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University Honors Program
University of South Florida
St. Petersburg, Florida

Certificate of Approval

Honors Thesis

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on August 24, 2001


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THE UKRAINIAN COSSACKS

by

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*A thesis submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for the University Honors Program
University of South Florida*

August, 2001

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The Ukrainian Cossacks

“A perpetual fear, a perpetual danger
inspired them with a contempt towards life.”
M. Gogol in “Taras Bulba”

Who are those who defended the city gates of Vienna from the Turkish invasion of 1683? Who founded the first democratic state according to Karl Marx? What historical figure in this group honors with his name an airport in Paris? The group was known as the Ukrainian Cossacks - both a controversial and important group in Ukraine and Eastern Europe. And the historical figure is Pylyp Orlyk, the founder of the first Ukrainian Constitution in 1709.

Who were the Cossacks? Although their definition ranges from freebooters and Turkish renegades, to unruly brutes and murderers, to Ukrainian freedom fighters, they were definitely a force and left a long-lasting impact over the centuries. The focus of my thesis is on the undeniable power and influence of Ukrainian Cossacks upon the entire region of Eastern Europe and the fate of Turkish invasion of all of the Europe. Cossacks' actions created many controversial images from the differing points of view of their neighbors: “fearless warriors, unmatched in their military skills” in the eyes of Cossacks enemies – Turks and Tatars; “cruel and vicious villains” in the Polish and Jewish perspectives; and “glorified freedom lovers and fighters” in the heart of any Ukrainian. The fact that those, rather vivid and strongly felt images of Cossacks exist is very proof of the Cossacks' powerful influence. The first chapter of my thesis acquaints a reader with historical events that evoked and furthered the genesis of Cossackdom in Ukraine, while the second part discusses the existing images and portrayals of Cossacks in Ukrainian, Russian and Polish folklore.

History of Ukrainian Cossacks

Chapter One: Genesis of Cossackdom

From its earliest history, Ukraine, situated on the direct route from southern Asia to the heart of Europe, was crossed by countless invaders. In that vast frontier, which in the 16th century was referred to as *okraina* – the land on the periphery of the civilized world – the age-old struggle of the sedentary population against the nomads flared up with intensity, fueled by the bitter confrontation between Christianity and Islam¹.

In the year of 1240 Kievan Rus', once a flourishing Christian state, which had had ties with Alfred's England and the glittering Byzantium of the Emperors, had fallen to a horde of Tatar horsemen. For two hundred years not only Ukraine but all of Eastern Europe lived under the terrible menace of the Golden Horde. Year after year the swift raiding parties of Tatars swept down on the towns and villages to pillage, kill the old and frail, and drive away thousands of captives. Ukrainian folk songs reflected the numbing impact of these raids:

“This night at midnight, before the cocks had crowed
The Tatars flew like the wind into our village
This night at midnight, an evil came to pass
When the wild Turkic band plundered all our land.”²

A single Tatar invasion destroyed the whole labor of the soil-tiller, meadows and wheat-fields were trodden down by horses or destroyed by flame, habitations were reduced to the ground, and people were slaughtered or driven off into captivity together with their cattle. The captives were dragged away to be sold as slaves in the Crimean port of Kaffa,

¹ Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 105

² Berezovsky, *Istoria Ukrainu v Narodnih Dumah ta Pisnyah*, p. 63

a city referred to by Ukrainians as “the vampire that drinks the blood of Rus’.” Sturdy boys were sold into training for Turkish janissary corps, strong men were to serve a lifetime chained to an oar of a Mediterranean galley, and young women were to enrich a khan’s harem. It was a land of terror, which desperately needed warlike people who were strong in their unity and trained to fight. Cossacks later became such a warlike people.

In the 16th century, inhabitants of western Ukrainian lands were under direct jurisdiction of the Polish government and oppression by Polish *szlachta* (Polish term for nobility) and the Jewish leaseholders. The oppressive conditions and mythology of Ukrainian freedom attracted rebellious individuals to the steppe, who preferred the dangers of frontier life to serfdom. They were also attracted by *slobody*, free of obligation land, given out by Polish magnates in their efforts to colonize the depopulated lands of the Dnieper basin. Inhabitants of the newly colonized regions grew bolder, more self-reliant and more militarily skilled than their western counterparts, since the first ones often had to plow their lands with muskets at their sides in case of Tatar attack. Their children, who had never known serfdom, grew up believing that they were free men who owed no obligations to anyone.

Frontiersmen were not uncommon in early modern Eastern Europe. Cossacksom developed along the Don River in Russia as well as along the Dnieper in Ukraine. Roughly analogous social groups evolved in Hungary, Croatia and other Christian land on the unsettled frontier with the Ottoman Empire. But nowhere did these peripheral classes come to play such a central role in their respective societies, as did the Cossacks in Ukraine. The Polonization of the Ukrainian elite drew Ukrainian Cossacks into a role

that was fulfilled elsewhere by the nobles. Consequently, the Cossacks became a key figure not only in the history of Ukraine, but also in Ukrainian national consciousness.³

A new class of Cossack-frontiersmen, composed of refugees and renegades, emerged. Cossacks, who settled at the Dnieper basin (Zaporozhians) dealt primarily with attacks of Crimean Tatars. Later formed Don and Kazan Cossacks (Russian Cossacks) fought against Astrahan and Kazan Tatar Khanates.⁴ Initially the Cossacks concentrated on pushing back the Tatars. But as they whetted their military and organizational skills and won ever more impressive victories against the Tatars and their Ottoman Turkish overlords, Cossacks became not only champions against the Muslim threat, but also defenders against the oppression of the Polish *szlachta*.

³ Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 9

⁴ Longworth, *The Cossacks*, pp. 12-13

Chapter Two: Zaporozhian Cossacks

Origin of the name "Cossacks" is debatable. Many historical sources suggest that the word came from the Turkish *kazak* of *gazzag*, meaning free warrior or vagrant.⁵ Indeed, the first people to be systematically called Cossacks were Tatars, renegades from the Khan's armies, who in the 15th century were hired by Lithuanian and Muscovite rulers, or who robbed independently. Yet by 1493 the Crimean Khan used the term to apply to Ruthenians who, in the service of Lithuanian Prince Glinsky, attacked a Turkish fortress.⁶ According, to Hrushevsky, the name Cossack had originated among the steppe people and was used to describe one who lived on booty. At first it was applied chiefly to nomadic Tatars, but was later transferred to Ukrainian freebooters.⁷

Cossacks were first evident to observers as frontier fighters. Beginning with the sacking of Kiev in 1482 by the Crimean Tatars, early Cossacks built a chain of forts to guard the borders. In 1492 the Crimean Khan complained that the Ruthenians had seized a Tatar ship, and the Lithuanian Grand Duke Alexander promised to make an investigation regarding the seizure. In 1499 charter of Kiev Cossacks were described as emigrants from the northern part of Ukraine who went into steppes to fish and then returned to Kiev with abundant supplies of fresh and salted fish. It is evident that Cossacks engaged in many kinds of activity; they were known as steppe traders, as freebooters and soldiers hired by the governors of frontier towns for expeditions against Turkish forts.⁸ Cossacks were not widely known at this time, primarily because the term referred to an occupation and not to a distinct class of people. Their ranks included

⁵ Gordon, *Cossack Rebellions*, p. 61

⁶ Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 112

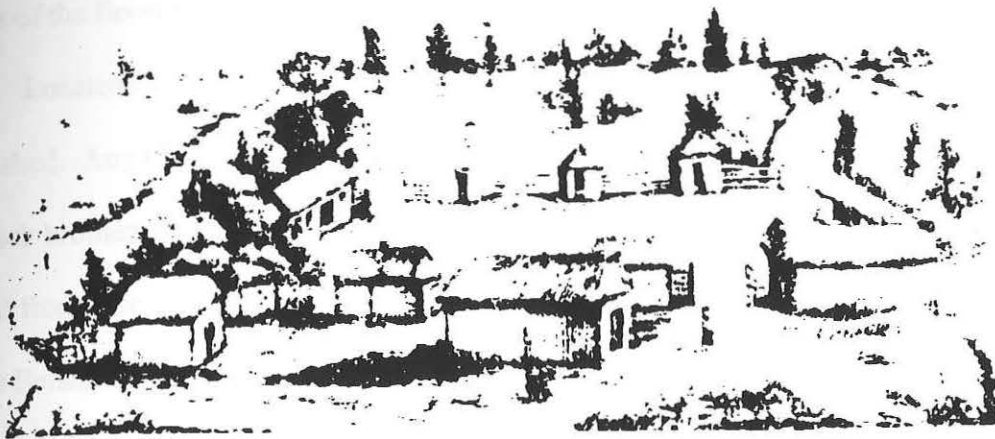
⁷ Hrushevsky, *History of Ukraine*, p. 151

