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RECIPROCITY OR CONFLICT: INTERCONFESSIONAL SITUATION AROUND MUSLIM SHRINES IN THE CRIMEA

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Annotation. The research discusses the problem of interconfessional communication and traditions of sharing sacred places on the Crimean peninsula which have been reflected both in literary sources and memories. Social and demographic changes in the 20th century (forced migrations, Soviet state policy in religion, repatriation) caused the complete extinction of interreligious practices of sharing. In recent years, Muslim shrines have obtained not only religious symbolism, but also a political meaning in the discourse of belonging to the place and historical rights for the territory between divergent social actors.

Key words: Crimea, religiosity, confessional communities, Muslim sites.

ВЗАЄМОДІЯ АБО КОНФЛІКТ: МІЖКОНФЕСІЙНА СИТУАЦІЯ НАВКОЛО МУСУЛЬМАНСЬКИХ СВЯТИНЬ КРИМУ

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Анотація. У статті розглядається питання міжконфесійної взаємодії та традицій спільного використання сакрального простору в Криму, котрі відображені в літературних джерелах та спогадах респондентів. Соціальні та демографічні зміни ХХ століття (примусова міграція, радянська політика в сфері релігії, репатріація кримських татар) призвели до повного занепаду міжрелігійних сусідських практик. В останні роки мусульманські святині набувають не тільки релігійної символіки, але й політичного значення в дискурсі належності до місця та історичних прав на територію різних етнічних груп.

Ключові слова: Крим, релігійність, конфесійні групи, ісламські святині.

ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЕ ИЛИ КОНФЛИКТ: МЕЖКОНФЕССИОНАЛЬНАЯ СИТУАЦИЯ ВОКРУГ МУСУЛЬМАНСКИХ СВЯТЫНЬ КРЫМА

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается вопрос межконфессионального взаимодействия и традиций совместного использования сакрального пространства в Крыму, которые отражены в литературных источниках и воспоминаниях респондентов. Социальные и демографические изменения ХХ века (принудительная миграция, советская политика в сфере религии, репатриация крымских татар) привели к полному упадку межрелигиозных соседских практик. В последние годы мусульманские святыни приобретают не только религиозную символику, но и политическое значение в дискурсе принадлежности к месту и исторических прав на территорию различных этнических групп.

Ключевые слова: Крым, религиозность, конфессиональные группы, исламские святыни.

In the recent decades, considerable information has been accumulated regarding the problem of interconfessional religious practices among Muslim and Christian communities in different regions of the world (Balkans, Middle East). The study of the problem of pilgrimage resulted in the shaping of several concepts on the origin of sharing sacred space. R. Hayden formulated the idea of "antagonistic tolerance". By this term he meant a pragmatic strategy of adaptation to religious neighbors when their complete displacement is physically impossible [7, P. 219]. This interpretation, however, has been challenged in a series of recent publications. Other researchers emphasize that the coexistence of several ethnic and confessional groups in one area does not necessarily lead to the aggravation of an interconfessional conflict. A close study of religious practices in ethnically diverse regions shows a variety of forms of mixed worship near holy sites. The escalation of interconfessional conflicts near shared sites often occurs at the times when the religious discourse is interfered with external political factors [3,8,2].

The article is devoted to the problem of experience of interconfessional interaction near the holy places of Muslim and Orthodox origin in the Crimea. In particular, we were curious to see whether the practices of sharing are common for the Crimea and if they could rather be described in terms of "antagonism" or "tolerance".

The main sources of this research are the field records collected during 2006–2011 in the Crimea. Ethnographic data are supplied with the analysis of historical literature and ongoing media resources.

Muslim shrines (Aziz in singular, Azizler in plural) and several Christian monasteries and churches have always been the places of parallel or mixed pilgrimage in the Crimea. There also exists a kind of sacred landscape objects (mountains, valleys) which has integrated shrines of several religious communities. For example, in the Maryam-Dere valley near Bakhchisarai, in a distance of just 2 kilometers, there are sacred sites of three religions. One of the sites situated there is Gazi Mansour Aziz. It is destroyed now. It is a Muslim place of pilgrimage with a dervish tekke, tomb, and healing water. Not far from this place there is a Christian monastery and Karaite cemetery in Yosyfat valley with an oak-wood called "Balta tisme" ("the ax will not touch"). Muslim Inkerman Aziz described by I. Hasprinskyi was also located near the Orthodox monastery of Inkerman [5].

