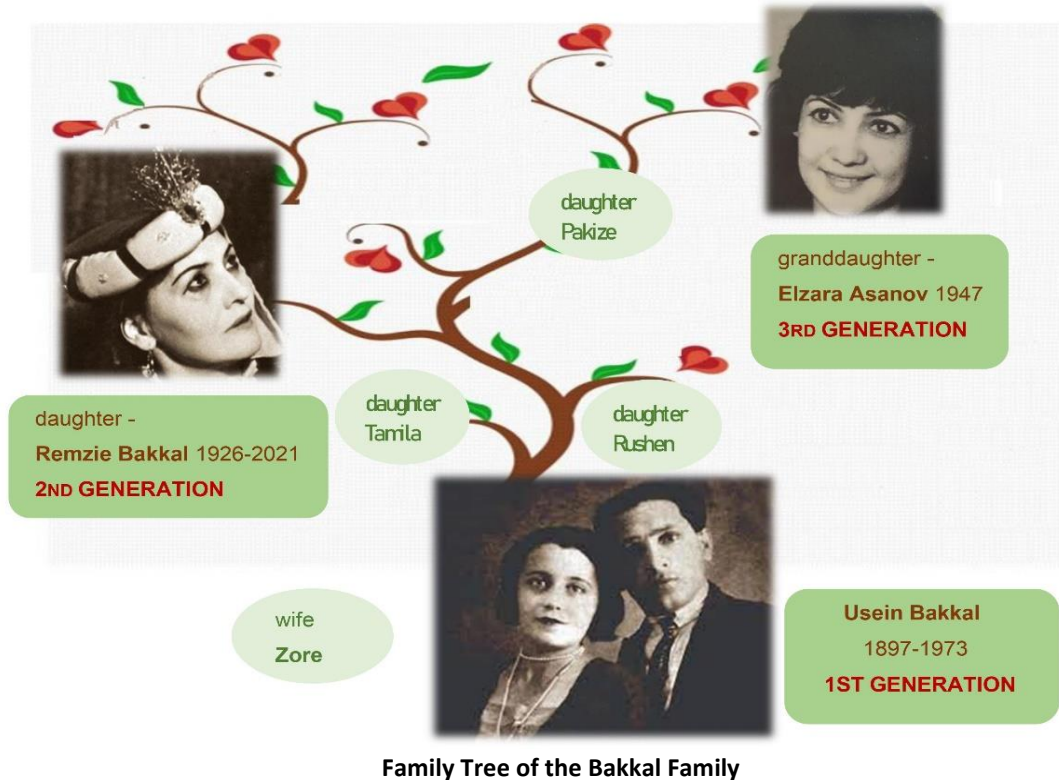


Historical overview of Crimean Tatar choreography through the lives of the Bakkal family



By Ulvie Seitosmanova*

I have been studying Crimean Tatar dances since I was 5 years old. Over time, I became interested in the history of Crimean Tatar choreography. Last year, our assignment was to study the role of the Crimean Tatar choreography in preserving the culture of the people in the twentieth century. The study won the first place in the all-Ukrainian competition MAN [Small Academy of Sciences] - Junior Researcher and was published in SHUV [School for the Young Scientist], No. 3-4 in 2020.

The study explores the theme of the history of Crimean Tatar choreography and is dedicated to the three generations of the Bakkal family: the outstanding choreographer Usein Bakkal, his daughter Remzie Bakkal and his granddaughter Elzara Asanova. The fate of this family is an extremely vivid example of how during the terrible events of the twentieth century they were able to preserve their love of folk dance and passed it on to future generations. (Figure 1)