⁸ Hrushevsky, *History of Ukraine*, p. 154

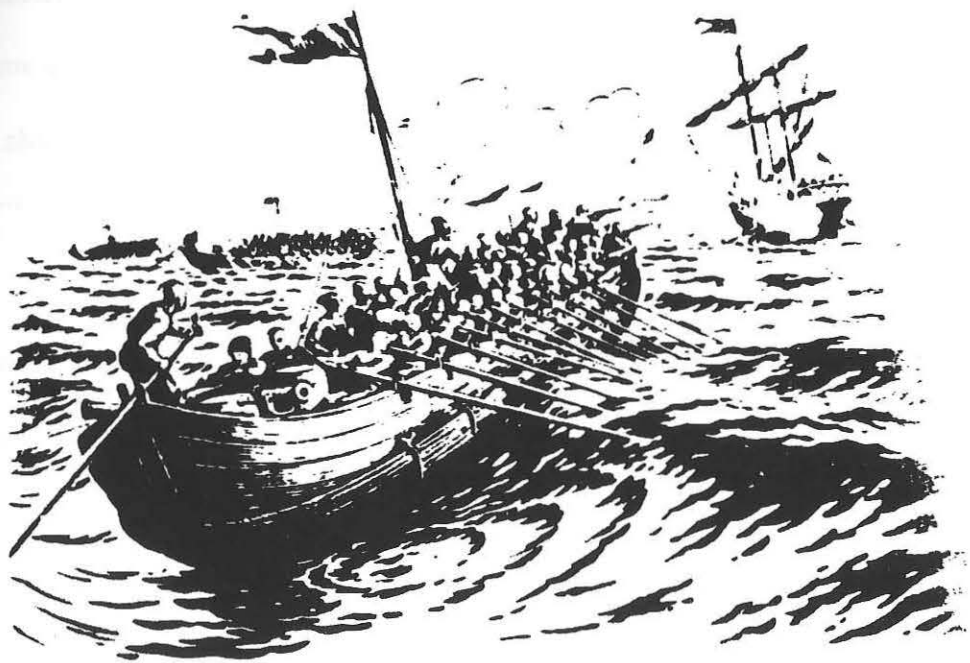
townspeople, farmers, impoverished gentry and even nobles and princes. In this early stage of Cossack genesis, foreign observers did not identify Cossacks as culturally distinct, but rather as traders or soldiers.

Ukraine, like other frontiers, attracted certain kinds of personalities. Only exceptional people and usually not the poorest leave their homelands for the unknown. On the other hand, Ukraine was also legendary for its fertility. The rich wilderness of Ukrainian land attracted the brave souls who dared to occupy the steppes in spite of the danger of the Tatar sword, and to fight for the sake of freedom, the wealth of the soil, and land without a landlord. As Linda Gordon observed: "The attraction of potential prosperity explained why the archetypal Cossack has two sides: fearless and hopeful, free-spirited and ambitious, independent and self-serving, anti-authoritarian and aggressive."⁹

Zaporozhian Sich. Cossacks built their own fortified centers, called *sich*, to protect against Tatars' attacks. The first *sich* was built on the island of Little Khortitsia (*Mala Khortytisia*) in the river Dnieper under the hetman Dmitro Vishnevetsky in about 1552. Because the first *sich* and the several subsequent ones were set up beyond the rapids (in Ukrainian: *za porohamy*), the Cossacks living there soon came to be known as the Zaporozhian Cossacks. This name was applied in order to distinguish them from other Cossacks who at the same time had begun to develop in similar circumstances further east along the southern Muscovite frontier and who were known as Don Cossacks. The land on both sides of the Dnieper River where the Zaporozhian Cossacks established their *sich* military fortresses was called *Zaporozhia*. The series of rapids on the river Dnieper provided security to the inhabitants of *Zaporozhia*, by forming a serious obstacle



Zaporozhian winter village. *Istoria Ukrainskoi Kultury*, Winnipeg, 1964. "Cossack Rebellions" Linda Gordon, Albany, 1983.



Cossack boats in battle. From Podhorodecki, *Sicz Zaporoska*, Warsaw, 1978. "Cossack Rebellions" Linda Gordon, Albany, 1983.

to navigation. The river was navigable to the practiced Zaporozhians only for a few weeks of the flood season, and not at all to foreigners.¹⁰

Located far beyond the reach of government authorities, *Zaporozhian Sich* flourished. Any Christian man, irrespective of his social background was free to join the Cossack brotherhood. Women and children, regarded as a hindrance in the steppe, were barred from entry. Cossacks developed decision-making forms quite different from those of the Polish or any neighboring government at that time. Cossacks carried an inherently democratic tradition from old Rus' in their general meetings, called *radas*. All men had equal rights and could participate in the frequent boisterous councils, which elected and, with equal ease, deposed the Cossack leadership: *hetman* (commander-in-chief), *osavuly* (adjuncts), *pysar* (chancellor), *obozny* (quartermaster), and *suddia* (judge).¹¹ Zaporozhia became to be known as a fortadel of freedom and elevated knightly spirit, with its logo: "We shall never bend low before anyone except the Lord God and only of our free will."¹²

The military prowess of the Zaporozhians was the basis of their social organization, which was largely determined by their military functions. However, as a group, Cossacks were also a self-conscious fraternity and not simply a product of military activity. "By using kinship as a metaphor for loyalty, Cossacks were able to demand powerful commitments from their members," noted Linda Gordon.¹³ "There is no bond more holy than that of a comradeship!... ties that are not of blood but of the soul!" says Taras Bulba in Gogol's novel. Zaporozhian Cossacks developed a rich culture of secret

⁹ Gordon, p.13

¹⁰ Hryshevsky, *History of Ukraine*, p. 156; Magosci, *History of Ukraine*, p. 170

¹¹ Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 110

ceremonies and rituals encouraging a sense of the value of belonging. Gulliaume Beauplan, a French cartographer and historian, describes Cossacks' initiation ceremonies, secret symbols of rank known only to some, taboos and fetishes, and highly organized leisure activity, such as competitive active games, which were simultaneously providing for training.¹⁴

In 1621, during the reign of Hetman Sahaidachnyi, the Orthodox metropolitan, Iov Boretskyi characterized Cossacks in his manifesto as "chivalrous men of our race, of our kin, and true Orthodox Christians, descendants of the glorious [Kievan] Rus, of the seed of Japheth, who fought Byzantine on land and on sea, of the warlike race which under Oleh, the Rus' monarch, attacked Constantinople. They are the same as those who with Volodymyr, the sainted king of Rus', conquered Greece, Macedonia, Illyria. Their ancestors, together with Volodymyr, were baptized and accepted Christianity from the church at Constantinople, and even to this day they are born, baptized and live in this faith."¹⁵

Cossacks raids against the Ottomans. By the late 16th century, as a result of the Cossacks' attacks against the Tatars and the Ottoman Turks, the image of the Cossacks among Ukrainians changed from "freebooters" to "defenders of Orthodox faith and people against infidels." The inhabitants of Ukraine were not the only ones who suffered at the hands of the Muslim Turks. All of 16th-century Europe shuddered at the very thought of an invasion by the Ottomans who, in 1526, had devastated Hungary and had almost captured Vienna. A large part of Eastern Europe remained directly exposed to

¹² Siundiukov, "Iliia Repin's Zaporozhian Cossacks: Hymn in Praise of a Free People". Daily newspaper "The Day."

¹³ Gordon, *Cossack Rebellions*, p.82

¹⁴ Beauplan, *Description d'Ukraine*, pp. 440-486

Tatar raids. Therefore, anyone who dared to challenge the *bisurmany*, as the Muslims were referred to in Ukraine, was sure to win sympathy at home and fame from their neighbors. Although they certainly reveled in the fame, Cossacks also had pragmatic reasons for launching raids: they pushed the Tatars away from their settlements and the booty they captured from the Ottomans was a rich supplement to their incomes. Infuriated by occasional Cossacks raids, the Ottomans attacked the Ukrainian land even more. As a result Cossacks attacks became more frequently and mercilessly.

In particular, Cossacks were praised as defenders against Turkish slave traders by Ukrainians and Eastern European people, who suffered from Ottomans. The slave trade became important in the 16th century, and one of the primary Ukrainian grievances against Tatars was their kidnapping of Ukrainian women, men and children for the lucrative Turkish slave markets. Not only Ukraine but also all Eastern Europe lived under the terrible menace of Turkish conquest and Tatar devastation. The Tatars subjected all of southeastern Europe and turned thousands of people into slaves. Tatars were selling slaves in all the Crimean cities, but especially in Kaffa, "a heathen giant who feeds on our blood," as one Lithuanian author called the city.¹⁶ Because of their anti-Turkish activity, Cossacks became popular heroes, whose deeds were commemorated in many Ukrainian songs and stories.

