

KERSTIN S. JOBST  
Institute of East European History  
University of Vienna

## A SACRAL AND MYTHICAL LANDSCAPE: THE CRIMEA IN THE EAST EUROPEAN CONTEXT<sup>1</sup>

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**Słowa kluczowe:** Krym, mit, przestrzenie sakralne, zbiorowe tożsamości

### Summary

The Crimean peninsula plays a decisive role as a mythical place both in literature (e.g. by Goethe, Pushkin, Mickiewicz) and in many (pre-)national contexts and narratives: in the early modern period, for instance, the Polish nobility had developed the idea of its Sarmatian ancestry, an ethnos which in antiquity settled in the Black Sea area and the peninsula. German-speaking intellectuals in the 19th century developed an “enthusiasm for the Crimean Goths”. They believed that they had discovered their ancestors in the Gothic Crimean inhabitants, who had been extinct since early modern times. But above all the National Socialists attempted to legitimize their political claims to the peninsula. The mythical and legendary narrations associated with the Crimea in Russian culture, however, were particularly effective: The alleged baptism of Grand Duke Vladimir in Chersones in 988, which is said to have brought Christianity to the Kievan Rus', plays a central role here, as do the numerous writers who drew inspiration from the Crimea. These narratives were used also by Russian political agents to legitimize the annexation of the Crimea in 2014.

### KRAJOBRAZ SAKRALNY I MITYCZNY. KRYM W KONTEKŚCIE WSCHODNIOEUROPEJSKIM

### Streszczenie

Półwysep Krymski odgrywa ogromną rolę jako miejsce mityczne zarówno w utworach literackich (np. Goethego, Puszkina, Mickiewicza), jak i w wielu (przed)narodowych kontekstach i narracjach: np. we wczesnym okresie nowożytnym polska szlachta wypracowała koncept swego pochodzenia od Sarmatów, grupy etnicznej, która w starożytności osiadła nad Morzem Czarnym i na półwyspie. Niemieckojęzyczni intelektualiści w XIX wieku przejawiali „entuzjazm dla Gotów

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on a part of my book *Geschichte der Krim. Iphigenia und Putin in Tauris* (forthcoming).

Krymskich<sup>2</sup>. Wierzyli, że odkryli swoich przodków w gockich mieszkańcach Krymu, którzy wymarli w czasach wczesnonowożytnych, ale przede wszystkim narodowi socjaliści próbowali legitymizować swoje polityczne pretensje do półwyspu. Mityczne i legendarne narracje związane z Krymem w kulturze rosyjskiej były jednak szczególnie efektywne: rzekomy chrzest wielkiego księcia Włodzimierza w Chersonesz w 988 roku, który rzekomo przyniósł chrześcijaństwo Rusi Kijowskiej, odgrywał w tym kontekście bardzo ważną rolę, podobnie jak wielu pisarzy, którzy czerpali inspirację z Krymu. Te narracje były również wykorzystywane przez rosyjskie władze do legitymizacji aneksji Krymu w 2014 roku.

When thou [sic; *recte* thee], a deeply hid, mysterious fate  
 Brought to Diana's fane long years ago,  
 To greet thee as a treasure sent by Zeus  
 With reverence and awe did Thoas come;  
 To thee these shores, which every stranger's heart  
 Had long appalled, were gracious and were kind;  
 For none ere thee was cast upon this coast,  
 Who did not bleeding fall in sacrifice  
 At Dian's shrine, as willed the ancient law,  
 ...  
 Say! since thy coming, has thou nothing done?  
 Who was it cheered the monarch's troubled mind?  
 Who was it that, with soft, persuasive words,  
 Moved him to waive the fearful law which willed  
 That every stranger in Diana's fane,  
 Year after year, should bleeding leave his life?  
 Who was it send to his dear fatherland  
 So oft the prisoners doomed to certain death?  
 Hath not Diana, far from giving sign  
 Of anger that her bloody offerings failed,  
 In richest measure granted all thy prayers?<sup>2</sup>

Lovers of German literature who have generally begun to consider the Crimean Peninsula and its geographical location only in the context of its annexation by the Russian Federation in the spring of 2014 probably know these lines. They were written by Germany's most renowned writer, Goethe, who, like other artists in the eighteenth century, repeatedly took up the then popular subject of Iphigenia.<sup>3</sup> Goethe too took his cue from the Hellenic tragedy written by Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* (414/412 BC). In Classical mythology, Taurica

<sup>2</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Iphigenia in Tauris. From the German of Goethe with Original Poems* (Liverpool: Privately Printed, 1851), act I, scene the second: 5–6. Available at: [https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/files/Iphigenia\\_in\\_Tauris.pdf](https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/files/Iphigenia_in_Tauris.pdf) (acc. 19.04.2018).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Christoph Willibald (Ritter von) Gluck's (1714) *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1779) or Goethe's first version of his *Iphigenia*.

was the place where Agamemnon's daughter was abducted by the goddess Artemis/Diana to save her from sacrifice by her father, a military leader who thus sought to end the calm the gods had brought to the winds that prevented him from sailing to do battle with Troy. As a reward for her rescue, Iphigenia had to serve as a priestess that performs cruel human sacrifice in this land of barbarians, for anyone shipwrecked on the Tauric coast was doomed to death. In Iphigenia's homeland, her mother Clytemnestra murdered her husband to avenge her daughter's presumed death, whereupon Iphigenia's siblings, Orestes and Electra, then killed their own mother – the stuff of which tragedies are made. As if that were not enough, Orestes – a descendent of Tantalus – was now cursed and asked the Oracle how he could escape divine wrath and eternal torment. He was told to bring “the sister” from Tauris. Since he believed Iphigenia to be dead, he thought the Oracle meant Apollo's twin sister, the goddess Artemis/Diana, and assumed he was to steal her statue from the temple there. Together with his friend Pylades he set out for Tauris...