In the written sources of the 19th – early 20th century, one can find a number of examples of sharing sacred objects. The information about the healing of illnesses of Muslim worshippers near Christian shrines, gathered in an attentive and scrupulous way, is present in religious literature [4, P. 491; 6, P. 87]. The latter describes Tavrida province and local Orthodox churches. By reference to the study of this narrative example, it has been suggested that the authors tried to enhance the significance of the object and reinforce the sacred legitimacy of the shrines.

As we can see, mixed or parallel religious practices near sacred objects were quite widespread in the period of the 19th – early 20th century in the Crimea. This region has always been characterized by cultural multiplicity. Therefore, members of local ethnic and religious communities demonstrated various forms of reception of neighbors' traditions and interpretation of their religious practices. Researchers of the mixed pilgrimage confirm that in

the regions with traditional ethnic and religious diversity (Balkans, Asia Minor, and Palestine) the boundaries between confessions are much more transparent than in the relatively monoethnic territories [3, P. 113 – 139].

Now we would like to focus on the following question: how is intercommunion interaction reflected in the collective memory of the Crimean Tatars?

In our interviews, there are a number of examples which illustrate intercommunal interactions in locations with mixed Christian and Muslim population both in everyday life and ceremonial time. The informants talked about the communication between Muslims and Christians during ritual periods. Ethnic neighbors congratulated each other on religious holidays: Christian Trinity, Christmas, Easter, and the Muslim Urasa Bayram, Kurban Bayram.

An informant from village Koz (Sunny Valley of Sudak Municipality) described an example of shared religious practices in a mosque. Referring to his words, Christians were allowed to visit the mosque together with Muslims on Friday or any other day, and pray in the way they could according to Orthodox traditions.

Oral narratives contain a number of sharing sacred space motives and stories about the interaction of the representatives of different confessions near local shrines. All of these examples can be divided into two groups:

1) Stories about joint or parallel worship at a holy place;

2) Stories about a sacrilege committed by a representative of another denomination.

For example, one of our informants told us a story about a Christian woman who took care of a Muslim holy site (Karly Aziz) at the time when the Crimean Tatars were in exile, *"After we were deported, an old woman took care of that place. She was a Russian woman. All the time she visited and cleaned up the site. After her death everything was destroyed[1]."*

One can guess that an important function of stories about common worship at Muslim shrines is underlining the importance of these sacred objects.

On May, 18, 1944 all the Crimean Tatars became the victims of ethnic repressions and were deported from their ethnic lands to Central Asia and other regions of the Soviet Union. In memoirs and political essays deportation is depicted as an act of punishment for non-existent crimes committed by Crimean Tatars and as an attempt to take away their homeland. Soviet official discourse justified forced eviction of Crimean Tatars affirming that they were traitors and collaborators of Hitler's Germany. This connotation gave birth to resistance among Crimean Tatars and was incarnated into a struggle for restoring justice and winning back their dignity. The process of repatriation of this ethnic group which had become an object of repression, the process of physical and symbolical restitution of ethnic lands to Crimean Tatars became the main aim of this struggle.

During the time when the Crimean Tatar community was located in the countries of deportation, traditional cultural landscape had shifted from the real to imaginary sphere. Memories about their ethnic landscape were retransmitted into mythological forms. Written and oral narratives devoted to the problem of deportation traditionally underline the

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[1] Recorded in 2009, village Taraktash, Sudak municipality.

irrational spiritual bonds between the Crimean Tatar ethnic community and their lost territory. In the academic literature of the last decades the significant importance of the ideological concept of the ethnic territory in the process of repatriation of Crimean Tatars is frequently stressed [11, P. 268; 9, P. 44-51; 10, P. 199-200; 1, P. 21-46]. The actualization of the concept of belonging to the place led to a longstanding mobilization among the Crimean Tatars and resulted in a massive repatriation that took place in the 1980–1990s.