Cossacks were certainly a military power. The earliest record of their sea invasion dates back to 1538, when a Cossack flotilla partially destroyed the Ottoman fortress of Ochakiv. In subsequent years, the Cossacks launched increasing numbers of these raids, gaining great fame, since the Ottoman Empire was at the time the most

¹⁵ Hrushevsky, *Istoria Ukrainu-Rusy*, pp.391-; Magosci, p.188

¹⁶ Hryshevsky, *History of Ukraine*, p. 161

powerful state in the world. The Cossacks attacks against the Turks reached a high point between 1600 and 1620. The most audacious blow was in 1615 when, within the sultan and his 30,000 garrison's view, about 80 Cossack boats managed to slip into Constantinople harbor, burn it, and make their escape. In 1620 they repeated the act. Meanwhile, in 1616 Kaffa, the city of the slave trade in the Crimea, was taken and thousands of slaves freed.¹⁷ In describing Cossack ventures, Naima, a 17th-century Ottoman historian, notes: "One can state with certainty that there are no people on earth who care less about life and have less fear of death than they. Military experts claim that this rabble, because of its bravery and skill, is unmatched in sea-warfare by anyone in the world."¹⁸ Cossacks' nautical dexterity, as noted by Henry Krasinski was also outstanding: "At sea, they directed their course without the aid of any nautical instruments, and solely by the guidance of the stars, and this with a regularity and precision difficult to be conceived – presaging winds, calms, and tempests, with mathematical exactness."¹⁹

Mercenary Diplomacy. The military prowess of the Cossacks gained them an international reputation. Starting in the 1570s, Cossacks became an active force in eastern European politics.²⁰ The neighboring rulers started to hire them as mercenaries, which furthermore built Cossacks' strength and confidence. In 1583 Zaporozhian Cossacks submitted a project to the Vatican for anti-Turkish action. From 1593 to 1595 Cossacks made seven military and piracy expeditions into Turkish and Tatar lands. In 1593 the Habsburgs of Austria sent an envoy to the Sich to conclude a pact for a coordinated attack against Ottoman forces in Moldavia. Cossacks particularly benefited

¹⁷ Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, pp. 112-113

¹⁸ Hrushevsky, *Istoria Ukrainu-Rusy*, p. 302

¹⁹ Krasinski, *The Cossacks of Ukraine*, pp. 21-22

²⁰ Poe, "The Zaporozhian Cossacks in Western Print to 1600," p. 543

from the 1593 war between Turkey, aided by the Crimean Khanate, and the Holy Roman Empire. Throughout the war there was a steady stream of envoys of foreign rulers and the pope coming to the Sich to bid for Cossack support.²¹ Indeed, the Sich behaved as a sovereign power, engaging in campaigns and conducting its own foreign relations.

Cossacks' military technique. On the land, the Cossacks' military technique began as that of the Tatars, their most frequent early opponents. These warriors employed sturdy horses, traveled light, and lived off the land. Their earliest raids and battles were against the Tatars, who almost always outnumbered them. Both Cossacks and Tatars relied heavily on the techniques of psychological warfare. Terror, so often employed by Tatars in their midnight attacks of Ukrainian people, became Cossacks' strongest weapon. They traveled silently, emerging as a nightmare out of the dark, wailing and howling as they charged.²²

The Cossack navy adapted some of the same military principles to the river and the sea. They built light boats, *chaiki*, (in English: seagulls). The most extraordinary feature of these boats was that, although they could hold forty to sixty men, they rode only two and one-half feet above the water line, so that Cossacks could approach very close to an enemy before being noticed. They usually moved at night, and after gliding silently in those "war canoes" down to the mouth of the Dnieper, waited for the new moon before venturing out into the sea.²³ If the Turks heard of Cossacks intentions, they would prevent them from leaving by stationing their galleys at the mouth of the river and opening fire. But "Cossacks, in utter contempt of the Turkish fire, now opened upon them, and pushed forward into the Black Sea," attacking adjacent Turkish cities. When

²¹ Gordon, *Cossack Rebellions*, p. 153; Poe, p. 542-3

²² Gordon, *Cossack Rebellions*, pp. 80-81

the Cossacks slipped out into the sea the Turks often sent messengers carrying the warning to Anatolia and the Danube. But all this is in vain, for "Cossacks make such use of their time that in 36 or 40 hours they are in Anatolia pillaging."²⁴

²³ Chevalier, *Discourse*, pp. 20-21

²⁴ Beuplan, *Description d'Ukraine*, 480-486

Chapter Three: Prominent Cossack leaders. Cossack State and Sovereign Ukraine.

The role of Cossacks in Ukrainian history was not limited to military raids and protection of the frontier. Before long, they combined their love of freedom and autonomy with a deep commitment to defend the Orthodox faith and fight against social oppression. Although still regarded by Poles as fugitives, Cossacks became a distinct organized social entity. In the last decade of the 16th century Cossacks reached their most political moment. As “resistance fighters,” according to Hobsbawm’s classification, Cossacks identified with a religious and class cause, employing a strategic defense and attack. The general theme of the first two substantial Zaporozhian-led rebellions: one in 1591-1593 led by a gentryman Krystofer Kosinski and the second one in 1595-1596 by Severyn Nalivaiko, was rage, motivated by personal feud, against subservience to Polish society. The continuousness of those rebellions demonstrated not only Cossacks strength but also their weakness, in the form of their inability to achieve decisive and lasting goals. However, in 1648 Cossacks developed a vision of a new political order for the Ukraine and a strategy for getting it: *hetman* (military leader) Khmelnitsky led an uprising that turned into a National Revolution and resulted in the formation of a democratic Cossack State.

Bohdan Khmelnitsky, from a family of Ukrainian nobility, became a hetman in 1648 and led a National Revolution, “the most cataclysmic event in Ukrainian history, unmatched by its magnitude, intensity and impact in the early modern history of all of Europe,” according to Canadian-Ukrainian historian Orest Subtelny.²⁵ Considered to be

²⁵ Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 123

a pivotal figure in the history of Ukraine and Eastern Europe during the 17th century, Khmelnytsky has been viewed in radically different ways. Polish historiography has viewed him as a leader of a destructive uprising that seriously undermined and eventually destroyed the Polish state, while Russian historiography has presented him as a leader who successfully led the Orthodox "Little Russians," a derogatory term for Ukrainians, into a united Russian state.²⁶ Jewish historians of Eastern Europe portray Khmelnytsky as an instigator of the first massive genocide in the modern history of the Jews.²⁷ Ukrainian writers see him as a great liberator, who propelled Ukrainians toward national and socioeconomic emancipation, although some criticize him for his decision to submit to Muscovy (The Pereiaslav Agreement).²⁸ The Venetian envoy Vimina, in Ukraine in 1650, observed on Khmelnytsky: "His utterances and his system of governing indicated that he possesses judicial thinking and a penetrating mind. In his manner he is gentle and unaffected, thereby winning the love of Cossacks."²⁹ Most historians seem to agree that Khmelnytsky changed the oppressed Ukrainian population into a nation with political awareness and ambitions and led it from revolutionary turmoil to constructive statehood.

Cossack State.³⁰ With remarkable speed and effectiveness the Cossacks established a new polity in Ukraine, which took the form of a Cossack State in 1648. It had the most highly developed form of autonomous self-government in Ukraine,

²⁶ Chirovsky, *An Introduction to Ukrainian History*. See also Cresson, *The Cossacks*; Holobutski, *Zaporozhskoe Kazachestvo*; Iavornitsky, *Istoria Zaporizhkykh Kozakiv*.

²⁷ Estimates of Jewish killed during the uprising had been greatly exaggerated in the historiography of the event. See B. Weinryb "The Hebrew and Chronicles on Bohdan Khmelnytsky and the Cossack-Polish War" Harvard: Ukrainian Studies 1, 1977, pp.153-77 also Weinryb "The Jews of Poland" pp.193-4

²⁸ Chirovsky, *An Introduction to Ukrainian History*, pp.184-5, Iavornitsky, *Istoria Zaporizhkykh Kozakiv*, pp. 56-68, Hrushevsky, *History of Ukraine*, pp. 277-318

²⁹ Reid, *Borderland*, p. 33

³⁰ The term Cossack State will be used with the reference to the period between 1648 and 1711. It implies a single autonomous and independent entity consisting of lands inhabited by Cossacks, while it is true that by the late 17th century there were already pronounced differences among the various Cossack regions (the

THE COSSACK STATE, 1651



- Regimetal center
- Fortified towns

Scale 1 : 5 850 000
 0 50 100 miles
 0 50 100 kilometers

Map 1. Cossack State 1648-1711. From Magosci, "History of Ukraine," Seattle, 1996

according to historian Paul Magosci.³¹ The state constitution and the legal system of the Cossack State evolved gradually from the Cossack organization. The Council of Cossacks, *rada*, was a self-governing agency, a kind of class parliament, which elected the top officers, *starshina* (elders), and was involved in the legislative, administrative, military, judicial, and financial affairs of the *Sich* and the surrounding territory. Its decisions were concluded by democratic majority rule. On the lower level, the Cossacks were organized in the regimental and centurion system, where the colonels, *polkovyi*, and the centurions, *sotennyi*, carried out military and administrative functions in their respective areas.³²

The National Revolution of 1648-1649 introduced many social changes. Firstly, a new leading class of Cossacks assumed an equal or superior status with respect to the political elite. The upper stratum of the Cossacks took over the entire government. Secondly, the position of the peasants improved somewhat. Although the Ukrainian society of that period remained essentially organized into classes headed by an elite group, it must be stressed that the Ukrainian class structure was comparatively liberal, influenced by traditions inherited from the Kievan era. Upward social mobility was relatively easy. Peasants could be elevated to the rank of common Cossacks, eligible to participate in politics.

