

A Woman Between Empire and the East: Representations of Crimea in 19th-Century Travelogues

Oleh Ivaniuk (ORCID 0000-0001-6750-5423)

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University (Ukraine)

Hanna Hedo (ORCID 0009-0004-5253-7384)

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University (Ukraine)

This article examines depictions of women of the Crimean Peninsula in the 19th century, reconstructed from Western European and Russian travel prose. The travel accounts of E. Craven, M. Guthrie, M. Holderness, A. Hommaire de Hell, O. Gorchakova, T. Passeck, O. Shishkina and others form a representative corpus of sources documenting the reception of the “new lands” following the annexation of the Crimean Khanate by the Russian Empire. The authors paid considerable attention to natural landscapes, architectural heritage, the way of life of indigenous peoples and the legal status of local women, reflecting the specific nature of their gender socialisation and colonial perspective.

A prominent place in the narratives is occupied by the figures of aristocratic women associated with the imperial elites (in particular the “mystical trio” – Madame Gachet, Baroness von Krüdener and Princess Golitsyna), whose activities shaped an eccentric and mythologised discourse surrounding the female presence in the region. An important component of the sources is the representation of Crimean Tatar women (particularly in the works of M. Holderness and T. Passeck), where elements of traditional dress, daily life and social status appear at the intersection of Orientalist exoticisation and ethnographic documentation. Towards the end of the 19th century, a new type of figure emerged in travel writings – the observer and tourist, whose quest for self-knowledge and critical reflection is clearly evident in Lesia Ukrainka's correspondence. Taken together, these sources reveal the multi-layered nature of representations of women – ranging from the romanticised and exotic to the ethnographic and everyday – and outline the role of female travellers in shaping European and Russian perceptions of the Crimea.

KEYWORDS

19th-century
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Introduction

One of the key outcomes of the Russian Empire's military and political expansion in the late 18th century was the annexation of the territory of the Crimean Khanate in 1783. Once under imperial control, Crimea presented itself to the invaders as a region with fundamentally different cultural, religious, ethnic and landscape characteristics. This sparked a wave of intellectual, scientific and administrative interest from both European intellectuals and Russian government officials and artists.

Travels to the Crimea in the 19th century were motivated by a variety of factors: ranging from the fulfilment of official state commissions and military-topographical reconnaissance to scientific excursions and health retreats. At the same time, texts written by women occupy a special place within the body of travel literature (travelogues). The foundations of women's travel discourse on Crimea were laid by the European aristocrats Elizabeth Craven¹ and Maria Guthrie. For Lady Craven, the peninsula served as a transit point on her diplomatic and private exploratory journey to Constantinople, whilst Maria Guthrie visited the

¹ Elizabeth Craven was the youngest daughter of Augustus, 4th Earl of Berkeley (1716–1755), and Elizabeth, Countess of Berkeley (1719/1720–1792). Between 1783 and 1786, she travelled through Europe and Turkey. Shortly after the annexation of Crimea by the

Russian Empire, friends advised the traveller to visit this region, which was considered exotic by Europeans. Elizabeth became one of the first women to see Crimea with her own eyes and to leave travel notes about it.



University of St. Gallen

Center for Governance
and Culture in Europe



o.ivaniuk@kubg.edu.ua
hahedo.fshn25@kubg.edu.ua



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Kyiv Metropolitan University

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region for scientific and health-related purposes, leaving behind a detailed description of the sights and local way of life. Throughout the 19th century, this body of sources was significantly expanded by the works of the British writer Mary Holderness, the Frenchwoman Adèle Hommaire de Hell, and Russian travellers and writers – Elena Gorchakova², Tatiana Passek, Olimpiada Shishkina, Maria Sosnogorova and others.

Generally speaking, female travellers' travelogues devoted considerable attention to geographical landscapes, classical and Eastern ruins, as well as the outward manifestations of ethnographic diversity. However, the specific nature of female gender socialisation at that time lent these texts a particular visual expressiveness. Whilst male travel discourse focused predominantly on the military-strategic, administrative, statistical or geopolitical aspects of exploring a region, female authors demonstrated a far greater sensitivity to private spaces, everyday details, the structure of family relationships, and the visual and cultural markers of difference in women's attire and social status within local communities. At the same time, European female travellers often documented harsh and violent practices of imperial subjugation of the population, whilst Russian female authors predominantly conveyed official imperial ideologies, emphasising the "civilising mission" and the "pacification" of the region.

The historiographical context of this study encompasses the research of A. Ismailova on the status of Crimean Tatar women in traditional society, the works of K. Jobst, devoted to analysing the place of the Crimean Tatars in Russian imperial discourse, as well as the research by G. Abdulayeva, which highlights the high level of legal and property protection afforded to women during the era of the Crimean Khanate (Ismailova, 2012; Jobst, 2014; Abdulaeva, 2015).

The primary sources for this study are the travelogues of M. Holderness, A. Hommaire de Hell, O. Gorchakova, T. Passek and O. Shishkina. In their diaries, letters and essays, the female travellers recorded their impressions of Crimea, often referring to one another's works. Such citations attest to the popularity of the genre and the use of previous publications as practical guides and points of reference prior to their own journeys. A comparison of these texts makes it possible to trace how private notes were transformed into public descriptions of the region, as well as to compare the perceptions of local life and culture held by Western European researchers and Russian authors.

