

## Before the Museum: Khan's Palace in Bakhchisarai in the Late 18<sup>th</sup> and Early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries<sup>1</sup>

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This article addresses the Khan's Palace in the town of Bakhchisarai (Bakhchisaray, Bağçasaray, Bayča Saraj) which is one of the most important touristic attractions and cultural heritage sites in the Crimea. This palace is an emblematic and one of the most visited places in the region, a monument of the former grandeur of the Crimean Khanate, famous in the history of Eastern Europe from the mid-15<sup>th</sup> to the late 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. For the Crimean Tatars it symbolizes the imagined "golden age" in their history, with the Khanate interpreted as their "national state." Russian culture views the palace as the location of the famous poem by Aleksandr Pushkin *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* and the embodiment of mysterious, romantic, and alluring Orient/East. The Poles remembered Bakhchisarai because of *The Crimean Sonnets* by Adam Mickiewicz. The public in different countries recollects the story of the southern tour of Russian Empress Catherine II in a company of Emperor Joseph II of the Holy Roman Empire and Western diplomats in 1787 and fantastic image of the khan's residence in travelogues. Today the former palace of Crimean khans is the core of the Bakhchisarai Historical, Cultural, and Archaeological Museum Preserve comprising more than a hundred archaeological, architectural, and cultural sites from the Aeneolithic to the Modern Periods located in the town and its environs. Modern museum officially starts its history from 1917, when, following the collapse of the Russian Empire and the outburst of national movements in border regions, the national museum of the Crimean Tatars was established in the former khan's residence. This article analyses the history of the monument during the fifty years after the unification of the Crimea with Russia, or the Russian annexation of the Crimea in 1783 (the choice of the word depends mostly on the user's political views). This case characterizes the development of museums and cultural heritage protection in Russia during the Imperial Period. Interesting is the rank of the Palace, which actually was a museum, but did not have this status officially. Moreover, our intention is to uncover how the former residence of Muslim rulers turned into a phenomenon important to very different cultures. It should be noted that the history of the Palace as a museum, including the period in question, has been addressed in several publications, but only in Russian (e. g.: MARKEVICH 1895; GERNGROSS 1912; IBRAGIMOVA 2015, 25–95; EMINOV 2017).

The palace is a centre of the town of Bakhchisarai, which is located in the south-western area of the Crimean Peninsula, in a narrow valley in between of the mountains with steep rocky sides (Fig. 1). General view of the place appeared on the painting by German artist Christian Geissler. He was a member of the academic expedition to South Russia in 1793–1794, organized by the government to study the

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• **Fig. 1.** • Christian Geissler. Bakhchisarai viewed from the north. 1794–1801. The complex of the Khan's Palace is on the foreground, to the left

remote provinces and headed by respected scientist Peter Pallas. Later, Geissler used his drawings from nature to make engraved illustrations for the travelogue (PALLAS 1812, Pl. II). Famous British traveler Edward Clarke who observed the Crimea in 1800 called Bakhchisarai “one of the most remarkable towns in Europe: first, in the novelty of its manners and customs; these are strictly Oriental, and betray nothing of an European character: secondly, in the site of the town itself; occupying the craggy sides of a prodigious natural fosse between two high mountains...” (CLARKE 1817, 170). Clarke’s friend Reginald Heber, who performed a trip through the Crimea in 1806, called the Khan’s Palace “the most striking feature” of Bakhchisarai: “[it], though neither large nor regular, yet, by the picturesque style of its architecture, its carving and gilding, its Arabic and Turkish inscriptions, and the fountains of beautiful water in every court, interested me more than I can express” (HEBER 1830, 259, 260; cf.: CLARKE 1817, 195, n. 1). The palace complex

• **Fig. 2.**  
Carlo Bossoli.  
Bakhchisarai. 1840–1856.  
The main courtyard  
encircled with different  
palace structures viewed  
from the south on the  
foreground





comprised of living rooms, audience chambers, harem, mosques, parade ground, stables, kitchens, servants' rooms, fountains, and cemetery (Fig. 2). The building of Crimean khans' official residence started in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century (for details see: IBRAGIMOVA 2015). However, not so many things survived from that period, since the palace was burnt down during the invasion of the Russian army in 1736. Later on, the residence was restored by next khans. Its architecture features mostly the Ottoman style with some elements of European Renaissance.

