18th centuries were struck by the Crimeans' tolerance (with rare exceptions) of several sects of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, by the general literacy (both male and female) and by the sophisticated main port of Gözleve (now Yevpatoria), which rivalled Rotterdam in modernity. The three centuries' worth of court judgements recently unearthed in St Petersburg show a society in which the rule of law prevailed, albeit one supported by slave-trading and Ottoman silver, as well as specialised industry and farming (leather, salt, pork and wine were the main exports). It was considered so civilised that prisoners of war preferred to remain in Crimea than be repatriated.

The Russian takeover between the 1730s and 1784, when the Ottoman sultan conceded Catherine the Great's annexation of the previous year, was far bloodier than anything the Crimean Tatars did to Russia. The French were soon forgiven for burning Moscow in 1812; the Crimeans' punishment for burning it down in 1571 is never-ending. Crimea flourished under Khan Kirim Giray (who invited Molière to perform in his palace at Bakhchisaray) in the mid-18th century. However, after defeating the Ottomans in 1774, Russia asserted Crimea's 'independence': it deprived Crimea of its extensive agricultural hinterland, evacuated its Greek and Armenian traders, installed a puppet khan and began a slow genocide, nearing completion today. Kent portrays the flight of the Tatars to Anatolia as an inexplicable reaction to Catherine the Great's guarantees. At the time, Russia was devouring four states: Poland, Georgia, Crimea and Finland. Crimea was unfortunate in that its indigenous population was cleansed and brutalised. Kent fails to mention that in 1833 the Russian minister of the interior confiscated and destroyed every Crimean manuscript in public or private hands: the great Zincirli madrasa was left without textbooks; every home was ransacked. The mufti supervising this destruction received a gold medal from Tsar Nicholas 'for diligence in removing from the Tatars manuscripts harmful to them and to the common peace, not accordant with the law nor with the rules of prudence'. One effect of the Crimean War was the confiscation of Tatar land, turning the indigenous Crimeans into serfs of Russian landlords, whose vulgar palaces, villas and churches now dominate the coastal landscapes. Kent does not mention the terrible deportations of the 1860s and 1880s, part of the tsar's ethnic cleansing of the northeast Black Sea coast, which exterminated hundreds of thousands, including entire nations, such as the Ubykhs. Ethnic manipulation and the importation of Bulgarian and German colonists to replace the expelled Tatars continued unabated in Crimea.

In its early years, the USSR banned the infant, idealistic Crimean Milliy Firqa ('National Party'). After an interlude, during which Tatar rule was reinstated, Stalin resumed the tyranny: the Tatar elite, including the great poet and Turkologist Bekir Cobanzade, was exterminated. Kent gives a figure of three thousand detained in the Great Terror; the NKVD records show that fifteen thousand were arrested, of whom nearly half were shot, the rest suffering a slower death in the Gulag.

The Nazi occupation was, relatively, a relief: about six thousand Tatars joined pro-German forces as *Schützmänner*; about the same number joined Soviet partisans. Influenced by German orientalists, the Nazis treated Crimean Tatars as Aryans. Even the Karaites, non-Talmudic Jews, were exempted from extermination. (Again, Kent blunders: the Germans killed Karaites in Kiev, but not in Crimea or Lithuania.)

The horrors of Stalin's final solution – the entire Tatar nation's deportation to Central Asia in May 1944, during which 100,000 perished – are underplayed by Kent: fishermen were put into barges that were scuttled at sea; highlanders were shot on sight. (The 2013 Crimean film about these events, *Haytarma*, banned from Russian cinemas, is available to watch on YouTube.)

Kent finishes by deploring the handing of Crimea to Ukraine by Khrushchev, although this made economic sense at the time. He dismisses the Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev, one of the few infants who survived the deportation, as a 'Soviet dissident': you might as well write a history of South Africa and call Nelson Mandela a 'black radical'. He whitewashes Putin's annexation, ignoring the role of Aksyonov 'the Goblin', an underworld *avtoritet*, in the unmonitored 'referendum'. Tatars are even now being expelled or murdered. An Orthodox convert who has taught in St Petersburg, he presented his book at the Russian embassy in the company of Western Putinistas. The one map in this otherwise unillustrated book shows Putin's projected bridge linking Crimea to Kerch, which Kent claims, optimistically, is due to be completed in 2019.

Brian Glyn Williams has written a far better book, although he takes the Russian annexation of Crimea in 1783 as his starting point. It is as thoroughly researched as it could be without using Tatar or Turkish sources. Its short prologue gives a succinct account of Crimean Tatar history before the Russian annexation. Using not just printed sources but also personal interviews and recordings of Crimean prisoners of war in the First World War, he shows what Russia did to the land and its people. He explores the success of Soviet and Russian propaganda in convincing foreign 'experts' that Crimea is ancient Russian territory, temporarily occupied by savage nomads. Williams is up-to-date and well informed about the reality behind recent events. He gives a graphic account of the Crimean Tatars' mistreatment in Uzbekistan, an experience as harrowing as their deportation. His book is properly referenced and accurate in detail. It also has rare black-and-white illustrations and a map (albeit fuzzy) of Crimea showing Tatar place names before Russification obliterated them. It has left me bewildered that Hurst can publish, almost simultaneously, two books of such diametrically opposite quality in the same field.

If only oriental studies in Britain (unlike Germany or France) were not so parlous that we now have no graduates capable of reading Ottoman Turkish, let alone Tatar, we might hope for Kent's aberration to be superseded by an authoritative history of Crimea for English-speaking readers.

To order these books from our partner bookshop, Heywood Hill, see page 25.