In the texts of the Ancient Greek authors, we encounter Tauris, today's Crimea, as the “Tauric Peninsula” (*Chersónesos Tauriké*) or the “land of the Tauri,” located at the end of the inhabited world, the *Ecumene*. The Greeks believed life here to be less civilized than in Hellas, even barbaric.<sup>4</sup> This clearly uninviting counterworld was inhabited by the Tauri, after whom the peninsula received its Classical name and who were thought to have settled on the southern coast and in its mountainous region. Little is known about them, neither their origin nor their language; the only information we have stems from the narratives of Classical authors; Herodotus, for instance, writes of them:

[T]hey sacrifice to the ‘Maiden’ both ship-wrecked persons and also those Hellenes whom they can capture by putting out to sea against them; and their manner of sacrifice is this: – when they have made the first offering from the victim they strike his head with a club: and some say that they push the body down from the top of the cliff (for it is upon a cliff that the temple is placed) and set the head up on a stake; but others, while agreeing as to the heads, say nevertheless that the body is not pushed down from the top of the cliff, but buried in the earth. This divinity to whom they sacrifice, the Tauroi themselves say is Iphigeneia the daughter of Agamemnon.<sup>5</sup>

In both Euripides and Goethe, Iphigenia is not a goddess, but someone who commits acts of cruelty against her will by order of Artemis/Diana. Even for the tragedian Euripides, the story ultimately ends well for the trio Iphigenia,

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<sup>4</sup> Vide Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: OUP 1989) on othering in Ancient times.

<sup>5</sup> Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, trans. George C. Macaulay, vol. 1, 2008 (E-Book), Book IV, Paragraph 103. Available at: [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2707/2707-h/2707-h.htm#link42H\\_4\\_0001](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2707/2707-h/2707-h.htm#link42H_4_0001) (acc. 19.04.2018).

Orestes, and Pylades; they are able to leave Tauris. However, there are crucial differences reflecting the lifeworlds and worldviews of their authors that are rooted in their times, separated as they are by over two thousand years: Euripides' Tauri are ideal-typical barbarians, even if the Greek antithesis is not wholly portrayed as human and civilized. Euripides' Iphigenia herself feels no bond with the autochthonous inhabitants and only manages to flee from Tauris by a ruse, without permission from the Tauric King Thoas. In Goethe, things are different, since he empathizes with his protagonist Thoas. This relationship clearly has him soften the rough customs of the barbarians:

Who was it cheered the monarch's troubled mind?  
 Who was it that, with soft, persuasive words,  
 Moved him to waive the fearful law which willed  
 That every stranger in Diana's fane,  
 Year after year, should bleeding leave his life?  
 Who was it send to his dear fatherland  
 So oft the prisoners doomed to certain death?<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, Goethe's Tauri are far less wild overall than those of Euripides.<sup>7</sup> However, in both variants, two poles collide. Despite a certain taming as a result of his affection for Iphigenia, King Thoas represents an archaic-mythic principle, and Iphigenia personifies civilization. In Tauris-Crimea both systems meet, periphery and metropolis interact, but regardless of a partial rapprochement, they remain ultimately irreconcilable.

And this holds not only for this Crimea myth, but also for a number of other mythic narratives that "revolve around a historical figure, an historical event, an historical fact, or an historical development" and whose content is only fixed in the center; these myths "are otherwise variably received and reproduced as uncomplex narration[s]."<sup>8</sup> It may be due to its location on the periphery – at least from the perspective of the center – that throughout the ages, across epoch boundaries, and through different cultures, the peninsula has become a prime space for myths and legends. After all, knowledge of far-off regions is often scarce, and where people lack facts, their imagination steps into the breach. The same applies in the case of the peninsula, where the events forming the original

<sup>6</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, op. cit., 6.

<sup>7</sup> On Iphigenia, vide e.g. Rolf Engert, *Iphigenie. Dichtungen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Euripides – Jean Racine – Johann Wolfgang Goethe – Gerhardt Hauptmann. 2. um eine mit Personen- und Fremdwortregister erweiterte Auflage* (Leipzig: Max-Stirner-Archiv, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Wolfgang Weber, "Historiographie und Mythographie. Oder: Wie kann und soll der Historiker mit Mythen umgehen?," in *Mythen Mächte. Mythen als Argument*, eds. Anette Völker-Rasor, Wolfgang Schmale (Berlin: Berlin-Verl. Spitz, 1998), 71. All translations from German scholarly texts by the author of the current article.

material of this Crimea myth are in part historically irrefutable, but in part hotly contested. Especially the myths simulated in the so-called Age of Nationalism were often “more convincing than historical research;”<sup>9</sup> and this is also the case in the Crimean context. This is clearly illustrated by the “inner relatedness” between the nation as the result of modernization and myths. One can even go so far as to say that the idea that “nations [are] ineluctable forms of societal organization or even form the aim of history itself is of mythic character.”<sup>10</sup> This can be very well illustrated in the case of the Crimean Peninsula.

Crimea is not only the presumed setting for Classical myths but also assumes such a large space in the Russian national memory that one might almost speak of a Russian national Crimean myth. The special importance of Crimea became apparent again during the annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation in March 2014.<sup>11</sup> This might be self-explanatory, given the Russian rule over Crimea from the late eighteenth century onwards. However, what is more remarkable is the fact that the peninsula occupies a special place in Polish, German, and even English legends. This requires further explanation; we will see that Crimea, often termed exotic or even Asiatic, is part of Europe in both its past and present.

### The Polish Sarmatian Myth

The nomadic Sarmatians, who spoke an Iranian language, penetrated into Crimea from the Volga and Don regions after the end of the fourth century AD. From there, they “rode in the Polish imagination to become appointed their ancestors,” as Neal Ascherson vividly puts it.<sup>12</sup> The material reason for this statement, which at first glance seems somewhat astonishing, is mainly to be sought in the grave excavations discovered in today’s Southern Poland, described in more detail by, among others, the Polish archaeologist Tadeusz Sulimirski (1898–1983) and indicating that the Sarmatian tribes settled there in the third century AD.<sup>13</sup> Further detail is beyond the scope of the present examination. However, we must recognize that – in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – Polish-Lithuanian aristocratic society (*szlachta*)

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<sup>9</sup> Stefan Germer, “Retrovision. Die rückblickende Erfindung der Nationen durch die Kunst,” in *Mythen der Nationen. Ein europäisches Panorama*, ed. Monika Flacke (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1998), 35.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, 33.

<sup>11</sup> Vide Kerstin S. Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums. Der russische Krim-Diskurs im Zarenreich* (Konstanz: Uvk Verlags GmbH, 2007), esp. 131–176.

<sup>12</sup> Neal Ascherson, *Schwarzes Meer* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1996), 24.