In 1787, the Russian government ordered that the town of Bakhchisarai should remain the place with only Tatar residents (KIRIENKO 1889, 10, no. 159). This reflected religious policy of the Catherinian Age, which generally was tolerable to non-Russian peoples and non-Orthodox religions, trying to find them appropriate place in the structure of her Empire. In the Russian period, the Bakhchisarai palace was under the jurisdiction of the imperial Ministry of the Interior and was maintained by the funds of the Department of State Treasury. Its general supervisor was the governor of Taurida (this name was given to the Crimea in order to underline its Classical history and denounce the Muslim period), and the local responsible official was the chief of police of Bakhchisarai (ZARUBIN 1994, 210). In 1784–1787, the Russians organized, sponsored, and conducted repair works in the palace which costs a considerable amount of 24,248 roubles not counting labour. Although the builders kept many original features of the complex, they nevertheless introduced “European” traits into its interior designs (MARKEVICH 1895,



• Fig. 3.  
William Hadfield.  
Palace of Her Imperial  
Majesty in Bakhchisarai.  
1787

136–138; GERNGROSS 1912, 16–20). As the French emigree Marquise Gabriel de Castelnau, who spent several years in South Russia, wrote later on, “*It was thought to please the Monarchess by distorting its Asiatic style; but there is no doubt that the replacement must seem rather bizarre to her...*” (CASTELNAU 1827, 168). Clarke was much more critical: “*the late Empress ordered it [the Palace] to be kept in repair, and always according to its present Oriental form. When she came to Bakhcheserai, a set of apartments had been prepared for her, in the French taste: this gave her great offence, and caused the order for its preservation, according to the original style observed in the building*” (CLARKE 1817, 180).

Catherine II arrived to Bakhchisarai on May 1787. Her astonishing southern tour was aimed at different purposes: the Empress decided to get acquainted with her new and vast land possessions, to establish firm relations with her new subjects, and to negotiate with the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II concerning the foreign-political issues and the would-be war with the Ottomans. For a couple of days (May 20–22 and 24–26), the former khan’s palace became a temporary residence for two emperors, their retinues, and western diplomats. Russian researcher Guzel’ Ibneeva published a drawing by William Hadfield, a painter of Scottish origin, who entered Russian service and followed Catherine II to the Crimea with the task of making drawings of the places visited by Her Imperial Majesty (IBNEEVA 2006, 242; fig. 39). The watercolour shows the Khan’s Palace with the coaches which carried the most high visitors, standing near Russian soldiers and some persons wearing Oriental dress, obviously Tatars (Fig. 3). From now on, the Palace sometimes appeared as a scene where West met East. Ironical is the caption, where the place is called the “palace of Her Imperial Majesty,” thus underlining the new status of the former khans’ residence.

There the Empress wrote a verse to her favourite Grigorii Potemkin, the governor of South Russia:

Oh, miracles of God! Who of my ancestors  
 Slept quietly because of their [Tatar] hordes and Khans?  
 But I cannot sleep amidst Bakhchisarai  
 Because of tobacco smoke and cries... Is not it a place of paradise?  
 (CATHERINE II 1997, 216, no. 762).

Here paradise signifies the triumph of the conqueror, who takes possession of a very important place, the land of promise. The feelings of the Empress were clear to Count Louis de Ségur, the French

ambassador to Russia: “*The satisfaction she felt was expressed in her countenance; she felt proud as a sovereign, as a woman and as a [C]hristian of being seated on the throne of the Tartars, formerly the conquerors of Russia...*” (SÉGUR 1827, 146).