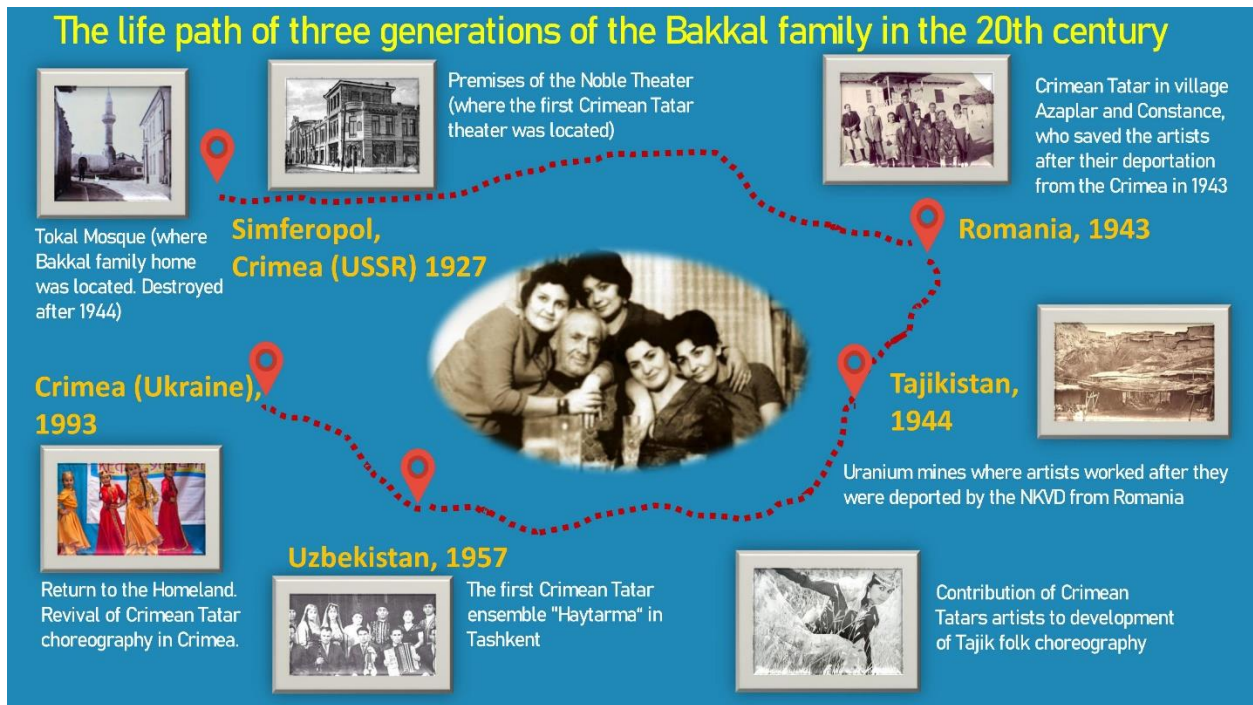


Figure 1. The life path of three generations of the Bakkal Family in the 20th century

The purpose of the study: To examine the unique role of the Bakkal family in preserving the folk choreography of the Crimean Tatars and the dancing skills of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan against the background of twentieth century events in the Soviet Union.

Task:

- Investigate the historical events in the life of the Bakkal family in the twentieth century.
- Analyze the Bakkal family's contributions to the development of dance in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- Assess the historical role of the Bakkal family in the preservation and development of Crimean Tatar choreography.

Usein Bakkal was born in Simferopol, in the neighborhood of the Tokal Jami (Mosque), to a family of grocers. Since childhood, he loved to dance. Alina Pidlipska, a well-known Ukrainian researcher in choreography, points to the unique role of weddings in the development of folk dances. [4] Therefore, it is no coincidence that Bakkal's dancing skills were improved during weddings and folk festivals, where he performed with great pleasure. (Figure 2)

When the Crimean Tatar Theater was first established in Crimea in 1923, Usein Bakkal immediately began working there as an actor and dance soloist. At this time, Russian and Tatar groups took turns working in the building of the former Noble Theater.

At the World Festival of Folk Art in Frankfurt on Main (Germany) in 1927, Usain Bakkal was recognized as a laureate. [5] After that he was appointed chief choreographer of the Crimean Tatar Theater. He staged compositions such as "Legend of the Mermaid," "Hodja Nasreddin," and "Shepherds." In 1937, a Crimean Tatar ensemble was organized and Usein Bakkal became the main choreographer of the ensemble. [6]



Figure 2. Crimean Tatar folk dance

Despite the outward peace of life, the years 1936-1938 were a very terrible period. On April 17, 1938, dozens of members of the Crimean Tatar intelligentsia were executed in the Simferopol prison on charges of nationalism. The cultural life of the people became severely curtailed for many years. Usein Bakkal miraculously avoided arrests during this terrible time.

World War II began. In June 1941, some artists were called to serve on the Soviet front. Others were sent on tour to visit military units and hospitals. The ensemble performed in the open field, on improvised stages and platforms. The ensemble returned to Simferopol on October 29, 1941, and on November 2 the German troops entered the city. An underground group operated in the Tatar theater, despite the threat of arrest and execution. Even under these conditions, Usein Bakkal tried to continue his creative activity and staged performances of "Golden Cradle" and "Bakhchisaray Fountain."

In the winter of 1943, the German occupiers began to retreat. The theater staff was forcibly sent to Romania under the threat of execution. Remzie Bakkal recalls: "Many people died on the way, many drowned in the sea! Winter, hunger, cold, fear ... Those who did not want to go were shot on the spot..." [5] In Bucharest, they were met at the train station by Crimean Tatars living in the village of Azaplar near Constanta. With their help, the artists managed to stay in Romania, and when Soviet troops liberated the area in 1944, they were handed to the Soviet commander's office as refugees. After that, the artists were sent to a filtration camp in Bolgrad, where they

looked forward to returning to Crimea. But they did not know that on May 18, 1944, the entire Crimean Tatar people had been deprived of their rights and deported mostly to Uzbekistan. The artists of the Crimean Tatar Theater were deported to Tajikistan, where they began mining uranium ore for the Soviet Union's atomic bomb project. Workers were gathered from the "punished peoples." Attempting to escape work camp was a crime punishable for 25 years in Siberian camps.



