the Nogays, and he succeeded in completing his predecessor’s mission. In February 1771, Catherine issued a charter to the Kosh Ataman of the Zaporozhian Host, declaring her success in “detaching from Turkish rule the Yedisan and Bujak hordes with the Jamboyuk and Yedichkul Tatars, who truly entered into an alliance with our empire and gave themselves into our patronage.” Finally, all four Nogay hordes living north of the Black Sea had become Russian allies. Catherine’s charter castigated the Cossacks for attacking Nogays travelling across their territory and it ordered their leader to punish those responsible, calling for “immediate delivery to the offended Tatars of total satisfaction.”<sup>73</sup> Catherine’s government took its new alliance seriously and made sure to fulfill its obligation of protecting the Nogays from predation by their historical foes. By a combination of internal autonomy and security from external threats, the Russians obtained the Nogays as allies.

<sup>72</sup> Rescript to Kiev Governor-General Major-General Prince Meshcherskii and Major-General Shcherbinin, confirmed November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1770, *SIRIO*, vol. 97 (St. Petersburg: 1896), pp. 182-183.

<sup>73</sup> Charter to the Zaporozhian Kosh [Ataman], February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1771, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, pp. 207-208.

The Russian authorities realized the importance of co-opting Nogay religious elites in addition to the aristocratic ones, and religious tolerance was a crucial part of this process. They sought to win over “a spiritual person located among the Yedisan people named Abdul-Kerim-Efendi, who, based on testimony, is in the special respect of everyone there and has control over matters in his hands,” primarily by freeing from imprisonment “his teacher Mufti Efendi with his family and relatives, who based on your report number up to twenty souls.”<sup>74</sup> It must be noted that the Russians courted religious leaders like Abdul-Kerim Efendi based on testimony of their respect and authority rather than based on rank or level of Islamic learning. This was likely more helpful for gaining Nogay allies than the Ottoman policy of appointing foreign religious leaders. Fisher states clearly “that the *ulema* among the Nogays were definitely opposed to independence for the Nogays, but their influence was much weaker among the nomads than among the settled Crimeans.”<sup>75</sup> Yet he does not discuss the figures wielding actual effective spiritual and religious authority among the Nogays. It is likely that such crucial figures were drawn to the Russian side.

Another vitally important factor in cementing Nogay support for Russia was the promise of resettlement to better pasturelands. All four Nogay hordes resettled from their territories north of the Black Sea to the Kuban region starting in 1771, and learning the reason for this movement is a difficult task. Of course, a major part of the reasoning was Russian military strategy, which benefited from clearing the areas in order to facilitate the movement of Russian troops to Turkish territories without harassment by their still highly tenuous new allies. Yet the Nogays themselves desired to move away from the lands ravaged by warfare and into more flourishing territories.<sup>76</sup> The Nogay leaders themselves took the initiative in their resettlement away from their previous lands, and these movements cannot be explained entirely as Russian coercion. The most notable

<sup>74</sup> Rescript to Major-General Shcherbinin, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1771, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, p. 201.

<sup>75</sup> Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, p. 35

<sup>76</sup> Both reasons are provided in a Rescript to Major-General Shcherbinin, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1771, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, p. 198.

evidence for this is the course of negotiations over the new territories of settlement: the Nogays demanded to be allowed to roam through the lands to the East of the Dnieper River, which were inhabited by the Zaporozhian and Don Cossacks. The Russians, by contrast, wanted to resettle them to the West of the Dnieper, up to the Bug or Dniester.<sup>77</sup> Supposedly, it was the pro-Russian leader of the Yedisian horde, Jan Mambet Bey, who first proposed moving the hordes beyond the Don to the Kuban. Catherine acceded to this proposal with the reservation that the Nogays must remain at a distance from the Kalmyks inhabiting the lands between the Don and the Volga in order to maintain peace between the two peoples.<sup>78</sup> Russia faced the difficult task of granting the Nogays new lands in order to gain their allegiance, but also remaining their protector from attack by other steppe peoples. By choosing the Kuban as their new place of settlement, Catherine was able to protect them from violence by both the Kalmyks and the Zaporozhian and Don Cossacks. As will be explained later, though, their new proximity to the Kabardinians and other Circassian tribes would lead to violent conflict that Russian authorities could not prevent, thus weakening their position as the Nogays' protectors and diminishing Nogay alignment with Russian interests.

Jan Mambet Bey was among the earliest Nogay leaders to ally with Russian interests, and he became their staunchest supporter among the hordes. Thanks largely to bountiful Russian gifts and payments he gained significant power not only over his own Yedisian horde but also to some extent over the other three. Of course, it is possible that his "request" to move his people to the Kuban region was invented by Russian imperial agents. Yet this possibility is denied by other sources. For one thing, the Yedichkul horde moved to the Kuban by sea from the Crimean port of Yenikale without Russian assistance and even before declaring allegiance to the Russians.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, a Turkish soldier held prisoner in Russia recounted that a Nogay emissary came to

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 199 and Rescript to Major-General Shcherbinin, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1771, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, p. 205.

<sup>78</sup> Rescript to Major-General Shcherbinin, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1771, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, p. 204.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 206. On Jan Mambet Bey, see Kołodziejczyk, p. 209, fn. 585 and Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, p. 53.

Bakhchisaray in December 1771 and relayed his horde's desire to move to the Kuban against the wishes of their *ulema*.<sup>80</sup> The fact that a Nogay even told an Ottoman soldier about their intended resettlement indicates that such a move was not simply the result of a Russian command. Finally, the destitution and hunger of both men and livestock observed by the Cossacks who helped move the Nogays to their new lands makes their desire to seek richer pastures much more plausible.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, Russian aid in relocating to richer territories must have been a major factor that facilitated the Nogays' alliance with the Empire. Yet the Russians feared that the Nogays could abandon their allegiance to Russia and escape across the Kuban River to Ottoman territory, and they were cautious to retain control over the Nogay hordes even while rewarding them with new lands. Catherine ordered Shcherbinin to insist on the Nogays "leaving on their part with you two or three persons of mirzas or others, not lacking renown among them," in order to ensure their compliance. Although the choice of individuals to remain in Russian captivity would "depend on the desires of the Tatar society," the selected persons had to be "worthy of the proposed aim."<sup>82</sup> This action of taking hostages from among the Nogay nobility was a thinly veiled version of the practice of *amanat* that had existed between Russia and nomadic steppe peoples for centuries. Catherine's government was careful to act as a benefactor of the Nogay hordes only as long as it could ensure their compliance or at least punish their disobedience according to the old customs.

The imperial government's success in gaining the support of the Nogays created an even more ambitious desire to gain the allegiance of the Crimean peninsula itself. As early as 1770, Catherine hoped that the Crimea would follow the example of the Yedisan and Bujak hordes.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> V. Smirnov, trans., "Zapiski Mukhammeda Nedzhati-efendi, Turetskago plennago v Rossii v 1771-1775 gg," *Russkaia starina* 81.4 (1894): 179.

<sup>81</sup> Skalkovskii, p. 124.

<sup>82</sup> Rescript to Shcherbinin, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1771, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, p. 244.

<sup>83</sup> Rescript to Kiev Governor-General Major-General Prince Meshcherskii and General-Major Shcherbinin, confirmed November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1770, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, pp. 182-183

However, this project faced difficulties for the same reason that the overtures to the Nogays had succeeded: the social and cultural differences between the Crimean Tatars and the Nogays. The sedentary Crimean Tatars had adapted to Ottoman cultural and political domination, and had no reason to aspire to “independence.” While a number of prominent Crimean noble families like the Shirin and Mansur clans could have gained more autonomy by casting off Ottoman control, they would also have lost assurances of the privileges guaranteed to them by the Porte in favor of nebulous, uncertain Russian promises of protection. For this reason, a full-scale military invasion was necessary before the Crimean residents acceded to their “independence” from Ottoman rule.

The 1771 invasion of Crimea took place primarily due to Russian military interests, but also tried to secure the support of the Crimean population. Catherine reasoned that Russian arms would be necessary to assure Crimean “freedom” from the Ottoman Empire whether the local population desired this but was unable to achieve it or whether they remained in “indecision.”<sup>84</sup> She issued a manifesto to the Crimean population explicitly based “on the very same political foundations, which until now in negotiations with the other Tatar hordes already bore so much fruit.” The accompanying orders to General Dolgorukov, the officer leading the invasion, urged him to punish any opposition but to reward Russian supporters with tangible benefits, hoping to thereby prove “that our entire aim goes foremost to disentangling them from the Turks.”<sup>85</sup> It was clearly believed that the Crimean Tatars could be enticed using the same methods as the Nogays. The manifesto itself cited this precedent, declaring that just as “the Yedisan, Bujak, Yedichkul, and Jamboyluk hordes, by natural human right, already renounced Turkish allegiance, affirmed among themselves by oath to exist and live as a people independent from everyone under the government of their own ancient customs and laws,” so too should the Crimean Tatars, “seeing

<sup>84</sup> Rescript to Major-General Shcherbinin, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1771, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, p. 198.

<sup>85</sup> Rescript to General Prince Dolgorukov, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1771, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, pp. 234-235.

the example given by their co-generative and co-religionist brethren, return also to their natural freedom and always want, in unity with them, to remain independent.”<sup>86</sup> This manifesto used the rhetoric of Enlightenment ideas such as natural rights and freedom to justify the Russian invasion in the eyes of Western powers, all while promising the Crimean Tatars protection and security in return for their loyalty, as well as liberty in the form of rule by their “ancient customs and laws.” But by conflating the Crimean Tatars and Nogays as “co-religionists” and “brethren,” Catherine ignored the major cultural differences between the two societies, thereby satisfying neither party.

Russia was finally able to pressure the Crimean elite to accept independence under its protection. Khan Selim Giray fled to the Ottoman Empire, fearing reprisals from the Porte, and Sahib Giray was elected to replace him. Upon his election, Catherine sent a charter to Sahib and “all the Tatar peoples,” confirming him as the “lawfully elected and independent from everyone, except only God, Khan,” who ruled over the “Crimean and other Tatar peoples,” allegedly sworn to obey him “by their ancient ancestors’ customs.”<sup>87</sup> This implied that his rule extended over the Nogay hordes as well, thus denying them the previously promised independence from both their Ottomans and Crimean rulers. The charter once again emphasized the “foreign” domination of the Ottomans and the “friendship” of the new Russian ally. The mention of dependence on God is interesting, since in the same document, Catherine promised to use “all the powers given us by God” to protect Crimean sovereignty.<sup>88</sup> This seemed to be an attempt to narrow the religious gap between the two polities by implying that the same God presided over both rulers. The Russians were wary of the difficulty of maintaining the newly created Muslim state under their influence. But so far, they had succeeded in forging an alliance with all of the Nogay hordes as well as with the Crimea. They would soon learn just how unstable alliances with borderland peoples could be.