Peter Carl Geissler, a son of Christian Geissler mentioned above, once made an engraving featuring the meeting of two emperors in the Crimea (Fig. 4). Here Catherine II and Joseph II are portrayed when dividing the world (or at least the Ottoman Empire): the map lays on the table in front of the Empress. The imagined landscape on the background clearly symbolizes the Crimea, with its combination of sea and Mediterranean flora. The tower in Oriental style, although fantastic, definitely refers to the region’s Oriental heritage and Bakhchisarai in particular. Interesting is that Joseph II was disappointed with his accommodation in the Palace. As he wrote to a friend, “*I am*

• Fig. 4. • Peter Carl Geissler. The visit of Joseph II and Catherine II of Russia to the Crimea. 1843



living in the apartments which in former times belonged to the khan's brother: all his wives were old women, and therefore my dreams cannot be bloomy" (JOSEPH II 1869, 361). Perhaps he was the only one to dislike the Palace: the others were amazed with its Oriental romanticism.

The image of Bakhchisarai and its palace became especially popular on the West because of the memoirs of Count de Ségur and famous courtier and remarkably witty intellectual Prince Charles de Ligne. Their books were translated into foreign languages and republished many times. Inspired by the tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*, they created the notion of the Crimea as Orient in Europe, the place indistinguishable from fairy tales. Prince de Ligne, fascinated with the Khan's Palace, wrote: "Fate has destined to me the chamber of the prettiest of the sultanas, and to Ségur that of the chief of the black eunuchs. <...> In this palace, which partakes of the Moorish, Arabic, Chinese, and Turkish, paintings, gilding, inscriptions, fountains, and little gardens are everywhere; among them, in the very droll and splendid audience-chamber may be read, in the Turkish language, in letters of gold, around the cornice, these words: 'In defiance of Envy, the whole world is informed that there is nothing in Ispahan, Damascus, or Stamboul as rich as this'" (LIGNE 1902, 18). Count de Ségur imagined that he appeared in a kind of Oriental phantasy, or a fairy tale (Fig. 5): "I remember that having lain down on my sofa, overcome by the extreme heat, and enjoying the murmuring of the water, the freshness of the shade and the fragrance of the flowers, I gave myself up to Oriental luxury, and was enjoying all the inactivity of a true Pacha..." (SÉGUR 1827, 144–145).



• Fig. 5.  
Reginald Heber.  
Bakhchisarai. 1806.  
Clarke used this  
pen-and-ink sketch  
to make an engraving  
for his travelogue  
depicting "Seraglio,  
or Palace of the Khans  
of the Crimea, with  
a view of the Charem"

Very similar was the mood of Russian travellers. It was not for nothing that Russian journalist and historian, ethnographer and university professor Nikolai Nadezhdin called his essay on the Crimea *The Russian Alhambra*. Bakhchisarai and the legends of its history played an important role in it (NADEZH-DIN 1839). It might well be that the appearance of the palace and other Crimean Muslim monuments destroyed a Russian ideological effort. In the Catherinian Age, Russian propaganda stressed the heritage of Craeco-Roman antiquity and Byzantine Christianity in the history of the Crimea as a pretext for the "right" to the region (ZORIN 2014, 92–120). However, the result was distant from the plans: public mind associated the Crimea with the Orient (DICKINSON 2002; KHRAPUNOV 2022). The site of the ancient Chersonese / Cherson, where the legendary baptism of Rus' happened in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, was perceived as an Orthodox shrine only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (KOZELSKY 2010; KHRAPUNOV 2016).

Russian authorities decided to use the former khan's palace as a hotel for travellers. After 1783, the Crimea became a popular stage of the Western Grand Tour, a traditional educative trip through Europe undertaken by upper-class young Europeans of sufficient means. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars changed the route of the Grand Tour, which initially passed through Switzerland and Italy, and moved it north, to Scandinavia, Finland, Germany and Russia (CROSS 2012, 5–6). The Crimea offered the travellers a multitude of new impressions and materials for reflections, such as Mediterranean nature of the south, exotic beasts and plants, new peoples and religions, cultural heritage sites related to classical antiquity, Byzantium, mediaeval Genoese, Jews and Muslims of the Modern period, and the process of imperial transformations in the new “Oriental” province (see e. g. KHRAPUNOV 2022a). The first Russian decades produced a few dozens of Crimean travelogues which particularly made Bakhchisarai and the khan's palace a must-see place.

