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(Mis)understanding the Cossack Icon

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On 5 November 1708, the terrified inhabitants of the Ukrainian town of Hlukhiv witnessed a shocking ritual. An effigy of their hetman, Ivan Mazepa, who together with his associates had recently defected from Tsar Peter I and joined the advancing army of Charles XII of Sweden, was dragged through the streets of the town. At a freshly built scaffold, Aleksandr Menshikov, the tsar's right-hand man, read out a list of Mazepa's crimes and tore the sash of the Order of St. Andrew from the effigy. These events gave the inhabitants of the Hetmanate—the autonomous Cossack polity in the Tsardom of Muscovy (later the Russian Empire)—their last public opportunity to see an image of their elderly hetman. His capital, Baturyn, and his palace were burned, his name was anathematized in all the churches of the empire, and his portraits were banned and destroyed. The same fate befell icons in which Mazepa was depicted as a donor to the numerous churches that he helped build or restore.[1]

Almost thirty years after the Hlukhiv ritual, in 1737, the mere suspicion that Mazepa had been depicted in an icon of the Dormition prompted a major investigation in the Hetmanate. It was alleged that the icon included portraits of Hetman Mazepa, his successor, Ivan Skoropadsky, and Acting Hetman Pavlo Polubotok. Members of the Cossack general staff who had served under the three hetmans testified that none of the images resembled the above-mentioned

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[1] On the anathematization of Mazepa and the ritual performed on his effigy on the orders of Aleksandr Menshikov, see Orest Subtelny, *The Mazepists: Ukrainian Separatism in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Boulder, Colo., 1981), 39-40. Cf. Oleksandr Rigel'man, *Litopysna opovid' pro Malu Rosiiu ta ïï narod i kozakiv uzahali* (reprint of the 1847 edition of *Letopisnoe povestvovanie o Maloi Rossii*, Kyiv, 1994), 547.

individuals. They described Mazepa as a carrot-haired man with a longish face and a beard.[2] The seriousness of the investigation and the summoning of high-ranking Cossack officers as witnesses attest to the fact that icons bearing Mazepa's image and portraits of him were systematically hunted down in Ukraine and destroyed long after Mazepa's actual defection, the end of the Northern War with Sweden, and the death of Emperor Peter himself. What helped sustain Mazepa's bad reputation was the anathema proclaimed annually on the first Sunday of Great Lent in the churches of the empire.[3]

Despite the continuing efforts of the imperial secular and church authorities to discredit Mazepa and, more particularly, the idea of the separation of Ukraine from Russia, of which he became a primary symbol, he turned into one of the most emblematic figures of European romanticism. Voltaire, Byron, Ryleev, Pushkin, and Słowacki wrote about him, while Liszt and Tchaikovsky, among others, dedicated musical compositions to him.[4] His upbringing at the court of the Polish king, his capture by the Cossacks and stunning rise to the pinnacle of Cossackdom, his romantic involvement with a younger woman, his flight from the tsar, his death in exile and, finally, his anathematization by the church—all these subjects proved irresistible to romantic authors. Mazepa's popularity abroad could not but inspire interest in him among the young

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[2] For a discussion of the incident, see D. Sapozhnikov, 'Zagadochnye portrety,' *Kievskaia starina*, 1884, no. 9: 732-42. Cf. Pavlo Zholtovs'kyi, *Ukraïns'kyi zhyvopys XVII-XVIII st*. (Kyiv, 1978), 225.

[3] See Subtelny, *The Mazepists*, 1. On the anathematization of Mazepa, see Giovanna Brogi, 'Mazepa, lo zar e il diavolo. Un inedito di Stefan Javorskij,' *Russica Romana* 7 (2000): 167-88. A church service commemorating the victory over the Swedes at the Battle of Poltava also featured a condemnation of Mazepa, who was identified with Judas. See Elena Pogosian, *Petr I—arkhitektor rossiiskoi istorii* (St. Petersburg, 2001), 177.

[4] See Hubert F. Babinski, *The Mazeppa Legend in European Romanticism* (New York, 1974).

Ukrainian national awakeners, for whom he was not only the ultimate romantic hero but also a symbol of resistance to the Russian Empire on behalf of their beloved Ukraine.

