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WESTERN EUROPEAN IDEALS OF CHIVALRY IN THE SPIRITUAL AND POLITICAL CULTURE OF THE UKRAINIAN COSSACKS AS A FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENT OF DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY IN UKRAINE

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Abstract. *The Ukrainian Cossacks not only became an important military and political phenomenon, but also formed a unique culture and psychology that combined both local traditions and European influences. One of the key external factors that influenced the formation of the culture of the Cossacks was Western European chivalry. Contacts with chivalric traditions took place through numerous interactions, including military alliances, cultural exchange, and the participation of Cossacks in European wars.*

As a result, the Cossacks adopted a number of features that shaped their self-perception, ideology and lifestyle, which became the foundation for the development of a democratic political regime in Ukraine. The authors of the article emphasize that the Cossacks borrowed a number of military tactics and customs from Western European chivalry. Among them: the use of heavy cavalry, characteristic of Polish hussars and French knightly detachments, heraldic symbols – coats of arms, banners reminiscent of Western European traditions, the development of fencing and horse fighting, which was combined with Eastern methods of war. The authors also note that, like European chivalry, the Cossacks developed their own code of honor, which contained: loyalty to brotherhood, defense of faith and readiness for self-sacrifice. Just as the European crusader knights defended Christianity, so the Cossacks positioned themselves as defenders of the Orthodox faith from the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Khanate. They also equally patronized monasteries and churches and used biblical motifs in rhetoric.

Keywords: *Ukrainian Cossacks, European knights, military ethics and psychology, democracy, code of honor, Christian values, defense of faith.*

Introduction.

Ukraine has a long historical continuity with European civilization, which includes interaction with European political, military and cultural traditions. The study of the influence of knightly ideals on the Cossacks helps to prove that:

1. The Cossacks were not just a «spontaneous movement», but formed their own ideology of honor and service on the model of European knightly orders.

2. The Zaporizhian Sich shared similarities with European military orders such as



the Hospitallers, Teutonic Knights, and Templars.

3. The Ukrainian military tradition did not evolve in isolation but in close interaction with Western military practices, noble codes, and legal norms.

Today, the Ukrainian army is fighting for independence, and the Cossack heritage is an important element of its identity. The chivalric code of honor, embodied in the Cossacks, has a direct connection with modern military ethics and psychology: readiness for self-sacrifice for the sake of the state, twinning as the basis of interaction in the army, protection of the weaker, which echoes European military traditions of humanity in war.

In the current conditions of Ukraine's European integration, this research is an important argument for debunking imperial myths that try to attribute Ukrainian history only to the influence of Muscovy or the Eastern world. Research on this topic helps to strengthen historical memory and refute Russian narratives about «common history».

Therefore, the authors of the article aim to study the influence of Western European chivalry on the culture of the Ukrainian Cossacks, since such scientific exploration confirms the European identity of Ukraine.

The methodology of the article is based on general scientific principles and methods of cognition with the aim of objective and comprehensive coverage of facts, events, and phenomena. It is based on the principles of historicism and objectivity of scientific research, which give preference to factual material and avoid subjective assessments. The topic was approached using general scientific and specific historical research methods. A comprehensive analysis of the extant sources and literature was conducted. The study was meticulously structured according to a systematic periodization, and material was presented using the problem-oriented historical method. Furthermore, the comparative historical method was employed to compare similar indicators and facts within the same historical conditions.

Such Ukrainian historians as Dmytro Yavornytskyi, Valeriy Shcherbak, Petro Sas in their works explored the parallels between the culture of the Ukrainian Cossacks and late medieval Western European chivalry, in particular the impact on military traditions and symbols. Dmytro Nalyvaiko and Yuriy Figurnyi analyzed how



knightly ideals influenced the corporate ideology and mentality of the Ukrainian Cossacks, in particular through the symbolism of weapons and military traditions. Valeriy Stepankov, Volodymyr Serhiychuk investigated how Cossack culture influenced the national identity of Ukrainians. The works of these scholars provide a deep analysis of the influence of Western European chivalry on the formation of the culture of the Ukrainian Cossacks, revealing the relationships between military traditions, symbols, and ideology of both communities.

Main text.

When studying the various elements of the cultural complex of the Ukrainian Cossacks, it is impossible to ignore Western European influences on the culture of the Ukrainian Cossacks.