While Crimean Tatars stayed in the places of eviction, the Soviet government began the process of ideological transformation of the Crimean cultural space. The authorities launched the process of Turk toponymy renaming in the mid-twentieth century. Since that time, Muslim cemeteries and mosques had been either destroyed or rebuilt. At the same time they began a process of deserted villages' colonization by new residents. They were mostly immigrants from the central regions of Russia.

When the Crimean Tatars returned to their ethnic homeland, they found themselves surrounded by a new cultural environment. Traditional cultural landscape was reminded only by some architectural details and natural surroundings.

The process of repatriation of the Crimean Tatar community to the Crimea was accompanied with a reconstruction of an imaginary landscape. The movement for the restoration of memory about their ethnic space is an important process which has acquired different forms. Meetings of settlers from native villages have become a significant form of "memory restoration". After such meetings they visit places which are still undamaged and have a collective meal. Materialization of the invisible landscape is represented by the renewal of objects with a bright ethnic and confessional symbolism: mosques, Islamic shrines, memorials of victims of deportation, and so on. Reconstructed objects have become symbolic mediators between the community and their ethnic lands, between the present and the past.

Reconstruction of destroyed Muslim shrines – Azizler – is a part of a considerable process of modelling the ethnic territory. Today Azizler as sacred objects are more than just the places for religious practices: they have become strong ethnic and religious symbols; they legalize Crimean Tatars on their historical territory. According to a Crimean journalist, Azizler are "the material manifestation of spiritual culture" of the Crimea (Crimean Reporter).

Search and rebuilding of the Crimean Muslim shrines have both collective and individual forms. According to oral narratives, the holy places were among the first places visited by immigrant families after their return to the Crimea. One woman told us about the holy site situated on the territory of Sudak fortress, *"I've known this place since childhood; it's like my home. Before my parents died, all the time, up to the end of their lives, they had been saying, 'It is not our homeland; the Crimea is our homeland. Do not forget it.' I prayed to God and asked Him, 'If we go to the Crimea, first of all, we will set foot on the fortress; we will go to this Aziz and read a prayer. And thank God, we came here. I have been near the fortress two or three times, and every day I pray to this Aziz»[2].*

The restoration of local pilgrimage after the repatriation was the beginning

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[2] Recorded in 2009, village Taraktash, Sudak municipality.

of the sacred landscape reconfiguration of the Crimea not only for Muslims, but for non-Muslim inhabitants of the peninsula as well. The main issue here is not religious practices and local pilgrimage. It is more about the way local intellectuals reflect upon the cultural and "spiritual" heritage of the Crimea as a common space for members of different ethnic groups and religions. Most frequently, this process is reflected in local history studies and tourism literature.

The process of repatriation and resettlement of Crimean Tatar ethnic community to their ethnic homeland was accompanied by increased confrontations between different ethnic and religious identities. Ethnodemographical changes that took place in the Crimea in the twentieth century led to the complete deconstruction of ethnic and confessional boundaries. Consequently, during the past 20 years the representatives of two dominant ethnoconfessional groups on the peninsula (Muslim Tatars and Orthodox Russians and Ukrainians), in fact, had to entirely rebuild their models of coexistence and neighborhood. However, after Crimean Tatars came back to their ethnic lands, it was impossible to avoid a conflict between different kinds of memory. These are the memories of the repatriates and of local Slavic population. The latter concerns mostly those people who moved to the peninsula in the second half of the 20th century. For Crimean Tatars local Russians are settlers or immigrants who settled in empty buildings abandoned by Crimean Tatars after deportation. They have nothing in common with historical memory, customs, past of Crimean Tatars. However, this does not apply to the Russians and Ukrainians who had lived with Crimean Tatars before the deportation. In our