Among those who showed more than a benign interest in the person of Mazepa was the young Ukrainian painter and poet Taras Shevchenko, a member of the first clandestine Ukrainian political organization who was to become known as the 'father' of modern Ukraine. As a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg, he became interested in Mazepa and searched among the paintings stored in the academy's attic for a portrait of the famous hetman. What he found was a depiction of a Cossack officer with unkempt hair and an unbuttoned coat, often thought in the nineteenth century to be a portrait of Mazepa.[5] While the painting was highly reminiscent of the romantic image of Mazepa as portrayed by Byron and Pushkin, it had nothing to do with his actual appearance. Shevchenko used some elements of it as a model for his portrait of another Cossack enemy of Peter, Acting Hetman Pavlo Polubotok. The latter died in a tsarist prison after appealing to Peter to restore Cossack liberties: unlike the 'accursed' Mazepa, Polubotok was accorded a measure of toleration by the Russian imperial authorities as a symbol of Ukrainian aspirations, apparently because he did not take up arms against the monarch.[6]

[5] The picture, originally known as a portrait of a 'Little Russian,' was later retitled 'Field Hetman.' The new name (*napol'nyi getman* in Russian) derived from a misunderstanding of the catalogue description of the picture, which stated that it was a not fully (*napolno* in eighteenth-century Russian) completed portrait of a hetman. Later it was taken to be a portrait of Mazepa. See Platon Bilets'kyi, *Ukraïns'kyi portretnyi zhyvopys XVII-XVII st. Problemy stanovlennia i rozvytku* (Kyiv, 1969), 124.

[6] As in the case of Mazepa, the portraits of Polubotok that circulated in Ukraine during the nineteenth century had nothing to do with the true image of the acting hetman. In real life, he was rather stocky and did not fit the requirements of a romantic hero. As a result, portraits of his father, Leontii, which fit those requirements much better, were disseminated as portraits of Pavlo Polubotok, popularizing the idea of Ukraine's struggle for its autonomous rights (ibid., 124, 219-21).

In the conflict between Peter and Mazepa, Shevchenko's sympathies were unquestionably on the side of the former. In the poem 'Irzhavets'' (1847), written after his arrest and exile on political charges, Shevchenko called the emperor a 'hangman' (*kat*) and regretted that the Cossacks of the Hetmanate had not emulated the Zaporozhians in giving unanimous support to their hetman, Mazepa, in his struggle with Peter at Poltava.[7] During the years preceding his arrest, Shevchenko lived for a while in Pereiaslav, one of the centres of the former Hetmanate. There he painted pictures of local architectural monuments, including the local Church of the Holy Protection (*Pokrova*) of the Theotokos.[8] He also had the opportunity to study the large painting of the *Pokrova* in the church, whose iconographic composition was drawn from the *Life of St. Andrew the Holy Fool*. Figuring prominently in that *vita* was the story of the appearance of the Mother of God in the Byzantine church of Blachernai to protect the people of Constantinople from a barbarian siege. Judging by the names of newly consecrated churches, the Feast of the *Pokrova* became popular in Ukraine during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The iconography of the *Pokrova* developed in Ukraine under strong Western influence, allowing painters to depict the Mother of God and the saints along with images of tsars and tsarinas, which replaced depictions of Byzantine emperors and empresses, as well as images of the Cossack officers who sponsored the icons.[9] One such Cossack icon was the Pereiaslav *Pokrova*, which was transferred from wood to canvas. It showed Tsar Peter I, Catherine I, representatives of the

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[7] See the English translation of the poem 'Irzhavets'' in *The Poetical Works of Taras Shevchenko: The Kobzar*, trans. C. H. Andrusyshen and Watson Kirkconnell (Toronto, 1977), 325-28, here 325-26.

[8] For a reproduction of the 1845 water colour, see *Shevchenkivs'kyi slovnyk*, 2: 323-33 (Kyiv, 1977).

[9] For a comprehensive discussion of the origins of the iconographic composition of the *Pokrova*, see Mieczysław Gębarowicz, *Mater Misericordiae—Pokrow—Pokrowa w sztuce i legendzie Środkowo-Wschodniej Europy* (Wrocław, 1986).