As it is known, in the XI century European chivalry was completely Christianized, and a new stage of its development began, namely, the formation and establishment of spiritual-chivalric monastic orders. With their existence and successful struggle against enemies, these monastic orders made a great impression not only on the Western European non-order chivalry, but also on their near and distant neighbors, including the Eastern European military classes, and in particular the Cossacks.

This influence was reflected in the highest manifestation of the Ukrainian Cossacks – the Zaporozhian Sich – the «Cossack Christian Republic». Not in vain one of the most famous historians and historiosophists of the XX century. Arnold Toynbee wrote in his famous work «Studies of History» that the Sich Society of the Dnieper Cossacks formed a semi-monastic military brotherhood, having common features with both the Hellenic brotherhood of Spartiates warriors and the orders of the Crusader knights [1, p.123].

The Zaporizhian Sich is united with the knightly and monastic orders of Western Europe of the 12th-14th centuries by such elements as religiosity, asceticism, collective land ownership, the cult of the Virgin Mary and Saints George and Michael. These elements were formed and developed in Western European chivalry, and later reproduced and continued their successful development on the territory of Zaporozhian Sich.



In the process of Christianization of Europe in the VIII-XI centuries. The Christian commandment «Thou shalt not kill» came into conflict with the warlike principles of chivalry. The church overcame this contradiction by developing a religious and philosophical concept of the «army of Christ». The blood shed by the sword consecrated by the church for Christian values not only ceased to be considered a sin, but also began to be interpreted as a Christian feat for the faith [2, p.43].

A new rise in the religious activity of Western European chivalry was distinguished by the period of the so-called Crusades, which lasted almost 200 years, from the end of the XI century. and until the last third of the XIII century. Name for these military-political expeditions was formed due to the fact that the participants of these campaigns, mainly Western European knights, attached fabric crosses to their robes and became true «warriors of Christ» [2, p.58].

A unique product of the Crusades was the creation of spirits of knightly-monk orders –state organizations of European chivalry, whose members were also called «knights of the church». The most powerful of them were three orders: the Ioannites (Hospitallers or Knights of Malta), the Templars (templars), the Teutonic (the Order of the House of St. Mary of the Teutons). These Christian orders were semi-monastic, semi-military organizations, whose members took vows of pure life, close to the vows of monks. They renounced their own will (the vow of obedience) and had to obey their elected leaders completely; renounced personal property (the vow of poverty and asceticism) and took the vow of chastity, non-marriage (celibacy). Unlike Christian monks, they took a fourth vow – military – to fight with the infidels until the Holy Land – Palestine – was completely cleansed of them [2, p.62-64].

As the authoritative Dutch medieval scientist J. Huizing, wherever the chivalric ideal was practiced in its purest form, special emphasis was placed on its ascetic element [3]. The American philosopher W. James wrote that the Christian knight-errant, like the Templar knight, was free from earthly bonds and poor. This ideal of a noble fighter, who did not need property, shaped the ethical, if not the practical, views of the military and aristocratic people. In this time period, the warrior-knight was respected as a person who would overcome any obstacles in his path. Owning nothing but his own life, and



being ready to put it at risk at any moment, when it was necessary, he was an unsurpassed example on the way to his ideals. That is why the connection of the chivalric ideal with the high values of religious consciousness: compassion, justice, fidelity, was in no way artificial and superficial. [4, p.81-85]

J. Huizinga wrote that the first knightly and monastic orders were formed as the most sincere embodiment of the medieval spirit in a combination of monastic and chivalric ideologies at a time when the duel with Islam became an unusual reality. Later they grew into solid political institutions, into huge economic complexes with collective land ownership and rich financial states. Over time, political gain gradually pushed their spiritual character into the background, as well as the knightly-game element, and economic aspects, in turn, took priority over political gain. Although, when the Templars and the Hospitallers even operated in the Holy Land, chivalry performed real political functions, and knightly orders, as estate organizations, were of great importance [3].