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<sup>86</sup> Manifesto Outline, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, pp. 245-246.

<sup>87</sup> Charter to the Crimean Khan and All the Tatar Peoples, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1771, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, p. 490.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

### ***III. The Russian-Nogay Alliance Faces Challenges: 1771-1777***

#### **A. Challenges during the Reign of Sahib Giray**

The central problem for Russian diplomats upon securing Crimean loyalty was whether to deliver the independence they had promised to the Nogays from both the Ottomans and the Crimean Khanate by creating two separate states, or whether to create a single new Crimean state and thereby maintain the territorial integrity of the khanate. The former policy would cement the support Russia had earned from the Nogays with its promises of freedom from the political and cultural domination of the sedentary Tatars, but it would simultaneously alienate the Crimean khans by dividing their domains. The latter policy would renege on promises to the Nogays, but had the potential to gain support from the Crimean ruling elite by not depriving them of a large number of their former subjects. The Russians would attempt to gain both options' advantages.

Initially, Catherine seemed inclined toward the former option, supporting the election of Shahin Giray sultan, the same *serasker* who had tried to turn the Cossacks toward Istanbul in 1768, as khan by the Nogays. Upon the recent departure of the majority of the Kalmyks from Russian territory into Central Asia, she needed border-guards against the Kuban Nogay horde, and figured that the four hordes that recently moved to the Kuban region, which were allied with Russia, could fulfill that role. She considered Shahin Giray a “dependable and well-meaning person”<sup>89</sup> based on service he had recently rendered to the Russian cause. In an undelivered draft of an order to Prince Dolgorukov, Catherine wondered whether Khan Selim Giray would agree to grant independence to the Nogays and thereby “forever lose the aforementioned peoples, who formed the main [military] strength of the Crimean peninsula.” She added, “We maintain the division of the Tatars into two independent areas as an even more advantageous position for the future of Our Empire, if only the rule and love of honor of the Crimean Khan could agree in this

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<sup>89</sup> Rescript to Shcherbinin, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1771, *SIRIO*, pp. 284-285.

with the professed wishes of his people.”<sup>90</sup> This order was not executed, however, because the situation changed with Selim Giray’s flight from the Crimea and his replacement by Sahib, who was less reliant on the Porte and friendlier to Russian demands. Upon his election, Catherine sent a replacement order to Dolgorukov, demanding that the Nogays recognize Sahib as Khan.<sup>91</sup> The accompanying order to Shcherbinin specified that persuading Nogay leaders to agree to Sahib’s election as Khan was his “most important” assignment, and mentioned that they would be able to negotiate with him for some autonomy within the khanate.<sup>92</sup> In just a few months, the preference for an independent Nogay territory was replaced with demands for political unity of the khanate.

At first, Russian policies tried to maintain the favor of the Nogays by securing autonomy and privileges for the Nogay hordes. Another undelivered imperial order demanded that Nogays be exempt from taxation and kept “in a certain separation [*osobennost*] from Crimea.” Notably, the Nogays were to be allowed to negotiate with the Khan for their privileges, and the hostages taken by Shcherbinin, now explicitly referred to as “*amanats*,” were to be used for this purpose.<sup>93</sup> The revised version of this order, which was delivered and executed in the spring of 1772, still retained these orders, but contained a warning to counteract the influence of Ottoman agents among the Nogays, who were gaining success in turning them from Russia.<sup>94</sup> Obviously, the Nogays already began to be disillusioned when Russia rescinded its promises of independence. But soon, even the promised autonomy under Crimean rule was abandoned. An order from June 1772 stressed the importance for Russian military interests of gaining control over the fortresses of Kerch and Yenikale in the Crimea, and told Shcherbinin to make concessions to the Khan in order to obtain these forts in return. It also suggested that a conclusion about the extent of the

<sup>90</sup> Rescript to Prince Dolgorukov, end of July, 1771, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, p. 377.

<sup>91</sup> Rescript to General-in-Chief Prince Dolgorukov, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1771, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, p. 406.

<sup>92</sup> Rescript to Major-General Shcherbinin, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1771, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, pp. 408-409.

<sup>93</sup> Instructions to Our Lieutenant-General Shcherbinin, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1771, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, p. 483.

<sup>94</sup> Instructions for Lieutenant-General Shcherbinin, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1772, *SIRIO*, vol. 118 (St. Petersburg: 1904), p. 83.



Khan's authority over the Nogay hordes could be reached either based on an agreement by both sides or based on a unilateral charter from the Khan. The order then authorized Shcherbinin to adjudicate the dispute about autonomy between the Khan and the Nogay leaders as he saw fit, "based on the course and success of your negotiations."<sup>95</sup> The implications of the order are clear: the primary Russian goal was to secure Crimean approval for possession of the strategic forts, and its favor with the Nogays could be sacrificed in order to achieve this objective. The Khan was given full control over the Nogays in order to secure his support for Russian military needs.

In a lengthy memorandum to the Austrian deputy Prince Lobkowitz, the Russian court justified its policies towards the Crimean Khanate. This document drew upon a curious blending of persuasive strategies, combining Enlightenment ideals such as liberty, rights, and justice with more practical advantages of Tatar independence such as weakening the Ottoman Empire. It also extensively described the history and internal socio-political organization of the Tatars, praising their "ancient pastoral and feudal regime" and their "customs and ancient practices."<sup>96</sup> While many of the facts presented are obvious misrepresentations or embellishments, some of them indicate a deep understanding of Crimean-Ottoman relations, such as the promise that the Giray family would inherit the imperial throne if the House of Osman were ever to fail to produce an heir. The document even mentions a "difference of sect"<sup>97</sup> between the Ottomans and Tatars, probably a reference to religious differences between the Nogays on one hand and the Crimeans and Ottomans on the other. This memo shows the flexible approach of the Russians to their new allies. On the question of the Nogays, it is characteristically vague, explaining that the Bujak, Yedisan, Yedichkul, and Jamboyluk hordes had already united into an "independent state under a single leader; and whether their union stays as it is or whether it is augmented by the accession of

<sup>95</sup> Rescript of the Empress to Lieutenant-General E.A. Shcherbinin, June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1772, *SIRIO*, vol. 118, pp. 150-153.

<sup>96</sup> Explanation of the Local State of the Tatars, *SIRIO*, vol. 97, pp. 310-311.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312. On the Girays inheriting the Ottoman throne, see Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, p. 5.

the Crimean Tatars, the Russian court has assured them and owes them its protection.” In other words, it was claimed that Crimean unity with the Nogays would be desirable for both parties. According to the Russian diplomats, “all that these four hordes ask is to possess peacefully some land where they can feed their herds,” which would be easier under Russian protection.<sup>98</sup> Based on this understanding, it did not matter whether there would be a single Tatar state, or separate Nogay and Crimean ones. Russia could justify either course of action to its European rivals, so it was free to choose whichever strategy would most benefit its own long-term political interests.

At this point, the Russian court realized the full importance of religious toleration as a key method of proving its good intentions. Catherine sought to assuage the Crimean elite’s fears that they would “pass from slavery to slavery,” but from one where “their mahommedan law was and remained without harm” to one where “this delicate and important point, pertaining to their conscience, will suffer prejudice.”<sup>99</sup> To this end, she issued another charter to “Crimean society,” this time including the “spiritual ranks,” reaffirming that they were “free and independent from everyone, except the One God.”<sup>100</sup> Emphasizing the unity of God in this charter, she attempted to signal her respect for and adherence to monotheism, the most important tenet of Islam. It must be noted that in an earlier, similar, charter to the four Nogay hordes, the divine is addressed not as “the One God” but as “The Almighty (*Vsevyshii*),” and Catherine praises “His omnipotence (*Ego vsemogushchestvo*).”<sup>101</sup> This address emphasizes God’s power over the daily lives of individuals rather than theological precepts about his nature, and would be likely to appeal more to the lived religion of steppe nomads than the scholarly sensibilities of the *ulema*. But after Russian officials decided to court the Crimean Khan at the expense of the Nogay leaders, religious authority was

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., pp. 314-316.

<sup>99</sup> Instructions for Lieutenant-General E.A. Shcherbinin, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1772, *SIRIO*, vol. 118, p. 74.

<sup>100</sup> Charter of the Empress to Crimean Society, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1772,” *SIRIO*, vol. 118, p. 70.

<sup>101</sup> Charters to the Yedisan (Bujak, Jamboyluk, and Yedichkul) Hordes, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1772, *SIRIO*, vol. 118, p. 13.

deferred to the Crimean government as well. Thus, in November 1772, Russian, Crimean, and Nogay representatives signed the Treaty of Karasu Bazaar, which established “the new Crimean state, without compromising the latter’s religion, laws, or freedom,” and which made certain that “the Khan’s authority spread over all of the peoples who had inhabited the former Khanate—this included the Nogays.”<sup>102</sup> This ensured that the more established religion and laws of the Crimean Tatars would reign in all parts of the new polity, infringing once again on the Nogays’ traditions.

When it came time for the Khan to appoint a *serasker* over the four hordes, the Russians supported his exercise of central authority by condoning his unilateral appointment of his desired candidate, rather than confirming a *serasker* elected by the Nogay leaders. Though Shcherbinin had identified Gazi Giray Sultan as a candidate for *serasker* who was both popular among the Nogay hordes and well disposed to Russian interests, Nikita Panin disapproved of this choice based on the necessity of taking Crimean religious authority into account. He wrote, “here it is entirely unknown, whether he might not be one of the number of those Tatar princes, who once and for all by the rite of the mahommedan law are most solemnly condemned to anathema and declared unworthy to rule over Muslims.” It is not said what Gazi Giray may have done to be anathematized by the powerful Crimean *ulema*, but his election as *serasker* would certainly have gained their disapproval. Panin explains that “under the separate rule of the Nogay hordes from the Crimea, [this] may not have prevented his designation as *serasker* over the hordes, by reason of the little discrimination [*maloi razborchivosti*] in fine points of law on the side of those coarse Tatars. But now, in the current state of our affairs with the Crimeans,” it was imperative to allow the Khan full “participation in internal matters of the Nogay hordes.”<sup>103</sup> This letter very clearly demonstrates Panin’s knowledge of Nogay disdain for Islamic law and in fact their preference

<sup>102</sup> Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, p. 50.