Orthodox clergy, and a number of Cossack officers, their wives and relatives under the protection of the veil (*pokrov*) of the Theotokos. **[See illustration. Source: Igor' Grabar', Istoriia russkogo iskusstva, vol. 6 (Moscow, 1914), p. 475.]**

Shevchenko was clearly impressed by the icon: years later, he included a description of it in his Russian-language novel *The Twins* (1855). One of the main characters, Nikifor Sokira, a descendant of an old Cossack family who embodies Ukrainian patriotic traditions, is presented there as a great admirer of that particular icon. Shevchenko described the church and the painting itself as follows: 'The Church of the Pokrova, clumsy and nondescript in construction, was built in honor of Peter I's conquest of Azov by Colonel Myrovych of Pereiaslav, a friend and contemporary of the anathematized Mazepa. Preserved in that church is a remarkable historical painting, perhaps a work of Matveev, if not of some foreigner. The painting is divided into two parts: above, the Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God; below, Peter I with Empress Catherine I; and around them, all his eminent associates. They included Hetman Mazepa and the founder of the shrine in all his regalia.'[10]

Shevchenko was correct in his identification of the portraits of Peter and Catherine, but his belief that the icon included a portrait of Mazepa was a mere figment of his imagination. The very fact that the icon included a portrait of Peter together with Catherine suggests that it could not have been painted before the announcement of their wedding in 1712. By that time, Mazepa had already been anathematized, and a depiction of the victorious tsar and his 'betrayer' in the same icon would have been simply impossible. As the investigation of 1737 indicates, even if such an icon had been painted, it would not have survived until Shevchenko's times.

Still, if Mazepa is not depicted in the icon, who is? There is good reason to believe that

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[10] Shevchenko, 'Bliznetsy,' in idem, *Povne zibrannia tvoriv*, 4: 26-27 (Kyiv, 1964).

the Pereiaslav icon was commissioned by members of the Sulyma family, which gave Ukraine a number of prominent Cossack officers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Pereiaslav icon closely resembles the *Pokrova* icon from the village of Sulymivka commissioned by Semen Sulyma, who was colonel of Pereiaslav from 1739 to 1766. It was either he or his father, Ivan, the acting colonel of Pereiaslav during the reign of Peter I, who most probably commissioned the Pereiaslav icon, so reminiscent of the *Pokrova* icon displayed at their estate in Sulymivka. What we now know about the Sulymas and the general atmosphere in the Hetmanate after 1712 indicates that the Pereiaslav icon manifested the loyalty of the Cossack officer stratum to the tsar, not the notion of rebellion against him symbolized by the image of Mazepa.[11]

Clearly, that is not how Shevchenko saw the icon and understood its historical and political message. After all, his Nikifor Sokira willed that the icon be placed at the head of his coffin at his funeral—not, of course, for its portrait of the imperial couple but because of the images of the Cossack officers. For Shevchenko and his contemporaries in the ranks of Ukrainian national awakeners, those images, especially that of Mazepa, symbolized the glorious Cossack past, which was emerging as a cornerstone of modern Ukrainian historical memory and identity.[12] Shevchenko's identification of one of the personages in the Pereiaslav *Pokrova* icon as Hetman Mazepa had a lasting effect on the study of the Cossack *Pokrova* in general and the Pereiaslav icon in particular.

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[11] For a discussion of the circumstances in which the icon was painted and its ideological message, see my *Tsars and Cossacks: A Study in Iconography* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 55-62. Cf. the reproduction of the Sulymivka *Pokrova*, ibid., plate XI.

[12] On the importance of the Cossack myth for the Ukrainian nation-building project, see John A. Armstrong, 'Myth and History in the Evolution of Ukrainian Consciousness,' in *Ukraine and Russia in Their Historical Encounter*, ed. Peter J. Potichnyj et al. (Edmonton, 1992), 125в39.

As the Cossack mythology gained a stronger hold on the imagination of adherents of the Ukrainian national movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so did the images of its hetmans. One of the main developments in the field was the de facto rehabilitation of Mazepa by the leaders of the national movement. Under new circumstances, he replaced Polubotok as a symbol of Ukraine's struggle for autonomy and independence. Numerous real and alleged portraits of Mazepa were included in the surveys of Ukrainian history that began to appear in the Russian Empire in the first decade of the twentieth century. The most popular of them was Mykhailo Hrushevsky's *Illustrated History of Ukraine*,[13] which included seven different portraits of Mazepa.