Research Methods

The methodological basis of the study is a combination of qualitative textual analysis of 19th-century women's travelogues with the tools of gender, postcolonial and intersectional studies developed by European and American researchers of women's travel writing. The interpretation of the travelogues draws on the postcolonial tradition pioneered by Edward Said ("Orientalism", 1978), taking into account that the Crimea is presented as an "annexed territory" and "new lands", which are understood through the prism of an imperial perspective. Women's texts are examined as part of a broader discourse of Orientalism, where power hierarchies, cultural stereotypes and notions of the "East" intersect.

The study takes into account the specific nature of 19th-century gender roles and the fact that female travellers often find themselves in a dual position: "colonised by gender but coloniser by race" (Ghose, 1998), as emphasised by B. Dell'abate Çelebi, who conceptualises intersectionality as a methodological tool for analysing women's travelogues. Gender analysis allows us to trace how female authorship modifies established colonial narratives, as well as how female travellers describe the position of women in Crimean Tatar society, in Russian provincial communities, and amongst foreign women associated with the imperial elites. Intersectionality is used as a methodological tool to analyse the intersection of gender, class, nationality, religion, social status and the political positions of female travellers. This allows us to take into account the heterogeneity of women's experiences – ranging from British and French authors to Russian – as well as different types of female figures (foreign mystics, landowners, tourists and Crimean Tatar women). This approach enables us to see how one and the same figure can simultaneously be the object of exoticisation, sympathy, admiration or condemnation.

At the same time, a comparative approach is employed, juxtaposing European (British, French) and Russian women's travel writings. This makes it possible to identify differences in colonial perspectives, the degree of criticality towards imperial policy, and the ways in which Crimean Tatar women and foreign women in Crimea are described. The comparative analysis draws on the work of researchers in the field of women's travel writing, in particular Dúnlaith Bird, who, in her monograph "Travelling in Different Skins: Gender Identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850–1950" demonstrates how female travellers construct gender identity in colonial contexts (Dúnlaith, 2012).

Thus, the research methodology combines a source-based analysis of women's travelogues with postcolonial, gender and intersectional approaches, enabling not only the reconstruction of women's images of 19th-century Crimea, but also a critical examination of the mechanisms by which these images were constructed within imperial and gendered discourse.

The aim of the study is to reconstruct and analyse the reception of the Crimean Peninsula in 19th-century women's travelogues within the context of gender identity, imperial ideologemes and cultural contacts. The focus is on the mechanisms for constructing the Crimean landscape, topography and way of life of local communities in the texts of Western European and Russian female authors, who appear simultaneously as bearers of the imperial perspective and as subjects constrained by the social norms of the time.

Results and Discussion

Mystical and eccentric portrayals of foreign women in imperial discourse: the "mystical trio"

An important and conceptually rich area of analysis in travel literature on Crimea is the study of reflections on European aristocratic women who, for political, religious or personal reasons, settled on the peninsula in the first decades following its annexation by the Russian Empire. In 19th-century travelogues and guidebooks, a distinct

² Elena Sergeyevna Gorchakova (1824–1897) – a Russian writer and educator, a princess, and a lady-in-waiting to the Empress. She travelled extensively, and her journeys through Ukraine were recorded in her travel notes "Vospominaniya o Krymu" (Moscow,

1881). In addition to descriptions of nature and landscapes, she provided a detailed account of the way of life of the Crimean Tatar people and the daily lives of Russians in Crimea. She also published her seminal work "Kiev" (Moscow, 1885).

romanticised discourse emerged around the so-called “mystical trio” – Baroness Varvara Julia von Krüdener³, Princess Anna Sergeevna Golitsyna⁴ and the enigmatic Madame Gachet.

The application of postcolonial and gender methodologies allows us to interpret the presence and activities of these women in Crimea as a specific phenomenon of privileged colonial appropriation of space. Having found themselves in conflict with the official political and religious institutions of St. Petersburg or having been marginalised from European high society, these women utilised the annexed southern periphery of the empire as a platform for their own social, spiritual and gender experimentation. In this context, Crimea emerged as a liminal space where imperial authority had not yet fully standardised daily life, enabling aristocratic women who had fallen out of favour with the monarchy to construct alternative forms of life-building. For the authors of these travelogues – in particular the French traveller Adèle Hommaire de Hell and the Ukrainian local historian and memoirist Maria Sosnogorova⁵ – the description of the lives of this trio served as a means of seeking a European intellectual and cultural footprint within an exoticised environment, as well as an attempt to delineate the limits of permissible female autonomy within an imperial context.

In her analysis of V.J. von Krüdener, Adèle Hommaire de Hell devoted considerable attention to her complex evolution from a brilliant society lady to a spiritual leader. The traveller portrayed her as a striking figure who, in her day, stood out in the aristocratic salons of Paris “for her beauty, talent and status”, successively embodying the roles of “a woman of the world, a heroine, a marvellous writer and a prophetess” (*Hommaire de Hell, 1847: 375*). The Baroness’s literary fame was particularly emphasised: her authorship of the romantic novel “Valérie” brought her widespread popularity and a place of honour within French intellectual circles. Having left France, V. J. von Krüdener found herself at the court of Emperor Alexander I, where her mystical Christianity struck a deep chord with the monarch himself. At the same time, she launched a charitable campaign of unprecedented scale amongst the poor of St. Petersburg. A. Hommaire de Hell noted that, due to her extraordinary kindness of heart, she was respectfully known in the capital as the “Mother of the Poor”. The baroness immediately distributed to the needy all the funds she received from the emperor, as well as her own considerable wealth. As a result, her house was besieged from morning till night by peasants and mothers of families, to whom she provided material assistance and spiritual comfort (*Hommaire de Hell, 1847: 376*).