<sup>103</sup> Letter of Count N.I. Panin to Lieutenant-General E.A. Shcherbinin, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1772, *SIRIO*, vol. 118, p. 287.

for leaders who were willing to subvert it in favor of steppe traditions. It shows that Catherine's government would have been willing to support such less institutionalized religious beliefs and practices in order to secure a valuable ally as leader of the Nogay hordes, thereby undermining the understanding of Catherine's approach to Islam espoused by historians such as Robert Crews. However, due to the shift in Russian interests and the necessity of courting Crimean religious leaders, this policy was abandoned in favor of one condoning stricter enforcement of *sharia* law.

As one would expect, these policies resulted in rebellion against Russian interests by the Nogay hordes. Following a common borderland pattern, the Nogay leaders rapidly shifted back to courting their previous Ottoman protectors once the promises made to them by Russia were abrogated. While the Yedisan horde may have retained its pro-Russian stance under the powerful leadership of Jan Mambet Bey, the Yedichkul horde completely broke away from their Russian alliance and acted on its own without acknowledging the Yedisan leader.<sup>104</sup> Catherine ordered Dolgorukov to take military action against any Nogays communicating with the Porte, "putting some to the sword, taking others prisoner into bondage, giving them to landlords as serfs, and finally burning their settlements, as oath-breakers."<sup>105</sup> She combined Dolgorukov's punitive actions with continued diplomatic overtures by Shcherbinin.<sup>106</sup> But Nogay retraction from the Russian alliance and renewal of allegiance to the Porte continued. A new strategy for cementing the Nogay alliance was to encourage Nogay nobles such as the Yedisan leader Jan Mambet Bey Yedichkul leader Mambet Bey and to foster their children and grandchildren with Russian army officers.<sup>107</sup> Although this practice was supposedly initiated upon the request of the Nogay leaders themselves, it still resembled a less coercive version of the old steppe practice of taking *amanats*.

<sup>104</sup> Letter of Count Panin to General-in-Chief Prince V.M. Dolgorukov, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1773, *SIRIO*, vol. 118, p. 386.

<sup>105</sup> Rescript No. 4 of the Empress to Prince V.M. Dolgorukov, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1773, *SIRIO*, vol. 118, p. 384.

<sup>106</sup> Rescript No. 5 of the Empress to Prince V.M. Dolgorukov with an autographical note, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1773, *SIRIO*, vol. 118, pp. 387-388.

<sup>107</sup> Rescript of the Empress to Lieutenant-General E.A. Shcherbinin, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1773, *SIRIO*, vol. 118, p. 331.

None of these practices succeeded in regaining Nogay support, though, especially given renewed raiding by Kabardinians from the mountains. The Russian court received word about “relations of the Kabardinian leaders with Nogay peoples released from submission to the Ottoman Porte,” and of Gazi Giray’s overtures to both the Nogays and the Kabardinians.<sup>108</sup> The Kabardinians fighting on the side of the Turks against the Russians appealed to the Nogays for support, and it can be deduced that an implicit threat of attack by the Kabardinians stood behind this offer, if the Nogays should refuse to betray the Russian alliance and shift their allegiance. The inability of the Crimean Khan or the small remaining Russian garrison to protect the Nogays from raiding by the powerful Kabardinians helped convince the Nogay hordes that they needed a different protector.

Gazi Giray, who had now gained support from the Kabardinians in addition to popularity among the Nogay hordes, was becoming an indispensable partner for the Russian cause. With the Nogays threatening to turn to full-scale attack against the Russians, the imperial court once again switched strategies and began to support Gazi Giray as *serasker* of the Nogays. Catherine stated, “We find it useful to present to the Nogay hordes, of their own accord, to elect as their *serasker* Gazi-Giray-Sultan,” whom she hoped to make into a Russian military ally in return. Catherine realized that “the Tatar loyalty to mahommedanism” would not allow the Crimeans to approve of this election, but chose to support it all the same.<sup>109</sup> This shift showed the pragmatism that was so characteristic of the Russian court when dealing with the Nogays and Crimean Tatars. Though they risked alienating the Crimean Khan, to whom they had promised authority over the Nogays, and losing the support of the Crimean *ulema*, imperial officials acted based upon their strategic needs at the time, willing to grant autonomy to powerful new leaders in order to gain the loyalty of borderland peoples. This flexibility would be tested once more by another new development.

<sup>108</sup> Rescript of the Empress to Lieutenant-General Medem, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1773, *SIRIO*, vol. 118, p. 392.

<sup>109</sup> Rescript of the Empress to Lieutenant-General E.A. Shcherbinin, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1773, *SIRIO*, vol. 118, p. 486.

The power dynamics among the Nogay hordes were changed with the arrival of Devlet Giray in the Kuban from Ottoman territory. Devlet, who was a former Crimean Khan and a firm supporter of the Porte during the war against Russia, wished to overthrow Sahib and regain the Crimean throne himself. Catherine first learned of his arrival and attempts to gain support among the Nogays in late 1773, and ordered military countermeasures.<sup>110</sup> Her worry was well founded, since Devlet had rapid success in winning Nogay loyalty. By March 1774, the Yedichkul horde under its separate leader Ismail Bey joined Devlet in rebellion against Khan Sahib and Russian influence, and other hordes were in danger of shifting their loyalties as well.<sup>111</sup> The Russians first tried to counteract this new threat by continuing their entreaties to Gazi Giray, hoping to befriend a leader with popularity among the Nogays.<sup>112</sup> But Devlet had firmly replaced Gazi as the most viable alternative to Crimean and Russian power in the region. The Russians quickly abandoned their overtures to Gazi, instead supporting the election of Shahin Giray as the Nogay leader.<sup>113</sup> It is notable that the specific title of *serasker* was replaced by an ambiguous position of leadership, leaving it vague whether the Russians were now willing to support independence for the Nogays.

Shahin Giray, who was appointed his brother Sahib's heir apparent, or Kalga sultan, had recently returned from an extended stay in St. Petersburg, where he had become a firm supporter of Russian influence in Crimea and grew personally very close to Catherine. Though he had been a Nogay *serasker* earlier, his long absence did not make him a popular choice for leader among the Nogay hordes. The Russians would have to enhance his candidacy using other means in the absence of popular approval. One of these means was the threat of physical violence: Russian troops attacked and chased away Shahbas Giray, Devlet's appointed Kalga sultan, when he tried

<sup>110</sup> Rescript No. 11 of the Empress to Prince V.M. Dolgorukov, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1773, *SIRIO*, vol. 118, p. 489.

<sup>111</sup> Rescript No. 5 of the Empress to Prince V.M Dolgorukov, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1774, *SIRIO*, vol. 135 (St. Petersburg: 1911), pp. 71-72.

<sup>112</sup> Rescript of the Empress to Lieutenant-General E.A. Shcherbinin, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1774, *SIRIO*, vol. 135, p. 31.

<sup>113</sup> Rescript No. 3 of the Empress to Prince V.M. Dolgorukov, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1774, *SIRIO*, vol. 135, p. 48.

to enter into negotiations with the Yedisan horde about switching loyalties.<sup>114</sup> Another means, however, was reiterating and expanding guarantees of religious and cultural toleration. Nikita Panin wrote to the Yedisan leader Jan Mambet Bey that Russian policies toward the Nogays were tolerant, “not touching on their way of life, laws [*zakon*: also potentially meaning “faith”], and their accepted ancient customs.”<sup>115</sup> He implicitly tried to favorably contrast the total Russian removal from Nogay cultural practices with the enforcement of Muslim orthodoxy that would accompany an Ottoman-backed candidate for Khan. While this alone may have worked on the more amenable Yedisans, earning the support of the Yedichkul horde required a combination of carrot and stick. Panin wrote to the Yedichkul leader Ismail Bey, insisting that Islam should not tie his horde to Istanbul since “the current war had its beginning not due to mahommedan law, but by the usual faith-breaking of the Porte.” In other words, he implied that the Christian and Muslim peoples could easily live in peace. However, this was accompanied by the threat that “All Nogay and Crimean Tatars, among others those belonging to the Yedichkul horde, could in all ease have been defeated and exterminated by victorious Russian arms.”<sup>116</sup> This very clearly implied that it was preferable to have Russia as a tolerant protector than as a ruthless opponent.

In the summer of 1774, the Russo-Turkish war finally came to an end with the ratification of the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji. The treaty’s third article stated, “all Tatar peoples: Crimean, Bujak, Kuban, Yedisan, Jamboyluk, and Yedichkul, without reservation from both empires have to be acknowledged free and completely independent from any foreign rule.” Though the Tatars were to be ruled “by their ancient laws and customs,” it was acknowledged that “in spiritual rites, as co-religionist Muslims with regard to His Sultanic Majesty as Grand Caliph of Mahommedan

<sup>114</sup> Rescript No. 6 of the Empress to Prince V.M. Dolgorukov, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1774, *SIRIO*, vol. 135, p. 100.

<sup>115</sup> Letter of Count N.I. Panin to Jan-Mambet-Bey, Leader of the Yedisan, Bujak, and Jamboyluk Hordes, and to their elders, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1774, *SIRIO*, vol. 135, p. 56.

<sup>116</sup> Letter of Count N.I. Panin to the Leader of the Yedichkul Horde Ismail-Bey and to its elders, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1774, *SIRIO*, vol. 135, pp. 58-59.

law, they must abide by the rules prescribed by their law, without the slightest however prejudice for their established political and civil freedom.”<sup>117</sup> Thus, in theory, the Ottoman Sultan was to retain religious authority over the Crimean Khanate while granting it full political independence. However, given the extensive mandates of *shaira* law pertaining to political and civil matters, as well as the contradictions between *sharia* law and the “ancient laws and customs” of the Nogay hordes, the practical application of this article’s stipulations were quite ambiguous. Nikita Panin sent the text of the treaty’s third article attached to a letter to Jan Mambey Bey and other Nogay elders. Though Panin persuaded the Nogays that they were now “free and governed by their own laws,”<sup>118</sup> it can be surmised that many Nogay notables would not have been particularly enthused about the Porte’s declared retention of control over their religious lives. It is highly possible that discontent with the treaty’s provisions contributed to the victory of Devlet’s anti-Russian faction.

In June 1775, Catherine received word that Devlet Giray had successfully overthrown his predecessor Sahib and installed himself as Khan. Although Devlet came to power largely due to the military support of the Yedichkul horde, Russian officials protested against Devlet’s election, which lacked the approval of the Nogay hordes. However, despite its protests about Devlet’s illegitimacy, the Russian court publicly acknowledged Devlet as the new Crimean Khan in order to preclude accusations of meddling in Crimean affairs and to lend credibility to the Khanate as a fully independent state. As Catherine later explained, “the downfall of Khan Sahib Giray and the ascension in his place of the famous Devlet Giray now open up completely new needs and turns in the affairs of that region.”<sup>119</sup> This new situation meant that Russian officials now had to work covertly in order to overthrow Devlet and replace him with the Russian candidate Shahin Giray.

