

### From Baghçesaray *Salsabil* to Bakhchisarai Fountain: The Transference of Tatar Triumph to Tears

Created in 1764 by a Persian master called Omer, the Baghçesaray *salsabil* represented the heart of the Crimean Tatar khanate.<sup>1</sup> Baghçesaray, the 'Palace in the Gardens', is in the picturesque valley of the River Çuruk-Su [Rotten Water] in the southern Crimea. The Khan's residence, with its royal chambers, harem, two mosques, courtyards, baths, embankments, portals, gardens and cemetery, had grown gradually since its establishment in the early sixteenth century, thereby coinciding with the consolidation of the Ottoman hegemony on the peninsula. Its *salsabil* was built in white marble and decorated with reliefwork of rich floral arabesques surrounding a fecundate circle. Surmounted by a curvilinear cornice and with three slender demi-columns on either side, the fountain was placed in a niche (the central and largest of three) in the wall of a beautiful octagonal building with round cupola on a hill above the upper garden terrace of Khan-Saray, the Khan's palace.<sup>2</sup> This was the *türbe*, that is the mausoleum, of Khan Qirim [Krym] Giray's favourite wife, the Georgian Dilara Bikech, a beauty who died tragically young. An inscription by the entrance read 'A Prayer for the Soul laid to rest of the deceased Dilara Bikech'.<sup>3</sup> Above the fountain there is another inscription which is a eulogy to the wise Khan and the healing qualities of the water which he has channelled for the good of all:

To the Glory of the Almighty, a face of Baghçesaray has once again vanished; gloriously built by his Grace, the great Qirim Giray! Through his indefatigable efforts he has given this country water to drink, and with the help of God he has succeeded in more. From the subtlety of his wits he found water and built a beautiful fountain. Whosoever wants to believe, let them come. We ourselves have seen Syria and Baghdad. Oh sheikhs! Whosoever will quench their thirst at this tap, their tongues will utter the phrase: come, drink the clean water, it bears a cure.

The public accessibility of this source was then key. In keeping with this the *türbe* bordered a lane at the extreme south-eastern corner of the palace complex. Those who came there to take the waters or meditate would not impinge upon the privacy of the Tatar court.

In the centre of the fountain there is an Arabic inscription which

gives its original name: *Salsabil*. In the Koran this is a heavenly spring for the souls of the dead to drink from.<sup>4</sup> The word means 'seek the way' and 'swallow pleasantly', for, drinking from the spring, the way is said to open to the magnificent spiritual realm, to the presence of God. This clearly is in keeping with Qirim's idea.

The tradition of the *salsabil* was well established in Islamic architecture. According to such authorities as Tabbaa and Fathy<sup>5</sup> it was a prime element in facilitating mental repose and agility. It could 'elucidate a specifically Islamic Paradise' and common features were 'the alternating stillness and movement of water... the temporarily solid or sculptural appearance of water... [and] the use of water as a thin veil over stone.'<sup>6</sup> Some of the most original examples of the Islamic fountain were to be found in the places noted on the inscription: Iraq and Syria. Their early proliferation around the Black Sea to the south occurred between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The use of apparently still, filled basins contrasting with the flow of the falling (or rising) water was especially significant. Tabbaa suggests: 'the fountains, with their still and moving, solid and ephemeral, controlled and free waters, conveyed to the viewer both a momentary sensuous joy and a more lasting feeling of the inevitability and uncontrollability of change, which in turn leads to meditation about God, the only Permanent and Eternal.'<sup>7</sup> In Baghçesaray the water dropped into a series of nine (a sacred number) basins from a central eye surrounded by petals. From at least the early nineteenth century this has been interpreted (notably in non-Tatar writing) as symbolising the grief of the Khan. Following the movement of the water the theory is that having filled the first large basin that is the 'heart', the 'tears' then spill over into two smaller basins, where their collective stillness represents the relief that comes from crying. However, the sequence from larger to smaller basins is then repeated twice as the water trickles towards the largest basin of all, that on the ground. The message of fragile and yet continuous love appears convincingly in keeping with Qirim's suffering. This, combined with the refinement of the carving and the selection of material, would in turn, be in keeping with one interpretation of the Islamic *salsabil* as a signifier of princely sensitivity, eminence and taste.

