

Khan's Ukraine: The Borders of the Past

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The ethnic history of Ukraine is not my main scientific interest, but I often have to talk to my Western colleagues about the situation in Ukraine. Actually, this is not my own case only, but is well-known to many Ukrainians who are asked: "What part of Ukraine you are from – East or West?" (if you are not from Kyiv, which is somewhere in the middle).

Looks like it was once in postwar Germany, divided into Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. So, you have to answer, and what is more – to justify the illegality of this division. But it is not easy, as one thing is to convey something to our fellow citizens who share the same reality, and the other one is to persuade Europeans who have a habit to hear more of the facts new to them – more to doubt their truth. There are some other factors to understand this situation. Since 2014, the Kremlin propagandists have been pushing the myth of the "South-East of Ukraine", or Novorossia ("New Russia") as originally a separate territory, where the pro-Russian population suffer from the oppression of the "criminal Kyiv authorities".

Only in 2016, after the achievement of conditional (or ghostly?) stability in the Donbass, conversations about Novorossiia somewhat subsided. Moreover, it was "renamed" to Malorossia ("Little Russia"). Still, no matter how ridiculously these views may seem from historical point of view, the Russian Federation does not abandon the idea of pressuring on Ukraine, through the humanitarian sphere in particular. It is known that the Novorossiia province, with its center in Katerynoslav, emerged as a result of the separation of the southern part of Ukraine from the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Already after the liquidation of the Khanate in 1783 and subsequent successful actions in the territory of modern Odesa region, the Russian Empire radically changed the composition of the population of the region: the Nogai tribes have

been sent from this territory, the Crimean Tatars migrated, some lands were actually deserted, which caused the mass colonization in the 19 th century.

In some regions, only the names of settlements, rivers, lakes and few architectural monuments remained from the previous population (especially in the Odessa region). Not so long ago, I helped colleagues from the Kherson Museum of Local History to read inscriptions on Ottoman and Tatar tombstones collected there from all over the South of Ukraine. Among them are the tombstones of the XVII-XVIII centuries, which belonged to famous people (religious figures, merchants, military etc); in fact, it is only a thousandth part of all that past which has been destroyed, taken out, sold out ... Such is the nature of the steppe: like the desert, it absorbs history, especially when that is no longer respected by living generations. As a researcher of the Crimean Tatar philosophical heritage, I had to keep in hand and read the manuscripts of natives of this region, which now could be found in the libraries of Turkey, Poland, Germany, the USA and other countries.

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They preserve historical memories which need to be explored carefully. Even some architectural monuments, such as the famous Ackerman fortress, require extensive exploration and preservation (recently the remains of a mosque have also been discovered there).

And here exactly we come across the part of the historical memory, which is so-called "Khan's Ukraine", that was virtually wiped out by the efforts of the conquerors from the North. The term, especially in today's realities, may be reminiscent of "Soviet Ukraine" or "Little Russia", but in fact, it had a historical practice (not artificially created): it was the so-called southern territory of the Right Bank (of Dnipro river) in the eighteenth century, which was part of the Ottoman Empire.

At the end of the seventeenth century, there were even their own Cossack hetmans, who got the protection of the Sultan. There is much to tell about the history of these lands, especially after Khan's Ukraine expanded to the north of modern Podillya (in the years 1672-1699), but the cultural aspect of the Ukrainian lands in the Ottoman Empire has not been sufficiently studied yet. One of the questions: How did the population perceive the Ottoman Sultan, when population fled from the enslavement in Russian imperial to the "Khan's land", especially in the eighteenth century?

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One more question is "How the inter-religious relations developed?", as in spite of the Muslim power, in some regions, especially in rural areas, the majority of the population continued to profess Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Judaism and other religions. And the ethnic composition was, after all, extremely colorful here. If you read, for example, the descriptions of Ackerman (Belgorod-Dnistrovsky), Izmail, Ochakov and other cities of the Ukrainian South of the XVII-XVIII centuries, the picture seems very attractive: all of them look about the same as the modern historical cities of Turkey (Istanbul, Bursa, Antalya, Sinop).

We know a lot about Roxolana – wife of Sultan of Ukrainian origin (especially thanks to the latest publications of her letters), but our "male Roxolans" who, having come from Budzhak and Yedisán, held high positions in the Ottoman Empire, are little known to us. It happened that the border of the Christian and Muslim worlds, which was passing through the South of Ukraine, later moved far in this direction and finally the cultural wealth of the past turned to "Ottoman yoke".