An important role in the conceptualization of early modern Ukrainian icon painting was played by Evgenii Kuzmin's essay on 'Ukrainian Painting of the Seventeenth Century,' which appeared on the eve of World War I as part of the sixth volume of Igor Grabar's *History of Russian Art*.[14] Kuzmin suggested that Ukrainian art of the second half of the seventeenth century had been shaped by the rise of national identity, owing to the influence of Metropolitan Peter Mohyla and, as Kuzmin put it, 'the definitive unification of Ukraine with Moscow under Bohdan Khmelnytsky.' In his opinion, the latter development 'promoted the vindication of all that was characteristically Orthodox, i.e., Byzantine-Russian, as a counterweight to Polish Latinization.'[15] Kuzmin maintained that the defining feature of Ukrainian art in the first decades of the

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[13] See Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi, *Iliustrovana istoriia Ukraïny* (Kyiv, 1912). The book appeared in numerous editions in Ukraine between 1912 and 1918 and was later repeatedly reprinted in the West.

[14] Despite its title, the essay also covered Ukrainian painting of the eighteenth century. See Evgenii Kuz'min, 'Ukrainskaia zhivopis' XVII veka' in Igor' Grabar', *Istoriia russkago iskusstva*, vol. 6 (=*Istoriia zhivopisi*, vol. 1, *Dopetrovskaia ėpokha*) (Moscow, 1914), 455-80.

[15] Ibid., 458-59.

eighteenth century was the growing impact of West European art forms—a process associated with Hetman Mazepa. Although the hetman figured as a 'scoundrel' (*getman-zlodei*) in Kuzmin's text, the author used quotation marks to dissociate himself from that characterization. Kuzmin stressed the impact of Mazepa's activities on Ukrainian art, comparing it with that of Metropolitan Mohyla. He associated another important development in art, the advance of secularism at the expense of religion, with the transforming activity of Peter. Those were the elements that Kuzmin discerned in the *Pokrova* icon from Pereiaslav, which was reproduced in the volume. He claimed that the secularism of the new era was reflected in the centrality of the figure of Peter in the icon, while the advance of Western influence was apparent in its style.[16]

The study of Cossack icon painting in the former Russian Empire was halted by the events of World War I and the Revolution. The rise of militant atheism in the USSR and the intensification of government attacks on the cultural intelligentsia further hindered research on the subject. In Ukraine, the situation was exacerbated by the incessant official search for manifestations of Ukrainian nationalism in art and scholarship, with Mazepa serving as the embodiment of 'Ukrainian separatism.' Thus a revival of the study of Cossack icon painting in Ukraine became possible only in the 1950s, and then only within the context of research on the

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[16] Kuzmin's high opinion of Mazepa's role in the development of Ukrainian art was apparently influenced by Hrushevsky's treatment of the hetman. In his essay, Kuzmin made reference to one of the Cossack-era portraits in Hrushevsky's survey (ibid., 462, 170-76). In turn, Kuzmin's essay influenced quite a few Ukrainian scholars, including Mykola Holubets, the author of a survey of Ukrainian art (1922). There, Holubets repeated almost verbatim some of Kuzmin's basic assessments. He noted the influence on Ukrainian art of 'Ukraine's unification with Russia' and the profound impact of Ivan Mazepa's activities on the Westernization of Ukrainian art forms. See Mykola Holubets', *Nacherk istoriï ukraïns'koho mystetstva* (Lviv, 1922; repr. New York, 1973), 234, 240-41.

liberation struggle of the popular masses and the paradigm of the 'reunification' of Ukraine with Russia. It was in these terms that the Ukrainian art historian Pavlo Zholtovsky, freshly released from the GULAG, attempted to rehabilitate Cossack painting of the period in his study of early modern Ukrainian art (1958). In it Zholtovsky defined the ideological significance of the Cossack *Pokrova* icons (including the one from Pereiaslav) as follows: 'The Cossack *Pokrovas*, uniting religious and historical subjects, were a specific affirmation in church painting of the idea of the reunification of Ukraine with Russia.'[17] Thus Kuzmin's and, later, Holubets's interpretation of the conditions that influenced the development of Ukrainian art in the second half of the seventeenth century were transferred by Zholtovsky to the era of Ivan Mazepa and treated not as a cultural but a political phenomenon. Ironically, if one ignores the official 'reunification' terminology imposed on Zholtovsky, he was not too far off the mark, as the icons indeed reflected the nature of Russo-Ukrainian relations of the period.