<sup>117</sup> The Peace Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji between Russia and Turkey, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1774, in A.A. Sazonov et al., eds., *Pod Stigom Rossii: Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 1992), pp. 80-81.

<sup>118</sup> Letter of Count N.I. Panin to Jan-Mambet-Bey, Leader of the Yedisian, Bujak, and Jamboyluk Hordes, and to their elders, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1774, *SIRIO*, vol. 135, p. 182.

<sup>119</sup> Rescript of the Empress to Lieutenant-General E.A. Shcherbinin, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1775, *SIRIO*, vol. 135, pp. 190-191.



## B. Challenges during the Reign of Devlet Giray

By 1775, Nogay support for the Russian cause had been firmly undermined by their role in bringing Devlet Giray to the throne to replace Sahib, whom the Russians had intended to make Khan. Yet the Russians still counted on the Nogays as their chief supporters in the khanate, and acted in their name. This apparent misperception came from the very imperial throne itself, with Catherine issuing new orders on the Crimean question at the very start of January of that year. She refuted the Ottoman Porte directly, arguing against its claim that the Crimean Tatars did not desire independence and wished for Ottoman protection by pronouncing that “We at least on the other hand quite reliably know, that the so numerous Nogay hordes think entirely differently and are not a little unhappy with that disorder, which managed to be instilled in a certain part of the Crimean peninsula in so short a time by the resident Devlet-Giray Khan.”<sup>120</sup> This false statement cannot just be ascribed to Catherine’s lack of knowledge about the role of the Yedichkul horde in rebelling in support of Devlet, and was a likely self-justification of her intervention in the region. Moreover, it indicated her acute political strategy of returning toward placating the Nogays and winning support from among them for the installation once again of a pro-Russian candidate. In seeing the power that the Nogays could wield in internal Crimean affairs by overthrowing khans at their whim, Catherine reaffirmed her view of them as an indispensable ally for her empire.

Evidence for this reasoning can be seen in the overtures of Rumiantsev, the recipient of that order, to the Nogays later that year. He wrote to Ismail Bey and Shahbas Bey, leaders of the Yedichkul horde, in October, expressing his support of their supposed earlier demands for the “freedom and independence of the Tatar nation.”<sup>121</sup> The Yedichkul horde was a crucial target of

<sup>120</sup> Rescript of Empress Catherine II to General-Field Marshal Count Rumiantsev-Zadunaiskii, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1775, in Nikolai Fiodorovich Dubrovin, ed., *Prisoedinenie Kryma k Rossii: Reskripty, pis'ma, reliatsii i doneseniia*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1885), p. 3.

<sup>121</sup> Letter of Count P.A. Rumiantsev-Zadunaiskii to the Yedichkuls, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1775, Dubrovin, vol. 1, p. 45.

diplomacy both because it had shown its power by deposing Sahib Giray and because it was the most tenuously friendly to Russia, not recognizing the authority of the pro-Russian leader Jan Mambet Bey. It was necessary to persuade them to duplicate their earlier coup d'état, but with a Russian-friendly khan. This time, it would be Catherine's personal favorite Shahin Giray who was intended for the throne. With this in mind, Rumiantsev wrote to Brigadier Brink, an officer who was stationed in the Kuban, to urge Shahin to make overtures and give monetary gifts to a Yedichkul notable named Jan Mambet Mirza, and to "incline [Shahin] to accept him with his people into particular favor."<sup>122</sup> Yet monetary gifts alone would do little without accompanying concessions, and Catherine would have difficulty granting concessions to both Crimean society itself and to the rebellious Nogays on the question of recognizing a higher religious authority.

In her January rescript, Catherine gave her support for the Crimean Khan to deal with the Porte directly in religious matters. She urged "that the Ottoman Porte agree with the Tatars and the Crimean Khan as a nation and ruler that are completely free and independent from all, on the rites of the mahommedan faith," as long as recognition of the religious authority of the sultan as caliph would not infringe upon the "freedom and independence of the Tatar nation in its political and civil affairs."<sup>123</sup> This statement appears incredibly modern, seeming to advocate a separation between religious and secular civil affairs that was certainly uncommon at the time. On the other hand, though, it would authorize the Crimean Khan to treat with the Porte almost as an equal, and to regulate religious matters within his own realm. While this would make the Crimean Khan less reliant on Istanbul in things like enforcement of *sharia*, it would also enable the Crimean *ulema* to continue its pressure against unorthodox practices by populations such as the Nogays in

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<sup>122</sup> Order of Count P.A. Rumiantsev-Zadunaiskii to G. Brigadier and Cavalier Brink, August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1775, Dubrovin, vol. 1, p. 38.

<sup>123</sup> Rescript of Empress Catherine II to General-Field Marshal Count Rumiantsev-Zadunaiskii, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1775, Dubrovin, vol. 1, p. 2.

the Kuban. Therefore, Rumiantsev's statement was not entirely accurate when he told Brink that the Nogays, "by maintaining and protecting that freedom and their self-rule, fulfill the mutual agreements of the two powers."<sup>124</sup> The Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji did not resolve major tensions between the Crimean *ulema* and their Nogay subjects, leaving Russia free to play both sides.

Russian attempts to woo the Nogays did not preclude their suspicion of or even contempt for their nomadic allies. This is evident from the negative reaction of Nikita Panin to the death of Jan Mambet Bey, who Panin claimed had been the strongest supporter of Russian interests in the Kuban "despite the inconstancy of his own tribesmen."<sup>125</sup> It is obvious that Russian diplomats understood and disdained the shifting nature of Nogay allegiance, and that despite any gifts and concessions that they could provide, their alliance rested fundamentally on personal connections with opportunistic individuals like Jan Mambet Bey. In order to strengthen support for Russia, Rumiantsev ordered that money be dispersed to the Nogays "based not so much on the supposed nobility of their breeding and station, but on their trustworthiness and power within the nation and the direct benefit from it for us."<sup>126</sup> The Russian advisors had no qualms about undermining the authority of traditional Nogay social hierarchies for the purpose of furthering their interests. Whether they understood the precedence of strength over high birth in many nomadic societies or just wanted to subvert any stability that Nogay society may have had from its already weak aristocracy, their approach involved helping to create a new elite group rather than co-opting traditional power structures. But despite their distrust of the Nogays' loyalties and their weak traditional elites, Russian agents understood the importance of placating these individuals in one way or another to ensure the success of the broader Russian imperial strategy for gaining allies.

<sup>124</sup> Order of Count P.A. Rumiantsev-Zadunaiskii to Brigadier and Cavalier Brink, October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1775, Dubrovin, vol. 1, p. 46.

<sup>125</sup> Letter of Count N.I. Panin to Count P.A. Rumiantsev-Zadunaiskii, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1776, Dubrovin, vol. 1, p. 50.

<sup>126</sup> Order of Count P.A. Rumiantsev-Zadunaiskii to Prince Prozorovskii, November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1775, Dubrovin, vol. 1, p. 49.

Any opposition to Russian interests on the part of the Nogays was ascribed to Ottoman influence. Panin warned that Jan Mambet Bey's successor must not be a "creation of the Porte" and Rumiantsev called upon Brink to counteract the "trickery, fear, and other methods" used by the "other side" to oppose Russian influence.<sup>127</sup> While it is true that certain Ottoman officials worked behind the scenes in the Kuban, their influence could not explain all of the anti-Russian sentiment that was present among the Nogay hordes. More likely, Russian diplomats simply sought ways to justify the elimination of their opposition, and branding them Ottoman puppets was the most effective solution. For instance, Brink reported that Tokhtamysh Giray Sultan, a family member of Devlet Giray, "tried to incline the Yedichkuls, so that they would perform their attack on the Yedisans and with help from him and the Circassians, distract them from submission" to Shahin Giray.<sup>128</sup> Tokhtamysh was a member of the Crimean royal household and his strategy of dividing the various Nogay hordes and Circassian tribes against each other was formed in the Crimea, but it was still described as Ottoman influence. Brink also describes the activity of Jaum Haji, leader of a faction of the Yedisian horde who resisted Russian influence. Though he was a native Nogay leader, Jaum Haji was labeled an Ottoman agent. Brink warned that if he was to be left unchecked, the Nogays "little by little will start fleeing from here to unite with him."<sup>129</sup> It is obvious that the Nogays themselves, even the Yedisans who had been loyal supporters of Russian interests under Jan Mambet Bey, were divided in their allegiance, unsure what kind of autonomy or protection they could attain in a supposedly independent Crimea toward which both Russian and Ottoman policies were still so uncertain. Unless they initiated a new strategy, Shahin Giray and the Russians risked losing their earliest supporters in the Kuban.

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<sup>127</sup> Letter of Count N.I. Panin to Count P.A. Rumiantsev-Zadunaiskii, February 26, 1776 and Order of Count P.A. Rumiantsev-Zadunaiskii to Prince Prozorovskii, November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1775, Dubrovin, vol. 1, pp. 48 and 50.

<sup>128</sup> Report of Brigadier Brink to Prince Prozorovskii, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1776, Dubrovin, vol. 1, p. 69.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., pp. 69-71.

The Russian approach changed significantly in autumn of 1776, after Catherine decided it was time to place Shahin on the Crimean throne. It was decided that the Nogays should first elect Shahin as their Khan in the Kuban before he would take the Crimean peninsula itself with the help of Russian troops. Yet the Nogays resisted this strategy from the outset. Brink promised to urge notables of “various Nogay tribes” to send petitions to their brethren throughout the Kuban region to elect Shahin as an “independent and self-ruling khan,” but he also warned that this was dangerous as the Nogays “will only delay time in correspondence” in order to avoid the election. Brink suggested that intimidating the Nogays by moving his forces closer toward their wintering grounds was necessary in order to ensure their compliance. Otherwise, Shahin’s previously loyal brothers Batyr and Arslan Giray, who were his emissaries to the Circassian tribes and Yedichkul Nogay horde respectively, “could easily turn to the side of the Crimean Khan” against Shahin.<sup>130</sup>

In a hesitant postscript to his missive, seemingly fearful of appearing to disobey his own commander’s orders, Brink proposed ensuring that Shahin’s election as Khan should not specify the full extent of his supposed domains, implying that he would be elected as Khan of all Crimea rather than just of the Nogay hordes. As Brink explained, “all Nogays by ancient custom have ties to the Crimeans” but “our side is trying, by completely separating the Nogay hordes from the Crimea, to make them into a separate government.” He warned that in reaction to this, “their light-mindedness [*legkomyslie*] will double in conjunction with the imagined harm to their ancient customs,” causing the entire election to be rejected, “since even having mistrust of the assurance of our gift of freedom to them, they all came to disorder.”<sup>131</sup> Brink clearly believed that the Nogay hordes wished to remain subjects of the Crimean peninsula, despite their cultural differences from it and history of rebellion against it. He believed that the Nogays would reject

<sup>130</sup> Report of Brigadier Brink to Prince Prozorovskii, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1776, Dubrovin, vol. 1, pp. 125-126.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp. 129-130.

their own independence if this required severing traditional ties in favor of vague assurances of protection by Russian troops. This view seems to directly contradict the desire for independence from the Crimean Khans that had governed Nogay actions up to this point, and it merits further investigation to learn whether the Nogays truly would have opposed their own independence.