<sup>13</sup> Tadeusz Sulimirski, *The Sarmatians: Ancient Peoples and Places* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970), 73. The first Polish version was published in 1979.

underwent a specific cultural transformation known in today's cultural history as "Sarmatism" and, nolens volens, established a connection between Eastern Central Europe and Crimea.<sup>14</sup> The multi-ethnic aristocracy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth thereby created for itself a common integrational construction of identity based on select Classical ancestors.<sup>15</sup> This construction rested

primarily [on the] external appearance of a conservative landowner, anti-urban and anti-intellectual, characterized by artificially exaggerated religiosity, with a tendency for luxurious profligacy and class pride. In representative-cultural respect, this attitude was expressed in valuable robes, jewels, weapons and saddles plated with silver if not gold and decorated with precious stones, and valuable horses.<sup>16</sup>

These "Polish Sarmatians" perceived themselves as living on the periphery, not between civilization and barbarism, but between (Latin) Christianity and the confessional and religious Other. In the early modern period, these Others were the Orthodox Muscovite state or the Muslim Ottoman Empire, with which the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was in competition. The Viennese historian Christoph Augustynowicz quite correctly sees the central cultural motif of Polish Sarmatism in their topos of *Antemurale Christianitatis*, that is, the idea that the Commonwealth was the "barbican of Christianity."<sup>17</sup>

One function of Sarmatism was the ideological battle with the external enemy in which Polishness – synonymous with the aristocratic elites, for the peasantry was expressly considered not to be part of the nation – was increasingly identified with Roman Catholicism, to the increasing exclusion of the Protestant (predominantly Calvinist) and Orthodox aristocrats within the Polish-Lithuanian state. It might seem surprising that the Polish nobles (*szlachta*) sought (self-)confirmation of its own superiority in the Sarmatians, given that they came from Eurasia and in the perspective of the esteemed Classical authors were barbarian nomads. Positive appropriations of purportedly "uncivilized" groups are by no means rare, particularly in the East Central and Eastern European region. For instance, this form of self-orientalization appears among

<sup>14</sup> I follow Christoph Augustynowicz, *Kleine Kulturgeschichte Polens. Vom Mittelalter bis zum 21. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Promedia, 2017), 38–45. Vide *Sarmatismus versus Orientalismus in Mitteleuropa*, eds. Magdalena Długosz, Piotr O. Scholz (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> For the deployment of this myth in the context of the development of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and historiography, vide Norbert Kersken, "Geschichtsbild und Adelsrepublik. Zur Sarmatentheorie in der polnischen Geschichtsschreibung der frühen Neuzeit," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, vol. 52, no. 2 (2004): 235–260; Stanisław Cynarski, "Sarmatyzm – ideologia i styl życia," in *Polska XVII wieku. Państwo – społeczeństwo – kultura. Konfrontacje historyczne*, ed. Janusz Tazbir (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1974), 269–295.

<sup>16</sup> Christoph Augustynowicz, op. cit., 38.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, 39.

the Eurasians, a group of Russian intellectuals who were very active in exile in the interwar period and for whom Russianness was a mixture of the European and the Asian, hence superior to European.<sup>18</sup>

## The Magyars and Crimea

The founding myth of the Hungarians is closer still to Polish Sarmatism and also related to Crimea: the brothers Hunor and Magor are considered the progenitors of the tribes of the Huns and the Magyars. Their father is said to have been Nimrod; at least according to a medieval chronicle, whereby it is not clear whether he is identical to the biblical figure. Other sources have it that Hunor and Magor were the sons of Magog and hence grandchildren of Noah, which lends (purported) Hungarian emanation particular distinction. Magog himself is said to be the forefather or, in some versions, the king of the Scythians.<sup>19</sup> There are several interesting things here. The assumed relationship between Magyars and Huns, who have something of a mixed reputation, being considered particularly wild and cruel. Just as the Scythians, the Huns also have a direct connection to Crimea. While the latter are believed to have arrived in Crimea during the Migration Period, the former had settled there as early as the seventh century BC. As if that were not enough, Hunor and Magor married the daughters of the Alan prince Dula – and the Alans themselves are considered a branch of the Sarmatians situated in Crimea – before heading westward with the Huns to today's Hungary.<sup>20</sup> These, then, are the national myths that cannot be verified...

If we choose to follow the USA anthropologists and myth researchers Littleton and Malcor, there is even a connection between the British Arthurian legends and the northern Black Sea region. They see a link between these legends and the Sarmatians, who arrived in the British Isles around the second century as Roman auxiliaries. That would mean that the ideal, heroic King Arthur, his knights of the Round Table and the Holy Grail did not originate in Celtic mythology, but were imported, as it were, from the Black Sea region.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Vide e.g. Stefan Wiederkehr, *Die eurasische Bewegung. Wissenschaft und Politik in der russischen Emigration der Zwischenkriegszeit und im postsowjetischen Russland* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> Miklós Molnár, *A Concise History of Hungary*, trans. Anna Magyar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6.

<sup>20</sup> Mindful of this myth, travelers in the nineteenth century made their way to the region also to discover traces of "Hungarian" life, vide e.g. Jean-Charles de Besse, *Voyage en Crimée, au Caucase, en Géorgie, en Arménie, en Asie-Mineure et à Constantinople en 1829–1833. Pour servir à l'histoire de Hongrie* (Paris: Delaunay, 1838).

<sup>21</sup> Scott C. Littleton, Linda A. Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot. A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail* (New York et al.: Garland Publ., 1994).

## A Germanic Crimea? From the Gothic Myth to the National Socialist “Gotengau”

The German-speaking lands also developed a special interest in the peninsula on the Black Sea, which became known to a European-wide public following its annexation by the Tsarist Empire in 1783, and accordingly also became a destination for travelers. From the nineteenth century onwards, German visitors were attracted not only by the beauty of the landscape or the mild climate, as indicated by the unusually high number of travel reports by German-speaking writers, including some female authors,<sup>22</sup> but also by its mythic past. Most of these reports are characterized by an enthusiastic search for traces of “Gothic life” that had long been hidden to modernity. However, in the First and Second World Wars, Germans arrived in Crimea with less peaceful intentions.