In contrast, the figure of Princess A. S. Golitsyna emerges in the traveller’s writings as the embodiment of intellectual defiance and eccentricity. The French observer candidly noted that the princess was “hated at court”. Golitsyna was far too haughty to conceal her own convictions, and her rare intellect, physical beauty and bold philosophical views that stirred up numerous enemies against her amongst the imperial aristocracy.

The figure of Madame Gachet is shrouded in the greatest aura of mystery, myth and behind-the-scenes rumours in the travelogues. According to information cited by A. Hommaire de Hell, this lady of high rank arrived in St. Petersburg from England accompanied by a large retinue, presenting herself as a refugee who had suffered during the French Revolution. She was received with great attention in the capital’s high society, and Alexander I himself showed her particular favour. However, the true motives behind her move to Russia and her actual origins remained an “impenetrable mystery”. Rumours circulated in high society salons about her noble origins and her desire to remain incognito, which meant that not even the Emperor knew her real family name (*Hommaire de Hell, 1847: 376-377*). Ultimately, Adèle Hommaire de Hell, drawing on the information she had gathered, claimed that Countess Jeanne de La Motte⁶ was hiding behind this name; she had been publicly punished and branded on the Place de Grève in Paris for her involvement in the notorious pre-revolutionary “Affair of the Queen’s Necklace” (*collier de la reine*)⁷.

The immediate cause for the expulsion of the “mystical trio” from St. Petersburg was the widespread international attention their activities had attracted. According to the traveller’s account, the publication of a satirical article in an English newspaper, in which Emperor Alexander I and his female mystical entourage were subjected to sharp criticism and “the most scathing sarcasm”, forced the monarch to sign an order for their exile to the southern periphery of the empire (*Hommaire de Hell, 1847: 377*).

Once in Crimea, the aristocratic women founded a mystical circle and attempted to carry out proselytising and missionary work amongst the Crimean Tatar population. However, these attempts to convert the local inhabitants to Christianity proved entirely unsuccessful. A. Hommaire de Hell documented in detail the subsequent fate of each member of the circle. She noted that Baroness von Krüdener had died as early as 1824 in Karasubazar in the arms of her daughter, Baroness Berkheim. Princess Golitsyna subsequently abandoned religious missionary work altogether and adopted an eccentric lifestyle. She rejected traditional women’s attire, donning an “Amazonian

³ Krüdener, Varvara Julia von – a baroness, French-speaking writer, and preacher of mystical Christianity in the Russian Empire and Germany. She spent the last years of her life in Crimea. She died in 1824 in Karasubazar.

⁴ Anna Sergeyevna Golitsyna (née Vsevolozhskaya) – a princess, writer and owner of the Koreiz estate in the Crimea.

⁵ Maria Oleksandrivna Slavich (née Dannenberg, pseudonym Sosnogorova) (1820/1821–1891) – a writer, memoirist and publisher of the annual “Guide to Crimea”. She began her literary career in the “Odesa Herald”, where she published a series of articles on Crimean landmarks. She was the author of the book “Livadia” (Odesa, 1872).

⁶ Jeanne de La Motte (1756–1791/1826) – a French adventuress from the impoverished House of Valois. She married the Count de La Motte and was the mistress of Cardinal Louis de Rohan. She claimed to be a close friend of Queen Marie Antoinette (a claim the queen herself denied). She was involved in fraudulent schemes, notably the notorious “Affair of the Queen’s Necklace”, for which

she was sentenced to life imprisonment. She fled to London, where she published her memoirs. According to official accounts and encyclopaedias of the time, she died in London in 1791. However, according to the memoirs of Baroness Maria Bode, in 1812, under the name of the Countess de Gachet, she moved to St Petersburg, took Russian citizenship, and later settled in Crimea.

⁷ M. Sosnogorova, the author of “The Guide”, has thoroughly analysed the issue of identifying Madame Gachet. The researcher noted that, although some sources suggest that the Countess de La Motte fled to England and died in 1791, A. Hommaire de Hell put forward compelling arguments in favour of these figures being one and the same person. Drawing on eyewitness accounts and the documents she had studied, the traveller asserted that it was indeed the Countess de La Motte who was hiding under the name of Gachet. M. Sosnogorova considered these conclusions to be convincing and not contradicted by the information available at the time, concluding that this foreign woman’s past remained a mystery to those around her in Crimea.

petticoat with a woollen waistcoat” and a Polish fur hat. Thanks to her regal demeanour, illustrious name, phenomenal memory and vast wealth, Golitsyna created a sort of “small court” at her estate in Koreiz, where she presided “like a true sovereign”, rallying the local elite and distinguished foreigners around her until her death in 1839. Madame Gachet, on the other hand, chose a life of complete seclusion: she rented a small house on a wild stretch of coastline near Artek, where she lived with just one maid. She had almost no contact with those around her, and the only times local residents saw her were during her galloping horse rides along the coast, for which the aristocrat chose “the stormiest weather” of all.

This information was later reproduced and expanded upon in Maria Sosnogorova’s “Guide”⁸ (*Sosnogorova, 1874: 81-82*). The local historian described the romantic, secluded estate of the mysterious Frenchwoman, Countess Gachet, on the deserted coast beyond Artek, drawing attention to her monastic lifestyle and her connections with the Golitsyn and Krüdener circle in Koreiz. M. Sosnogorova cited local legends in detail, according to which, following the foreign woman’s death, a special, form-fitting garment was allegedly found beneath her clothes, along with a criminal brand, which indicated her identity as the Countess de La Motte, who had been convicted in France (*Sosnogorova, 1874: 82*).