Fedir Umantsev, the author of the section on early modern Ukrainian painting in the collective volume *Essays on the History of Ukrainian Art* (1966), also regarded the Cossack *Pokrovas* as manifestations of the reunification of Ukraine with Russia and the unity of 'two fraternal peoples.' The editors of the volume published a black-and-white reproduction of the Pereiaslav icon, a colour image of a *Pokrova* icon that included a portrait of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, and a detail of the Sulymivka icon—the most representative collection of reproductions of the Cossack *Pokrovas* at the time. In discussing the Pereiaslav icon, Umantsev claimed that, along with the image of Peter I, it included portraits of Catherine II (an obvious confusion with Catherine I) and the architect of Peter's church reform, Teofan Prokopovych. He

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[17] See Pavlo Zholtovs'kyi, *Vyzvol'na viina ukraïns'koho narodu v pam'iatkakh mystetstva XVI-XVIII st.* (Kyiv, 1958), 53-54.

also claimed that the icon had been commissioned by the builder of the church, a certain

Nemyrych, confusing the name of the famous seventeenth-century Cossack general chancellor

with that of the eighteenth-century colonel of Pereiaslav, Ivan Myrovych.[18]

The late 1960s witnessed a revival of interest in early modern Ukrainian icon painting,

which prompted numerous publications and republications of the *Pokrova* icons. Most

prominently featured was the icon with the portrait of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, while the Pereiaslav

icon was reproduced only once, in the above-mentioned one-volume history of Ukrainian art.

There are several reasons why the Khmelnytsky icon not only overshadowed but completely

eliminated the Pereiaslav *Pokrova* from histories of Ukrainian art. First of all, the Pereiaslav icon

itself was destroyed in World War II, leaving scholars and publishers with a mere copy. Second,

although Peter I, whose portrait appeared in the icon, was regarded as a progressive figure in the

1960s, he was no match for the leader of a popular uprising, Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky,

especially when it came to representing the idea of Russo-Ukrainian friendship—a key concept

in post-World War II Soviet historiography. And last but not least, the Pereiaslav icon was

blemished by its association with the name of Ivan Mazepa, the antihero of the historiographic

myth of the 'friendship of peoples.' Shevchenko's identification of one of the Cossacks in the

icon as Hetman Mazepa, whom Soviet ideological watchdogs proclaimed a traitor to the

Ukrainian people, was not forgotten. Shevchenko's works were reissued in large print runs

throughout the Soviet period, and some Soviet scholars, such as Hryhorii Lohvyn, continued to

list Mazepa among the historical figures depicted in the Pereiaslav icon.[19]

At the end of the 1960s, Platon Biletsky published his groundbreaking study of the early

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[18] See *Narysy z istoriï ukraïns'koho mystetstva* (Kyiv, 1966), 94-95, plate VI, illustrations nos. 159, 160.

[19] See Hryhorii Lohvyn, *Po Ukraïni. Starodavni mystets'ki pam'iatky* (Kyiv, 1968), 71.

modern Ukrainian portrait, in which he did not associate the flourishing of Ukrainian art in Left-Bank Ukraine (a Soviet euphemism for the Hetmanate) with the consequences of the Pereiaslav Council of 1654, which, according to the Soviet historical imagination, proclaimed the 'reunification of Ukraine with Russia,' or with the friendship of the two fraternal peoples. Rather, Biletsky saw it as a consequence of Khmelnytsky's 'wars of liberation' and of the economic independence of the Cossack polity.[20] From that statement, it was only one step to the assertion that the Ukrainian state had been independent under Khmelnytsky—a notion regarded by the Soviet watchdogs as the ultimate manifestation of 'Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism.' Biletsky, for his part, made use of the Soviet paradigm of class struggle to assert his national agenda. In the tradition of Ukrainian populist historiography of the pre-revolutionary era, he attacked the representatives of the Cossack officer stratum, such as the Sulymas, claiming that they had 'rejected' their glorious Cossack ancestors and invented a foreign ancestry to prove their noble status. Although Biletsky did not write specifically about the Cossack *Pokrovas*, his attitude to the likely commissioners of the Pereiaslav and Sulymivka icons leaves no doubt that he did not approve of their servility toward the Russian tsars. [21]

In his book of 1981 on early modern Ukrainian art, Biletsky elaborated his critique of the social egoism of the Cossack officer stratum, which betrayed the interests of the people (and, one should understand, the nation as well) in its pursuit of the privileges and estates granted by the

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[20] See Bilets'kyi, *Ukraïns'kyi portretnyi zhyvopys*, 82.