Secondly, the right to private property, in particular the right to own the land was established, which was crucial for the state's economy, agriculture, manufacturing and trade. Recognition of the Cossack property rights established economic significance of

Hetmanate, Sloboda Ukraine, Zaporozhia, and the Right Bank Ukraine). After 1711 the tradition of Cossack statehood was only preserved in Hetmanate (Magosci, p. 231)

³¹ Magosci, *History of Ukraine*, p. 271

³² Chirovsky, *An Introduction to Ukrainian History*, p. 227

the Cossack class and promoted its growth into a nation. According to Nicholas Chirovsky, author of several books on Ukrainian history and economy, “these years of national freedom enormously increased the productive potential of the country.”³³

The political status of the Cossack State was constantly changing. In 1648 Ukraine became a *de facto* sovereign state. In 1649 Ukrainian independence was established *de jure* and ended with the agreement of Pereyaslav in 1654. By signing the agreement, Bohdan Khmelnytsky accepted the protection of the Muscovite tsar for his land and nation and reserved all the rights of a sovereign nation, however, Muscovite-Russian authorities distorted the interpretation of it in legitimizing their imperial expansion into Ukrainian lands.³⁴ Nicholas Chirovsky asserted in his “Introduction to Ukrainian History” that, “if the original agreement of 1654 had established some kind of Muscovite protectorate, then it was an illusionary one, because the foreign courts, including Muscovite court, considered Ukraine a fully independent nation, which freely ruled itself and maintained diplomatic relations with other nations.” Moscow never objected or questioned the sovereignty of the Cossack State during Khmelnytsky’s lifetime.³⁵

Ivan Mazepa is another prominent Ukrainian political leader and the most controversial one. Educated in Kievan-Mohylian Academy, equipped with enormous political and diplomatic experience, Mazepa held the post of *hetman* of Cossack Ukraine from 1687 to 1709, when he attempted to secede from Russia with the assistance of

³³ Chirovsky, *The Ukrainian Economy*, p. 295

³⁴ Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy*, pp. 51-59

³⁵ Chirovsky, *An Introduction to Ukrainian History*, p. 228. The juridicial nature of Hetmanate’s union with Muscovy is controversial and highly debated. The interpretations include personal union, protectorate, military alliance, incorporation, or reunion. The most comprehensive and recent summary of the varied interpretations is Z.Kohut’s “*Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy*,” see also J.Basarab

Charles XII of Sweden. Imperial and Soviet historians traditionally viewed Mazepa as a “traitor,” because he deserted Peter I and allied himself with Charles XII, King of Sweden. Such a view was based on the assumption that Ukraine was an integral part of the Russian Empire, and that Mazepa’s turn to an external power was a treasonous act. This view is captured in an 1850 issue of the journal *Svit*. A nephew asks his uncle, “Who is the worst creature in the world?” The uncle replies, “The devil.” The nephew then asks, “And who is next worse to the devil?” The uncle replies, “Mazepa.”³⁶

Nineteenth century Ukrainian historians reassessed Mazepa and regarded him as a national patriot who, in response to harsh Muscovite rule, tried to obtain independence for his homeland. Michael Florinsky, a Columbia University professor, commented: “Mazepa, was motivated by the legitimate and honorable desire to safeguard the autonomy of his country and to save it from destruction by siding with the probable winner.”³⁷ Orest Subtelny stated Mazepa’s position quite succinctly “We should serve our sovereigns because they protect us, but if they will no longer defend us, then we owe them no more service.”³⁸

The legend of Mazepa inspired a number of works by artists of the Romantic movement in the 19th century’s Europe. Most famous writers, Lord Byron, Victor Hugo, and Aleksander Pushkin composed poems about Mazepa. Musicians were even more attracted to the legend of Mazepa. Several operas were written entitled *Mazepa*, the most famous by Peter Tchaikovsky in 1884.

“*Pereiaslav 1654: A Historiographical Study*” (Edmonton, 1882), and N. Andreev “*Pereiaslavskii dogovor*” in *Studies in Muscovy* (London, 1970)

³⁶ Priezel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy*, pp. 305-6

³⁷ Magosci, *History of Ukraine*, p. 239

³⁸ Subtelny, “*Mazepa, Peter I, and the Question of Treason*,” pp. 170-1

After Mazepa's death, Pylyp Orlyk, Mazepa's trusted associate, was elected the hetman in exile. With the election of Pylyp Orlyk, the Constitution of the Rights and Liberties of the Zaporozhe Host was adopted. It proclaimed the independence of Ukraine from Poland and Muscovy and the establishment of a Cossack parliament and constitutional monarchy in Ukraine, which limited the powers of the hetman, a groundbreaking concept at the time. Cossacks were never granted an opportunity to implement this Constitution, because in 1775 Catherine the Great abolished the Cossack State. However, the document continues to have a great significance as a step forward in the development of Ukrainian political thought.³⁹

³⁹ Chirovsky, *An Introduction to Ukrainian History*, p.197-206

Chapter Four: Demise of Cossack Ukraine

In late 17th and early 18th centuries the educational level in the Cossack State was high in comparison with Russia. In fact, the Ukrainians were the representatives of modernity for the Russians, not vice versa as was the case later.⁴⁰ A Canadian historian Marc Raeff observed: "One is struck by the fact that at the moment of its subordination to Muscovite Russia, it was Ukraine who enjoyed and exercised a clear cultural predominance. Much later in the nineteenth century, at the birth of modern national consciousness, Ukraine had the status of a peasant culture adjudged inferior and harshly repressed."⁴¹

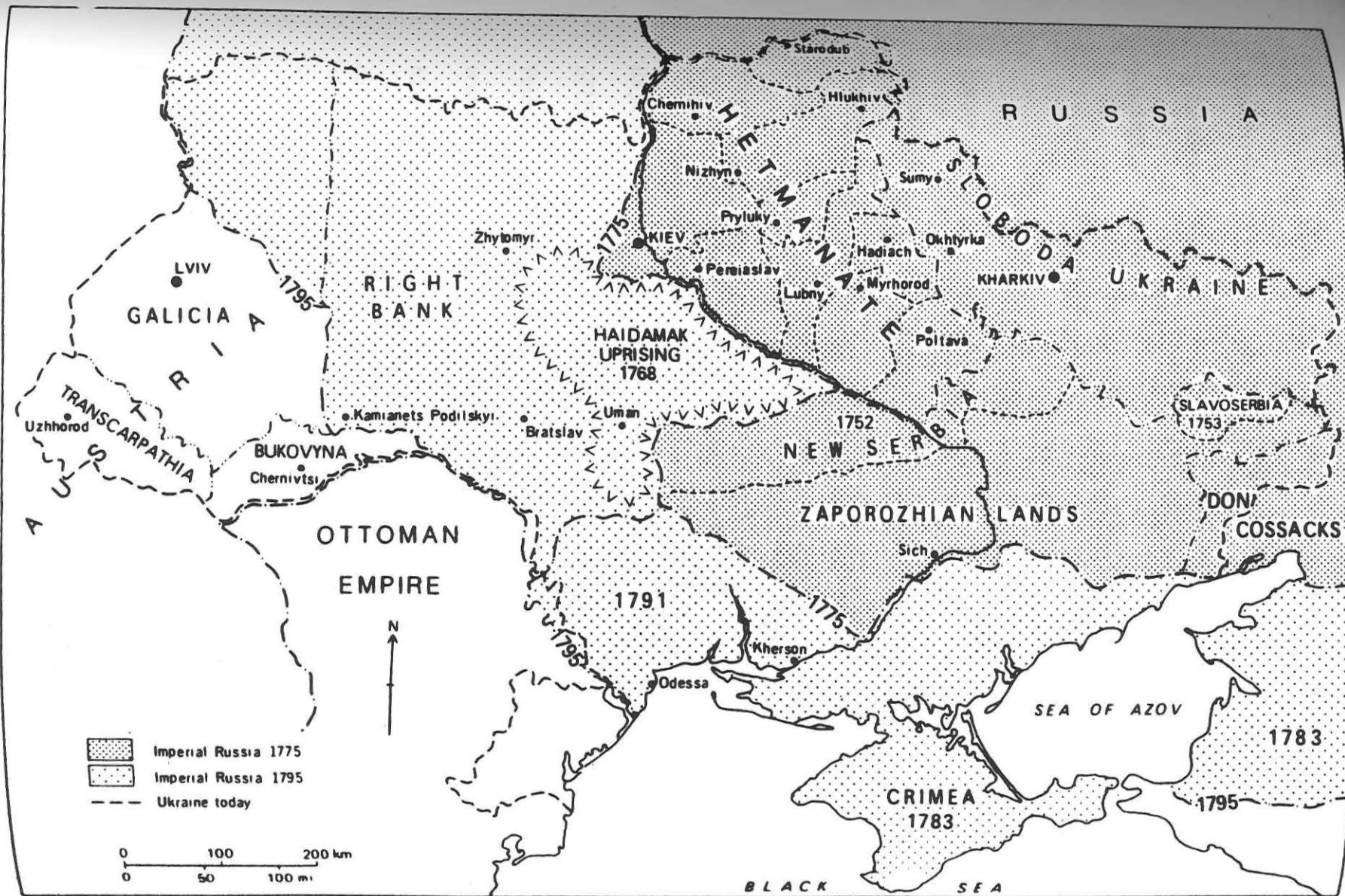
During the existence of the Cossack State cultural activity continued to develop and reach broader segments of the population. As Arab Paul of Aleppo, who traveled through Ukraine on his way to Moscow, wrote in 1655, "Even villagers in Ukraine can read and write." Higher education even in the worst times was available in the Kiev Academy and its affiliates. The Kiev Academy, a leading school in the Orthodox world until the late 18th century, produced a breed of writers, primarily interested in the history of their homeland and who composed so-called Cossack chronicles.⁴²