There is strong reason to believe that Brink's understanding of this matter can be trusted. Although his derision of Nogay "light-mindedness" and "disorder" obviously exhibit a prejudiced disdain for less "civilized" peoples, he likely used the rhetoric and tropes of imperial discourse in order to make his arguments better received by the St. Petersburg elite. Brink, a relatively junior officer, hesitated to contradict his superiors and the personal orders of the Empress, but he felt compelled to do so because of the situation that he saw in the field. Brink had grown to know the Nogays quite well from being stationed among them, and he had often provided valuable cultural information to his superiors. For instance, in one secret report he had pointed out the necessity of buying fodder for horses before the impending invasion of Crimea because of the Nogays' habit of burning the steppes each autumn, adding that purchasing grain from the Nogays would help win them over as allies.<sup>132</sup> While Brink's testimony must not be taken at face value, he did have a vested interest in keeping the Nogays as stable military allies in the impending invasion, so his beliefs about their motives would have been stated in good faith, and they must be given weight.

While they are probably fairly reliable, Brink's statements about the Nogays' desire to remain Crimean subjects do not have any explicit proof. However, there is even more conclusive evidence that the hordes at this time wished to remain vassals of the Ottoman Empire. Arslan Giray wrote to his brother Shahin that when he petitioned the Yedichkul horde to elect Shahin as khan, they rejected his request, answering, "From ancient times we have been accustomed to diligently serving the Right-Faithful Empire and henceforth we will not cease serving it with

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<sup>132</sup> Secret report of Brigadier Brink to Prince A.A. Prozorovskii, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1776, Dubrovin, vol. 1, p. 98.

equal zeal.”<sup>133</sup> In other words, the Yedichkuls claimed that they had never forsaken their loyalty to the Muslim Ottoman Empire and that they remained its subjects. Moreover, the Yedichkul mirzas themselves wrote a letter to Brink, asking him why he was moving his troops toward their encampments. They entreated him, “Now between the empires there is peace, so do you have a particular command from your queen for this? If such exists, then we ask you to show us, and if not, then why are you coming to us? We have our own greatest monarch: His Sultanic Majesty, to whom we are obliged to report on this.”<sup>134</sup> Even two years after the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji supposedly granted the Crimean Khanate its independence from the Porte and after two attempts by the Russian Empire to gain independence for the Nogays from both the Crimean and Ottoman rulers, the Yedichkul horde, at least, still insisted on maintaining its traditional ties to Istanbul.

This continued attachment may seem inexplicable given the expressed desire of many Nogays to break from Ottoman and Crimean suzerainty and their numerous historical attempts at rebellion. But the Nogays were acutely aware that their prior dependence also implied protection, and many of them trusted the familiar protection of Ottoman power more than a risky, uncertain alliance with Russian troops, whose protection was shown to shift rapidly whenever their goals so dictated. The Russian Empire was a more powerful ally, as proven by its recent victory in the war, and it could therefore provide greater protection than the Ottomans could. However, this strength also left fewer means of resistance for the Nogays in case their autonomy was at stake. The Nogays had frequently rebelled against the Ottomans because they knew that their rebellions stood a chance of gaining concessions, while the outcome of a potential future rebellion against Russian authority would be uncertain, and thus potentially undesirable. Though the Russians had initially been useful allies, the Nogays were hesitant to take them on as permanent protectors.

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<sup>133</sup> Letter of Arslan-Giray-Sultan to Kalga Shahin-Giray-Sultan, received November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1776, Dubrovin, vol. 1, p. 143.

<sup>134</sup> Letter of Yedichkul Mirzas to Brigadier Brink, received November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1776, Dubrovin, vol. 1, pp. 143-144.

Brigadier Brink was finally able to overcome this hesitancy and regain the allegiance of all four Nogay hordes in January of 1777. He wrote to Prince Prozorovskii that his envoys to the Yedisan and Jamboyluk hordes had returned with agreements from their leaders to elect Shahin Giray as their Khan. The Bujak and Yedichkul hordes, he noted, had agreed to do the same thing shortly before that. Brink announced, “As the mirzas, so too especially the people, filled with joy, all unanimously answered that they agreed to the election of Shahin-Giray as Khan.”<sup>135</sup> Of course, knowing that many Yedichkuls still considered themselves Ottoman subjects, one can easily dismiss Brink’s statements about the Nogays’ joyful, unanimous election of Shahin Giray. This statement was just a reiteration of the official Russian position about granting “freedom” to the Nogays. However, it is more difficult to determine why exactly the Nogays, who only several months prior had told Brink of their loyalty to the Porte, agreed to support Shahin’s candidacy as Khan. Determining the answer requires evaluating a combination of several important factors.

The first factor that could have shifted the Nogays’ allegiance was monetary incentives. Brink observed Ottoman agents in the Kuban plying the Nogays with gifts just as the Russians did, and it is possible that the hordes were simply motivated by short-term material gain, joining whichever side offered them a greater tangible reward. But this rationale would not explain their resistance to electing Shahin earlier in 1776, when Russian gift giving was extensive. Of course, another important factor was military intimidation. Brink had relied on Tatar messengers to ask for Shahin’s election in fall of 1776, but in January 1777, he sent emissaries to the hordes from his own troops. Russian soldiers directly pressuring the Nogays would certainly have been more intimidating. It could be argued that the Nogays paid token allegiance to the Ottomans until the Russians exhibited the full extent of their military commitment to Nogay “freedom.” Yet such a rationale would face difficulties in explaining the initial successful appeals of the Russians to the

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<sup>135</sup> Report of Brigadier Brink to Prince Prozorovskii, January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1777, Dubrovin, vol. 1, pp. 234-235.



Nogays from 1768 to 1771. A third vital factor was the need for protection. Brink's messengers found the hordes "enveloped with great fear of those sultans [Devlet Giray's brothers] and the Circassians from the great robberies inflicted upon them"<sup>136</sup> According to Brink, the hordes were reluctant to support Shahin out of fear of reprisals by Devlet's supporters in Circassian tribes of the Caucasus mountains, who vehemently rejected Russian influence and raided Nogay camps. This raiding would have made the Nogays seek out protection from the mountain peoples by an imperial power. A final important factor, of course, was guarantees of cultural autonomy. As has been previously proven, the Nogays must have shifted between Ottoman and Russian allegiance based on which power they judged more likely to tolerate their traditional beliefs and way of life.

No single line of reasoning provides an adequate justification of the Nogays' actions leading up to their election of Shahin Giray as Khan. The Nogays shifted their allegiance based on a complex web of factors centered on gaining remuneration, autonomy, and protection, which was typical of weak borderland groups caught in strategically important areas between powerful neighbors. Fisher claims that the main motivation of the Nogays was freedom from interference in their daily lives. He states, "For the Nogays, that regime in Bahçesaray which had the least political and financial control over their affairs was the best one."<sup>137</sup> According to him, political independence was the only real factor behind the Nogays' actions. Yet this does not explain their insistence upon obedience to the Ottoman Porte and their appeals to the Sultan as their protector. Rather than the unqualified pursuit of freedom that Fisher supposes, Nogay leaders maneuvered to gain the greatest autonomy while maintaining traditional hierarchical relationships that gave them protection from external threats. Thus, Russian appeals were most effective whenever they involved both incentives for loyalty and punishments for betrayal. Brink's tactic of combining

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>137</sup> Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, p. 79.

bribery, intimidation, cultural accommodation, and promises of protection succeeded in turning the Nogays to his side in early 1777, but would not be able to permanently retain their allegiance.

Upon learning of Shahin's election as Khan by the Nogays, Catherine instructed that he proceed to take control in the Crimea as well. However, despite her wish that Shahin "be brought into the Crimean peninsula as soon as possible," she noted the necessity of leaving in the Kuban "a dependable leader for the internal government of the Yedichkuls that submitted to him, [and] to intice and win over to his leadership the other hordes remaining there still in indecision."<sup>138</sup> In a letter to Shahin Giray, Nikita Panin reiterated the necessity of retaining control in the Kuban.<sup>139</sup> Because of his previous success in doing just that, Brink was tasked with remaining in the Kuban for that purpose. He was instructed to continue emphasizing Russian religious tolerance, which ensured Tatar independence "without touching the rites and traditions of mahommedan law," and which was mindful of the "difference in inclinations and consequent sometimes evident schism" between the Crimeans and the Nogays. However, he was also told to stress that the Tatars were left "without any protection by the Turks" and were under threat of "execution and vengeance" by Russian troops. Obviously, both military intimidation and promises of protection were still in force. Furthermore, he was ordered to continue using "financial means" to achieve these goals.<sup>140</sup> All of the successful strategies for retaining Nogay allegiance were expected to continue under Shahin's rule. Catherine's instructions were soon carried out, and Shahin Giray was enthroned as Khan in the Crimea. But his complete inability to successfully execute any of the aforementioned strategies for securing local support would cause a final dramatic reversal in the Nogays' loyalty.

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<sup>138</sup> Rescript of the Empress to General-Field Marshal Count P.A. Rumiantsev-Zadunaiskii, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1777, *SIRIO*, vol. 145 (St. Petersburg: 1914), p. 318.

<sup>139</sup> Letter of Count N.I. Panin to the Elected Crimean Khan of the Nogay Hordes Shahin-Giray, approved by Her Imperial Majesty January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1777, *SIRIO*, vol. 145, p. 328.

<sup>140</sup> Rescript of the Empress to General-Field Marshal Count P.A. Rumiantsev-Zadunaiskii, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1777, *SIRIO*, vol. 145, pp. 318-321.