Noting that she personally could not confirm or refute these claims with absolute certainty, M. Sosnogorova concluded that this woman’s past remained an unsolved mystery.

Alongside the detailed accounts of the “mystical trio”, travel notes and guidebooks also featured other fragmentary portrayals of foreign women whose lives on the peninsula were closely linked to the imperial elites. An examination of these images provides a deeper understanding of the nature of women’s presence, their socio-cultural adaptation and the construction of imperial discourse on the southern periphery of the Russian Empire.

Autonomy and the challenges of living alone: a microhistorical analysis of the case of Mademoiselle Jacquemart

In the context of studying the spectrum of female representations in Crimea, the microhistorical analysis of the experience of the Frenchwoman Mademoiselle Jacquemart, as recorded in the travel notes of Adèle Hommaire de Hell, is of significant importance. This case illustrates the phenomenon of a woman’s solitary existence and intellectual independence in the provincial setting of the imperial periphery.

Previously, Mademoiselle Jacquemart had worked as a governess in the high society circles of Vienna and St. Petersburg. As A. Hommaire de Hell noted, few people had led “a more eccentric life”: in her youth, her beauty, talent and wit had brought her exceptional popularity, which was rare for someone of a governess’s modest social standing. She later gave up teaching and settled on her own in a small house in Sudak. Describing her compatriot as a deeply educated woman with distinctive scholarly interests, Hommaire de Hell emphasised her passion for geology: Jacquemart undertook walking excursions through mountain ranges and along the coast, armed with a geological hammer to collect minerals.

At the same time, this example highlights the fragility of women’s autonomy in the first half of the 19th century. Being outside the patriarchal protection of her family or a husband, Jacquemart faced social and physical vulnerability. Her memoirs record her admission of the “hardships and inconveniences of life”, which she no longer had the courage to reject, and of her necessity to carry pistols due to the constant threat of night-time attacks.

A. Hommaire de Hell paid particular attention to an account of an armed attack as recounted by Jacquemart herself. Having given some food to a local Greek man who was looking for work, the Frenchwoman was returning the next day from a geological survey carrying a small hatchet for splitting stones. A stranger tracked her down, snatched the tool and struck her several times on the head. The victim survived by a stroke of luck, having lost consciousness during the attack, whilst the assailant fled in an unknown direction (*Hommaire de Hell, 1847: 389-390*). This dramatic episode instilled in Jacquemart a constant sense of anxiety and forced her to remain in a state of constant readiness for self-defence.

Although Mademoiselle Jacquemart’s experience did not reflect a widespread trend – as European intellectual women living alone in the Crimea of that time remained the exception – an analysis of it demonstrates the attempts by individual women to push the boundaries of traditional social roles. By choosing the periphery of the empire as a space for personal freedom, they paid the price of social isolation and everyday danger.

A. Hommaire de Hell’s focus on the figures of her compatriots (Jacquemart, Madame Gachet) was driven by a shared language, cultural affinity and emotional trust, which facilitated discussions on topics relevant to French society, as well as the traveller’s natural interest in compelling and extraordinary life stories.

The transformation of the travel experience in the late 19th century: reflections by Lesia Ukrainka

Towards the end of the 19th century, the nature and motivation behind women’s travels to the Crimea underwent significant changes. The development of the railway network and Yalta’s climatotherapy infrastructure transformed the peninsula from a romanticised “exotic land” into a resort area for the entire empire. This contributed to the emergence of a new social type of female traveller – a holidaymaker, a tourist and an observer.

A striking testament to this shift is Lesia Ukrainka’s correspondence during her stay for medical treatment in Yalta in the 1890s. Unlike her predecessors, whose descriptions were limited to a colonial, aestheticised admiration of ruins, the writer shifted the focus to an analytical understanding of the daily life and mentality of the resort community. She paid particular attention to the Russians, noting their cultural and ideological differences from the local population and the Ukrainians.

In letters to her family, Lesia Ukrainka described her forced cohabitation with a student on a Moscow paramedic course, a choice made for financial reasons. The writer noted that this cohabitation did not cause any significant domestic inconvenience, as her “companion” (using the word exclusively in a practical sense) was rarely at home, constantly going on excursions with the Mountaineering Club or strolling around Yalta. At the same time, Lesia

⁸ Maria Oleksandrivna Slavich (née Dannenberg, pseudonym Sosnogorova) (1820/1821–1891) – writer, memoirist, and publisher of the annual “Guide to the Crimea”. She began her literary career

in the “Odesa Herald”, where she published a series of articles on Crimean landmarks. She was the author of the book “Livadia” (Odesa, 1872).

Ukrainka frankly admitted that the girl remained “a complete stranger” to her, and the constant presence of a stranger in the house weighed heavily on her (*Ukrainka, 1978: 380*).

The roots of this estrangement lay in the deep ideological chasm between the Ukrainian intelligentsia and the Russian-oriented student community. Lesia Ukrainka drew attention to the superficiality of her 20-year-old neighbour's thinking – a girl originally from Orel – who already possessed certain “categorical standards and frameworks” and believed in them uncritically. Her mind was dominated by “utter confusion” regarding “regional issues”: the young woman proved incapable of distinguishing between the concepts of chauvinism and national self-awareness, autonomy and separatism. In the writer's view, such a lack of understanding and subconscious centralism were characteristic of most Russians from the “central provinces”, in whose minds this conviction had become lodged like an unremovable “nail” (*Ukrainka, 1978: 381-382*).