This landscape inspired professional and non-professional painters (Fig. 6). Some of them made drafts by pen to be coloured later, after returning back home. On-site drawings were copied on engravings and lithographs to decorate books of



• Fig. 6. • Fedor Alekseev. A View of Bakhchisarai. Ca 1797

travellers were great critics of Russia. Clarke, whose Crimean travelogue was published five times during his lifetime, not counting its French and German translations, built up the reputation of an expert on archaeology and antiquities of the Crimea. In his view, the Russians purposefully destroyed cultural heritage, since it was their natural feature. This observation concerned not only classical but also Muslim monuments. Discussing the sad destiny of Bakhchisarai after the Russian annexation, Clarke lamented that the Russians “*have laid waste the country; cut down the trees; pulled down the houses; overthrown the sacred edifices of the natives, with all their public buildings; destroyed the public aqueducts; robbed the inhabitants; insulted the Tahtars in their acts of public worship; torn up from the tombs the bodies of their ancestors, casting their relics upon dunghills, and feeding swine out of their coffins; annihilated all the monuments of antiquity; breaking up alike the sepulchres of Saints and Pagans, and scattering their ashes in air*” (CLARKE 1817, 179). One tends to assume

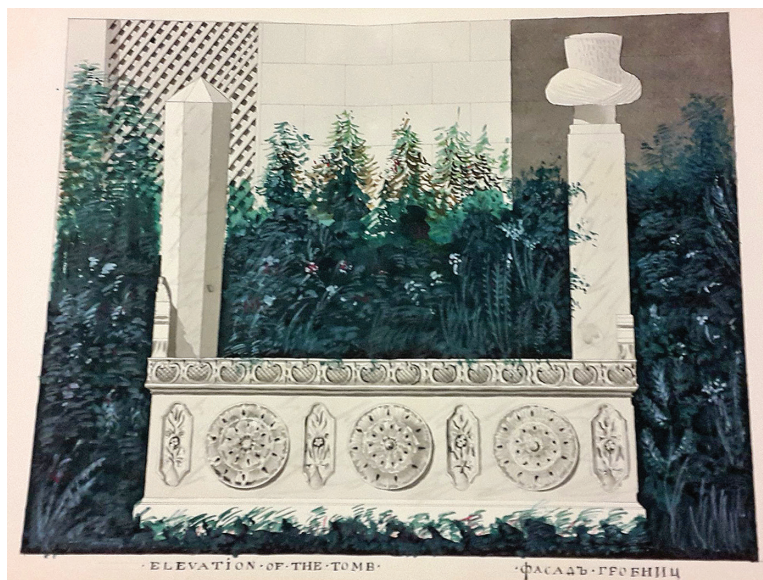
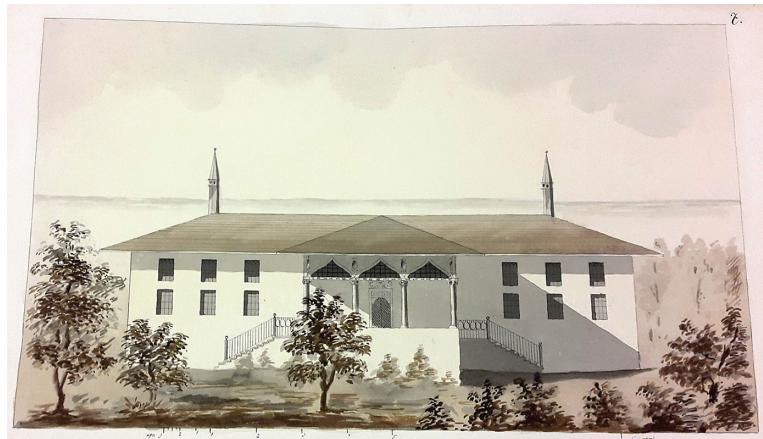
ings and lithographs to decorate books of travelogues or to be published separately. It would not be an exaggeration to call Bakhchisarai's palace one of the most painted object in provincial Russia (see large but still incomplete catalogue: BAKHCHISARAI 2015). Some of the drawings are presented as figures to this paper. Their artistic level varied from quite advanced to amateur. Those who had never been to the Crimea used to copy these drawings and paintings. A good example is that Italian Giacomo Quarenghi, the architect of a number of famous buildings in imperial Petersburg under Catherine II, Paul I, and Alexander I, twice copied Hadfield's picture of the Khan's Palace (see ORIENTALISM 2017, 129–131).