#### IV. *The Destruction of the Russian-Nogay Alliance: 1777-1783*

##### A. **Nogay Rebellion against the Rule of Shahin Giray**

Shortly after Devlet Giray's flight to Istanbul in March 1777, Shahin triumphantly arrived in the Crimean peninsula from the Kuban together with his Nogay supporters and took up his throne as khan.<sup>141</sup> Shahin attempted to modernize and reform the khanate and to bring it into the Russian political orbit, but the destruction of traditional social relations that his reforms required alienated the vast majority of his subjects, dooming his experiment to failure from the very start. Upon his ascension, Shahin obtained a document from the Crimean population, according to which "the entire society voluntarily rejected the future election of Khans, as by the practices of mohammedan law, (so too) by ancient Tatar custom, in whose rights the Kalga-sultan always, as the eldest heir, was the recipient of the Khan's dignity."<sup>142</sup> This assertion was simply false: the Kalga-sultan had never automatically succeeded to the throne. This means that immediately after taking the throne, Shahin took steps to establish the Crimean Khanate as a hereditary monarchy by abrogating the traditional privileges of the Crimean Tatar nobility and clergy to elect their ruler. Shahin himself had come to power thanks to the election of the Nogay hordes, which hoped to gain political influence in his new khanate. They would certainly not have been pleased by his consolidation of autocratic power in his own person. While the old Crimean regime had not given the Nogays any *de jure* political influence, ruling them through appointed *seraskers*, its weakness had enabled them to defend their autonomy using the threat of rebellion. Shahin's attempt to strengthen the Giray monarchy would have been a major blow to Nogay autonomy. His abrogation of the rights and privileges of all parts of Crimean society, including the Nogay hordes, would prevent his reign from achieving success by breeding rebellion against him.

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<sup>141</sup> Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, pp. 80-82.

<sup>142</sup> Letter of Shahin-Giray-Khan to Count Rumiantsev-Zadunaiskii, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1777, Dubrovin, vol. 1, p. 493.

Shahin also made sure to receive Russian approval for all his major reforms. He informed Rumiantsev that “if by any political rules it will be undesirable for Her Imperial Majesty to most graciously approve the aforementioned article” establishing a hereditary monarchy, he would undertake means to repeal it.<sup>143</sup> Beyond simply executing policies that were beneficial to Russian military interests, Shahin became practically a Russian puppet. He stopped relying on the frontier practice of shifting his allegiance between the two imperial powers in favor of more permanent submission to a single empire. This undermined the Nogays’ entire strategy of cultural survival.

Shahin used his newly acquired autocratic powers to undertake an ambitious project of military, administrative, and tax reforms. A Karaite Jewish Rabbi named Azar’ia, who lived in Crimea at the time, gave a detailed eyewitness account of events. The first round of reforms took place in 1777, immediately after Shahin’s rise to power. He professionalized civil administration by ensuring “that the governors would not take payments for their own benefit, as by old custom, but would each receive his own sustenance from the treasury based on his worth.”<sup>144</sup> This would probably have angered the bureaucrats, who were used to embezzling extra income from subjects for their own needs and would not have welcomed increased accountability. He also levied new taxes on goods such as wine and equalized taxes between Muslims and Christians living in the Crimea, which would likely have infuriated the *ulema*. Finally, and most significantly for the Nogays, he attempted to create a standing army of “regular troops, which he formed based on the Guards that he had observed during the time of his stay in Petersburg.”<sup>145</sup> The Nogays were previously the backbone of the Crimean Khanate’s military, and they used this position to their advantage both in the rebellions of 1699 and 1757 and afterward by bringing Devlet and Shahin

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 495.

<sup>144</sup> Rabbi Azar’ia ben Iliia, “Sobytiia sluchavshiesia v Krymu v tsarstvovanie Shagin-Girei-Khana,” trans. A. S. Firkovich, *Vremennik imperatorskogo Moskovskogo obshchestva istorii i drevnostei Rossiiskikh* 24 (1854): 103.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

Giray to power. Shahin's new troops, however, were to be formed by "taking one warrior from every five houses, which were required to supply that warrior with weapons, a horse, and all necessary provisions."<sup>146</sup> The new troops, levied from Crimean society and directly subordinate to Shahin, would undermine the *de facto* power that the Nogays wielded and which they used to ensure that their autonomy and privileges were respected. The Nogay leaders found themselves betrayed, with the very same power they had used to help bring Shahin to the throne now being taken away from them. However, this first attempt at a regular standing army was short-lived.

Shahin's first attempt at reforms did not last long, since the backlash caused a full-scale popular rebellion against his rule among the Crimean populace. Though the Nogays would have rebelled against the reforms eventually, it was the Crimean common people, facing the burden of giving up their sons to the new military and financing its armament, who took the initiative. The rebellion commenced when "everyone called up for military service dispersed and ran off to their homes, saying that the Khan betrayed the people." However, "as the news of the popular uprising against the government and landlords spread, the number of rioters grew."<sup>147</sup> The uprising forced Shahin to briefly abdicate the throne and was only quelled with the help of Russian troops. Once back in power, though, Shahin recommenced his reforms on an even grander scale. He instituted a system of progressive taxation, "by which the rich pay 48 *miskals* of silver, those of middling wealth pay 24, and the poor pay 12." He subsequently "began to gather troops of two kinds: one called Beshli, and the other Saiman. [...] He formed the Beshlis on the pattern of Russian forces, changed their clothes, and distinguished them more and more from the Saimans."<sup>148</sup> The newest tax system and standing army were even more onerous for the Nogays. This time, they rebelled alongside the rest of the Crimean population in order to demand a return to their old privileges.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., pp. 113-115.

Shahin's new attempts to tax the Nogays were very clearly a major reason for their revolt against him. The notables of the Yedichkul horde wrote in a letter that "if he, Shahin-Giray will not rid us of excessive taxes and will not treat with us as duty demands, [we will be] unwilling to stay in submission and obedience to him."<sup>149</sup> This is quite explicit evidence that Nogay unrest in the Kuban was affected by Shahin's attempts to modernize taxation. Rather than getting gifts in exchange for their obedience and service as they had in the past, the Nogays were now materially disadvantaged by the very ruler they had helped bring to power. Shahin's modernized army of *beshlis* probably had a less direct impact on the rebellion, especially since he was only able to conscript about 1,000 of them.<sup>150</sup> Nevertheless, the prospect of losing their traditional warrior culture and being forced to wear Western clothing, drill in the European manner, and obey orders from Crimean officials rather than their own hereditary chiefs must have disturbed the Nogays.

More significantly, Shahin's failure to successfully conscript an army may have actually contributed to rebellion against him in another way: by making him seem weak and incapable of providing the protection that the Nogays needed. The Circassian tribes were a leading element in the rebellion against Shahin, even sending their warriors to fight his forces in the Crimea.<sup>151</sup> The Nogays realized that by expressing loyalty to Shahin, they would have earned the enmity of the powerful Circassians, who were located close enough to Nogay pasturelands to easily launch raids against their encampments. By contrast, the Khan was far away in Crimea and unable even to control his own peninsula, much less punish the Circassians for their attacks with his meager and disobedient new forces. For the Nogays, the choice was clear: the Circassians were simply a more intimidating potential enemy than Shahin was, even despite the Khan's Russian support.

<sup>149</sup> Translation of a Tatar Letter by Elders of the Yedichkul Horde, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1781, Dubrovin, vol. 4 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1889), p. 111.

<sup>150</sup> Report of Lieutenant-General Suvorov to Count Rumiantsev-Zadunaiskii, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1778, Dubrovin, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1885), p. 553.

<sup>151</sup> Rabbi Azaria, p. 124.

Perhaps the only major aspect of Shahin's rule that did not inspire hatred for him among the Nogay hordes was his religious policies. Unlike most of his predecessors, Shahin was lax in enforcing Islamic law throughout his realm. As mentioned above, he violated *sharia* by making Muslims and Christians pay equal taxes, and Rabbi Azar'ia praised him as a "wise sovereign and farsighted politician" for his generous treatment of the Karaites and other religious minorities. Shahin even obtained *fetvas* from the Crimean *ulema* permitting him to remain the ruler without appointment by the Ottoman Sultan, and to wage war against the Sultan with the aid of Russian troops.<sup>152</sup> The Nogays, whose society (unlike Crimea) did not have sizeable Christian or Jewish minorities, and who had previously shown their readiness to wage war against the sultan despite his title of caliph, did not particularly object to these policies. In fact, they may have welcomed the cessation of earlier Ottoman confession-building practices. But the khan's remaining Muslim subjects were furious at what they saw as the breakdown of Crimean religious authority. In fact, Shahin's "good treatment of the non-Muslim minorities gave rise to rumors that he was himself a Christian," because "he appeared to conservative Muslims to be breaking every law of Islam."<sup>153</sup> Though he had strong support from the Crimean religious minorities, this was no longer useful to him after Catherine exiled the peninsula's entire Christian population into Russian territory in the summer and fall of 1778. Much has been written about this event, with some historians believing Catherine's stated goal of protecting the Christian community from Muslim reprisals and others suspecting an intentional ploy to weaken Shahin by depriving him of his only remaining support base.<sup>154</sup> Whatever the case, this action left Shahin without any loyalists, as his religious policies had completely alienated crucial sectors of society such as the *ulema* and conservative Muslims.

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<sup>152</sup> Rabbi Azar'ia, p. 115.

<sup>153</sup> Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, p. 89.

<sup>154</sup> Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, p. 66. For a more recent treatment of the subject, see Ravil Tagirovich Deinikov, "K voprosu o vyvode khristian iz Krymskogo khanstva v 1778 g.," *Voprosy istorii* 4 (2014): 153-168.

Shahin Giray's policies violated every single strategy for obtaining the support of frontier peoples caught between much more powerful empires. Instead of preserving the historical rights and autonomy of privileged groups, he uprooted traditional social structures with modernization attempts. In the political sphere, this involved establishing himself as a hereditary and autocratic monarch with his own personal army, which undermined the positions of the Crimean nobility and clergy as well as the Nogays. In the religious sphere, this involved extending equal and even privileged treatment to religious minorities. Though this did not particularly trouble the Nogays, it earned him the enmity of the vast majority of the Crimean population. Instead of dispensing gifts to local leaders in order to entice them to his side, Shahin imposed standardized taxes on his entire population, even trying to tax groups that had not previously paid taxes, such as the Nogay hordes. Instead of intimidating geographically distant groups into submission by sending troops into their territory, Shahin largely kept his new regular army close at hand. He left the Nogays in the periphery of his domains to their own devices, thereby giving them opportunities to defy his authority with impunity. Rather than providing protection to these tenuously loyal groups from external attack by their enemies, he made his own weakness abundantly clear and so convinced the Nogays to seek assurances of their safety elsewhere, such as with the Porte. It is little wonder that Shahin was unable to maintain himself in power for long, and even less surprisingly, this time around the revolt against his rule began in the periphery of his domains, among the Nogays.

