

Scientific article

DOI 10.28995/2073-0101-2026-2-440-456

For citation

Konkin, D. V. (2026). «Highest Commands» of Russian Emperor Alexander I as a legal instrument for preserving the historical and cultural heritage of Crimean Muslims, First quarter of the 19th century, Herald of an Archivist, no. 2, pp. 440-456. DOI 10.28995/2073-0101-2026-2-440-456

Konkin, D. V.

V. I. Vernadsky Crimean Federal University, Simferopol, Russia

«Highest Commands» of Russian Emperor Alexander I as a legal instrument for preserving the historical and cultural heritage of Crimean Muslims, First quarter of the 19th century

Abstract

An important tool for resolving practical state issues in the Russian Empire were «Highest Commands» – oral orders issued by the monarch that were binding on his subjects. Due to their specific nature, «Highest Commands» were often not recorded in official law collections, but they regularly appear in archival records. These orders sometimes assumed key significance in resolving practical regional issues, particularly in regulating issues that arose during the incorporation of the «national outskirts» of the Russian Empire. By the beginning of Alexander's I reign, such regions included the newly formed Taurida Governorate, populated primarily by Muslims. Materials discovered in the Russian State Historical Archive (St. Petersburg) and the State Archives of the Republic of Crimea (Simferopol) demonstrate Emperor Alexander I's personal involvement in resolving local issues. The «Highest Command» of Alexander I to the Minister of Internal Affairs, V. P. Kochubey, issued in 1803 motivated the adoption of key regulations concerning the funeral rites of the Crimean Tatars. As a result, the Tauride Governor, together with the Tauride Mufti, developed a decision banning mass burials of Muslims near mosques and in the immediate vicinity of residential areas in Crimea. Muslim cemeteries were henceforth to be established in nearby and specially designated areas outside of populated areas. Another important measure, resulting from the direct intervention of Emperor Alexander I, was permission for Crimean residents to build their homes in accordance with the established canons of Islamic architecture. The ban was introduced in 1809 following the adoption of a uniform architectural standard for all of Russia. In 1818, an exception was made for Crimea as a result of the Emperor's «Highest Command». Modern Western historiography consistently emphasizes the colonial nature of the Russian state, manifested, in particular, in the allegedly deliberate infringement of traditional rights and customs and religious discrimination against the Crimean Tatars. Archival materials introduced into scholarly

circulation demonstrate the bias and one-sidedness of this view. Documented evidence illustrates Alexander I's lack of prejudice regarding Islamic rules and traditions, and his willingness to make exclusive decisions that took into account the unique situation of the «national outskirts» of the Russian Empire.

Keywords

Alexander I, Russian Empire, Crimea, «Highest Commands», Crimean Tatars, Muslim burial rites, Crimean Tatar architecture, archival sources.

Download the article: [konkin_doi](#)

References

Orekhov, V. V. (2017). In the Labyrinth of the Crimean Myth, Simferopol, Nizhny Novgorod, Raster, 579 p.

Marginani, Burhan ad-Din. (2013). Al-Khidaya, Almaty, Kusar-sayakhat, 470 p.

Steven, A. H. (1891). Files of the Taurida Provincial Government Archives Relating to the Search, Description, and Preservation of Ancient Monuments within the Taurida Province, News of the Taurida Scientific Archival Commission, no. 13, pp. 33–54.

Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, A. I. (1897). From the Memoirs of Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, Russkaya Starina, Vol. 91 (July–September), pp. 69–102, 333–356.

Tunkina, I. V. (2011). The Discovery of Feodosia, Pages from the Archaeological Study of Southeastern Crimea and the Initial Stages of the History of the Feodosia Museum of Antiquities, 1771–1871, Kyiv, Bolero, 240 p.

Khismatullin, A. A., Kryukova, V. Yu. (1997). Death and Funeral Rites in Islam and Zoroastrianism, St. Petersburg, Petersburg Oriental Studies, 272 p.

Khrapunov, N. I. (2022). English Travelers and Crimea, Late 18th – First Third of the 19th Century, Sevastopol, Albatros, 324 p.

Khrapunov, N. I. (2022). Bakhchisaray in the Descriptions of Foreign Travelers of the Late 18th – Early 19th Centuries, Sevastopol, Albatros, 360 p.

Chekmarev, V. M. (2022). Architectural heritage of the British in Russia, 1556–1941, Moscow, Tonchu, 752 p.

(2014). Cream: a path through the ages. History in questions, Ed. by V. A. Smoliy, Kiev, Institute of History of Ukraine, 456 p.

Marginani, B. al-Din. Al-Hidayah, Almaty, K?usar-sayakhat, 470 p.

Clarke, E. D. (1816). Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa. Pt. 1: Russia, Tahtary and Turkey, 4th ed., vol. 2 , London, T. Cadell and W. Davies, 524 p.

Dubois de Montpereux, F. (1843). Voyage Autor du Caucase, chez les Tcherkesses et les Abkhases, en Colchide, en Georgie, en Armenie et en Crimée, tome 5, Paris, Librairie de Gide, 464 p.

Fisher, A. (1978). The Crimean Tatars, Stanford, Calif., Hoover Institution Press, 259 p.

Hommaire de Hell, X. (1843–1845). Les steppes de la mer Caspienne, le Caucase, la Crimée et la Russie meridionale, tome II, Paris, P. Bertrand, 598 p.

Jobst, K. S. (2007). Die Perle des Imperiums: Der russische Krim-Diskurs im Zarenreich, Konstanz, UVK, 485 s.

Kozelsky, M. (2010). Christianizing Crimea, Shaping sacred space in the Russian Empire and beyond, DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, XIII, 270 p.

Lazzerini, Ed. (1988). The Crimea Under Russian Rule. 1783 to the Great Reforms. IN: Russian Colonial Expansion to 1917, Ed. by M. Rywkin, London, New York, Mansell Publ., pp. 123–138.

Seymour, H. D. (1855). Russia n the Black Sea and Sea of Azof, Being a Narrative of Travels in the Crimea and Bordering Provinces, London, John Murrey, 362 p.

Williams, B. G. (2001). The Crimean Tatars, the diaspora experience and the forging of a nation, Brill, Leiden, Boston, K?ln, 488 p.

About authors

Konkin Denis Valerievich, Candidate of Historical Sciences, V. I. Vernadsky Crimean Federal University, Research Center for the History and Archaeology of Crimea, Researcher, Simferopol, Russia, +7-978-828-61-56, denis_konkin@mail.ru

ORCID 0000-0002-6966-9963

Grant information

The paper was conducted with the financial support of a grant from the Russian Science Foundation (project No. 25-28-20072, «Instrumentalization of History: the Use of Crimea's Past in Russia and Abroad, 1783–1853»), <https://rscf.ru/project/25-28-20072/>

The article was received in the editorial office on 13.02.2025, recommended for publication on 20.03.2026

You can read completely article in the russian historic-archival magazine “The Herald of an Archivist”. Read more about terms of subscription [here](#) .

Полностью материал публикуется в российском историко-архивоведческом журнале ВЕСТНИК АРХИВИСТА. Ознакомьтесь с условиями подписки [здесь](#) .