In describing a student's request for help in securing a place to study in Switzerland or France, Lesia Ukrainka drew up a generalised socio-psychological portrait of young women from the Russian nobility and bourgeoisie of the time. She noted that the young woman had enrolled on the paramedic course more on a “whim” than out of a true calling. Whilst retaining her aristocratic upbringing, a characteristic “dose of Russian carelessness” and the good-natured intention to “get a closer look at life” abroad, she simultaneously demonstrated a practical streak: she was not poor, but she also proved herself to be “far from generous” (*Ukrainka, 1978: 394*).

Lesia Ukrainka's correspondence shows that, by the end of the 19th century, women's journeys to the Crimea had ceased to be characterised by aristocratic exile or romantic adventure. They had become a centre for renewal and national self-awareness, where Ukrainian female travellers acted as critical observers of imperial resort life.

Visualisation, exoticisation and aesthetic codes of Crimean Tatar women

The indigenous population of the Crimean Peninsula, in particular Crimean Tatar women, emerged as a key focus of attention for European and Russian female authors of 19th-century travelogues. A postcolonial and visual-anthropological analysis of these accounts reveals a distinct exoticisation: the construction of the image of the “Eastern Other” through detailed descriptions of authentic clothing, hairstyles, cosmetics and home furnishings.

The first element to catch the travellers' attention was the striking visual difference between traditional Crimean Tatar attire and the familiar European wardrobe, as well as the fact that the attire of members of the social elite was distinguished not so much by its basic style as by individual elements of luxury, the quality of the fabrics and the preciousness of the trimmings.

One of the most detailed ethnographic descriptions of the appearance of Crimean women was provided by the British researcher Mary Holderness⁹. In her works, she systematised and documented the complete composition of

the traditional women's wardrobe. At its core were loose, wide trousers (shalwar), which were tied at the ankle and fell right down to the heels, a light blouse, and a quilted cloak (beshmet or anter) made of Turkish silk, cotton, or gold or silver brocade – depending on the owner's wealth, financial status and social rank (*Holderness, 1827: 220*). Unmarried girls wore caps made of red cloth (feskas), trimmed with gold fringe, whilst peasant women often adorned their headdresses with small gold coins. Coins were also used to make necklaces (monista), which were sometimes crafted from silver in the form of a solid collar that fit snugly around the neck and featured numerous silver pendants. M. Holderness drew particular attention to the considerable amount of jewellery: women wore several rings set with precious stones on their fingers, whilst the hands of wealthy Tatar women were adorned with numerous bracelets made of coloured glass or precious metals (*Holderness, 1827: 220-221*).

Detailed information about the daily life and material culture of the Tatar aristocracy was provided by Tatiana Passeck in her memoirs¹⁰. Having learnt from local residents of the Russian traveller's genuine interest in the way of life of Tatar women, the Tatar princess Kankalova sent her an official invitation to spend an evening together. T. Passeck set off for the estate on foot, accompanied by her two children, a wet nurse, nannies and an interpreter. Upon entering through the gate into the courtyard, surrounded by high stone walls, she saw a large crowd of women in bright and glittering attire. On the steps of the house, the hostess herself – Princess Kankalova, accompanied by her 17-year-old daughter – welcomed the guests in accordance with traditional Eastern customs. It is worth noting that the hostesses themselves were dressed relatively simply: in plain blouses made of fine raw silk (similar in cut to Russian ones), fastened with precious emerald cufflinks, whilst their wide, low-hanging sashes gleamed with massive gold plaques featuring relief work. The young princess's jet-black hair was plaited into two long braids that reached almost to her knees; woven into them were golden talismans bearing engraved quotations from the Quran, which had been specially brought from Mecca by a dervish. On her head, the girl wore a small red velvet cap, and in her ears – earrings with long pearl pendants. The attire of the other women present in the courtyard was characterised by varying degrees of colourfulness and variety (*Passeck, 1879: 294-295*).

At the princess's warm invitation, T. Passeck and her companions were led into the harem – a spacious and light-filled room, divided into two unequal parts by slender wooden columns. The windows of the room had fine wooden frames with coloured glass panes. In the larger half of the room, the hostess and her daughter, the wet nurse, as well as T. Passeck with her children, nannies and interpreter, were comfortably seated on a wide sofa. Meanwhile, in the smaller part of the room, the other women and maids sat directly on the floor. In keeping with the tradition of Eastern hospitality, the princess was presented with a pipe with a long cherry-wood stem. She took a few puffs and politely offered the guests a smoke, but T.

⁹ Mary Holderness – a British traveller and author. She was originally from England; in September of 1815, her family joined the Reverend Arthur Young in London whilst preparing for a journey to the Crimea. They travelled overland from Riga to Karagoz (now Pervomaiske) in the Crimea between 18 November 1815 and 3 February 1816. She lived there until March 1820. On her return to England, she published “Notes Concerning the Crimean Tatars” (1821) and “New Russia” (1823).

¹⁰ Tatiana Petrovna Passeck (1810–1889) – a Russian writer and memoirist, wife of the historian and geographer Vadim Passeck, and founder of the children's magazine “Igrushechka”. The draft section of her published memoirs, which recounted her personal life, focused on her time on the Crimean Peninsula and descriptions of the region.

Passeck declined. With the help of the interpreter, the princess enquired about the purpose and planned duration of the guests' visit to Crimea, and announced her daughter's upcoming wedding and the imminent marriage of her son, a member of the Guard. Princess Kankalova earnestly invited T. Passeck to attend both celebrations, although the traveller later expressed regret in her memoirs that, due to her travel schedule, she was unable to take up this opportunity (*Passeck, 1879: 294-295*).