The final rebellion against Shahin took shape in August of 1781, when the Nogay hordes rejected Shahin's authority entirely. Catherine lamented the "disorder unfolding in the Kuban among the Nogay hordes and their renunciation of the Crimean Khan's rule." She commanded Prince Grigorii Potemkin to stabilize the area by "termination of this revolt at its very beginning, while it has not yet spread into the Crimea to the injury of the current Khan and to the prejudice



of our interests.”<sup>155</sup> Russian officials were previously the ones fomenting rebellion among the Nogays against the Crimea, both in 1768-1771 and in 1775-1777. Russian interests had benefited twice from Nogay rebellions, most recently from the one that had brought Shahin to power in the first place, so they knew the threat that such a revolt could pose and were wary of being on its receiving end. They knew that it could easily spread to the Crimean peninsula itself, as proven by so many of the previous rebellions. This time, however, they knew that the situation had changed fundamentally. This was notably the first time that Catherine so openly and directly referenced “Russian interests” in her orders, revealing what actually stood behind all of her stated concerns about Tatar “independence,” reviving their “ancient customs,” and the onerous “Turkish yoke.”

The Russian authorities knew that the previous strategy of attempting to entice the Nogay hordes to their side by a combination of bribery, protection, accommodation, and threat was no longer viable. Shahin had gone too far in undermining his own support base with his attempted modernization of the Crimea. The Nogays would no longer find Russian overtures credible when their candidate had acted completely counter to what was promised. The only possible remaining method of securing Russian interests in the region was outright use of force. Potemkin was told to inform the rebels of Russian impatience, “presenting to them the preparedness of our forces for defeating them.” It was evident that this time, Russian military intervention was not merely support for one or another candidate for the Crimean throne, but a threat of full-scale occupation. If the rebellion did not cease despite Potemkin’s best diplomatic efforts, Catherine instructed him to “bring our affairs to such a stage that the very faithlessness of the ill-wishers will not turn out otherwise than for our own benefit and glory.”<sup>156</sup> This cryptic remark actually suggested that the

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<sup>155</sup> Rescript signed by Empress Catherine II to Prince G.A. Potemkin about instructions regarding the renunciation of the Crimean Khan’s rule by the Nogay Hordes in the Kuban, August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1781, *SIRIO*, vol. 27 (St. Petersburg: 1880), p. 192.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 192-193.

rebellion could be turned to Russia's advantage by justifying their annexation of the khanate as a benevolent intervention intended to prevent mass violence and disorder. Events would unfold in just such a matter, allowing Potemkin himself to obtain great personal benefits and glory as well.

Catherine's fear of the rebellion spreading from the Kuban to the Crimean peninsula was well founded. In May 1782, Shahin's brothers Batyr and Arslan Giray, who emerged as leaders of the rebellion in the Kuban, wrote letters to notables within the Crimean peninsula such as the *ulema* and the Shirin and Mansur noble families, and "by August the rebels controlled the whole of the Crimean peninsula as well as the Kuban."<sup>157</sup> Just as it happened many times previously, rebellion by the Nogay hordes was a lightning rod that mobilized mass unrest throughout many parts of Crimean society. Russian troops were once again needed to reestablish order, and just as before, "the Russian government first sent notes to the rebel leaders pleading for sensible actions and followed this with a full-scale invasion." This invasion, however, far surpassed the previous interventions in scale and in ferocity. According to Fisher, "by placing Potemkin in charge of the campaign, Catherine perhaps showed an unconscious change of heart concerning the annexation, for Potemkin was one of the most vociferous champions, along with Bezborodko, of" annexing the peninsula.<sup>158</sup> If this is true, then Potemkin's victories on the battlefield must have inclined Catherine even further toward his views. Russian troops successfully crushed the rebellion and shortly afterward, in the spring of 1783, Potemkin succeeded in "persuading Catherine to take at last the step of formally annexing the Crimea to her empire." The annexation was proclaimed by an imperial manifesto on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1783.<sup>159</sup> The Crimean Khanate, the last successor state of the once-great Golden Horde, was no more. The Nogay hordes, as supposed subjects of the Crimean khans, were to be incorporated into the Russian Empire alongside their Crimean Tatar brethren.

<sup>157</sup> Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, pp. 125, 130.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

Because Russia annexed the Crimean Khanate as a direct reaction to the second rebellion against Shahin Giray, and because the Nogays in the Kuban started this rebellion, it would be no exaggeration to say that the Nogay hordes played a pivotal role in causing Russia's annexation of Crimea. The Nogays' rebellion, in turn, was caused by the collapse of the strategy that they had successfully pursued since at least 1768 by playing both sides in the Russo-Ottoman imperial rivalry against each other in order to secure the greatest benefits for themselves. Once Shahin Giray placed the Crimean Khanate firmly in the Russian camp, the possibility of an independent Crimean state was no longer viable. While Russian policies long sought to preserve the Crimean Khanate as a buffer state between the two empires, the Nogays precluded this course of action.

Too often, the role of nomadic steppe peoples has been excluded from explanations of Russian imperial expansion in favor of accounts focusing on the personalities or internal politics of the Russian court in St. Petersburg. For instance, some historians have attributed the shift from Russia's support for Crimean "independence" to its annexation of the territory to the replacement of Nikita Panin by Alexander Bezborodko as Catherine's *de facto* Foreign Minister. According to this narrative, Panin was a proponent of more conciliatory Russian foreign policy, as evident from his opposition to partitioning Poland, while Bezborodko, as a man of the borderlands raised in modern-day Ukraine, pursued more expansionist policies in areas like Poland and Crimea.<sup>160</sup> While it is true that Russia's annexation of the peninsula occurred shortly after Panin's dismissal, it is equally likely that the failure of Panin's policy, stemming from his mediocre understanding of steppe peoples' interests, actually contributed to his downfall. Other historians have credited Grigorii Potemkin with abandoning the idea of a Crimean buffer state in favor of annexing the khanate outright. According to this view, Potemkin was motivated by a combination of desire for

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<sup>160</sup> For this approach, see for instance David L. Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia: The Panin Party* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 1-227.

personal glory, the lure of Crimea's mythic past, the need to secure Russia's frontier, and his project of Slavic settlement along the Black Sea coast by which he hoped to profit from its fertile farmlands. As Catherine's favorite, Potemkin supposedly had enough power to act nearly on his own.<sup>161</sup> While it is true that Potemkin took an active part in suppressing the last rebellion against Shahin and that he finally convinced Catherine to issue the annexation manifesto, he could not enact this policy for nearly a decade before 1783 because of the Nogays' success in convincing the Russian imperial center of their earnest submission. Both of these explanations ascribe far too much agency to representatives of the imperial center, and they do not realize that individuals like Panin, Bezborodko, and Potemkin often merely reacted to complex situations on the ground.

A more promising approach for explaining the Russian annexation of the Crimea should incorporate findings from the study of frontier history. A good example of this approach is Owen Lattimore's study of the imperial rivalry between Russia and China over Inner Asia. According to Lattimore, the rival empires "learned by experiment to discriminate between those territories, resources, and peoples which could be profitably included within their imperial expansion and those which it was better to exclude because military action, administration, and the collection of revenue cost more than they were worth."<sup>162</sup> For Russia, the Nogays under Crimean rule were another such experiment, where initial exclusion was replaced by eventual inclusion following the Russian annexation. Though this was a fairly late experiment, Russia obviously still had much to learn in dealing with steppe peoples. By incorporating knowledge about frontier groups like the Nogays, it is possible to achieve a more nuanced view of center-periphery interactions that helped shape dramatic events in Russian history such as the annexation of the Crimea.

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<sup>161</sup> For many of these arguments, see Marc Raeff, "In the Imperial Manner," in *Catherine the Great: A Profile*, ed. Marc Raeff (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 197-246.

<sup>162</sup> Owen Lattimore, "Inner Asian Frontiers: Defensive Empires and Conquest Empires," in *Studies in Frontier History: Collected Papers, 1928-1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 503-504.

## B. The Final Fate of the Nogays: Expulsion, Assimilation, Extermination

The fate of the Nogays loomed large following the annexation of the Crimean Khanate and its incorporation into the Russian Empire as the *Tavricheskaia Oblast*.<sup>163</sup> The presence of an unruly nomadic population in the Kuban hindered settlement by Russian peasants and effective civil administration. The same characteristics that had made the Nogays such useful allies: their mobility, militarization, and lack of submission to external authority, now made them the most difficult part of Crimean society to transform into loyal imperial subjects. In order to overcome this challenge, Russian authorities would have to reject their earlier strategy of accommodation and steppe diplomacy in order to put an end to the Nogays' usual frontier practices. Formulating a new strategy was entrusted to a group of men headed by Alexander Bezborodko. In August of 1783, these men presented Catherine with a report on the Nogays, supposedly in response to a petition by "the main leader of the Nogay hordes Halil-Efendi-Agha with the clergy and other Mirzas," who asked for permission to move to lands in the Russian interior.<sup>163</sup> The state officials thus presented their decision to resettle the Nogays as a gracious accession to the nomads' own demands. While it is unknown whether the Nogays' petition was genuine or one of the many requests made under Russian pressure, it is important to note that the Empire still portrayed itself as a loyal ally and protector of Nogay interests. The report is rife with Enlightenment rhetoric, claiming to respect the Nogays' "choice" while also improving their "mores" and quelling their "wildness." Above all, though, the proposal was a product of state interests: it was aimed at "that primary goal of, according to external and internal political circumstances," aiding the Nogays' "complete attachment to the Russian state, and to make this people useful to the government."<sup>164</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Most Devoted Report to Empress Catherine II by Prince A.A. Viazemskii, Count I.A. Osterman, A.A. Bezborodko, and P.V. Bakunin, on Means of Resettlement into Russia for the Nogay Hordes, August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1783, *SIRIO*, vol. 26 (St. Petersburg: 1879), p. 466.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

Bezborodko and his colleagues revealed their close familiarity with the dynamics that governed the behavior of borderland peoples like the Nogays. According to their understanding, “Russia, repeatedly having these peoples as its subjects, equally often experienced that their wildness, accompanied by rebellious willfulness, alongside their shared faith and proximity to the Ottoman Porte, were a reason by which they continually betrayed first one, then the other government, and instead of the expected social benefit, brought more disorder.” Furthermore, “without changing their way of life and their mores, equal fruit must be expected of them in the present case.”<sup>165</sup> In other words, the officials realized that the Nogays’ position between two empires necessitated constant shifting allegiances in order to gain both protection and autonomy.