interviews they are presented as the living witnesses of the Crimean Tatars' presence on the peninsula. For the majority of the Orthodox population that had settled here during the second half of the twentieth century, Crimean Tatars are strangers who threaten the stability and prosperity of the Christian Crimea. This perception is reinforced by the dominant historical myth about Christian Taurida and its conquest by the steppe hordes. According to this myth, the Crimean Tatars are the direct descendants of the Mongol nomads. It denies the right of the Crimean Tatar repatriates to consider the Crimean peninsula their homeland. This contradiction has already become the reason for the series of intercommunal conflicts near local shrines of different religions: Muslim graves and mosques, Christian churches and intending crosses. In 2006 we conducted our field research in Bakhchisarai during the interconfessional conflict which involved Crimean Tatars and Slavic citizens. Members of the Crimean Tatar community (people of different age) were picketing the city market built in the Soviet period (on its territory there was a Muslim shrine "durbe"). They demonstrated their attitude to authorities and members of other ethnic groups: it is impossible to keep the market near human graves. In the times of political aggravation, holy places become centers of ethno-political mobilization of the community. Shrines have a strong ethnic and religious connotation. They are the ideological outposts for defending the symbolic right to own the territory.

From the beginning of the repatriation and until nowadays, there have been several waves of vandalism against Muslim cemeteries and holy sites (Azizler) in the Crimea. It is now generally accepted that

vandalism on sacred sites (graves, temples, shrines) is a method of denial of the territorial claims of certain constituencies. In fact, vandalism is a conflict of symbols in the cultural landscape. It shows the level of intercommunal antagonism in a particular region.

In this research the local pilgrimage and traditions of sharing sacred spaces were taken as a special lens for studying the dynamics of ethno-confessional processes in a particular region. It is apparent from the present study that lived religiosity seeks for the ways to overcome doctrinal differences and competitive confessional strategies. The traditions of interconfessional neighborhood and practices of sharing sacred objects in the Crimea are widely reflected both in literature sources and memories.

The materials we have discovered in the field open a second set of questions concerning intercommunal interactions and discursive constructions of the sacred landscape in the contemporary Crimea. Social and demographic changes in the 20th century (forced migrations, Soviet state policy in religion, repatriation) caused the complete extinction of interreligious practices of sharing. The present controversy of identities and collective memories has resulted in escalation of conflict near religious sites in the Crimea. The third conclusion that can be drawn from our research concerns the question of politization of religious practices. Our research shows that nowadays Muslim and Christian shrines have acquired not only religious symbolic importance, but also political meaning in the discourse of belonging to the place and historical rights for the territory between divergent social actors.

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Reciprocity or Conflict: Interconfessional Situation around Muslim Shrines in the Crimea

Abstract

In this research the local pilgrimage and traditions of sharing sacred spaces were taken as a special lens for studying the dynamics of ethno-confessional processes in a particular region. Mixed or parallel religious practices near sacred objects were quite widespread in the period of the 19th – early 20th century in the Crimea. The traditions of interconfessional neighborhood and practices of sharing sacred objects in the Crimea are widely reflected both in literature sources and memories. Local ethnic and religious communities demonstrated various forms of reception of neighbors' traditions and interpretation of their religious practices. There are a number of examples which illustrate intercommunal interactions in locations with mixed Christian and Muslim population both in everyday life and ceremonial time. During the time when the Crimean Tatar community was located in the countries of deportation, traditional cultural landscape had shifted from the real to imaginary sphere. Reconstruction of destroyed Muslim shrines – Azizler – is a part of a considerable process of modelling the ethnic territory. Today Azizler as sacred objects are more than just the places for religious practices: they have become strong ethnic and religious symbols; they legalize the Crimean Tatars on their historical territory. The process of repatriation and resettlement of Crimean Tatar ethnic community to their ethnic homeland was accompanied by increased confrontations between different ethnic and religious identities. It is apparent from the present study that lived religiosity seeks for the ways to overcome doctrinal differences and competitive confessional strategies. Nowadays Muslim and Christian shrines have acquired not only religious symbolic importance, but also political meaning in the discourse of belonging to the place and historical rights for the territory between divergent social actors.