Qirim's self-aggrandisement in the fountain and its inscription goes hand in hand with its dedication to his beloved wife and his belief. It came from the Khan who had been Catherine the Great's first and strongest foe in the Crimea, yet who had also, in the very year he built his wife's mausoleum and the *salsabil*, been the first to accept a Russian consul there. He was known as a most able fiscal, cultural and military administrator. He most aggressively and successfully attacked southern Russia in 1769 only to die, possibly by poison, shortly after his return to his base at Qavshan, south of Bender.<sup>8</sup> Qirim was known by contemporaries as the 'last' Khan, though other weaker ones followed. An inscription made on the walls of the palace after his death reveals the

honour accorded him, making it no surprise that the Russians should so quickly seek to make their own stamp on his most venerated shrine:

Qirim Giray Khan, son of his excellency Devlet Giray, the source of peace and security, wise sovereign, his imperial star rose above the glorious horizon. His beautiful Crimean throne gave brilliant illumination to the whole world.<sup>9</sup>

Another, in the cemetery, behind the Great Khan's Mosque, belonged to the sepulchral monument of Qirim: 'Oh God, Always Alive and Eternal! War was the craft of the magnificent Qirim Giray Khan. 1183 [1769]'. In many respects his creation of the *salsabil* as a public fountain and shrine, replete with self-homage, appears modelled on the Fountain of Sultan Ahmed III outside the gates of Topkapisaray in Istanbul. This had been created three and a half decades earlier by the 'Tulip Sultan', the harbinger of Ottoman peace and culture, and another strong foe of the Russians.

The problem was that once the Crimean Khanate had been destroyed by the expanding Russian empire in 1783, as part of Catherine the Great's Greek Project<sup>10</sup>, and the Russians began to restore and visit the palace, the *salsabil* assumed new political and national significance. First, in 1787, it was moved: away from the *türbe*, in its far green corner of the palace complex, and into the most intimate courtyard of the palace, between the khan's chambers and the harem. This really was the hub of the Khanate while under Turkish suzerainty. The transference of the fountain came as part of Potemkin's preparations for Catherine's triumphal tour of her new dominions, in the company of Emperor Joseph of Austria. As far as Bakchisarai was concerned, these involved a major refurbishment undertaken between 1784 and 1787. It was undoubtedly highly significant that architecturally the palace was a Crimean version of the Topkapisaray [Cannongate Palace], the great seraglio and seat of the Ottoman sultans in Catherine's 'destination', Istanbul. The renovation was conducted by the versatile soldier, sailor and future founder and architect of Odessa, the cosmopolitan Joseph de Ribas. His goal was to 'unite "Asian" character with European needs, though apparently French taste prevailed.'<sup>11</sup>

The timber-framed palace began to be altered, in many parts beyond recognition, in order to be turned into the Russian governor's residence. Simultaneously, the *salsabil*, one of only a few stone monuments of the Khanate in Baghçesaray, was not only moved but it began to be written about, not least in the romantic, orientalist poetry of Pushkin and Mickiewicz. Its exotic mystery and form captured the imagination of such colonial visitors.<sup>12</sup> With the help of these and local lore it assumed an alternative title: the Fountain of Maria Potocka.<sup>13</sup> This was in association with the young Polish noblewoman captured during one of the Tatar raids on Poland (though in reality, unless history repeated itself in the 1750s, this was in the late sixteenth century not the mid-eighteenth),

who was taken back to Baghçesaray to enter the harem, becoming a wife of Khan Feth Giray I and mother of Ahmed, a future nureddin and founder of the Koban branch of the Girays. The introduction of Maria into the interpretation was an early nineteenth century romantic diversion, coinciding conveniently with the new Russian rule of the Potockis' homeland and with the anti-royalist noble family who had plotted to unseat the Polish king, to the ultimate advantage of the Russians. According to Pushkin, Maria's arrival in the harem turned the Khan's head and heart away from his Georgian favourite, who was no longer Dilara but Zarema. The upshot was that as Maria, distraught at her captivity, stole into Feth Giray's apartments one night, Zarema threatened her with her dagger and within a few days Maria suddenly was no more (Zarema was drowned the same day).