For her part, Elena Gorchakova described Tatar girls who were gathered around the town fountain in colourful quilted beshmets¹¹, caps with monists¹² and with finely plaited braids (*Gorchakova, 1884: 10*). Thanks to a visit to the home of a local Tatar, E. Gorchakova was able to examine in detail a neatly arranged women's wardrobe: colourful beshmets, a festive jacket trimmed with precious sable fur, velvet caps adorned with rubies and filigree¹³ with turquoise inlays, shoes embroidered with gold thread, as well as heavy silver belts featuring niello¹⁴ and the finest filigree work (*Gorchakova, 1884: 13*).

In contrast, Olimpiada Shishkina, in her notes, combined descriptions of luxury with openly disparaging, colonialist judgements. Describing women dressed in costly brocade¹⁵ and velvet with pearl-embellished lattices across the chest, she claimed that even the most expensive clothing could not lend them any grace. Shishkina claimed that their "Mongolian faces and eyes" were allegedly devoid of any expression, which is why Tatar women seemed to her to be "utterly senseless creatures" (*Shishkina, 1848: 249*).

The divergence between European and Russian research perspectives was also clearly evident in the assessment of traditional cosmetic practices (in particular, the use of henna¹⁶ to dye hair, nails and teeth). Whilst Russian authors typically expressed incomprehension and disdain – such as Shishkina, who described Tatar women as "very untidy" and believed they were marred by "dishevelled hair and orange nails" (*Shishkina, 1848: 230*), – the British writer Mary Holderness, on the other hand, focused on the technical details and social conventions of the practice. She noted that the privilege of applying make-up to the face was granted exclusively to married women, whilst unmarried girls were permitted only to dye their hair and nails the same colour (*Holderness, 1827: 222*).

Most Russian female authors, influenced by imperial ideology, portrayed local women as unattractive and lacking in aesthetic taste. Their texts also frequently contained assertions that women's beauty faded rapidly due to early marriages, as a result of which a Tatar woman aged thirty allegedly already looked like an elderly woman (*Sosnogorova, 1874: 18*).

Alongside her description of the Tatar population, M. Holderness provided a detailed account of the Bulgarian female settlers, noting their extraordinary diligence, neatness and swarthy appearance with shining dark eyes. They wore white woollen dresses with a two-inch red insert at the hem, from beneath which a red underskirt peeped out, and a wide sash embroidered with silk or gold thread. Bulgarian women wore muslin scarves on their heads, loosely wrapped around the head with the ends hanging

down their backs; Holderness noted that this headdress was considerably less graceful than the Tatar women's exquisite headscarves. The researcher also recorded an important historical detail: previously, Bulgarian women had lavishly adorned the front of their dresses with gold and silver coins, but were forced to abandon this tradition so as not to attract the attention of the Turkish agha, who would appropriate and confiscate this gold (*Holderness, 1827: 225-227*).

A social portrait and the legal status of Crimean Tatar women

In most imperial and European travelogues of the time, Muslim women rarely featured as independent subjects of historical and sociological analysis. Due to the dominance of the "male gaze" and the limited access of foreigners to private spaces (the harem), the average reader might have formed a discursively distorted impression that the indigenous society of the peninsula consisted exclusively of men, whilst the presence of women was limited to passing references to the wives of the imperial administration. However, certain female travellers, by virtue of their gender, had a unique opportunity to peer behind the veil of domestic life and analyse in detail the actual social status of Crimean Tatar women.

Referring to this discourse, the British observer Mary Holderness, citing the direct words of a respected local resident, noted that in the external patriarchal discourse, a Tatar wife was often perceived as a complete slave to her husband. According to these biased assessments, a woman was considered desirable only to the extent that she served to satisfy his physical needs or secured advantageous marital and family alliances between influential and wealthy family clans (*Holderness, 1827: 225*).

However, Holderness's subsequent in-depth and insightful account completely refuted the simplistic notion of the total lack of rights and passivity of Crimean Tatar women. Drawing on her own long-term observations in Karagoz, the British researcher documented in detail the legal mechanism for divorce, as governed by the norms of Muslim law (Sharia). In cases of systematic physical abuse, psychological abuse, marital infidelity or a husband's failure to provide adequate financial support, a woman had a clear procedural right to appeal to the local qadi or mullah and initiate an official dissolution of the marriage (*Holderness, 1827: 241*).

It is noteworthy that following a divorce, a woman retained full ownership of her own property (in particular, her dowry and the mahr stipulated in the marriage contract), whilst her former husband was obliged to pay a specified sum of money in compensation and to provide for the children. A comparative analysis shows that, thanks to these institutionalised norms, Muslim women enjoyed even significantly greater legal freedoms in certain property, financial and civil law matters than women of the time in many countries of Western Europe or the Russian Empire, where the institution of "coverture" – the legal subordination of a married woman – prevailed. Furthermore, Holderness rejected the stereotype that Muslim marriages lacked emotional depth, noting that she had repeatedly observed

¹¹ Beshmet – an upper garment fastened at the front worn by Tatars and Caucasian peoples; a half-coat.

¹² Monisto – a women's neck ornament made of coins, pearls, medallions, beads, coral and the like, which indicated the wearer's social and financial status.

¹³ Filigree – a piece of jewellery made from fine wire, or lace-like patterns of gold or silver wire fixed onto a metal surface.

¹⁴ Chern – an alloy of silver, lead and sulphur, used for artistic decoration and the firing of metal objects.

