

**Paul Robert Magocsi. *This Blessed Land: Crimea and the Crimean Tatars.*** Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Toronto, 2014. Distributed by U of Toronto P. vi, 154 pp. Illustrations. Maps. Notes. Select English-language bibliography. Illustration Sources and Credits. \$27.95, cloth.

**T**he present monograph is by Paul Robert Magocsi, the well-known author of the book *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*. It consists of ten chapters, which guide the reader through the details of the geographic delimitation of the Crimean peninsula and the Crimea's human geography—consisting of representatives of “virtually every linguistic and cultural group in Europe and Asia” (7)—up to its present status quo as a home mainly for both Slavic peoples (Ukrainians and Russians) and the Tatars (a subgroup of the “Turko-Tataric” language family). Without a doubt, the latter group deserves the space and attention that it has been allotted by Magocsi. The author describes the Tatars' deportation from the Crimea to Central Asia (Uzbekistan) in 1944 and their struggle to be permitted (eventually) to return to the Crimea, a struggle that included petition after petition to allow their return, with some Tatar leaders resorting to death by self-immolation. Chapter 10, which is entitled “Crimea in Independent Ukraine” (136-47), contains a photo of the Gaspirali Crimean Tatar National Library (which was opened in 1990) in Simferopol and a statement of commitment, which shows a photo of a young Crimean Tatar girl and is entitled “The Crimean Tatars Are Here to Stay” (145). Table 7.1 shows the nationality composition of the Crimean ASSR in 1926: there were 301,000 Russians (42.2 percent); 179,000 Crimean Tatars (25.1 percent); and 77,000 Ukrainians (10.8 percent) out of a total population of 714,000 in the Crimea (95). The 2014 census shows a population of 1,492,078 Russians (67.9 percent); 344,515 Ukrainians (15.7 percent); and 232,340 Tatars (10.6 percent) out of a total population of 2,197,564 (“Crimea”).

Chapters 2 to 8 (10-121) present a kaleidoscopic survey of various peoples and events in the Crimea, starting with the mysterious Cimmerians, around 1100 BC, and the Taurians, who may have predated the Cimmerians. The Taurians, in turn, were displaced by the Scythians, and this brought a period of peace and stability known as the Pax Scythia. This peace was disrupted by the nomadic people the Sarmatians in 250 BC; Byzantine rule followed. Eventually, all of this movement resulted in “a Greek-Scythian-Sarmatian hybrid civilization . . . under the protection of the Roman Empire” (19). This was followed by four centuries of strife, which was initiated not by nomads from Central Asia but by the Germanic tribes known as Goths; the dominance of the latter was very short-lived, however, owing to the invasion of the Huns. In addition, a new type of invader came from the Baltic region of Scandinavia—that is, the Rus', who in the 850s, together with several East

Slavic tribes, formed Kyivan Rus'. By the end of the tenth century, a Rus' principality was formed at Tmutorokan on the eastern shore of the Kerch Strait. The principal interest of the Rus' in the Crimea was a search for salt, which was a vital commodity in medieval society.

Chapter 3 (24-33) shows that the stability created by the Christianization of Rus' was undermined by Slavic and Turkic tribal groups, some of which established trade ties with Byzantium. However, the Turkic tribes (especially the Kipchaks) soon faced a different threat—the invasion, after 1227, of the Mongols, that is, Chinggis (Genghis) Khan's armies, with soldiers drawn primarily from the Tatars and other Turkic peoples. The resulting "political order and era of prosperity" has been called the Pax Mongolica (27).

In chapter 4 (34-53), Magocsi describes the formation of the "Crimean Khanate." Map 6 illustrates the composite elements of the Crimea in terms of six clan territories (Shirin, Barin, Argin, Iashlav, Mangit/Mansur, and Kipchak); the "Theodoro-Mangup Principality," at the southernmost tip of the peninsula; and a sizable piece of coastline under Ottoman rule (40). At the end of this chapter, the author tackles the question of the ethnic composition and linguistic features of the Crimean Tatars. He advances the conclusion that "the Crimean Tatars evolved from an amalgam of ethnic groups, many of whom have lived in Crimea since time immemorial" (52). It took the infatuation of Empress Catherine II with "the intelligence, good looks, and European manners of Shahin Giray" (50) for her to agree to the formation of an independent Crimean state under the protection of the Russian Empire. Shahin Giray's inability to contain the revolts against his regime led, in 1783, to a manifesto, in which Catherine II put an end to the independent Crimean state and annexed it to the Russian Empire. The rest of the Crimean Khanate's territory in the peninsula and north of the Sea of Azov was turned into a *guberniia*, which was called Taurida.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with two difficult periods; the chapters are entitled "Crimea in the Russian Empire" (54-79) and "Crimea in War and Revolution" (80-91), respectively. These two chapters are followed by chapter 7, which is entitled "The Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic" (92-107). There, one will find map 9, showing the various areas that were occupied around 1930 by a mixture of Armenians; Bulgarians; Jews with three distinct communities, that is, the Krymchaks (who were probably indigenous to the peninsula), the Ashkenazim, and the Karaites; Russians; and Ukrainians, as well as a very large region that was compactly inhabited by Crimean Tatars (96). It is noteworthy that by that time, the Crimean Tatar language was written in Hebrew characters, a feature that remained until the twentieth century. Then came that fateful year after the beginning of World War II in 1939. This time is described in chapter 8, which is entitled "Crimea during

World War II" (108-22); here, one finds the subchapter "Ethnic Cleansing Soviet Style" (121). This was when the forcible removal of 188,000 Crimean Tatars from the Crimea was enacted, following a decree signed by Joseph Stalin. But that was not enough, and the Soviet authorities tried to do everything in their power to erase any memory of the Tatars, whom they at that point labelled "ethnocultural burdens" from the past (123). Place names were changed, and the Tatars' homes, gardens, and livestock were allocated to communities of Russian-speaking Slavs (126). However, the Crimean Tatars, especially the exiles in Uzbekistan, did not give up and found ways of returning to the Crimea. They organized demonstrations until the Supreme Soviet, in a decree of November 1989, recognized their right to return to the Crimea.

Magocsi's book is a true treasure. Perhaps the only real criticism that this reviewer would express is about the absence of an index. The index in the book *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*, for instance, is a most helpful feature (it certainly helped me work through the text).

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#### Works Cited

Magocsi, Paul Robert. *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*. Cartographic design by Geoffrey J. Matthews, U of Toronto P / U of Washington P, 1993. *A History of East Central Europe 1*, edited by Peter F. Sugar and Donald W. Treadgold. "Crimea." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, last edited 13 Jan. 2019, 2:44 a.m. (UTC), [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimea). Accessed 12 Jan. 2019.