[21] Ibid., 191-92. Biletsky's critique of the social egoism of the Cossack officer stratum was directly applied to the sponsors of the *Pokrova* icons by Zholtovsky, who wrote: 'The "Cossack *Pokrovas*" present a profoundly conceived image of the contemporary Hetmanate, its elite, the colonels, captains, and Cossack officers, who based themselves on the power of the tsarist Russian regime and gradually entered the ranks of the "well-born nobiliary stratum" (Zholtovs'kyi, *Ukraïns'kyi zhyvopys XVII-XVIII st.*, 231-34).

Russian government. In a decade of government-sponsored hunting for manifestations of

Ukrainian nationalism and 'idealization' of Cossackdom, which cost the first secretary of the

Communist Party of Ukraine, Petro Shelest, his career, Biletsky could not write as he had in the

late 1960s about the economic independence of Bohdan Khmelnytsky's state as the basis for the

flourishing of Ukrainian art. At most, he could limit the number of obligatory references to the

impact of the 'historical act of the reunification of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples' on art and

continue his class-based critique of the pro-Russian elites of the Hetmanate.[22] In his new book,

Biletsky briefly discussed the Pereiaslav and Sulymivka icons, noting the Russian roots of their

composition. He also quoted from Shevchenko's description of the Pereiaslav *Pokrova* but failed

to mention Mazepa among the figures possibly depicted in it.[23]

While Ukrainian art historians under Soviet rule struggled with state-imposed limitations

on what they could say in their works, their few counterparts in the ranks of the Ukrainian

diaspora in the West sought to ignore the Russian aspect of the Cossack *Pokrovas* altogether,

focusing on the genre of Cossack *Pokrovas* as an expression of Ukrainian art. What resonated

very strongly among historians of Ukrainian art in the West (all of them recent émigrés from

Ukraine) was the interpretation of Ukrainian art of the first half of the eighteenth century as a

phenomenon closely associated with the activities of Hetman Mazepa. If in Soviet Ukraine

association with Mazepa could relegate a particular work of art to decades of obscurity and

neglect, in the diaspora this association had the opposite effect, since Mazepa emerged there as a

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[22] See Platon Bilets'kyi, *Ukraïns'ke mystetstvo druhoï polovyny XVII-XVIII stolit'* (Kyiv, 1981), 6-7, 98, 100.

[23] Although he stayed away from the 'Mazepa problem,' Biletsky questioned Shevchenko's suggestion that the author of the icon was a foreigner, noting that an artist of such qualifications could have been trained in the Kyivan Cave Monastery as easily as in the West (ibid., 36-37).

forerunner of Ukrainian independence. It was through this prism that the architecture, painting and engraving of the era were interpreted in Volodymyr Sichynsky's book on Mazepa as a patron of the arts.[24] The same approach was taken by the historian of the Ukrainian icon (and an active icon painter himself), Sviatoslav Hordynsky. In his popular book on the history of the Ukrainian icon, published in 1973, Hordynsky noted the wealth of *Pokrova* iconography in Cossack Ukraine and associated it with the development of portrait painting during the Cossack era. Like other diaspora scholars, he preferred not to focus on the political and ideological message conveyed by the Cossack *Pokrovas*.[25]

The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the rise of independent Ukraine resulted in the lifting of ideological controls on publications dealing with the history of Ukrainian art. The collapse of state-sponsored atheism and the religious revival on the one hand and growing interest in the history of Ukrainian culture, with icon painting as one of its components, on the other resulted in the publication of an impressive number of books and illustrated collections on the history of the Ukrainian icon. The 1990s saw an avalanche of publications that included reproductions or discussions of the Cossack *Pokrovas*. When it comes to quantity of reproductions, the *Pokrova* with the portrait of Bohdan Khmelnytsky remained in the lead, with the Pereiaslav *Pokrova* as sorely neglected as before 1991—this time, apparently, not because of the alleged association with Mazepa but because of the portrait of Peter I, whose empire-building efforts find little admiration among Ukrainian scholars. Given that the original icon did not survive, it has been easy for contemporary Ukrainian scholars to avoid including it in their

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[24] See Volodymyr Sichyns'kyi, *Ivan Mazepa. Liudyna i metsenat* (Philadelphia, 1951).