Figure 3. Remzie Bakkal

But in 1948, the entire Crimean Tatar troupe was arrested and sentenced to 25 years in prison camps. Only Remzie, Usein's daughter, escaped arrest because she was only 19 years old. (Figure 3) She took care of her sister Pakize's five-year-old daughter. Remzie continued to work in the music and drama theater. Her performance of Tajik dances was a big hit for the audience. [5] Since her father had been arrested, in 1952 the theater's management felt threatened and demanded that she renounce her father's surname and never mention that she was a Crimean Tatar. Remzie refused. Her popularity as the best dancer of Tajik dances saved her from dismissal.

Seven years later, after Stalin's death in 1954, the regime of "special settlers" was lifted for the Crimean Tatars. Crimean Tatar artists who were fired and were now allowed to work in their profession. They were able to travel within Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. However, the mention of their nationality and history was still forbidden. Even worse was the punishment for any attempt to return to homeland Crimea.

Immediately after their release from the camps, famous dancers, musicians, and singers decided to create a professional Crimean Tatar ensemble. The authorities allowed this but banned the use of the word "Crimean Tatar" in the ensemble's name. Then the artists gave it the symbolic name Haytarma from the most popular and beloved folk dance of the Crimean Tatars. "Haytarma" means "return" in Crimean Tatar. Therefore, this name of the ensemble and its

performances constantly reminded the Crimean Tatars of their dream and longing for the homeland Crimea.

In 1957 the best artists of the pre-war Crimea gathered in the first line-up of Haytarma, namely: S. Eredzhepov, E. Topchi, S. Chelebiev, A. Krymtaev, A. Dzhemilev, G. Degirmendzhi, G. Gvardeev, G. Akhmadulin , R. Asanov, S. Mamutov, and A. Sattarov. [12] The first dances were staged under the direction of Usein Bakkal, which marked the beginning of the revival of Crimean Tatar choreography.

The difficult life during the occupation, resettlement, unrest and the years spent in prison undermined the health of Usein Bakkal. In 1973, without seeing his native Crimea, the prominent Crimean Tatar choreographer Usein Bakkal died in exile. Despite all the terrible events, he was able to pass on to his children the skills and love of the Crimean Tatar folk dances. (Figure 4)

Remzie was awarded the title of Honored Artist of Tajikistan in 1963, and the title of People's Artist of Tajikistan 23 years later. In the last years before returning to the Crimea in 1991, she worked as the chief choreographer of the Tajik Musical Theater Lahuti.



Figure 4. Elzara and her father Usein Bakkal

The granddaughter of Usein Bakkal, Elzara, began working at the Opera and Ballet Theater Sadriddin Aini in Dushanbe (Tajikistan), where she danced in performances such as "Swan Lake," "Don Quixote," and "Cleopatra." She later became a soloist of the ensemble, and in 1977, for her significant contribution to the development of national choreographic art, Elzara Asanova was awarded the title of Honored Artist of Tajikistan. She recalls: "I could perform Tajik, Uzbek, Turkish, Indian, Arabic, and Gypsy dances...." [13]

In the early 1990s, after the collapse of the USSR, about 300,000 Crimean Tatars (including my family) left their homes, good jobs and friends, and returned to Crimea. This is considered a unique historical phenomenon, when many families of the entire nation traveled thousands of kilometers to return home after fifty years in exile.

Remzie Bakkal, 65, also decided to return to Crimea. The first years in Crimea for the Bakkal family, as for most Crimean Tatars, were very difficult. But she never regretted returning home. In 1991, she founded together with the famous violinist Dilaver Bekirov the ensemble "Crimea" in Simferopol. In 1993, at the age of 67, she was invited to be the chief choreographer of the Haytarma ensemble. [12] The same ensemble that was first created by her father, Usein Bakkal, in 1939.

Hundreds of concerts, regular rehearsals and tours, the development of new choreographic compositions, all managed by Remzie Bakkal. It seems incredible that Remzie Bakkal successfully worked as the main choreographer of the Haytarma ensemble until the age of 94. (Figure 5)

Unfortunately, on April 7, 2021, after decades of great work to develop the choreography of the Crimean Tatar people and folk dances in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the bright life of Remzie Bakkal came to an end. But the talents of Remzie Bakkal and her active life inspired a new generation of talented Crimean Tatar choreographers and dancers. These are Dzhemile Osmanova, Munir Ablav, Dinara Arslanova, Edie Ablava and others. Currently, more than 5,000 children and young people (in Crimea and as IDP's in Ukraine) are engaged in the dance groups inspired by these choreographers.