Whether to beautiful Dilara ('Zarema') or beautiful Maria, both were outsiders compelled into the hub of the Tatar world, both came from areas and people subsequently annexed by Russia, and so the fountain had particular pertinence. In *Bakhchisarai Fountain* Pushkin inferred the sense of false or forced union through envisaging the weeping memorial: 'Surmounted by a cross that blesses The Mohammedan crescent, A symbol, naturally, of impertinence, But born of wretched ignorance'. In fact, only Islam appeared represented on the fountain. Though it had been rumoured that Maria had painted a cross above the crescent in her room, if there was any Christian symbolism about the *salsabil* it was temporary and new, added by the Russian settlers.

It was hardly a surprise that Potemkin would have Qirim's fountain moved and altered in preparation for Catherine's visit, nor that when she arrived she would sit on the Khan's throne - for this seat was the key to the Black Sea (into which the fountain ultimately drained), and with that the dream of capturing Istanbul. The move was essential for the creation of the new myth. For, as Kondakov noted, poorly sited and erected, and with clogged pipes, in its new position its stream turned to a drip, that would allow Pushkin to pronounce 'The water murmurs across the marble, And falls in cold tears that will never cease.' By the time of Pushkin's visit in 1820 they were on the verge of drying up. In any case the flow was long ago stopped.

### Transference transformed

The Tatar Moslem interpretation and function of the Baghçesaray *salsabil* was quickly obfuscated. It was supplanted by the romanticised Russian image of the 'Fountain of Tears', this gaining currency and remaining powerful in Russian and western orientalist culture through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Carl Brulloff [Karl Bryullov], the great Russian artist-aesthete, made it the subject of his homage to Pushkin, *Bakhchisarai Fountain*. This was a monumental painting of odalisques around a pedestaled fountain and pool, upon which he worked

for twelve years, 1838-49, following the death of the poet.<sup>14</sup> It contained nothing like the *salsabil*.

Brulloff was followed by the Moscow artist Vladimir Drittenpreis, a member of the symbolist 'Blue Rose' and 'Golden Fleece' groups, who in 1907 published his drawings of *Bakhchisarai* and *The Fountain of Tears* in the journal *Libra* [Vesyl].<sup>15</sup> In the latter, both within and melding into a frame of abundant foliage, the *salsabil* weeps from an eye over a series of basin as in reality. However, the water then falls down a small sequence of inclined foliated steps to a straight narrow channel that leads to two rectangular pools. These are missing in Baghçesaray. And going by the photograph of the dry fountain in Kondakov's 1898 article, where they are also absent, they would not have been present when Drittenpreis made his drawing. Yet, perhaps in keeping with his being born into an architect's family and his training, the appearance of Drittenpreis's *Fountain of Tears* is actually in keeping with the typical *salsabil* traits as described by Tabbaa. Most particularly, it echoes Tabbaa's thirteenth century examples found across the Black Sea, i.e. at the Artuquid Palace, Diyarbakir; the Al-Firdows Palace, Mardin; and Ayyubid Palace, Aleppo. Still, Drittenpreis, who was of mixed Bavarian-Russian descent, was a decadent. His roses turn into and are threatened by a mass of dominant creeping ivy, submerged within which is a procession of white veiled women-apparitions that approaches the fountain.

Drittenpreis's unsettling, Rococo *Fountain of Tears* iterated a strong sense of the cultural fragility and human frailty felt in the twilight years of Romanov rule. Its view touched a contemporary Russian nerve. Within two years Yakov Protazanov, a future leading director of both early Russian and Soviet cinema, was making his first film: *Bakhchisarai Fountain*. Appropriately it was a black and white silent movie produced by the Gloria Company of Moscow. If the film signalled the flickering end of the *salsabil* in the Tsarist period it was to have one final, magnificent reincarnation in the Soviet era. This was Boris Asafyev's ballet *Bakhchisarai Fountain*, with a libretto by Nikolay Volkov. The original choreography was by Rostislav Zakharov, while the stage and costume designs were by Valentina Khodasevich. First performed at the Kirov Theatre in Leningrad on 22 September 1934, it transferred to Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre in June 1936, and then toured the major Soviet and east European cities until the late 1950s.<sup>16</sup> Its fashion coincided with the period of high Stalinism.