[25] See Sviatoslav Hordyns'kyi, *Ukraïns'ka ikona XII-XVIII storich* (Philadelphia, 1973), 22-23.

illustrated collections.[26]

Contemporary Ukrainian writing dealing with Cossack iconography presents a curious mix of old and new approaches to the subject. Some scholars remain attached in one way or another to their Soviet-era stereotypes, while others are prepared to pull out all the stops in attempting to complete the nationalization of the Cossack *Pokrovas* as symbols of Ukrainian identity. The first tendency is represented by the most recent work of Fedir Umantsev, the author of the 1966 essay on early modern Ukrainian art that includes a reproduction of the Pereiaslav *Pokrova*. In 2002 Umantsev published a general survey of medieval and early modern Ukrainian art in which he essentially repeated his previous assessments of *Pokrova* iconography and his earlier factual errors. He characterized the *Pokrova* icon with the portrait of Khmelnytsky as consonant with ideas expressed in Ukrainian *dumy* (epic songs) 'that extol the events of the Pereiaslav Council.' Sadly for the elderly scholar, there are no such *dumy*. In discussing the Pereiaslav *Pokrova*, Umantsev repeated his old errors whereby the church builder Colonel Myrovych was confused with Nemyrych, and Catherine I with Catherine II.[27]

The scholarly standards of proponents of the complete nationalization of the Cossak *Pokrovas* would appear to be no higher. In an illustrated history released by the same Kyiv publisher that issued Umantsev's book, the art historian and Orthodox activist Dmytro Stepovyk presents the *Pokrova* icons as the embodiment of Ukraine's incessant struggle with its three

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[26] See, for example, the album of reproductions published for Western consumption in 1996 by Liudmyla Miliaieva. It includes three Cossack *Pokrovas*—those from Deshky (with the portrait of Bohdan Khmelnytsky), Sulymivka, and Novhorod-Siverskyi (see *The Ukrainian Icon*, text by Liudmila Miliayeva [Bournemouth and St. Petersburg, 1996]), 68-74. As in her earlier publications, Miliaieva avoids any comment on the ideological meaning of the icons, focusing instead on their characteristics as works of art.

[27] See F. S. Umantsev, *Mystetstvo davn'oï Ukraïny. Istorychnyi narys* (Kyiv, 2002), 242.

oppressors: the Ottoman Empire, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Muscovy (later the Russian Empire). He also denies the possibility that Peter I is depicted in the *Pokrova* icon from Sulymivka (obviously confusing it with the one from Pereiaslav). Stepovyk writes that the *Pokrova* icons were meant to depict the Byzantine emperor and empress, not the Russian tsars. He goes on to reject the possibility of Peter I's depiction on patriotic grounds, stating: 'And what artist of sound mind would depict a bitter enemy of Ukraine, a despot and an insane maniac in a Ukrainian icon after what he did to Ukraine following the Battle of Poltava?'[28]

If one compares the attention paid to the Cossack *Pokrovas* in the course of the twentieth century in terms of number of reproductions with the amount of actual research done on them in the same period, the result is quite disappointing. That research was minuscule indeed, especially as compared to the body of work done in neighbouring Poland and represented by Mieczysław Gębarowicz's book on *Pokrova* iconography. The Pereiaslav *Pokrova*, associated in one way or another with the figures of Emperor Peter I and Hetman Ivan Mazepa, who are highly symbolic in modern national and social mythologies, exemplifies the difficult plight of art-historical research in modern Russia and Ukraine. It also focuses attention on the ideological and political currents that have influenced the interpretation of East European art over the last two centuries, including the rise of competing national projects that sought to 'nationalize' the artistic heritage of multinational empires and the advance of radical socialist doctrines that emphasized class struggle, striving to eradicate all manifestations of religious belief and its reflection in the fine arts. It appears that meticulous research into the rich legacy of the Cossack iconographers and the discovery of the multilayered significance of their work remains largely a task for the future.

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[28] See Dmytro Stepovyk, *Istoriia ukraïns'koï ikony X-XX stolit'* (Kyiv, 1996), 66.