Figure 5. Crimean Tatar dancers performing at the Hansaray, Crimea

The granddaughter of Usein Bakkal – Elzara Asanov, also returned to Crimea and created in 1994 the women's dance ensemble "Guldeste" (Flower Garden). More than a thousand children and young people learned Crimean Tatar dances as well as Uzbek, Turkish, Ukrainian, Jewish, Indian, Arabic and Gypsy dances in the ensemble "Guldeste." [13].

Conclusion:

The Bakkal family, despite hardships, humiliation, poverty, expulsion from their homeland and even the risk of losing their national identity, managed to preserve and revive the Crimean Tatar choreographic culture. (Figure 6) The preservation of native culture took different forms, varying from amateur dances at weddings to artistic performances on the stage of professional theaters. Learning another culture does not necessitate losing one's own culture. The Bakkal family utilized

their talents in enhancing the culture of the people among whom they lived. And this helped them to preserve their native Crimean Tatar choreography.

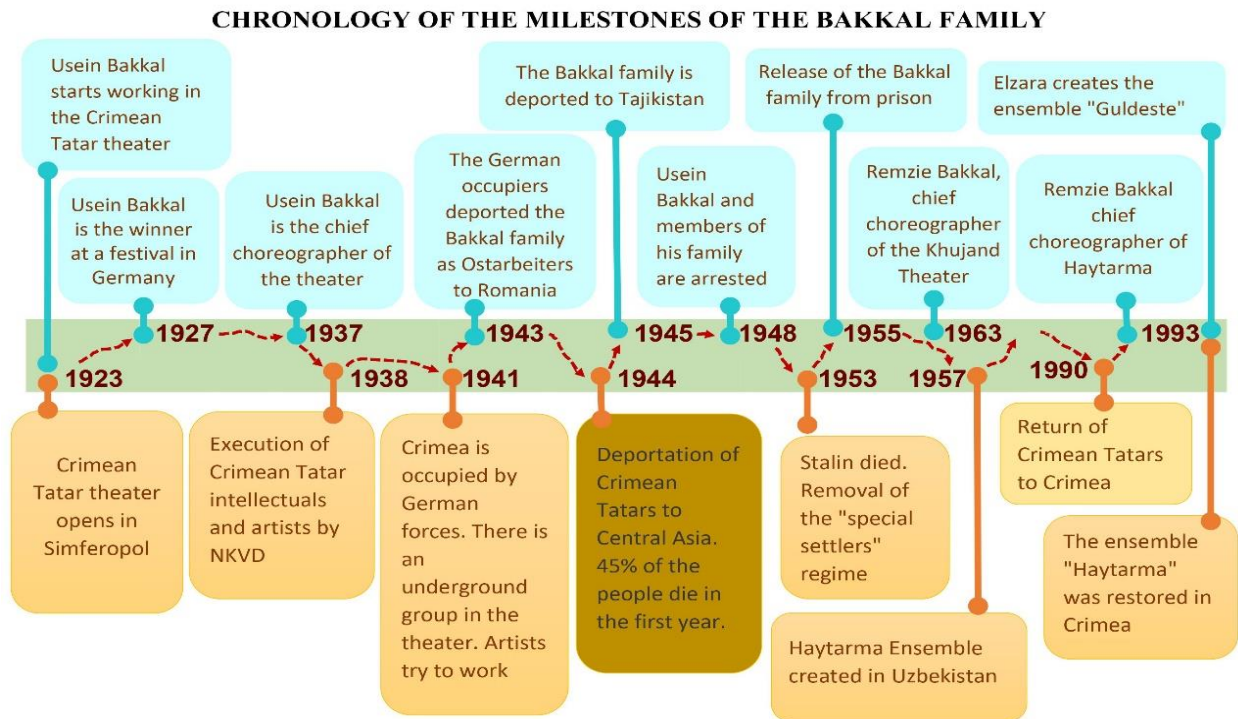


Figure 6. Chronology of the Bakkal Family

* As an 8th grade student at the Kryukivshchyna Secondary School in Kyiv, Ulvie Seitosmanova won an award at a national competition in Ukraine. Her project involving the contributions of the Bakkal Family to the preservation and revival of Crimean Tatar choreography was awarded the first place at the All Ukrainian "Young Researcher-History" competition in 2021. Ms. Seitosmanova was born in 2007 in Crimea to a Crimean Tatar family, who had returned to their homeland after living in exile for nearly 50 years. Seitosmanova started performing Crimean Tatar dances at the age of five and participated in various festivals in Ukraine and abroad. Her family relocated to Kyiv following the Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014. She plans to continue her studies at the choreographic college at the Academy of Arts named after Pavlo Chubynsky in Kyiv.

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