The ballet confirmed that the *salsabil* was the 'Fountain of Maria Potocka'. Its first act (Maria's capture by 'Giray') even takes place in a Polish castle with the music moving from polonaise to mazurka to cracovienne. Its second, marking Maria's arrival in Baghçesaray and Zarema's despair, is accompanied by martial and Caucasian folk music. In the third act Zarema savagely stabs and kills Maria, while in the fourth Giray orders Zarema to be hurled from a cliff. Finally, in the epilogue Giray mourns Maria beside his newly built fountain. He is alone and silent but has a dream of a beautiful woman. Performed by the best dancers



of the age, with Galina Ulanova in the lead role of Maria, the ballet was perfect for the Stalinist era. It became Stalin's favourite. Did he, the steely Georgian despot, executioner and family man, identify with the 'Caucasian' resolve of Zarema or the vigour and sensitivity of the Khan? Did he enjoy the display of power over a western neighbour, and in particular Poland? Whatever Stalin felt, Asafyev's ballet was his most successful. In 1939 it was published and widely disseminated by the State Music Publishing House. This, two years after its hero and heroines had been recreated as sculptures by Elena Yanson-Manizer. Appropriately her nymph-like Marias were made in porcelain, while her most expressive graceful and aggressive interpretations of Zarema and Giray were cast in bronze.

And so ended the transference: a symbol of Crimean Tatar Renaissance transformed into one of Stalinist 'romance'.

<sup>1</sup> For a history of the Khanate, see A. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, Stanford, 1978; A. Bennigsen et al, *Le Khanat de Crimée dans les Archives du Musée du Palais de Topkapi*, Paris, 1978. The latter is particularly useful in detailing the Giray dynasties.

<sup>2</sup> A valuable account of the palace and fountain, which takes issue with their prevailing literary and physical treatment in Russian times, remains N. Kondakov, 'O Bakhchisarayskom dvortse i ego restavratsii', *Iskusstvo i khudozhestvennoye promyshlennost'*, no. 6, March 1899, pp. 435-452. See also V. Gerngross [Vsevolodskiy], 'Khanskiy dvorets v Bakhchisaray', *Starye Gody*, April, 1912. More recent analysis can be found in N. Bogdanova, I. Loboda, *Bakhchisarayskiy istoriko-arkheologicheskiy muzey, Simferopol'*, 1965; and E. Krikun, *Pamyatniki krymskotatarskoy arkhitektury (XIII-XX vv.)*, Simferopol', 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Dilara is a Turkish name meaning lover or heart adorer. Being a Georgian Dilara may have been Moslem or Christian. Generally, the nineteenth century Russian interpretation considered her Christian, and as a martyr to her faith. This may have been supported by a further inscription on her grave, though I have not been able to definitively confirm this.

<sup>4</sup> See The Holy Koran, sura 76, verse 18.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Y. Tabbaa, 'Towards an interpretation of the use of water in Islamic courtyards and courtyard gardens', *Journal of Garden History*, 7, 1987, no. 3, pp. 197-220 and H. Fathy, *Natural Energy and Vernacular Architecture*, Chicago, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Tabbaa, pp. 197-198.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 218. Unlike most of the *salsabils* surveyed by Tabbaa, the Baghçesaray version does not possess a *shadirwan*, a sloping carved marble slab that allowed the water to appear like a veil. Nor does it pour into further channels or pools. It is possible, since the fountain has been moved, that these features did originally exist. However, its distinctive purpose may mitigate against this.

<sup>8</sup> Concerning Qirim's life, achievements and exploits, see Bennigsen, pp. 353-354. He was deposed in 1764, the year he created the *salsabil*, but reinstated four years later. Further details concerning his rapid demise are in A. Fisher, *The Russian annexation of the Crimea 1772-1783*, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 28, 31-32, these being derived from Ottoman sources.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> See D. Shvidkovsky's article in this volume.