The real Goths, or the peoples termed as such, are believed to have appeared in Crimea from the second century AD onwards. Their provenance is the subject of a very lengthy controversy: the interpretation expressed in sources from as early as the sixth century, that the Goths were originally from Scandinavia, was and still is rejected by other researchers, inter alia in favor of the theory that they were an autochthonous group from the Vistula region that later migrated to the Black Sea.<sup>23</sup> However, German Crimea enthusiasts – especially the National Socialists with their racial fanaticism – insisted on the former version and preferred to refer to Germanic rather than Slavic provenance. While in the nineteenth century many authors’ interest in the Crimean Goths was primarily historical, nationalist interest groups such as the Alldeutsche Verband (ADV, the All-German Association) expressed firm claims to this and other regions in Eastern Europe, pointing to a formerly Teutonic Crimea – for which there is no historical foundation whatsoever.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of a “German Crimea” principally referred to two elements. On the one hand, there was excitement at the thought that for some centuries, the mountain principality of Theodoro, which came to an end with the Ottoman invasion of Crimea in the late fifteenth century, had been a Crimean Gothic state and hence “somehow” German. Moreover, this view confirmed the assumption that the ancestors of the Germans had been capable of state-building

<sup>22</sup> Vide the references in Kerstin S. Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums*, 435–441.

<sup>23</sup> Vide Thorsten Anderson, “Der nordgermanische Sprachzweig,” in *Altertumskunde – Altertumswissenschaft – Kulturwissenschaft. Erträge und Perspektiven nach 40 Jahren Realexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, eds. Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, Heiko Steuer (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 224, 229.

<sup>24</sup> Vide Dietmar Neutatz, *Die “deutsche Frage” im Schwarzmeergebiet und in Wolhynien. Politik, Wirtschaft, Mentalität und Alltag im Spannungsfeld von Nationalismus und Modernisierung 1856–1914* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1993), 204–220.



on the Black Sea. It is true that Gothic inhabitants of Crimea had withdrawn to the safety of the inaccessible mountains in response to the Hun invasion, but as a result, the population of Theodoro was ethnically very mixed, comprising not only Goths but also Greeks, Alans, and others; their lingua franca was presumably Greek.

However, there exists a sixteenth-century source that has long been used to demonstrate that a Germanic dialect, Crimean Gothic, was long widespread in Crimea. Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq (1522–1592), who served Emperor Ferdinand I in Istanbul between 1555 and 1562, not only made a name for himself by introducing the tulip bulb to Europe, but also left what for many years remained the only small corpus of the Crimean Gothic language, consisting of only 101 words.<sup>25</sup> At his own request, in the Ottoman capital he had been introduced to two inhabitants of Crimea, he wrote, with whom he communicated through an interpreter, writing down words such as “plut” (Blut, blood) or “thurn” (Tür, door) and identifying them as a Germanic language. His sources were somewhat problematic, consisting of only two people, but linguists generally do not doubt the existence of a Germanic-based language in Crimea, although that is no proof of a peninsula formerly inhabited by Germans.<sup>26</sup> However, in later times the idea of a “German Crimea” from the Middle Ages to modernity proved attractive. Only recently, Busbecq’s small corpus of Gothic words incidentally was expanded by Russian researchers, who managed to decode stone slabs unearthed by an excavation in the 1930s: the authors date the artifacts to the ninth/tenth century, consider them sensational, and derive from them extensive knowledge of the history of Crimea, including the distribution of viticulture, the status of the Crimean Gothic language in comparison with Greek, and other aspects.<sup>27</sup>

Against this linguistic background, the National Socialist “Gotenland plans” seem less astounding. The main actors were the “Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Regions” under the leadership of the leading Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg and Hitler himself. The former proposed various ideas concerning Crimea in the context of the criminal policy of creating “Lebensraum,” i.e. settling occupied Eastern Europe with Germans while enslaving and exterminating the local population.<sup>28</sup> Hitler accorded Crimea a special role in the context of the

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<sup>25</sup> Vide MacDonald Stearns Jr., “Das Krimgotische,” in *Germanische Rest- und Trümmer-sprachen*, ed. Heinrich Beck (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1989), 175–194; with Busbecq’s account in the original Latin and in German.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, 176–178.

<sup>27</sup> Andrey Iu. Vinogradov, Maksim I. Korobov, “Gotskie graffiti iz Mangupskoi baziliki” (Gothic Graffiti from the Mangup Basilica), *Srednie Veka*, vol. 76, no. 3–4 (2015): 57–75. Available at: <http://www.gotica.de/boranicum.pdf> (acc. 14.3.2017).

<sup>28</sup> Vide Norbert Kunz, *Die Krim unter deutscher Herrschaft 1941–1944. Germanisierungs-utopie und Besatzungsrealität* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), esp. 41–73.

policies manifested in the “General Plan Ost” (General Eastern Plan). This is already evident in the fact that, as early as 1941, months before the peninsula was taken, he thought about the creation of a “Gotengau,” the territory which would have extended beyond Crimea to include other areas along with the territory of Kherson region.<sup>29</sup> Hitler’s “Gotenland” fantasies, as well as the renaming of Sevastopol’ (Crimean Tatar Aqyar) as “Theoderichshafen” and Simferopol’ as “Gotenburg,” grew into “a pet project of the ‘Führer,’” reports the historian Kunz.<sup>30</sup> At its core was the Germanization of the area via a settlement with Germans from South Tyrol; only on the condition of the firm plan to exterminate or disenfranchise the local population. Fortunately, this did not happen, but it illustrates that the National Socialist policy on Crimea was not only influenced by military and economic considerations, but that myth also played a role.

### Slavic-Russian Crimea Myths

The annexation of Crimea in February 2014 by the Russian Federation certainly showed one thing: the unshakable conviction of many Russians that Crimea is an elementary part of Russia. This was (and is) accompanied by close emotional ties to the beautiful peninsula on the Black Sea. This is one of the factors rendering it a prime mythic space in Russia, but also in Ukraine and many other parts of the former Soviet Union. Therefore, any attempt to outline all the legendary narratives connected to this place would be doomed to failure from the very outset. Hence, let us focus on two particularly representative examples from religion and literature: two fields that in different ways attempt to support the idea of the legitimacy of Russian rule that is so popular in Russia.