¹⁵ Brocade – a silk fabric with a pattern woven using gold or silver metallic threads.

¹⁶ Henna – a dye made from the dried leaves of the henna plant. The tradition of decorating the body with henna designs is still practised today in many countries of the Arab world.

displays of sincere affection, tenderness and mutual respect between spouses, even though strict religious traditions and social customs demanded suppression and restraint in the public expression of feelings (*Holderness, 1827: 225*).

Valuable microhistorical material on the everyday family life and social self-realisation of Tatar women is contained in the travelogue by Yelena Gorchakova, who, whilst travelling along the southern coast of Crimea, was invited into the home of a local resident. She described with admiration the lovely and exceptionally graceful 20-year-old hostess, Hanife. Despite a 30-year age difference with her 50-year-old husband, Hanife displayed a deep and sincere affection, watching his every gesture and listening intently to his every word (*Gorchakova, 1884: 12*).

The husband, for his part, was openly proud of his wife in front of guests, emphasising that Allah had blessed her not only with physical beauty and intelligence, but also with exceptional artistic skill: she had mastered the technique of gold embroidery and was skilled at embroidering precious towels, cushions, festive caps and beshmets (*Gorchakova, 1884: 13*). An important detail in the social portrait of Hanife was the description of her level of education: her husband specifically emphasised that she had studied for three years at a local school under a mullah, could read the Quran fluently, was proficient in Arabic script and had an excellent grasp of the religious and legal laws of Muhammad (*Gorchakova, 1884: 14*). This fact significantly set Hanife apart from the general population of indigenous women, since, according to M. Holderness's general observations, the overall level of female literacy among Crimean Tatar women in the first half of the 19th century remained extremely low, due both to conservative social norms and the absence of a well-developed system of women's religious schools (*mektebs*) (*Holderness, 1827: 226*).

At the same time, using the example of Hanife, Gorchakova revealed a complex system of socio-spatial restrictions and freedoms determined by her husband's legal status as a Turkish subject¹⁷. Comparing her situation with the daily lives of local Alushta Tatar women, the traveller noted characteristic normative differences: under customary law, the wife of a Turkish subject was strictly forbidden from visiting neighbours, and was permitted to attend wedding celebrations only once a year. At the same time, within the confines of her private estate, Hanife enjoyed considerable autonomy: she had every right to relax freely, swim in the sea and stroll in the secluded family garden, the privacy of which guaranteed that her private life remained shielded from the gaze of outside men (*Gorchakova, 1884: 19*).

The "otherness" of Muslim women in travelogues

The theme of Muslim women's freedom took on its most acute, ideologically motivated and distinctly colonial tone in the works of the Russian traveller and writer Olympiada Shishkina. Unlike Western European observers, who sought to analyse the legal status of Tatar women through the lens of Sharia law and property relations, Shishkina subordinated her own observations to the prevailing imperial doctrine. Traditional Muslim women's attire (in particular the chador and white veils) appeared in her text not as a cultural or religious marker or a means of protecting private space, but as a visual symbol of socio-cultural regression. She described local women who "timidly made

their way, from head to toe, like corpses, wrapped in white sheets", interpreting this appearance as a vivid manifestation of "eternal and complete slavery", in which all human concepts, intellectual pursuits and higher feelings were supposedly completely frozen (*Shishkina, 1848: 86*). The metaphor of "the dead" in this context served as a typical exoticised motif, denying indigenous women their agency and portraying them as a passive element devoid of vital dynamism.

Conceptual misunderstandings and the deliberate distortion of Muslim daily life were further exacerbated in the description of the religious sphere. Having visited a local mosque and learnt from the mullah that the inner prayer halls were intended for the general public, whilst women prayed exclusively at home and did not take part in communal public prayer at the mosque, Shishkina expressed open surprise and moral condemnation. She perceived this spatial separation of sacred life not as a traditional canonical norm of Islam (where a woman's prayer at home is considered equivalent), but as a manifestation of systematic humiliation. The Russian author was struck by the contrast between the mullah's emphatically respectful, gallant attitude towards them – foreign and Christian women, whom he should, according to the religious hierarchy, regard as infidels – and what she perceived as his disregard and neglect of the religious needs of his own mothers, wives and sisters (*Shishkina, 1848: 94*).

The dehumanisation and portrayal of the Muslim population as "savage" formed the basis of imperial "civilising" rhetoric. It was intended to justify the moral right and historical necessity of the annexation, military-administrative subjugation and subsequent religious and cultural integration of the Crimean Peninsula. O. Shishkina, articulating her own emphatically Orthodox piety, actively promoted a rigid binary division between "us" (the bearers of the "true faith" and civilisation) and "them" (barbarians enslaved by "false teachings"). At the same time, Islam was portrayed not as a distinct world religion, but as a tyrannical system ("the teachings of Mohammed"), serving only to satisfy the autocratic ambitions and passions of the ruling elite.

In order to definitively deprive the Crimean Tatars of their legal and historical claim to the peninsula, Shishkina resorted to promoting pseudo-historical theories. She suggested that the ancestors of most local residents had once been Christians, whom "ruthless conquerors" had in the past forced, through brutal torture and violence, to renounce their holy faith in order to spread Islam (*Shishkina, 1848: 86*). This mythologised assertion was intended to delegitimise Crimea's Islamic identity by presenting the imperial presence as a "just restoration" and "liberation" of lands that had originally been Christian. It is noteworthy that the author underpinned this ideological construct with her personal genealogical context: she emphasised that her own ancestor hailed specifically from Crimea and died in Russia as a steadfast Christian, thereby legitimising her own privileged imperial perspective through family memory (*Shishkina, 1848: 94*).