The Russian officials knew that they could fix this problem by changing the geo-cultural landscape of the region. However, even then, they could not rely entirely on coercion and needed to co-opt the Nogays into this project. They proposed to “provide each the freedom to follow his own inclination in choosing a nomadic life or a settled one, since such lack of coercion will allow these new subjects to better feel Your Imperial Majesty’s maternal care for them.” Though the choice was to be free, it was preferable that “they would all willingly agree to chose a settled way of life, and form stable settlements for the future.”<sup>166</sup> Those who chose a nomadic life would be resettled between the Volga and Ural rivers and on lands between the Volga and the Don recently vacated by the departed Kalmyks. Those who chose to settle and take up farming were to be given land in the Saratov, Astrakhan, Penza, and Tambov *gubernii*s, as well as along the Volga River. The settled Nogays would be most useful for the Empire, since by proximity to other agrarian populations, they would assimilate “their industriousness, their mores, and their dutiful obedience to authority.” Those who remained nomads would henceforth be less harmful

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

since resettlement would “cut off any communication of the Tatars with their co-religionists, up to now their patrons, and over time even the hope will be destroyed of their ever being in prior relations with them.”<sup>167</sup> The idea was to destroy the need for the entire strategy of borderland diplomacy that brought the Nogays into alliance with Russia in the first place: no more military intimidation, promises of protection against rival tribes, financial gifts, or promises of cultural accommodation would have to be given to the newly sedentary Russian subjects. For persistent nomads, at least the toleration of their syncretic, shamanistic form of Islam could be abandoned.

It is interesting to note that this proposal was accompanied by a request to provide the Nogays with greater tax benefits. The report suggests “at the first occasion to grant the possible satisfaction of all the Nogay peoples’ demands: to ease their current taxes and endow them with better benefits than the ones that they had in their former position.” Moreover, given that one of the demands was “for an exemption to be given to the poor Nogays in taxes until the year 1786, and to allow these dues to be made up from the wealthy,” Bezborodko’s group suggested going even further, and “to rid not only the poor, but also the well-to-do from this tax.”<sup>168</sup> This action signaled the Nogays’ real transition from allies into subjects. Their previous tribute payments, which were called taxes but were actually a nod to the old practice of collecting *yasak*, were to be temporarily abolished and eventually replaced by regular, standardized taxation. The rest of the techniques of steppe diplomacy were to be abolished as well: no more *amanats* would be taken, no more *shert*’ treaties concluded, and no more gifts given to the horde leaders. In one fell stroke, the traditions that had ruled Russian-nomad relations since the 15<sup>th</sup> century were gone.

The traditions of steppe diplomacy were to be replaced by the institutions of full imperial subjecthood. Exemption from taxes was meant to “inspire their hearts toward ardent faithfulness

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 467.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., pp. 466, 468.

and attachment to the Russian state,” replacing the old order where one’s political allegiance was determined by personal advantage with a new one where political identity was governed by an emotional sense of belonging. But love of the imperial motherland was not always sufficient to ensure obedience. The modern state apparatus was deployed against Nogay freedom. Part of this process consisted of knowledge production: As Bezborodko’s group admitted, “Neither the amount of available pastureland, nor the exact number of people to resettle is clearly known to us,” and it was “necessary to now send surveyors, who would describe all settlements made on those lands.”<sup>169</sup> By gaining more accurate knowledge about the Nogays’ lands and settlement patterns, the Russian state would better be able to control them and to prevent future rebellion.

Besides knowledge creation, however, the entire machinery of the state was to be utilized in order to turn the Nogays into loyal Russian subjects. Some of these measures would have been potentially beneficial for the nomads. For instance, the officials ordered “building courtyards or settlements for the settlers” and “construction of stores and the preparation of provisions for their food supply.” Others, however, carried the threat of violence and domination. Thus, a decision was made that “as a precaution at the time of these peoples’ journey, it will be necessary to make plans to maintain a certain number of Russian troops along the locations of the proposed path.” Moreover, it was decided to build “small fortresses as near the Tatars’ pasturelands, so too near their settlements, [...] so that the leaders located in them could better monitor the Tatars’ actions and prevent any uprising they might undertake, and where beyond that, there could be reprisals for investigations following any difficulties or arguments between Tatars and Russians.”<sup>170</sup> The same tools that would ensure safety and justice for the Nogays could also destroy any resistance. The once fiercely independent hordes would become docile and obedient residents of the Empire.

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 468, 467.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., pp. 467-468.



Catherine almost immediately approved all of the measures proposed by Bezborodko and his colleagues in their report. In an order to Prince Grigorii Potemkin, she commanded that the Nogays be given lands for their pastures between the Volga and Ural rivers, that any necessary measures be undertaken both for their benefit and for the safety of other Russian subjects, that money from the state treasury be used for this purpose, and that the Nogays receive tax benefits as previously described.<sup>171</sup> It is not known how many Nogays decided to take up farming rather than maintaining their nomadic way of life, but it can be surmised that the vast majority desired to remain nomads. Everything was prepared for the final conclusion to more than three centuries of Russian conflict and diplomacy with the independent Nogay hordes of the Black Sea steppe.

The migration turned into a catastrophe from which the Nogays were never to recover. For unclear reasons, the Nogays decided to turn back shortly after setting out on their journey, with many fleeing across the Kuban River into Ottoman territory. General Alexander Suvorov, tasked with supervising the resettlement, ordered attacks on the escaping Nogays. He and Don Cossack ataman Ilovaiskii massacred the Nogay population, including women, children, and the elderly. According to Alieva and Asker, “the expedition of Russian troops against the Nogays fleeing beyond the Kuban concluded with almost total extermination of the Nogay people.”<sup>172</sup> The Nogays who elected to adopt a sedentary way of life and take up agriculture were resettled many times throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, often in various parts of the new *Tavricheskaia Oblast*, and most of them eventually assimilated into Russian or Crimean Tatar society. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the remaining Nogay population largely immigrated to various territories in the Ottoman Empire, including the Northern Caucasus, Anatolia, and Dobruja in contemporary Romania.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Rescript signed by Empress Catherine II to Prince G.A. Potemkin on the resettlement of Nogay Tatars to the Ural Steppe, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1783, *SIRIO*, vol. 27, pp. 277-278.

<sup>172</sup> Alieva and Asker, pp. 23-27.

<sup>173</sup> Skal'kovskii, pp. 151-190 and Williams, pp. 111-278.

### *Conclusion*

At every point between the start of the Russo-Turkish war in 1768 and the final Russian annexation of the Crimea in 1783, the Nogay hordes played a critical role in the history of the khanate. Since before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Nogays had been very tenuous subjects of the khans, possessing their own culture, lifestyle, and even religious practices distinct from those of Crimea. They were therefore quick to welcome Russian influence in the area, becoming rebellious allies of the Russians and setting a precedent that the Crimean peninsula itself would follow. However, this alliance would face many challenges in the ensuing years after Russian authorities reneged on their initial promises to grant the Nogays independence. The Nogay hordes frequently shifted their loyalty during his time, starting rebellions that brought both the anti-Russian Devlet Giray Khan and later the pro-Russian candidate Shahin Giray to the Crimean throne. However, when the latter khan attempted to destroy their traditional autonomy and privileges, the Nogays could not dislodge him in their usual fashion because of the full-scale Russian occupation at his back. Now irrevocably annexed by an imperial sovereign even more dramatically different from them than their last, the vast majority of them faced extermination, assimilation, or simply expulsion from their ancestral homeland. The Nogays were the Russian Empire's first allies in the Crimean Khanate as well as its final foes, but they would never entirely adapt to life as its loyal subjects.

Even the historians who acknowledge the Nogays' importance for Crimean and Russian history are incapable of explaining their actions. Fisher, for instance, treats the Nogays as chaotic and unpredictable actors who shifted their political allegiance at random. He remarks, "It seemed very difficult to retain any form of organization or order among the Nogays. Their loyalties were not firmly set towards any side."<sup>174</sup> He therefore fails to discern the distinctive pattern of frontier behavior that motivated Nogay actions. While their shifts in allegiance truly were frequent and

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<sup>174</sup> Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, p. 68.

rapid, the Nogays did not act without reason, and arduous, detailed analysis can largely explain their motivations. Like many other borderland peoples, their leaders were easily enticed by bribery and gifts while also being highly susceptible to intimidation by military presence. They sought protection from attack by external threats, but also demanded strict autonomy regarding their social, political, economic, and cultural life. An important aspect of this last demand was toleration for their syncretic and unorthodox religious practices. Because of the difficulty of negotiating with allies whose behavior was so difficult to predict, Russian officials relied on the time-honored traditions of Muscovite steppe diplomacy for interacting with the Nogays, though they often concealed these traditions under the rhetoric of Enlightenment ideals in their writings.

While this study provides an important contribution to the scholarly literature about the role of the Nogays in the Crimean annexation and about the practices of borderland peoples more broadly, it naturally suffers from a number of drawbacks and limitations. Foremost among these, of course, is its failure to incorporate any Turkic-language primary or secondary sources, which would have provided an invaluable alternative perspective on the conflict. Additionally, the use of published materials rather than archival sources implies the possibility that some important documents were simply left unanalyzed. Finally, the nearly exclusive reliance on diplomatic and political correspondence precluded any real discussion of social or cultural history. All of these limitations, however, may equally indicate fruitful areas for future scholarship. Other promising topics for further research include the economic and environmental history of the region. David Moon has performed good work in this area, urging scholars “not to make too sharp a distinction, however, between nomadic pastoralism by the indigenous population and settled, arable farming by the incomers. There was a very long history of arable farming on the steppes.”<sup>175</sup> His study

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<sup>175</sup> David Moon, *The Plough that Broke the Steppes: Agriculture and Environment on Russia's Grasslands, 1700-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 17.

sheds light on new aspects of the Nogays' transformation from rebellious pastoral nomads into docile sedentary farmers. By challenging wide assumptions about pastoral and agrarian practices, such scholarship can provide a more nuanced view of relations between steppe peoples like the Nogays and Russian non-state actors such as peasant settlers. Though the diplomatic or political history of Russian-Nogay relations is fascinating, the ploughs of ordinary Russian or Ukrainian peasant farmers changed the Nogays' way of life at least as much as Potemkin's cannons did.

Nogay history may seem like an insignificant chapter in the broader history of Eastern Europe. After all, the Nogay population today is roughly as low as it was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Yet the Nogays present a stark reminder that southern Ukraine, which today forms the heartland of a quintessentially agrarian, Christian, European nation-state, was for centuries home to pastoral, nomadic, Muslim, "oriental" tribal confederations. Eliminating the Nogays was an essential step in formulating contemporary European identity. As this same territory is being contested once again today, it is important to remember how quickly and drastically lands and populations can change hands between empires, religions, and ways of life.

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