The idea that Crimea is an important Christian-Orthodox *lieu de mémoire* is widespread in collective Russian-Slavic imaginaries. This notion became popularized particularly from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards.<sup>31</sup> One reason for this was the growth of religiously charged national sentiment following defeat in the Crimean War. As in other parts of Europe, Russian elites increasingly debated what constituted the substance of their nation and most came to the conclusion that Orthodoxy played a large role in it. In this debate,

<sup>29</sup> Vide the critically edited and commented table talk in *Adolf Hitler. Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944. Die Aufzeichnungen Heinrich Heims*, ed. Werner Jochmann (Hamburg: Knaus, 1980), esp. 39, 48, 90–91, 124.

<sup>30</sup> Norbert Kunz, op. cit., 234.

<sup>31</sup> Vide Kerstin S. Jobst, “Holy Ground. The (Re-)Construction of an Orthodox Crimea in 19th Century Russia,” in *Bulwarks in a “Religious Triangle.” Borderland Myths in East European Multiconfessional Societies in the Age of Nationalism*, eds. Liliya Berezhnaya, Heidi Hein-Kirchner (Oxford/New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

the Crimean War became stylized as a Holy War which the imagined Russian nation had lost to Muslims (i.e. the Ottoman Empire) and even to Anglican and Roman Catholic Christians (England, France, and Piedmont-Sardinia). And the fact that a large part of this battle was fought in Crimea imbued it with further significance since the place was already bound up with older legends and narratives. Christianity had come to the peninsula early, and this was also of great symbolic value to the Russian Empire because a centuries-old connection could be constructed between the Holy Land, Crimea, and what would later become a Russian state, even if in the eyes of most historians the link is tenuous. At the center of these narratives stands the ruined city of Chersonesos/Korsun', which became the largest excavation site in the Soviet Union,<sup>32</sup> and today is a suburb of Sevastopol'. The three narratives that form our focus here became especially popular from the 1850s onwards,<sup>33</sup> but are much older; while two of these 'stories' – like most myths – are based on a kind of true core of a real historical event, the third belongs to the realm of fantasy. However, all three helped reinforce the idea of a special, insoluble connection between Crimea and the Central Russian territories.

The oldest and least probable legend concerns the journey of Andrew the Apostle from the Holy Land to Lake Lagoda near today's St. Petersburg, during which he is said to have visited Crimea in 33 AD to preach among the Scythians. The story was presumably first written down by Eusebius of Caesarea (260/4–339/340), considered the father of Church history, before eventually reaching the Old Church Slavic Primary Chronicle (*Povest' vremenykh let*), to this day the most important source on the history of the Old East Slavic state of the Kievan Rus'.<sup>34</sup> The apostle is said to have visited Crimea before heading north, where he marked the site of what would become Kyiv, the "mother of all East Slavic cities," by erecting a Saint Andrew's Cross; somewhat anachronistically, since the symbol only became associated with him upon his martyrdom. This is mentioned in a single sentence: "When Andrew was teaching in Sinope and came to Kherson (as has been recounted elsewhere), he observed that the

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<sup>32</sup> *Crimean Chersonesos. City, Chora, Museum, and Environs*, ed. Joseph C. Carter (Austin: Inst. of Classical Archaeology, Univ. of Texas, 2003); Kerstin S. Jobst, "Chersones," in *Religiöse Erinnerungsorte in Ostmitteleuropa. Konstitution und Konkurrenz im nationen- und epochenübergreifenden Zugriff*, eds. Joachim Bahlcke, Stefan Rohdewald, Thomas Wunsch (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2013), 3–10.

<sup>33</sup> Mara Kozelsky, *Christianizing Crimea. Shaping Sacred Space in the Russian Empire and Beyond* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> Adolf Stender-Petersen, *Geschichte der russischen Literatur* (Munich: Beck, 1986), 37–38; Andrey Iu. Vinogradov, "Apostol Andrej i Chjornoe More. Problemy istochnikovedenija" (Andrew the Apostle and the Black Sea. Problems of Source Study), in *Drevnejšie gosudarstva Vostočnoj Evropy. 1996–1997 gg.* (The Oldest States in Eastern Europe. 1996–1997), ed. Aleksandr V. Podosinov (Moskva: "Vostochnaja literatura" RAN, 1999), 348–368.

mouth of the Dnieper was nearby.”<sup>35</sup> However, this brief mention sufficed for the construction of a special connection between the Holy Land, Crimea, and the Rus’ or Russia.

Of greater significance – and based on a “real” event – is another story, according to which the Slavic apostles Constantine and Methodios visited Crimea around 860. At the time, large parts of the peninsula were under the rule of the Khazars, whom the two priests sought to convert to Christianity.<sup>36</sup> This mission was ultimately unsuccessful since the Khazar elites later adopted the Jewish faith. Nevertheless, the Crimean sojourn of these missionaries, who are said to have given the East Slavs their alphabet and are revered for this reason alone, plays an important role in the construction of a link between the peninsula and Russia. The life of Constantine is particularly full of stories marking the role of Crimea as a holy site of Christianity that have entered the collective repertoire of legends of many Orthodox believers. Here there is only space to mention the miraculous rescue of relics of the exiled and later canonized Clemence of Rome, who was martyred in Crimea in 94 AD. The two apostles are said to have later taken his relics to Rome.<sup>37</sup> The following story is of even greater significance, even if it is bound up with the historically unlikely idea that Crimea was inhabited by a sizeable proportion of Slavic speakers or at least people who spoke a Slavic dialect:

And he [Constantine] found here [in Crimea] a Bible and a psalter written in Old East Slavic letters [Russ. *ruskimi pis'menami*; Old Church Slavic *rus'sky pismeny*],<sup>38</sup> and he found a man who spoke this language. And he spoke with him and understood the meaning of this language

<sup>35</sup> *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*, trans. and ed. by Samuel Hazzard Cross, Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953), 53–54. Available at: <http://www.mgh-bibliothek.de/dokumente/a/a011458.pdf> (acc. 20.04.2018).

<sup>36</sup> *Zwischen Rom und Byzanz. Leben und Wirken der Slavenapostel Kyrillos und Methodios nach den Pannonischen Legenden und der Klemensvita. Bericht von der Taufe Rußlands nach der Laurentiuschronik, 2. Auflage*, ed. Josef Bujnoch (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1972), 54–102.