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that similar thinking was peculiar to the Westerners in general: they were sure in their superiority over the others, and considered themselves true heirs of ancient civilizations. Therefore, the French during Napoleon's Egyptian campaign "saved" archaeological treasures from "barbarous" Egyptians, allegedly unworthy of their "great ancestors". Demonstrative are parallels between Clarke's anti-Russian rhetoric and Napoleon's propaganda in 1812, which certainly developed independently from Clarke, using the discourse of "Russian barbarism" which destroyed cultural heritage as opposition to "civilization" (for details see KHRAPUNOV 2019; KHRAPUNOV 2022a).

In contrast to Clarke's philippic, the Russian government did some works for the protection and restoration of the cultural heritage, the Khan's Palace in particular. In 1798, the governorate architect William Hastie made drawings of different Crimean sites, Muslim and Christian, requiring restoration. 15 of 34 "plans and elevations" depicted the condition of the Khan's Palace. Particularly, the observer can see that some of the structures were grassed (Fig. 7). This album signifies that a project for the restoration of old structures was prepared. Emperor Paul I made the palace subordinated to the department at the Imperial Court Ministry responsible for building and housekeeping and granted the amount of 8,106 roubles 90 kopecks to the civil governor of the Crimea to repair the former khan's residence. From that time on,



• **Fig. 7.** William Hastie. Plans and elevations of the ancient khans' palace at Bakhchisarai. 1798. Drawings nos. 8–10 from Hastie's album with original titles. 1 – elevation of the old palace (no. 8); 2 – elevation of the upper mausoleum (no. 9); 3 – elevation of the side of the Khan Krym Girey's tomb (no. 10)



the amount of 887 roubles 85 kopecks was given annually to repair the Palace. The chief of the town police was made responsible for the complex (MARKEVICH 1895, 138).

In 1821, the Committee of Ministers of the Russian Empire sent academic Karl Köhler and architect Eugene Pascal to the Crimea in order to study the conditions of local archaeological and architectural monuments. Köhler supervised the making of drafts and plans of reconstruction of different sites, mostly from the Mediaeval and Early Modern Periods, Muslim in particular. However, both Köhler and Pascal considered that the Khan's Palace is "*in a very bad state, [and] its restoration is absolutely senseless.*" The suggestion was to pull down the Palace and to build in this place "*a stone palace in Oriental taste, but in much smaller size*" (TIESENHAUSEN 1872, 385, 393). One can only wonder, if this proposal had been accepted, would Bakhchisarai have continued to embody the Islamic element of the Crimea in Russian culture? Or would other centres, like Yevpatoria or Staryi Krym with their numerous Islamic monuments, have taken on this role? Luckily, the said project was not realized due to the lack of money.

In this period, there appeared some myths around the Khan's Palace. The most famous of them addressed Crimean khan's alleged love to a Christian prisoner. In the complex of palace buildings there was an isolated mausoleum of some lady called Diliara, died in 1764 (IBRAGIMOVA 2015, 175–176). The memory of her quickly disappeared: but the sepulchre standing at a distance from the cemetery of khans and, non-typically, constructed for lady, gave birth to local legends. The travellers ignorant of Muslim architecture and incapable of reading Arabic inscriptions but fascinated with Eastern romantics were ready to believe in all these rumours and, moreover, to make their own contribution. Lady Elizabeth Craven, whose visit to the Crimea in 1786 was a part of the long tour organized to flee from repeated scandals, described the khan's palace and mentioned that: "*I saw from the windows a kind of dome which raised my curiosity, and I am told it is a monument built to the memory of a Christian wife, which the Khan loved so tenderly that he was inconsolable for her loss; and that he had placed it there, that he might have the satisfaction of looking at the building which contained her remains. This Tartar Khan must have had a soul worthy of being loved by a Christian wife I think*" (CRAVEN 1789, 180). Plausibly, the isolated location of the mausoleum was explained as the buried lady was Christian, so she could not be interred in the main cemetery, along with Muslim khans.