Culture and arts were especially revived under Mazepa's rule. A series of new churches, theaters, printing shops and schools were constructed in the ornate style that came to be known as Cossack Baroque. "Mazepa's patronage both raised the level of culture in Ukraine and increased the influence of Ukrainian culture and thought in

⁴⁰ Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p.195

⁴¹ Raeff, *Ukraine and Imperial Russia*, p. 69

⁴² Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p.155, 195; Chirovsky, *An Introduction to Ukrainian History*, p. 193



Map 2. Russian expansion in the 18th century. From Subtelny, "Ukraine: A History", Toronto, 1988

Muscovy itself. Muscovite tsars were more than anxious to tap the talent of those trained in the Kievan Academy...[who] almost single-handedly transformed the educational, religious, and cultural life of the newest leading power in Eastern Europe, Muscovy.”⁴³

Abolition of Cossack Ukraine

The Battle of Poltava was probably one of the most decisive battles in the world history. Nicholas Chirovsky speculated on how completely different could have been the political fortune of entire Eastern Europe, if Charles XII and Mazepa had won the contest: Muscovy would have never achieved the prominence of the Russian Empire and Ukraine would have become a sovereign state.⁴⁴ Instead Peter's the Great army sacked the capital of Hetmanate, Baturyn, and massacred 6,000 of its residents.⁴⁵ Similar actions of torture and cruelty were carried out by Muscovites throughout the Cossack State and its peaceful population. They were undertaken as a measure of terror against the bastion of Ukrainian self-assertion, “the nest of banditti,” according to Muscovite evaluation.⁴⁶ Peter the Great promptly weeded out Ukrainian separatism by extracting the maximum in economic and human resources from the Hetmanate. 20,000 estates accumulated by Mazepa, making him the one of the wealthiest men in Europe, were given out to Russian colonels and nobility for the victory at Poltava.⁴⁷ A great number of Cossacks were conscripted for building canals and fortifications of Peter's favorite capital of St. Petersburg.⁴⁸

The autonomous rebellious Cossack State was definitely an undesirable bastion of Ukrainian self-assertion from the point of view of Catherine's centralist policies, but as

⁴³ Magosci, *History of Ukraine*, p.259

⁴⁴ Chirovsky, *An Introduction to Ukrainian History*, p. 205

⁴⁵ Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy*, p. 303

⁴⁶ Ohloblyn, *Studii Istorii Ukrainy*, pp.352-274

long as the threat of the Tatar military and booty onslaughts persisted, the Cossacks were a welcomed military deterrent. However, as a result of the Russian-Turkish peace treaty, the Tatar danger was largely suppressed. Therefore, in June 1775, on the Holy Day of Pentecost, Catherine the Great liquidated the Cossacks State and incorporated it into New Russian gubernatorial districts. She also attempted to obliterate the Zaporozhians from popular memory by announcing that "the word 'Zaporozhian Cossack' shall be considered an insult to our imperial majesty." After the abolition, 5000 Zaporozhian Cossacks fled to the mouth of Danube River and later joined Kuban Cossacks of Russia.⁴⁹

Soviet historians considered abolition of Hetmanate to be a politically sensitive topic that is best ignored. Their contribution has been limited to two topics: the class struggle and the "friendship" of the Ukrainian and Russian people. Under the rubric of friendship soviet historians had produced many works of the two nations common struggle against Napoleon, when several traditional Cossack units, previously annihilated, were reestablished.⁵⁰ "The military-political organization, which for more than four hundred years had defended Ukraine against the merciless onslaughts of the Tatars, Polish *shlachta* and Muscovite-Russian imperialist domination, was finally defeated by Peter the Great in 1709 and Catherine the Great in 1775, the two Muscovite-Russian Empire builders and simultaneously the executioners of Ukrainian national independence," concluded historian Holobutskyi.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Subtelny, *Mazepa, Peter and the Question of Treason*.

⁴⁸ Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy*, p. 71

⁴⁹ Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, p. 176

⁵⁰ Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy*, pp. 5-6

⁵¹ Holobutsky, *Zaporozhskoe Kazachestvo*, pp.215-216

Though the historical Cossacks ceased to exist in the eighteenth century, they lived on powerfully in the Ukrainian imagination. The historical background, I provided in chapter 1, is essential to understanding the controversial, but powerful image of Cossacks captured in folklore. The same approach is taken to understanding the reason and impetus of any art, which derives from culture and history. The periods of Turkish invasion and slavery produced *dumas* (sad epic tales), when Polish oppression led to ferocious fight for freedom and songs praising the Cossacks courage, as well as Polish and Jewish laments about Cossacks brutality and slaughtering.

PART TWO: Image of Cossacks

The history of Cossacks is not written in documents and historical records, it is rather preserved in songs, ballads and folkstories. Poets, narratives, and minstrels were, generally speaking, the chief historians of the Cossacks. Yet the national ideals and the guiding traditions of the Cossack race, maintained orally, have lost nothing in strength or influence. The Cossack ballads teach love of freedom, loyalty to comrades and *hetman* and a sturdy devotion to the privileges, obtained by the forefathers. Cossack folktales, filled with the spirit of the "Free Steppe," tell of hard knocks given and taken for the sheer love of fight, of desperate and bloody struggles followed by feasting. In all these romances the dominant note is the praise of personal liberty.

I. Romanticized image of Cossacks. The 19th century Ukrainian historians presented Cossacks as the very essence of Ukrainian character, defenders of Ukrainian people, faith and freedom. Popular Ukrainian folk songs and poetry glorified the Cossack past, creating a national "collective memory" essential for future national revival. Imperial Russian historiography claimed Slavic origin of Cossacks as great warriors, Soviet historiography praised Cossacks revolutionary traits, but both disclaimed Cossacks as Ukrainian nationalists.

Taras Shevchenko, Ukraine's leading national poet and writer, asserted that Cossacks were the ultimate embodiment of the Ukrainian spirit of freedom in his poem "Feudal." It presents the Cossacks as strong believers in the independent future of their 'blessed Ukraine,' ready to fight for it till the last drop of blood.

"It was our choice to die as Cossacks,
While holding our swords,
Fighting for our land.
It was our choice to fight the Turks,
And Poles and petty Russians,

So that our children could stand tall,
 Worshiping and singing in their tongue.
 It was our choice to die for freedom,
 For our blessed Ukraine.”¹

“Taras Bulba,” a tale by Mykola Gogol, a Ukrainian, who was compelled to write in Russian to get printed, captured the heroic past of Cossacks in their ferocious fight for freedom against Polish oppression. Gogol, a third generation offspring of a famous Cossack Gogol, who took an active part in saving Vienna from Ottoman Turks in 1683, with Cossack’s blood running in his veins, injected the spirit of his race into the novel.² The author was inspired with the sense of intense living, Nietzsche’s “living dangerously,” adopted by Cossacks and recognition of courage as the greatest of all virtues. In the novel Cossacks are presented as a kind of people, whose lives had passed in constant activity, who were compelled to act by the constant danger: “A perpetual fear, a perpetual danger inspired them with contempt toward life.” Yet the written records and ‘withered chronicles’ don’t capture a half of it. The novel is saturated with the joy and sadness of Ukrainian songs, from which the author learned the history of his people. “The songs of Ukraine are its poetry, its history and its ancestral grave. He who hasn’t been penetrated with them, knows nothing of the history of this land,” Gogol wrote in the letter to his friend.

Ilya Repin’s famous masterpiece “Zaporozhian Cossacks Writing a Letter to the Turkish Sultan” captured the independent and humorous spirit of Cossacks. Ilya Repin, a Ukrainian artist, sought to achieve historical accuracy through meticulous research with historian Dmytro Iavornytsky and dedicated 13 years of his life to that project. The artist put his heart, mature talent and understanding of the people’s soul into that work. One

¹ Shevchenko, *Kobzar*, p. 207



Zaporozhian Cossacks Writing a Letter to the Turkish Sultan by Ilya Repin.
1878-91, 6'8" X 11'9", oil painting. St. Petersburg Art Gallery, Russia

*Letter of Zaporozhtian Cossacks
to Turkish Sultan*

"You Turkish Devil! Brother and companion to the accursed Devil and Secretary to Lucifer himself, Greetings!

What the hell kind of noble knight art thou? Satan voids and thy army devours. Never will thou be fit to have the sons of Christ under thee. Thy army we fear not, and by land and by sea in our chaikas will we do battle against thee.

The scullion of Babylon, thou beer-brewer of Jerusalem, thou goat thief of Alexandria, thou swineherd of Egypt, both the Greater and the Lesser, thou Armenian pig and Tatar goat. Thou hangman of Kamyanets, thou evildoer of Podolia, thou grandson of the Devil himself, thou great silly oaf of all the world and of the netherworld, and before our God, a blockhead, a swine's snout, a mare's ass, and a clown of Hales. May the Devil take thee!

That is what the Cossacks have to say to thee, thou basest born of runts! Unfit art thou to lord it over true Christians!

The date we know not, for no calendar, have we got. The moon (month) is in the sky, the year is in the book, and the day is the same here as with ye over there — and thou canst kiss us thou knowest where!

Koshovty otaman

Ivan Sirko

and all the Zaporoshian Cossack Brotherhood.