<sup>11</sup> Kondakov, p. 447. Born in Naples, de Ribas (1749-1800) was of Spanish and Irish descent.

<sup>12</sup> See Pushkin's 'To the Fountain of Bakhchisarai Palace' (1821) and 'Bakhchisarai Fountain' (1821-3) and Mickiewicz's 'Crimean Sonnets' (1825). The Scot, William Hastie, working for St Petersburg, produced the first detailed architectural survey ('Atlas') of the palace, with plans and elevations, in 1798. This is kept in the Manuscript Department of St Petersburg Public Library (fond 550, OCPK, R XIII, no.6). Pushkin lamented the state of repairs, decay and 'half-European' reconstruction that he witnessed when he visited two decades later.

<sup>13</sup> When Pushkin's *Bakhchisarai Fountain* was variously published in the 1820s it was accompanied by a passage from Ivan Murav'ev-Apostol's *Tauride Journey* (1823) in which the author maintained that all the local inhabitants insisted to him that the memorial was to Maria Potocka.

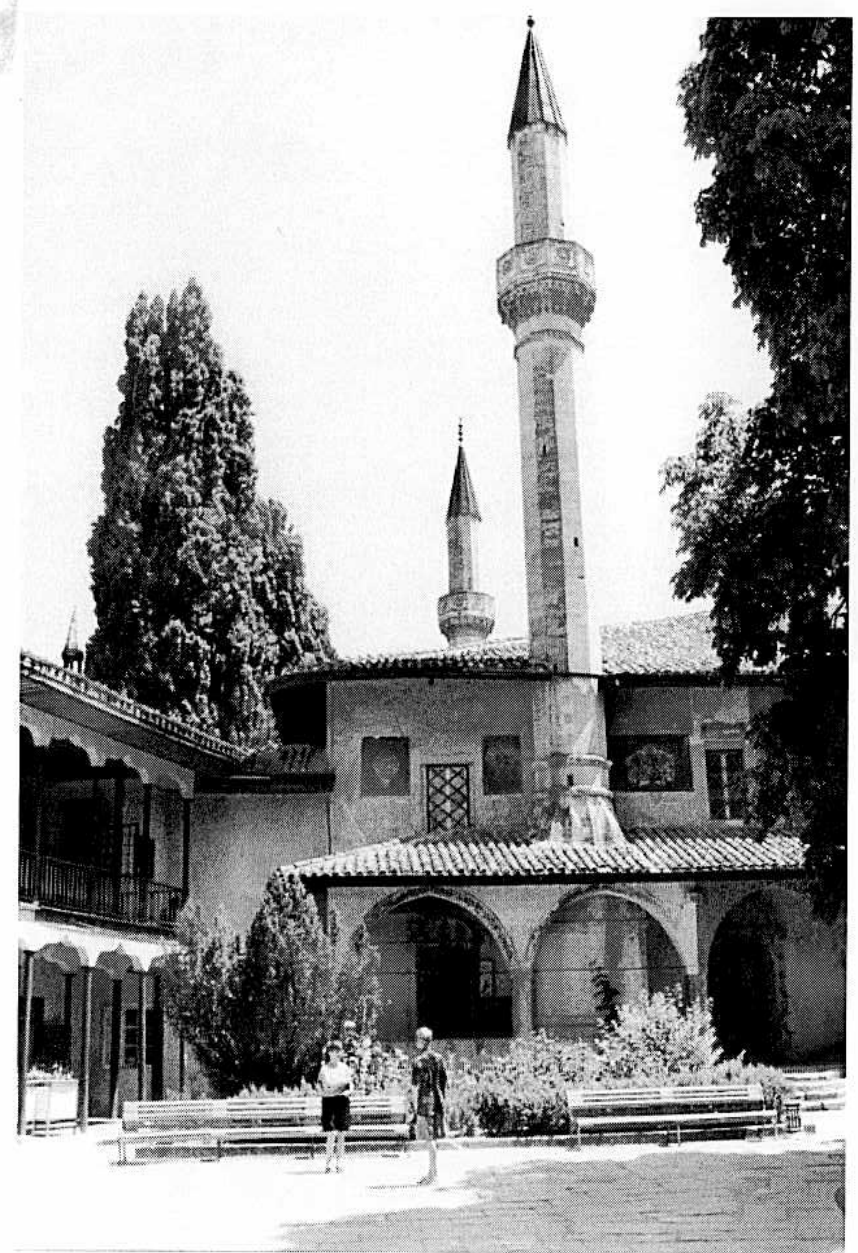
<sup>14</sup> The painting is now in the collection of the All-Russian Museum of Alexander Pushkin, St Petersburg.