<sup>37</sup> “Zhitie Konstantina-Kirilla. Pamjat i zhitie blazhennogo uchitelja nashego Konstantina Filosofa, pervogo nastavnika slavjanskogo naroda. Podgotovka teksta i perevod Ludmily V. Moshkovoii i Anatolija. A. Turilova, kommentarii Borisa N. Flori” (The Life of Constantine-Cyril. Memory and Life of Our Blessed Teacher Constantine the Philosopher, the First Mentor of the Slavic People. Ed. and trans. Ludmila V. Moshkovaia and Anatolij A. Turilov, commented by Boris N. Flori), in *Biblioteka literatury Drevnej Rusi. T. 2: XI–XII veka*, eds. Dmitrii S. Likhachev, Lev A. Dmitriev, Anatolij A. Alekseev, Natalia V. Ponyrko (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1999), Chtenie 3. Available at: [http://lib.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=2163#\\_edn61](http://lib.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=2163#_edn61) (acc. 20.11.2017).

<sup>38</sup> “Rus’sky pismeny” should correctly be translated as “Old East Slavic” and not as “Old Russian,” as it is often the case. On the complex field of translating these and similar terms see Ludolf Müller, Günther Schramm, Andrzej de Vincenz, “Vorschläge für eine einheitliche Terminologie des alten Ostslaventums,” in *Russia mediaevalis*, no. 7 (1992): 5–8.

and associated the difference between the vowels and consonants of his own language. And praying to God, he began to read and speak. Many were amazed and praised the Lord.<sup>39</sup>

Nineteenth-century Russian authors were excited that Constantine had discovered a Slavic language that had been invented “here in Korsun’ as a lingua franca for various peoples; after all, Korsun’ was a city in which the different tribes came together with their different languages.”<sup>40</sup> The particular connection between the peninsula and Russia, going back far beyond the annexation of 1783 was constantly retold in its manifold variations. Able scholars received relatively little attention, such as the Russian historian Vasilii Kliuchevskii (1841–1911), who thought the “presence of Slavs ... among these old peoples” in the later South Russian region to be marginal.<sup>41</sup> But what is the *rus’sky pismeny* mentioned in the life of Constantine? Most medievalist working on the area agree “that it is a recording error, and that it was originally called ‘surskie’ (Syrian), and hence it must have been letters that were unfamiliar to the Greek.”<sup>42</sup>

However, the most potent of the religious myths concerns the alleged baptism in Korsun’ in 988 of the grand prince of the Kievan Rus’, Vladimir/Volodymyr (ca. 958–1015), who – if the sources are to be believed – had hitherto lived a wholly un-Christian life. This preceded the mass baptism of Kyiv and with it the beginnings of the Christianization of the Old East Slavic Kievan Rus’, although it is worth noting that Christianization processes were widespread in Eastern Europe in the tenth century, as demonstrated by parallel developments in Poland, Bohemia, or Hungary. Even if historians cannot relate the exact circumstances surrounding Vladimir’s baptism,<sup>43</sup> it is beyond doubt that Vladimir and his troops besieged Chersonesos around 988, an event also noted in Arabic chronicles.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, it cannot be established whether Vladimir had set out for Crimea in order to help the Byzantine emperors Constantine VII and Basileus II put down the rebellion in the city or whether he had other motivations.<sup>45</sup> The *Primary Chronicle* relates that as thanks for his military assistance, the two brother emperors promised the heathen Vladimir their sister, the purple-born Anna, on the condition that he be baptized, which he initially agreed to, before refusing

<sup>39</sup> “Zhitie Konstantina-Kirilla.” Chtenie 3.

<sup>40</sup> Volodimir Jastrebov, “Khersones Tavricheskij” (Tauric Chersonese), *Kievskaja Starina*, vol. 2, no. 5 (1883): 30–38, here 36–37.

<sup>41</sup> Vasilij O. Kljutschewskij (i.e. Vasilij O. Ključevskii), *Russische Geschichte von Peter dem Großen bis Nikolaus I.*, vol. 1 (Zurich: Artemis-Verlag, 1945), 99.

<sup>42</sup> Kerstin S. Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums*, 303, 74.

<sup>43</sup> Günther Stökl, *Russische Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1983), 59; Heiko Haumann, *Geschichte Rußlands* (Munich: R. Piper Verlag, 1996), 45–46.

<sup>44</sup> Vide Peter Kawerau, *Arabische Quellen zur Christianisierung Rußlands* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967).

<sup>45</sup> Kerstin S. Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums*, 296–298.

immediately before the wedding in Chersonesos. God's punishment swiftly followed, for Vladimir went blind. Anna convinced him that after he was baptized his sight would return, which indeed happened: after the local bishop had completed the act, Vladimir could see once again. The Chronicle continues: "Vladimir glorified God, saying, 'I have now perceived the one true God.' When his followers beheld this miracle, many of them were also baptized."<sup>46</sup> Upon returning to the Rus', Vladimir introduced Christianity. The fact that this undeniably important step originated in the peninsula has been repeatedly emphasized in Russian debates on the subject, especially in the nineteenth century, and used to legitimize the possession of Crimea. A recent example is the speech Russian president Vladimir Putin held before the Federal Assembly a few months after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. With reference to Vladimir's baptism, Putin stressed Crimea's significance for Russian religion and civilization as comparable to the importance of Jerusalem's Temple Mount for Jews and Muslims, for it was in Chersonesos/Korsun' that Vladimir had been baptized.<sup>47</sup>

### Crimea – a Centre of Russian Culture?

In several of these myths, Crimea assumes the function of a contact zone between apparently competing spheres: the sacred and the heathen; the civilized (Christendom) and the uncivilized; Christianity and Islam. This image of the contact zone is also reflected in many literary works related to Crimea. Especially in Russian,<sup>48</sup> but also in Ukrainian or Crimean Tatar literature, the locus per se is of particular importance.<sup>49</sup> What for many Russians is Crimea's non-negotiable Russian character is often also "explained" by the fact that it enjoys a significance in Russian culture that can only be compared with that of Saint Petersburg or Moscow.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 113.

<sup>47</sup> "Putin: Dlja Rossii Krym imeet sakralnoe znachenie" (Putin: Crimea Possesses a Sacred Meaning for Russia), *Grani.Ru – ezhednevnaia internet-gazeta*, 4.12.2014. Available at: <http://grani.ru/Politics/Russia/President/m.235628.html> (acc. 9.08.2017).