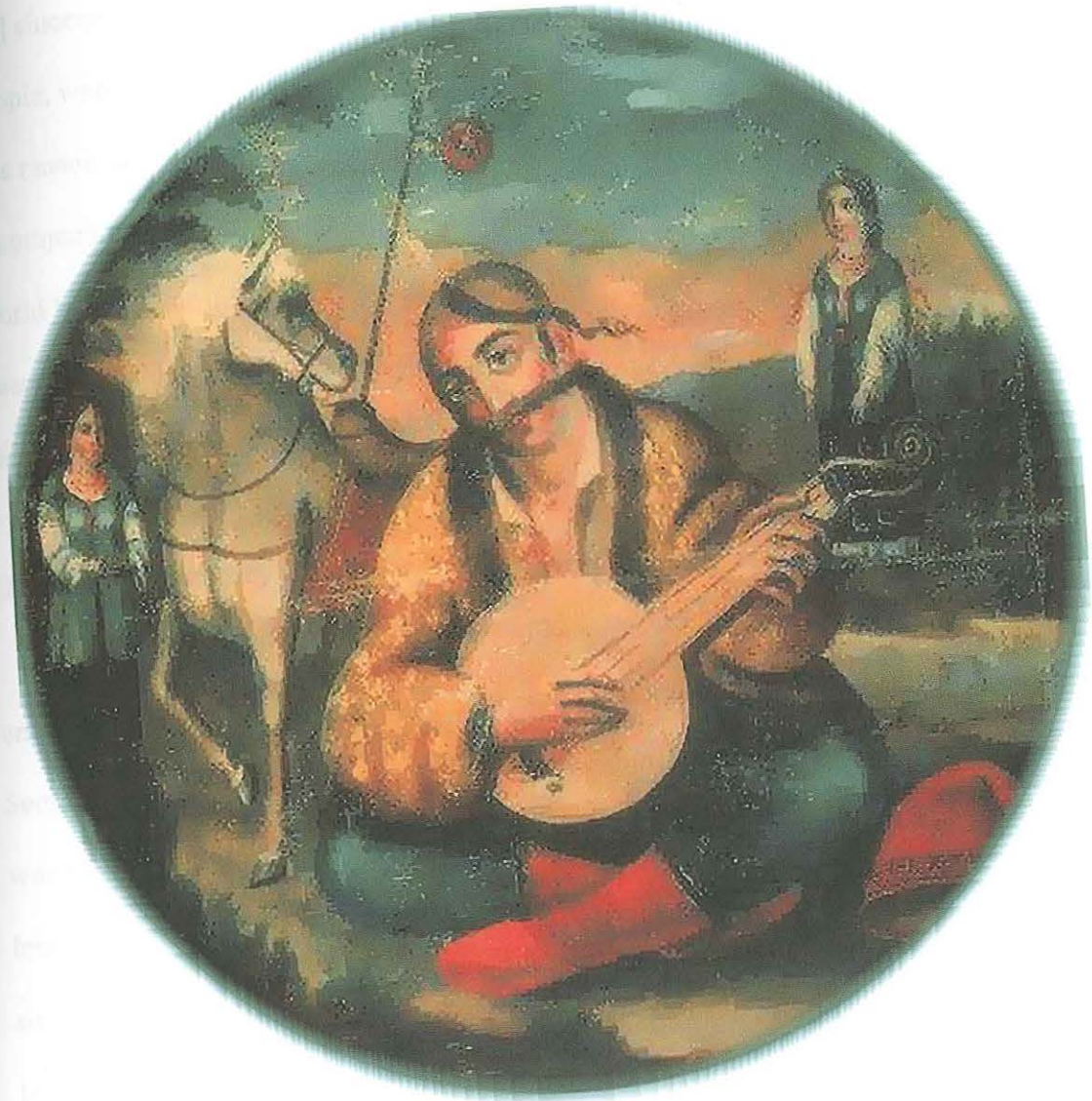
can immediately sense the beauty of those tough but cheerful and fearless people. One can hear their laughter, laughter of free man, who simply would not be frightened by the Turkish sultan, albeit a formidable and powerful enemy. It is believed that 1660 the Cossacks composed a letter in reply to the mighty Turkish Sultan Mohammed's IV offer of his protection to the Cossacks. The letter appears to be a masterpiece of crude ridicule, where each of the Sultan's high-sounding titles is distorted into a blasphemous insult.³ Although the authenticity of the letter is questionable, the painting and the letter fully embodied the Cossacks spirit – facetious, coarse and yet enticing.

Another creative work that captured the Cossacks' wit and passion of Ukrainian Cossacks is Ivan Kotlyarevsky's burlesque travesty "Aeneid" (1798). Written in pure Ukrainian vernacular language, it portrays the glorious past of the Cossacks. The experiences of Trojan soldiers in Vigil's Aeneid reflect the similar fate of the Zaporozhian Cossacks wandering over the face of earth, unable to find a home. Beyond the gusty humor of the author stand out the pictures of the 'everlasting memory of the Cossack State.'

A popular character in the Ukrainian folklore paintings of the 17th and 18th centuries was Cossack Mamai, a minstrel of Zaporozhian legends. Never painted in a battle or charging on a horse, he was always shown as a freedom lover, depicted in a meditative pose playing *bandura* (a lute-like instrument), but with his weapons and a horse close by. The image of Cossack Mamai reflects the Ukrainian national character: one who guards his homeland, but dreams of a peaceful creative work at home.

² Shumeyko, "How Ukrainian Cossacks Saved Vienna from Destruction."

³ Cresson, *The Cossacks*. Picture: Defiant Letter.



**Cossack Mamai with Two Women. Anon. Middle 18-th century.
Ukrainian State Museum of Ukrainian Fine Arts, Kiev.**

Gulliamle le Vesseur de Beuplan, a French scientist, whose maps of Ukraine were models of western European cartography until the beginning of the 18th century, portrayed Cossacks in his book *Description d'Ukraine* as “very brave, crafty, clever, [and yet] sincerely generous, without ulterior motives or ambitions to become very rich,” as people, who “greatly value their liberty, and would not want to live without it, and for this reason, they are so inclined to revolt.” According to Beuplan, Cossacks are incomparable to others in their fighting as well as feasting: “there is no nation in the world like this for liberty in drinking, but this is to be understood when they are at leisure, for while they are in war, or projecting some enterprise, they are extraordinarily sober.”⁴

II. Contradictory Image of Cossacks.

Polish and Jewish historians portrayed Cossacks as brutes and unruly bandits who undermined authority of Polish government and slaughtered Polish and Jewish people. Some Polish writers saw the 1648 National Revolution and Haidamaks attacks as the worst experiences of Cossack barbarism against Polish civilization⁵. Others saw it as a lesson from which Polish society should learn. Seweryn Goszczynski, for instance, suggested in his epic poem “The Castle of Kaniv” that Uman’ experience should be used to point the way to reconciliation with Ukrainians and to the creation with them of a

⁴ Beuplan, *Description d'Ukraine*, pp. 480-6

⁵ Haidamaks movement – series of devastating uprisings of peasants and Cossack leaders in 1730’-1760’ in Western Ukraine against national and religious Polish oppression. At one time the struggle became a real encounter between the Orthodox and the Catholics. In 1768 in the town of Uman’ the Haidamaky achieved their greatest victory against Poles when thousands of Polish gentry perished by the wrath of the populace. (Chirovsky, pp.218-9). Haidamaks movement was compared to Robin Hoodism of England and to large extend, Eric Hobsbawn’s concept of “social banditry” can be applied to it.

common platform in the search for freedom from tsarist oppression for both peoples⁶.

As for the Jewish perspective, the distinguished 20th century historian, Simon Dubnow called Uman' 'the second Ukrainian catastrophe' and a Yiddish song from the late 18th century summed up the Jewish attitudes:

“Our Father in Haven, how can you stand the sights,
That Ukrainian Jews should suffer such horrible troubles!
Where in the world are such persecutions heard of?
Gonta has even killed small children and took their money.
The most evil of the haidamaks should come before you,
Lord of the world, and you should help all who protected us!”⁷

Taras Shevchenko's longest poem "Haidamaky" (1843), based on the events of the 1768 haidamaks rebellion, truthfully expresses the wild and often merciless character of peasant revolts against social oppression. The important notice to make is that the epic portrays the historical exploit of the Ukrainian people, who were representatives of an independent nation until its brutal subjugation by Polish oppressors. While Shevchenko does not condone the bloodshedding exploits of Zalizniak and Gonta, he sees the past, even with all its evils, as a source of inspiration for Ukrainians in the future. Another breathtaking moment of the poem is when Gonta orders to kill his own sons, who in his eyes committed a treasonous act by accepting the religion of oppressors of Ukrainian people. Killing of his own children, who accepted Catholicism, is justified by the supremacy of a national ideal over parental ones in an attempt to preserve the Cossack Ukrainian traditions that are about to become extinct.

Along the entire way
From Kiev to Uman' the dead
In heaping piles were laid.

⁶ Goszczynski, *Poems*, p.127

⁷ Magosci, *History of Ukraine*, p. 299

The Haidamaks on Uman'
 Like heavy clouds converge
 At midnight...
 The Haidamaks take the town
 With shouts: 'The Poles should pay!'
 Wild cries and streams. Mid streams of blood
 Stands Gonta on the square
 With Zalizniak together, they
 Urge on the rebel band:
 'Good work, stout lads! There, that's the way
 To punish them, the damned!'
 And then the rebels brought to him
 A Jesuit, a monk, with two young boys.
 'Look Gonta, look!
 These youngsters are your sons!
 They're Catholics: since you kill all,
 Can you leave them alone?'
 'Kill them now...'