<sup>15</sup> Vesey, St Petersburg, 1907, no. 10. He also exhibited them at February 1908 show of the New Society of Artists in St Petersburg. A few months later Dr. Drehtenpreis graduated as an architect from the Moscow College of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. He also studied painting at the college. Between 1909 and 1911 he continued his architectural studies at the St Petersburg Academy. At the time of his Bakhchisarai drawings he also decorated the hall of the Moscow Literary Art Circle, home to the 'Free Aesthetics' Society, which he also joined in 1907.

<sup>16</sup> Is it significant, given its potent semantics, that in the post-Soviet period it has been revived and toured to the 'west'?

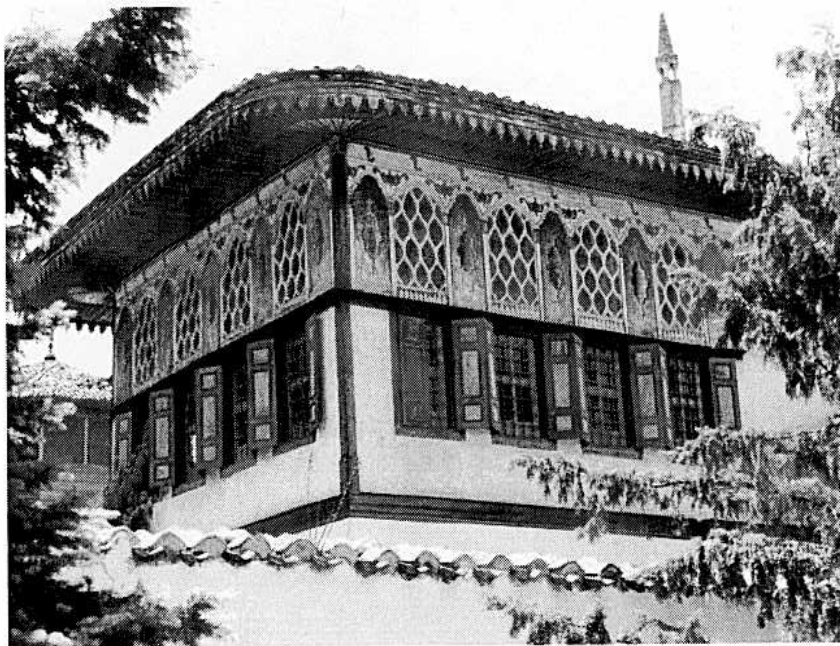


*Two Roses do I bring to Thee, O Fountain of Love, Fountain Alive':  
The Baghçesaray Salsabil in its current site with Bust and Two Roses of Pushkin*