<sup>48</sup> Vide e.g. Aleksandr N. Rudjakov, Vladimir P. Kazarin, *Krym. Poeticheskij atlas* (Crimea. A Poetic Atlas; Simferopol: Tavrija, 1989).

<sup>49</sup> In the Ukrainian context, Lesia Ukraïnka (1871–1913) is associated with Crimea; due to her lung disease, this important writer has repeatedly resided in the peninsula and poetically rendered her Crimean impressions. A museum in Yalta is dedicated to her. On the Crimean Tatar "negative myth" in literature on the deportation in 1944, vide Svetlana Czerwonnaja, Martin Malek, "Literarische Verarbeitungen der Deportation der krimtatarischen Bevölkerung. Eine 'vergessene' Quelle der Geschichtsforschung," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtsforschung (ÖZG)*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2017): 218–228.

<sup>50</sup> Vide e.g. Aleksandr P. Ljusyj, *Krymskij tekst v russkoj literature* (Crimean Text in Russian Culture; St. Petersburg: Aleteija, 2003).

Indeed, the list of authors who sought and found artistic inspiration in Crimea is impressive. Lev Tolstoy composed his famous *Sevastopol Sketches* there, vividly conveying the horrors of the Crimean War in a fashion that still speaks to readers today, and Anton Chekhov created a literary monument to Yalta with his novella “The Lady with the Lapdog.” The house in Köktöbel (Crimean Tatar; Russian/Ukrainian Koktebel’) owned by the painter and poet Maximilian A. Voloshin (1877–1932), credited with the Silver Age movement, attracted many other greats of Russian literature, especially in summer, including Marina Tsvetaeva, Osip Mandel’shtam, and Andrei Belyi. But the author admired most in Russia to this day is Alexander Pushkin;<sup>51</sup> and it was he in particular who helped establish Crimea as an eternal site of Russian culture. Remarkably, this “Russian” narrative centers on a Muslim – a Crimean Khan – and a Pole with the name Maria. It is perhaps even more surprising that the core of reality can be traced to a love affair between the Khan Qırım Geray (Crimean Tatar; Russian/Ukrainian Kyrym Gerai, Krym Girei; 1717–1769) and Dilâra Bikeç (Crimean Tatar; Russian/Ukrainian Diliara Bikech).<sup>52</sup> What is clearly visible here is the fluidity and flexibility of the mythic repertoire beyond linguistic and cultural boundaries; this myth can be considered Russian, Crimean Tatar, or Polish.

In 1820, Pushkin was banished from the capital due to some poems that ridiculed leading public figures. Instead of being forced into the much more unpleasant and more usual exile to Siberia, he was allowed to travel south, arriving in Crimea via the Caucasus. Like many travelers before and since, he was inspired by the unusual, “exotic” Crimea. Heavily influenced by Romanticism at the time, Pushkin had presumably already heard of the Tatar legend of the hopeless love of a Crimean Khan for a Christian captive,<sup>53</sup> out of which the poet developed a southern Oriental triangular story bearing the title “Bakhchisaraiskii fontan” (The Fountain of Bakhchisarai, 1823, Russian/Ukrainian; Crimean Tatar Bağçasaray). A nameless Khan – unclear whether the figure is modelled on Meñli Geray (Crimean Tatar; Russian/Ukrainian Mengli Gerai, Girei) or Qırım Geray (1717–1769)<sup>54</sup> – falls helplessly in love with a Polish captive by the name of Maria Potocka. However, as a Christian, it is impossible for her to love a Muslim. In the harem, this “swamp of sins,” she seeks consolation in the effigy of Saint Mary. But this calm is deceitful as the chaste Maria has a bitter enemy,

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<sup>51</sup> On the Pushkin cult in Russia and in the Soviet Union, vide Andrei Sinyavski (i.e. Abram Tertz), *Strolls with Pushkin*, trans. Catherine Thumer Nepomnyashchy, Slava I. Yastremski (New Haven/New York: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>52</sup> Kerstin S. Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums*, 256–257.

<sup>53</sup> Katya Hokanson, “Pushkin’s Captive Crimea. Imperialism in The Fountain of Bakhchisarai,” in *Russian Subjects. Empire, Nation, and the Culture of the Golden Age*, eds. Monika Greenleaf, Stephen Moeller-Sally (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 127.

<sup>54</sup> Kerstin S. Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums*, 255–281.

the Khan's former concubine, a Georgian by the name of Zarema. Zarema can only vaguely remember her Christian origins and has become almost Oriental; hence "wild," in the common European perspective of the time:

Not here beheld I first the light,  
Far hence my native land, but yet  
Alas! I never can forget  
Objects once precious to my sight.<sup>55</sup>

Zarema misses her undisturbed happiness with the Khan and issues her rival Maria with an unveiled death threat:

But listen! the sad prey to scorn  
If I must live, Princess, have care,  
A dagger still doth Zarem wear, –  
I near the Caucasus was born!<sup>56</sup>

The chaste Christian maiden Maria does indeed meet her end, although it is unclear whether it is at her own hand or that of Zarema, or from a broken heart due to what is perceived as a harsh fate to be alone among Muslims.

Days passed away; Maria slept  
Peaceful, no cares disturbed her, now, –  
From earth the orphan maid was swept.  
But who knew when, or where, or how?  
If prey to grief or pain she fell,  
If slain or heaven-struck, who can tell?<sup>57</sup>

The Khan, himself unhappy due to Maria's death, has Zarema killed too and heads north to rob and pillage Russia or Poland-Lithuania again. But the poem has him appear less savage following his love for a Christian and he erects a fountain in the memory of Maria. The real fountain on which it is based can still be seen in the former Khan's palace in the former capital of the Khanate, Bakhchisarai. Water droplets from a marble lotus blossom fall via a series of basins until they meet only briefly before flowing apart again to disappear in a stylized snail. For many observers, including even Pushkin himself, the "former fountain" from which the water dripped like from "rusty iron pipes" was a disappointment.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Alexander Pushkin, *Bakchisarai Fountain. And Other Poems*, by Various Authors, trans. William D. Lewis (Philadelphia: C. Sherman, 1849), 23. Available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/8192/8192-h/8192-h.htm> (acc. 23.04.2018).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, 26.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, 27.