Much time has gone by, since a child, a poor orphan,
 I roamed that Ukraine where Zalizniak and Gonta
 With sanctified sabres had wreaked vengeance dread.
 I grieve that they're past! I would trade present fortune
 If only those days could be brought back again⁸.

The following excerpt from the "Duma about the Battle at Korsun" presents an explanation to why Jewish population was attacked by Ukrainian peasants and Cossacks.

O you Jews,
 You children of pagan parents,
 Why did you build three taverns per mile?
 Why did you collect such high tolls?
 You did not leave even the poor beggars alone,
 But took away their millet and eggs!
 So now gather all these riches,
 And appease Khmel'nitsky with them.
 Because if you do not appease Khmel'nitsky,
 You'll have a tough going down the River Slucha.⁹

III. Self-representation of Cossacks in Ukrainian folklore.

The epitome of Cossack folk creativity during the 16th and 17th centuries in Ukraine was the *duma* or anonymous lyric epic tale. *Dumy* were recited to the accompaniment of the *bandura* by wandering minstrels. The earliest *dumy* are primarily

⁸ Schevchenko, *Selected Works*, pp.97-99

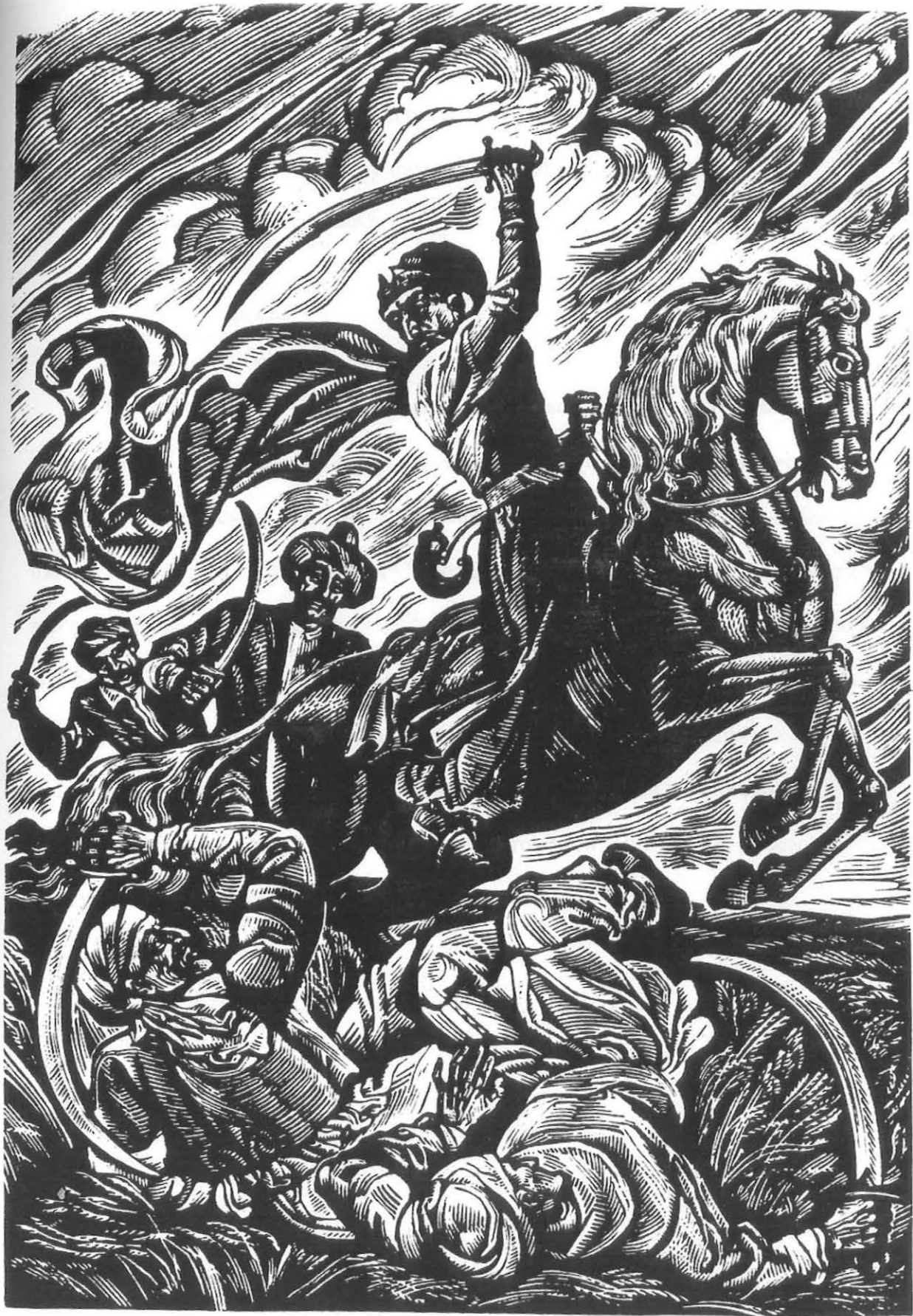
⁹ *Ukrainian Dumy*, p. 159

laments on the fate of young Ukrainian men forced to serve in the Turkish armies (Duma about the Lament of the Captives) or of young Ukrainian women sold into Ottoman harems (Duma about Marusia from Bohyslav). The later *dumy* are concentrated on the two major conflicts confronting Ukrainian frontier society: the struggle with Turks and Tatars and the resistance against oppression of the Polish *szlachta*. Ukrainian *dumy* speak of Cossacks glorious deeds in the battles. They tell of heroes who conquer three hundred, six hundred and even nine hundred Tatar enemies single-handedly. They describe loyalty to comrades and self-sacrifice for the good of others and for the prosperity of Ukraine. They tell of men who endure enormous pain and still keep fighting for the sake of their homeland. They convey a simple, down-to-earth ethic of recognizing a person for what he is, rather than for the money, fine clothes, or social status. They extol the virtue of freedom and eloquently proclaim that it is the most desirable thing on earth.

“Duma about the Lament of the Captives” tells of intolerable suffering of the Ukrainian people at the hands of the Ottoman Turks. The young Cossack captives are beseeching the Lord for a “wild wind from the Dnieper steppe” to free them, which is descriptive of the Zaporozhian Cossacks who would arrive as a wind, capture a Turkish galley, free the captives and take the booty.

On the holy day of Sunday, it wasn't the grey eagles screaming,
 But the poor captives weeping in bitter slavery,
 Raising their arms, shaking their chains,
 Begging and imploring the merciful Lord:
 ‘Send us, O Lord, a fine rain from the sky
 And wild wind from the Dnieper steppe!
 Maybe it will break the Turkish galley loose from its anchor!
 The iron chains have dug into our legs,
 They have cut our white young Cossack flesh to the yellow bone.’
 Liberate, O Lord, all the poor captives
 From bitter Turkish slavery
 From infidel captivity!¹⁰

¹⁰ *Ukrainian Dumy*, p. 23



A Cossack fighting Tatars. From Berezovsky, Ilya "Istoria Ukrainu v Narodnih Pisniakh ta Dymah." Kiev: Naukova Dumka, 1961

Another Ukrainian song, which has survived into a modern time, presents a poignant picture of Cossacks longing for his homeland in foreign captivity:

Do you hear my brother, Cossack?
 The row of cranes flies away
 Into the warm lands
 They call: crow, crow, crow.
 I'll die in a foreign land
 Before I fly over the seas
 My wings will fall away...¹¹