British Robert Willaim Hay, the future Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, who travelled in the Crimea in 1807, seems to be the first to mention the Polish surname of Potocka in relation to the grave, in the capture to a drawing (Fig. 8). The story of khan's beloved prisoner soon became very popular. There



• Fig. 8. • Robert William Hay. Tomb of Countess Potocka. 1807



• **Fig. 9.** • Grigorii Chernetsov and Nikanor Chernetsov. Pushkin in the Palace of Bakhchisarai. 1837. Although this scene is imagined, the painters portrayed the real Fountain Courtyard in the Khan's Palace

remained a report of the chief of police in Bakhchisarai and the keeper of the Khan's Palace Ivan Ananich concerning the harem prisoner. It stated: "neither in the palace nor in Bakhchisarai there exist an account of that Potocka; I interviewed old men, some being hundred-years old, who lived then at the court of different khans, but they also know nothing; they told me that under the government in those times, no one dared to be curious nor talk about khan's wives, bewareing of the punishment because of the Turkish jealousy" (BALAKIN – BODROVA 2013, 12). Ananich wrote that "Countess Sof. Potocka," when visiting Bakhchisarai, "said that there definitely was a khan's wife from their family, but she had no detailed account of that with her" (IBID.). This was a famous courtesan Zofia Potocka (nee Clavone), at that time the wife to a noble Pole Stanisław Szczęsny Potocki. The Potockis had an estate on the southern coast of the Crimea and probably came to Bakhchisarai on the way to it. Countess Potocka was of Greek origin: she was born in Constantinople, so in fact none of her ancestors could be Polish prisoners in khan's harem. Be that as it may, there are reasons to suppose that the name of Maria Potocka was added to the Bakchisarai legend by this noble lady who visited the town and heard the story of khan's Christian spouse (KOSHELEV 2015: 27).



This romantic tale became very popular. Among the travellers to the Crimea there were Russian and Polish national poets Alexander Pushkin (1820) and Adam Mickiewicz (1825). Crimea inspired them, so both used the legend of the beautiful Pole girl, a harem prisoner, in their poetry. Mickiewicz dedicated to her *The Crimean Sonnet VIII*:

In Spring of love and life, My Polish Rose,  
You faded and forgot the joy of youth;  
Bright butterfly, it brushed you, then left ruth  
Of bitter memory that stings and glows.  
(tr. by E. W. Underwood)

Pushkin imitated famous Oriental poems by Lord Byron. In *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* (Fig. 9) he introduced the motif of a jealousy and rivalry between the prisoners of harem, which resulted in the bitter end of two girls. The poet also added to the legend one of the fountains in the Khan's Palace, interpreting it in a way that falling drops of water symbolize the sorrow of inconsolable khan:

In token of Maria's loss  
A marble fountain he upreared  
In spot recluse; – the Christian's cross  
Upon the monument appeared...  
(tr. by W. D. Lewis)



• Fig. 10. • Vadim Passek. The Fountain of Tears in Bakhchisarai. 1836

the beauty prisoner. Even Crimean Tatars, who knew but their native language, reproduced and developed this legend, understanding the myth as a real part of their own history (BRONSHTEIN 1997, 479–481). It was a “boomerang effect,” when some vague and unclear local legend developing around an archaeological monument from the past was reconsidered and enlarged by Christian travellers, and after that returned to the local Muslim community.

The palace was rapidly deteriorating. Therefore, in the 1820s Alexander I ordered the large-scale restoration works, sponsored by the state, under the supervision of architects I. F. Kolodin and, after, F. F. Elson. The result was contradictory. On the one hand, the works were necessary to save the complex. On the other hand, the appearance of the palace significantly changed. It was not a surprise since the modern ideas of restoration were not developed by the time. Some of the buildings were destroyed; walls and ceilings of the others were covered with paintings in pseudo-Oriental style. Many of these “novelties” survived to these days (MARKEVICH 1895: 139–175; GERNGROSS 1912: 25–27; IBRAGIMOVA 2015, 50–64).