Thus, in nineteenth-century travel literature, a complex, multi-layered and deeply biased image of the Crimean Tatar woman emerged, which varied depending on the authors' origins and ideological perspectives:

¹⁷ Hanim – in Turkic languages, a form of address and a title meaning "madam" or "lady", added to a woman's name as a mark of respect.

Western European female travellers (M. Holderness, A. Hommaire de Hell) predominantly adopted a distanced, ethnographically analytical approach. They documented the specific features of material culture, details of daily life, domestic customs and the legal realities of Islamic law (in particular, the protection of women's property rights, the institution of divorce and the mahr), recognising that Muslim women enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy and legal protection within the private sphere.

Russian authors (O. Shishkina, E. Gorchakova, M. Sosnogorova): to a large extent subordinated their own observations to the task of symbolic appropriation. They constructed a rigid hierarchical opposition between the "enlightened, civilised centre" and the "primitive, disenfranchised and neglected periphery". The portrayal of Tatar women as "miserable slaves" served as a convenient ideological tool to justify colonial supremacy, linguistic and religious assimilation, and the Russian Empire's expansion towards the East.

Conclusions

Thus, this study reconstructs the diverse portrayals of women in 19th-century Crimea as found in European and Russian travel prose. The authors' descriptions were shaped by imperial ideologies, the gender norms of the time and their personal experiences. In their travelogues, female travellers focused on the lives of local women, viewing them either as exotic or as the population of a "backward" region in need of "civilisation". Most of them described only appearance and clothing, and only a few delved into an analysis of the daily life and legal status of Crimean Tatar women.

Due to the isolation of Muslim women from public life, these descriptions often remained superficial. However, female travellers had an advantage over men: religious customs allowed them to enter the private spaces of local women. Russian female authors were more influenced by the imperial ideology regarding the "otherness" of Muslims, whilst Western European female travellers showed greater interest in local culture and left more detailed descriptions of daily life.

Women's travel writing combined Orientalism with the prejudices of the time. Whilst accusing Muslim society of "patriarchal oppression", the authors simultaneously noted the financial security enjoyed by Crimean Tatar women, which European women did not possess.

Three key types of figures emerge from the sources. The first is represented by aristocratic women and spiritual seekers (Madame Gachet, Baroness von Krüdener, Princess Golitsyna), whose biographies helped to create a mythologised aura surrounding the female presence in the region. The second type consists of Crimean Tatar women, who are portrayed as the subject of ethnographic description. The third type is the new female observer or tourist of the late 19th century (notably in the letters of Lesia Ukrainka), who bore witness to the transition from imperial domination of the region to personal reflection.

Thus, 19th-century women's travelogues are an important source that reveals the intersection of the imperial

perspective, gender stereotypes and real life in the Crimea of that time.

AI Usage Declaration

The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence (GAI) tools were not used during the research process, data analysis, or manuscript preparation. In accordance with the GAIDeT taxonomy (2025), no research or writing tasks were delegated to GAI tools. Full responsibility for the content, scientific validity, and final outcome of the manuscript lies entirely with the author.

Declaration submitted by: **Oleh Ivaniuk, Hanna Hedo.**

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Жінка між імперією та Сходом: кримські образи у тревелогах XIX ст.

Олег Іванюк (ORCID 0000-0001-6750-5423)

Київський столичний університет імені Бориса Грінченка (Україна)

Ганна Гедьо (ORCID 0009-0004-5253-7384)

Київський столичний університет імені Бориса Грінченка (Україна)

У статті досліджено жіночі образи Кримського півострова XIX століття, реконструйовані за матеріалами західноєвропейської та російської подорожньої прози. Подорожні записи Е. Крейвен, М. Ґатрі, М. Ґолдернесс, А. Гоммер де Ґель, О. Горчакової, Т. Пассек, О. Шишкіної та інших утворюють репрезентативний корпус джерел, який фіксує рецепцію «нових земель» після анексії Кримського ханства Російською імперією. Авторки приділяли значну увагу природним ландшафтам, архітектурній спадщині, побуту корінних народів і правовому стану місцевих мешканок, що відображало специфіку їхньої гендерної соціалізації та колоніальної оптики.

Чільне місце у наративах посідають образи аристократок, пов'язаних із імперськими елітами (зокрема «містичного тріо» – мадам Гаше, баронеси фон Крюденер та княгині Голіциної), чия діяльність формувала ексцентричний і міфологізований дискурс довкола жіночої присутності в регіоні. Важливим складником джерел є репрезентація кримськотатарських жінок (зокрема у працях М. Ґолдернесс і Т. Пассек), де елементи традиційного костюма, побуту й соціального статусу постають на перетині орієнталістської екзотизації та етнографічної фіксації. Наприкінці XIX ст. у подорожніх текстах формується новий тип образу – спостережниця й туристка, чийє прагнення до самопізнання та критичної рефлексії виразно простежується в епістолярії Лесі Українки. У комплексі ці джерела розкривають багатшаровість жіночих репрезентацій – від романтизовано-екзотичних до етнографічно-побутових – та окреслюють роль мандрівниць у формуванні європейського й російського уявлень про Крим.

Ключові слова: тревелоги XIX ст., жінки Криму, жіночі образи, кримськотатарське суспільство, колоніальний дискурс, орієнталізм, імперський погляд, Леся Українка, культурні репрезентації.

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