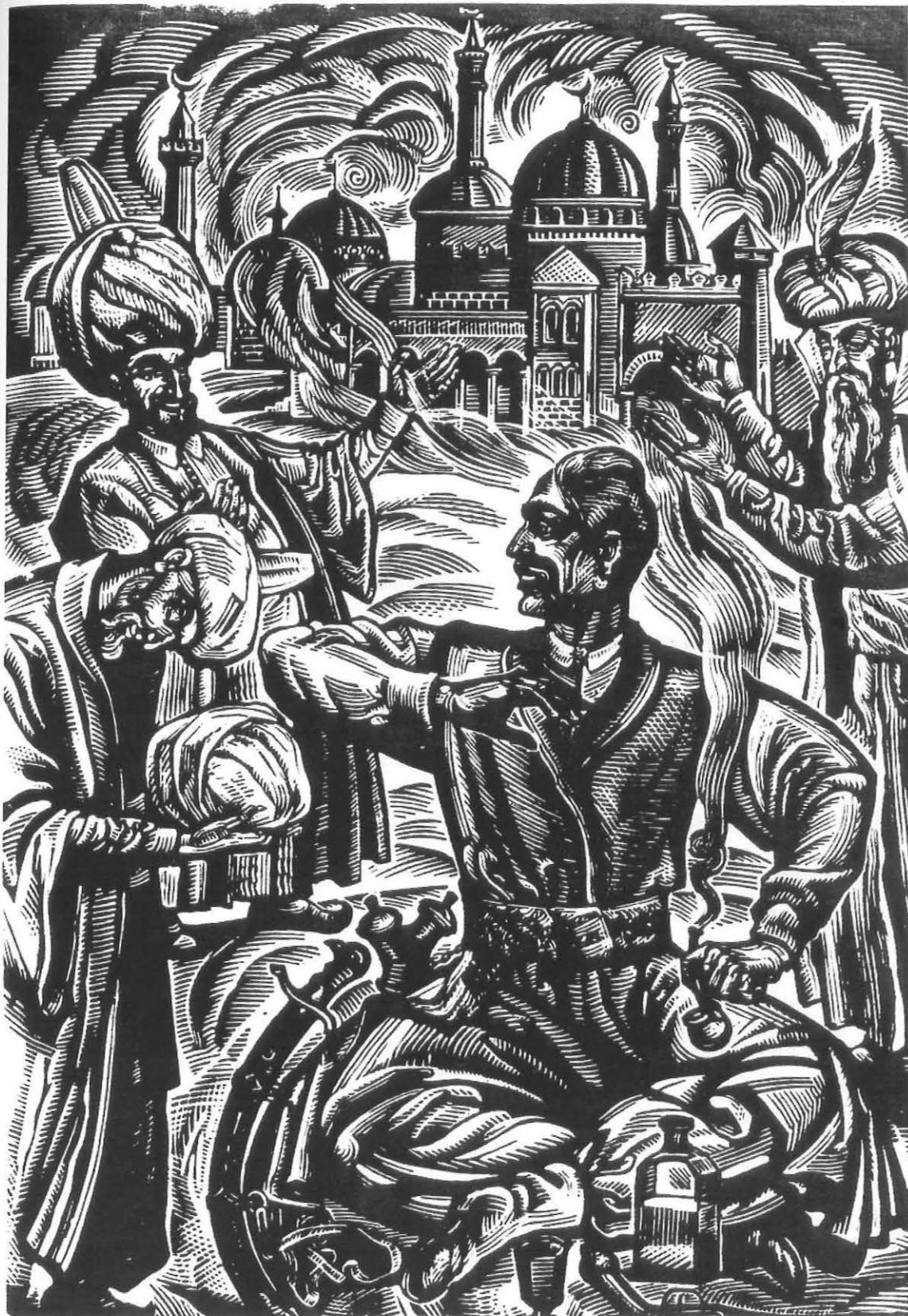
The majority of the Cossack songs portray Cossacks as free, daring, audacious young fellows. This image of Cossacks was one of courage and audacity all over Ukraine and later Russia. "Duma about Dmitro Vishnevetsky – Baida" suggests that by the late 16th century Cossacks had established the reputation as skilled and brave warriors and were recognized as military power.¹² The status of Cossacks was prestigious enough and the fear of their enemies great enough for a mighty Turkish sultan to desire alliance with the Cossacks through marital arrangement of his daughter and the Cossack *hetman*. Baida's reply to the sultan's offer of marriage is synonymous with the letter of Zaporozhian Cossacks to the sultan's offer of his protection. His reply emphasizes Cossacks' loyalty to Ukrainian faith and people.

He had unearthly strength
 He fought thunderously
 And also verbally.
 His enemies disliked him,
 Hung him by the hook to his rib.

In Tzaregrad at the bazaar
 Baida is drinking honey, vodka
 Baida is drinking not just a day or two,
 Not just a night or an hour.
 The Turkish sultan sends for him
 And asks Baida:
 'Hey, you, glorious, Baida,
 Be my loyal knight,

¹¹ Bratush, *A Historical documentary of the Ukrainian Community*, p.316

¹² Dmitro Vishnevetsky, nicknamed Baida, was a founder of Zaporozhian Sich and a Cossack Hetman (1550-1563). Under his leadership several successful exploits against Turks and Tatars were executed and commemorated in numerous Ukrainian songs.



Dmitro Vishnevetsky - Baida. From Berezovsky, Ilya
"Istoria Ukrainu v Narodnih Pisniah ta Dymah." Kiev:
Naukova Dumka, 1961

Take my princess' hand
 And become a Lord of all the Ukraine.'
 'Sultan, your faith is damned
 And your princess is no good for me.'
 The Sultan shouted to his servants:
 'Grab Baida hard with your hands
 And hook him up by his rib.'¹³

"Duma about Cossack Holota," in my opinion, briefly describes the history of Cossacks: confident people, although poorly dressed, enjoyed moments of freedom on their land in between of Tatars raids. Not willing to be turned into slaves, Cossacks had to fight for their freedom and not only they became skilled in fighting and defended themselves, they also freed their people from captivity and obtained glory as brave warriors. It is hypothesized that the early Cossacks learned military skills and techniques from their most frequent opponents – Turks. "*Duma* about Cossack Holota" suggests that Cossacks are also indebted to Turks for their clothes, which was mainly taken as booty. At the end Cossack Holota praises the Kylyian fields, probably because their vastness and wilderness nurtured his spirit of freedom and independence. The last two verses about Cossack fame never dying nor perishing are found in many *dumy* and folksongs and symbolize the Cossacks legacy.

In the fields, the Kylyian fields, on the beaten roads of the Horde,
 Cossack Holota was prancing his horse,
 And he was not afraid of fire, or sword, or even mire.
 It is true that the Cossack wore fine clothes:
 Three ragged suits of hemp,
 A sheepskin cap, with a hole in the top,
 Sewn with grass, and lined with wind,
 Cooling the young Cossack's head.
 [Holota met a Tatar in the middle of the fields.]
 'I,' said the Tatar, 'am after your bright arms,
 But even more after your raven-black horse,
 And still more after you, young Cossack.
 I want to capture you alive, to sell you to the pashas,
 To get so many gold coins that I couldn't count them.'
 Holota said: 'Tatar, gray-haired and bearded one!
 You must not have much sense:
 You have not yet captured the Cossack,

¹³ Berezovsky, *Istoria Ukrainu v Narodnih Dumah ta Pisniah*, p. 48-50

Yet you have already counted his price.
 You have not been among the Cossacks,
 You have not eaten the Cossack porridge,
 And you do not know the Cossack customs.”
 While saying this, he sent a lead gift into the Tatar’s chest.
 When the Tatar fell dead off his horse,
 Holota took off Tatar’s boots
 And placed them on his Cossack feet;
 He tore off the clothes
 And placed them on his Cossack shoulders;
 He took the Tatar’s horse by the reins,
 And reached the city of Sich.
 There he drank and made merry
 And praised the Kylyian fields endlessly:
 “O Kylyian fields,
 May you stay green in summer and winter,
 For you have helped me in an unhappy hour!
 May the Lord let the Cossacks drink and make merry,
 Think fine thoughts, and take booty bigger than mine,
 And trample their enemies underfoot!”
 Cossack fame will neither die nor perish.
 From this day on forever!¹⁴

Some arguments claim that the Cossacks influence played a positive role in the development of Ukraine’s social structure, political development and inspiration to regional art and culture. Other accounts of the Cossacks are plainly negative, particularly those from neighboring powers, which seek to discredit a positive image. But the fact that the dispute takes place at all reaffirms that there was an influence. The influence was strong enough for Ukrainians to adopt and for surrounding regions to need to discredit. Cossacks inspired popular poets, such as Shevchenko, Pushkin and Lord Byron. They provided themes for Mussorgski and Shostakovich and images for famous painters like Repin and Kandinskiy. Yet the pictures we have of them do not all coincide. In Gogol’s *Taras Bulba* they are fearless warriors with a healthy contempt for the false trappings of civilization, when in Polish literature they are cruel and vicious villains. Although the images of Cossacks are vastly different, their power is undeniable.

¹⁴ *Ukrainian Dumy*, pp.107-11

Through the considerable influence they gained in Ukraine, Cossacks were directly responsible for some of the major transformations of that region. They contributed more than any other social group to changing the very meaning of the word Ukraine – from a general descriptive term, borderland, to a proper noun, denoting a unique area. They gave substance to the embryonic national identity of the Ukrainian people.

It is deceptively easy to think that one has adequately defined the Cossacks through categorization such as mercenaries, rebels, social bandits or frontiersmen. Their actual activity, however, breaks through these categories, creating a spirit and moments of possibility in the Ukraine that were greater than the sum of these separate aspects. As Chirovsky very well noted, “the heroism attributed to the Cossacks in the romantic and nationalist folklore about them suggest that, in unspecific forms, it was just these possibilities that the Cossacks symbolized – possibilities for a free, prosperous and independent existence for the Ukrainians. The Cossacks’ ability to symbolize these aspirations was a central part of their historical significance. Their romanticized reputation, thus, is as much a part of their historical contribution as their actions.”¹⁵

For a group of their small size Cossacks had a considerable impact on the future of their part of the world. Linda Gordon summarized this well: “If not one of the major social phenomena of the modern world, the Cossacks’ influence was nevertheless considerable in Eastern Europe. Achieved some grandeur as they hurled themselves into history pursuing what they felt to be freedom and self-respect. For that alone, their history is worth preserving.”¹⁶ Both the powerful image of the Cossacks throughout

¹⁵ Chirovsky, *An Introduction to Ukrainian History*, p. 214

¹⁶ Gordon, *Cossack Rebellions*, p. 8

history and also the acts of the Cossacks themselves gave rise to a lasting influence of the development of Ukraine and the region. Although sometimes positive, sometimes negative and highly controversial, this influence played a key role, and is worthy of recognition when describing the history and present of Ukraine.

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