In this period, the Empire invented an original way of finding money to support the palace. After 1783, Crimean Tatars did not pay taxes, since the state did not want to raise their indignation and reckoned on making them habituated gradually to the Empire-wide taxation system. In 1829, annual

In fact, this fountain shows two inscriptions, both having nothing to do with love or romance: the first sites the Koran, the second glorifies Khan Krym Girei (IBRAGIMOVA 2015, 120–122, 310 nos. 4–5). It should be mentioned that such a method was typical of Pushkin: there is a number of cases when he, despite knowing historical realities, intentionally replaced them with phantasies: historical facts simply pushed his poetic creativity and were easily forgotten, when fantasies allowed a vivid image or a romantic plot (FORMOZOV 2012, 88–90, 257–259). Be that as it may, this episode shows how the architectural monument became a phenomenon of world literature (Fig. 10).

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the tale of Maria Potocka became universally known among the residents of Bakhchisarai. The locals related it to various rooms in the khan's palace, which were interpreted the “church,” “apartment,” and even “jail” of

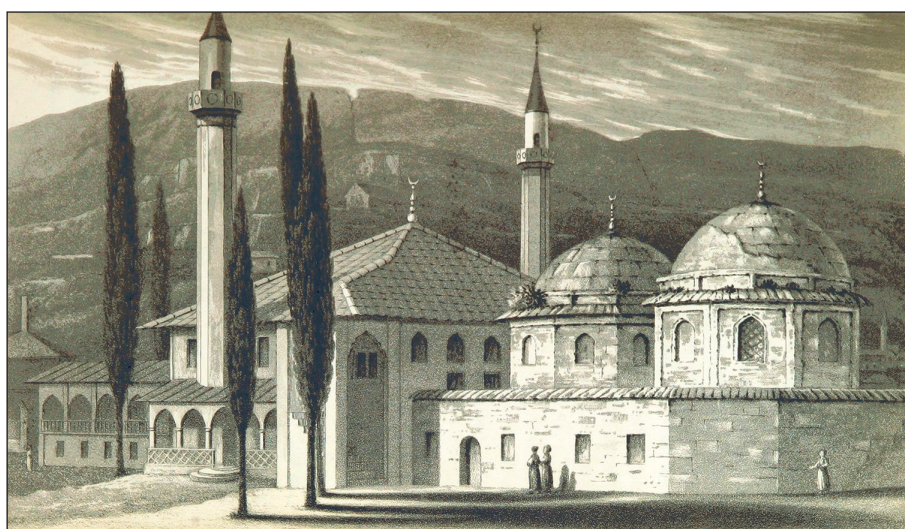


tax from the Tatars was introduced in the amount of 1 rouble 50 kopecks from a Tatar peasant (just for reference, Christian farmers paid 11 roubles 30 kopecks per capita – see KONKIN 2017, 195, 198 n. 45). The amounts collected in this way should be used to support the infrastructure in the Crimea, such as roads, bridges, post, water-pipes, urban constructions, and so on. However, the almighty governor of South Russia Mikhail Vorontsov persuaded the government to make some exceptions. Particularly, in 1830–1832 more than 40,000 roubles from the “Tatar tax” were spent to support the monuments of the Muslim cultural heritage, such as the Friday Mosque in Yevpatoria and the “tombs of the khans” in Bakhchisarai. The latter obviously referred to the monuments of the khan's cemetery which was an important part of the Palace complex (KONKIN 2020, 183).

This paper demonstrates that the Khan's Palace in Bakhchisarai changed its function in the Russian Imperial Period of its history. The former residence of the Muslim rulers de facto became a museum, though it did not have an official museum status. The government cared after its preservation despite the lack of modern technologies of conservation or museum work. One day the complex became the seat of

• **Fig. 11.**

W. H. Newnham.  
Tombs of the Khans  
of the Crimea. 1827.  
The Big Khan's Mosque  
is behind two vaulted  
tombs



• **Fig. 12.**

Carlo Bossoli.  
Bakhchisarai. 1842.  
The main façade  
and entrance  
to the Khan's Palace



the world policy, there the future of Eastern Europe and Ottoman Empire was discussed. Moreover, the former Khan's Palace became a Crimean attraction and a must-see place, which inspired travellers, poets, and artists. Due to their creative works, the Palace also became a part of Russian, Polish, and French culture. Simultaneously, the imagination of western travellers enriched the culture of the Crimean Tatars with some myths concerning the Age of the Khanate.

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