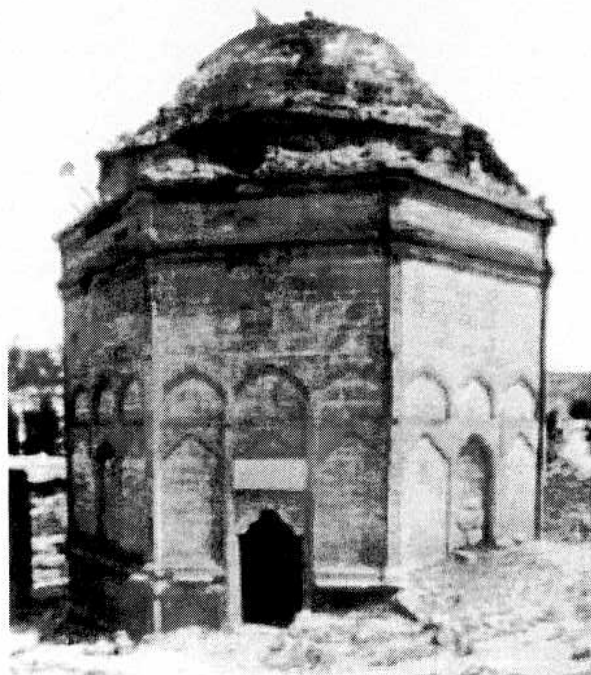


*Baghçesaray Palace Great Mosque*

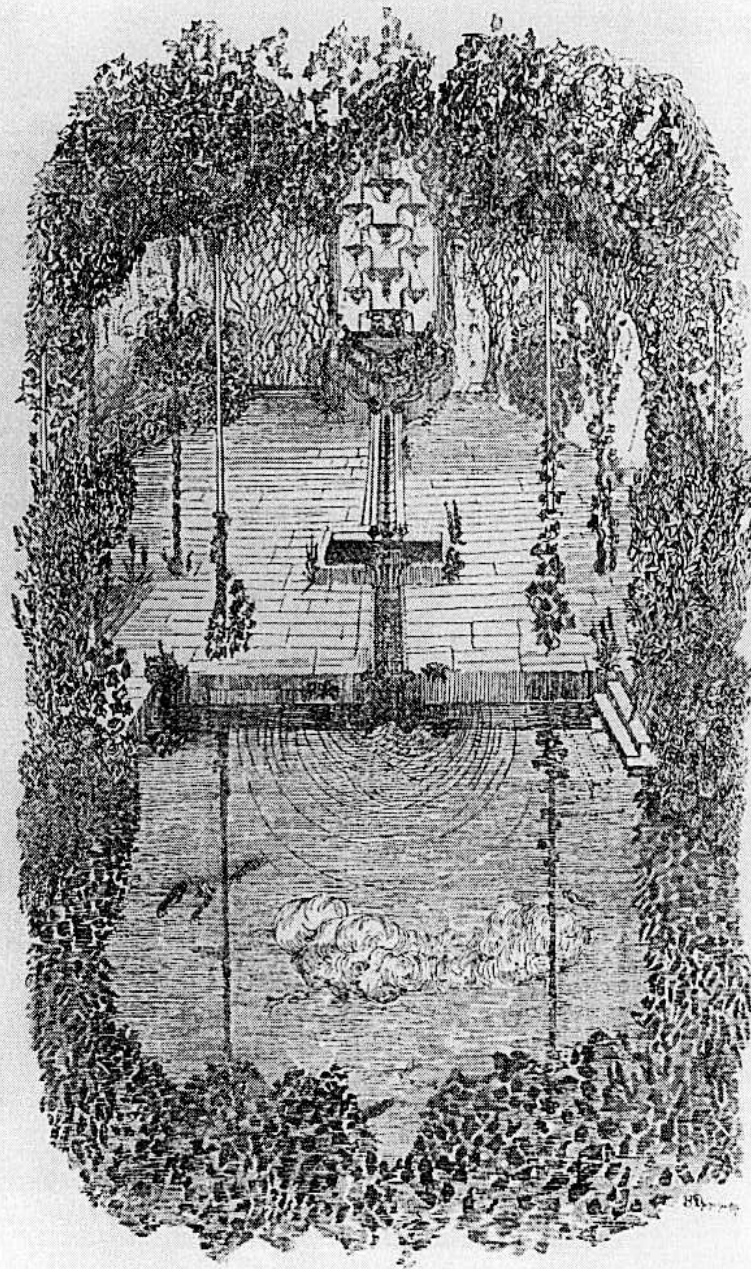




*Baghçesaray Golden Chambers. Exterior*



*Mausoleum of Dilara Bikech. Photograph c. 1898*



*Vladimir Drittenpreis, The Fountain of Tears. Published in Vesy, no. 10, 1907*



*Elena Yanson-Manizer, Zarema, 1937, bronze (Valentina Kaminskaya in the ballet Bakhchisarai Fountain).*



*Elena Yanson-Manizer, Gergy, 1937, bronze (M. M. Mikhaylov in the ballet Bakhchisarai Fountain).*



*Elena Yanson-Manizer, Maria, 1946, porcelain (Galina Ulanova in the ballet Bakhchisarai Fountain).*