<sup>58</sup> Pushkin to Anton Delvig, n.d. (1824), cited in Rolf-Dietrich Keil, *Alexander Puschkin. Ein Dichterleben* (Frankfurt a.M./Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 2001), 111.



At the same time, it is not least due to the national poet's text that the Khan's palace still stands at all. Following Crimea's recapture by the Soviet army in 1944, Stalin ordered the deportation of the Crimean Tatar population for alleged collaboration with the German occupiers but the palace survived the order to destroy Crimean Tatar cultural heritage since Pushkin had created a literary monument to it and hence "virtually beatified" it.<sup>59</sup>

The historicity of a Maria Potocka in the Khan's harem in Bakhchisarai cannot be verified. The renowned Austrian orientalist Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856) writes with some reservation: "the daughter of a Polish great (presumably Maria Potocka) stolen by the Tatars" is supposed to have existed and married a descendant of the Geray dynasty, which always provided the Crimean Khan.<sup>60</sup> The lady on which the easily infatuated Pushkin based his Maria has been sought by generations of literary scholars. They generally assume that the poet met Sofia Potocka in Saint Petersburg in 1818 or 1819, that is before his southern exile, and that she related to him the unhappy fate of her namesake. Her later marriage to a high-ranking military officer is said to have inspired the deeply saddened Pushkin to write the poem.<sup>61</sup> During his short life, ended by a duel, he repeatedly returned to the subject of Crimea, which had made a profound impression on him and countless other writers and fed the idea that the peninsula was a place in which the barely determinable "Russian culture" was firmly rooted.

However, non-Russian writers also drew inspiration from the beauty of the peninsula. Hence, if one wanted to, one could thereby justify other national claims to Crimea. Here we can point to Poland as it is not just via the above-mentioned Sarmatism that it cultivated a special bond with the peninsula. Its national poet and contemporary of Pushkin, Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) wrote his famous cycle *Sonety krymskie* (Crimean Sonnets; 1826). Having been banished to the South by Tsar Alexander I (1777–1825) in 1824, Mickiewicz too wrote of the "Fountain of Tears." However, he placed the emphasis elsewhere, not on the alleged irreconcilability of Christianity and Islam. Instead, he was more interested in his partitioned Polish homeland under Prussian, Austrian, and indeed Russian rule, personified by his supposed countrywoman Maria in "The Grave of Countess Potocka:"

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<sup>59</sup> *Die Krim entdecken. Unterwegs auf der Sonneninsel im Schwarzen Meer*, eds. Dagmar Köck et al. (Berlin: Trescher, 1995), 121.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte der Chane der Krim unter osmanischer Herrschaft vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts. Als Anhang zur Geschichte des Osmanischen Reichs zusammengetragen aus türkischen Quellen, mit Literatur-Übersetzungen und Anmerkungen, mit der Zugabe eines Gasels von Schahingerai, Türkisch und Deutsch, Neudruck der Ausgabe Vienna 1856* (St. Leonards/Amsterdam: Ad Orientem, 1970), 101–103.

<sup>61</sup> Vide Rolf-Dietrich Keil, op. cit., 183.

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.

O Stars! that seek a path my northland knows,  
 How dare you now on Poland shine forsooth,  
 When she who loved you and lent you her youth  
 Sleeps where beneath the wind the long grass blows?

Alone, My Polish Rose, I die, like you.  
 Beside your grave a while pray let me rest  
 With other wanderers at some grief's behest.

The tongue of Poland by your grave rings true.  
 High-hearted, now a young boy past it goes,  
 Of you it is he sings, My Polish Rose.<sup>62</sup>

This hope was fulfilled, for Mickiewicz is to the Poles what Pushkin is to the Russians or Goethe to the Germans. The *Crimean Sonnets*, this commitment to paper of yearning for a lost love and homeland – “l’amour perdu dans la patrie perdue fait du séjour en Crimée un exil doublement douloureux,” as the literary scholar Michel Cadot neatly puts it<sup>63</sup> – like Pushkin’s “Fountain of Tears,” were a great commercial success, albeit less so with Russian readers, who could not overlook the anti-Russian tone. The cycle remains popular in Poland to this day. However, they have not resulted in populist “claims” to Crimea.

Due to the course of political history, it was not until the 1950s that Crimea became Ukrainian. In the nineteenth century, the Ukrainian elites were too busy with their own nation-building project for the issue of a Ukrainian Crimea to emerge. Nevertheless, the Potocka motif also resonated in Ukrainian literature as a mythic Crimea narrative. The historian Mykola (Ukrainian; Russian Nikolai) Kostomarov (1817–1885), claimed by the Ukrainian national movement as one of their own, made the unhappy Polish prisoner a Ukrainian in his poem “To Maria Potocka:”

Mocking faith in God –  
 Stands the cross below the moon!  
 You hapless Ukrainian [Maria],  
 It tells of you!<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Adam Mickiewicz, *Sonnets from the Crimea*, trans. Edna Worthley Underwood (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Company, 1917), 13. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/sonnetsfromcrim00undegoog> (acc. 23.04.2018).

<sup>63</sup> Michel Cadot, “Exil et poésie. La Crimée de Puškin et de Mickiewicz,” *Revue Études Slaves*, no. 59 (1987): 149–150.

<sup>64</sup> Mikola I. Kostomarov, “Do Mari Pototskoï” (To Maria Potocka), in idem, *Tvory v dvokh tomakh*. T. 1 (Works in Two Volumes, vol. 1; Kyïv: Vyd. Chudozh. Lit. “Dnipro,” 1967), 56.

## Conclusion

As could be shown in this contribution not striving for completeness, the Crimea had played a decisive role in many temporal, national, and ideological contexts. It offers the stuff of which myths can be made. In literature, Crimea is often perceived as a space in which “civilization” and “barbarism” meet; it is dangerous, exotic, and beautiful at the same time. In the intellectual history of Poland, Hungary, Germany, and Russia, it is the place of the possible roots of one’s own origins; whether Sarmatians or Goths, it is always a question of shifting an anticipated descent of a special social group, or the ‘nation,’ to distant times and places. Therefore – and as the references of the Russian administration in 2014 had shown – sometimes claims to the territory of the peninsula were derived, which however lacked historical and juridical legitimation. Hence, concrete political claims can arise from national myths, as we saw not only in the Russian but also the National Socialist case.

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