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Oh yes, Russian historical science ensured everything possible to demonstrate Turkish world as a barbarian and destructive one. Under careful protection of Russian historians "letters from Cossacks to Ottoman Sultan" appeared, which have been suggested as the real ones even in Ukrainian text-books. In fact, there is nothing in common with true historical documents, the real letters of Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky to Istanbul, now found out in the archives and published. Russians described Cossacks as the enemies of everything "busurman", means barbarian (Turkic). What is more, at present time, Russian media made a lot of efforts to create a myth on modern image of Cossacks as the true followers and lovers of "Russian World", who also hate everything Ukrainian (independent, distanced from "Little Russia" or "New Russia").

Today we may openly announce that this "Russian narrative" in the Southern Ukraine became one of the mechanisms of mental occupation. Interestingly, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "Ottoman identity" (respectively conversion to Islam and loyalty to the Sultan) was not perceived as something completely alien. For example, in Berezhany (Ternopil region) a translator of the Krakow Castle Jan Kharowski (another name Pope-Zade), worked for a long time translating various literature including Muslim and

Christian texts from the Ottoman and to Ottoman (Turkic) language, in the early 18th century.

His huge manuscript collection (more than 100 texts) has been preserved in the archives of Dresden (Germany) and is still waiting for its researchers. Mikhail Tchaikovsky (Mehmet Sadyk Pasha, 1804–1886) from the Kyiv region, who fought on the side of the Ottomans as the head of the Ottoman Cossack Corps during the Crimean War, is also a very interesting figure.

These are just a few examples of Ottoman-Ukrainian identities. However, we will not see any of them in any national textbook, unfortunately. Budzhak (means “corner”, south of Odesa region) and Yedisian (“edge of seven tribes”, north of Odesa region and Transnistria) gave birth to many scientists who had significant achievements. Of course, the context of their work was Muslim, but it is not the specimen of ritual religiosity or political theology, but the spiritual heritage of poetic, literary and philosophical models.

For example, we often debate whether poets and prose writers who have written in Russian have been ours. But what do we, curiously, say about the Ottoman poet Nakshi Ali Ackirmani (d. 1665), author of the famous “Source of Life” collection? Apparently, he is not considered to be “our”, Ukrainian, so as dozens of natives of Ackerman, Kiliya, Ochakov, Khotyn, Balta etc. are not considered ours as well... In other countries, including Turkey, these figures (for example, the thinker Mehmed Ackirmani, who suggested the optimal solution to the problem of free will and divine predestination) are extremely popular, today scholars are defending theses on their researches. Still our level of interest in such issues is very low.

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The ethnic, cultural and social history of this region is a set of pages from which it is extremely difficult to present a single picture. But it seems to be necessary for our country to learn more, under the conditions when enemies continue to say that Ukraine is an “artificially created” territory, the “gift” of Russian kings. Of course, for the Turks, all this legacy is theirs, especially when Islamic heritage started to play an increasingly important role in President Erdogan’s political projects. But this is not a chance for history to be scattered: many countries do tourism business with mildly using not only their own heritage, but still do their best to preserve it.

“Ottoman” (as well as Tatar, which began to seriously interest Ukrainians only after 2014, frankly speaking) is not perceived by us that serious as “Polish”, “German” or other European, it is something more alien for us. The wedge between Russian history and the Ottoman past provided by the Russian historical science, turned into a big problem for us: it stopped a clear understanding of our history. What we need now is to look at our past with

dignity, placing all dots above the "i" and finally ceasing to perceive the Middle Ages and the early modernism through the Russian imperial prism. One might see the other side in such theses: why do we need to emphasize some "Turkish" component of our history? Is it not the same dangerous game that the variant with the "Russian World" in Ukraine, led to the loss of Crimea and part of the Donbass? In fact, when it comes to "Khan's Ukraine" or the former Ottoman space in general, the issue is not the "alien" but it "one's own."

It happened in our territories, prominent figures associated with Ottoman cities in Ukraine were of mixed ethnic origin, and finally, the Turkic peoples were part of the ethno genesis of the Ukrainian people. Not to mention the cultural influence: as much Turkic words (as well as Arabic and Persian borrowed through Turkic) as Ukrainian language has, the only could be found in Bosnian (among the Slavic languages). By restoring historical memory, we are drawing a picture of our country in the past, not only within its borders, but also in a wider cultural and geopolitical sense. Perhaps this is another way of getting a real international subject position, which we are talking and dreaming about and which from we have been thrown over the years by foreign occupation.