The ideological universe of the Middle Ages was saturated with religious ideas in all its elements and manifestations. War was involved in the system of Christian values, naturally, as a factor subordinated to the highest goal – the protection of the Christian world from enemy encroachments. Probably, in order to strengthen the religious idea and provide a role model for the «soldiers of Christ», the church used the images of the Virgin Mary, the Archangel Michael, St. George (Yura) and other «holy warriors» as patrons and defenders of Christian armies. They, as «warriors of Christ», were obliged to lead the troops into battle with the enemies of the Christianity, to go at the head of warriors called by their faith to fulfill the will of God and his church. In addition, at the height of the knightly era, the trinity of the great and most powerful patrons of European chivalry – the Virgin Mary, the Archangel Michael and St. George – was connected by a common denominator – the fight against the ancient serpent (dragon, tranceshaped by the Bible into the satanic symbol of the Antichrist, a symbol of absolute evil) and victory over him [3].

The Virgin Mary was considered the patroness of many monastic and knightly orders in Europe, including one of the largest – the Teutonic Knights. In 911, the Vikings besieged the French city of Chartres. According to legend, after the appearance of a



bishop on the fortress wall, who raised the holy tunic of the Virgin Mary above him, like a flag, the pagan Normans were suddenly seized with panic and quickly retreated [2, p.73].

In medieval Europe, the cult of the archangel Michael (the chief heavenly warrior) grew immensely. J. Huizinga noted that not only religion dominated the society of that time, but also religious ideas themselves fell under the attractive ideas of chivalry. Thus, the valiant feat of the Archangel Michael was the first of the military knightly achievements ever performed. And therefore, he is the founder of chivalry, and it, as «earthly army and human chivalry», appears as nothing more than the personification of the earthly image of angelic warriors surrounding God's throne [3].

F. Cardini argues that the total popularity of the Archangel Michael among the peoples who embarked on the path of Christianization was a consequence of the preservation of the former ancient military cults in new robes [2, p.114].

For both the Western European knighthood and the Ukrainian Cossacks and, in particular, for the Cossacks, one of the most cardinal tasks was to protect the Christian faith and the church. It is not for nothing that well-known scientists, researchers of the Cossacks, Apollon Skalkovsky and Dmytro Yavornytskyi, represented the Cossacks in their scientific works as knights and protectors of the Orthodox faith and church. The Christian Orthodox religion was the dominant form of ideology in the Zaporozhian Sich [5, p.48]. On the territory of the Sich there was a church of the Intercession of the Virgin Mary. With the money of the Cossacks, the Trakhtemyriv and Mezhyhiria monasteries were built, where the Cossacks healed their wounds and illnesses and lived out their lives [6, p.162]. In addition, Orthodox churches and monasteries were founded throughout the territory of Zaporozhye. In its palanquins, religious figures corresponded with the Cossack elders to obtain permission to collect alms for the church and repair temples in the «Zaporozhye liberties» [7, p.29]. In turn, the foreman, as, for example, P. Kalnyshevsky, fulfilling the request of the clergy, asked to assist in the production of the Gospels, holy icons¹, to appoint a rector to the church, which was built at his expense. Christian priests usually blessed the Zaporozhians who went on military campaigns [7, p.32].



That is why D. Yavornytsky emphasized that a special feature of the character of the Zaporozhian Cossacks was their religiosity, which rejected any manifestation of hypocrisy, and which is what distinguished them from others. The defense of the belief system of their ancestors and the Orthodox Church formed a solid foundation for their lives. Living in the «Tatar steppes» and being under the protection of the Crimean Khan, the Cossacks openly disgraced and even cursed the Tatars for burning the Cossack shrine – Samara St. Nicholas's Monastery. In 1710 the Zaporozhian Cossacks, during the conclusion of the treaty with Pylyp Orlyk, raised the question of the Orthodox faith in the first paragraph [6, p.178].

Belonging to the Orthodox Christian denomination was the most important condition for acceptance into the brotherhood of the Zaporozhian Cossacks [6, p.32].

A. Skalkovsky in his work «History of the New Sich» distinguished two main circumstances that concern the Zaporozhians. The first is the demand of Kosh Zaporozhsky for the independence of their church and clergy from the general Russian hierarchy or from the Metropolitan of Kiev. This can be considered an additional proof of the order system of the Zaporozhian army. The second feature of the Zaporozhians is a special respect for Kiev monasteries, mainly for the «The Mezhyhirya Savior-Transfiguration Monastery» [8, p.49].

It is especially worth noting the unpretentiousness of the Zaporozhian Cossacks in everyday life, which can be compared with the asceticism of Western European knights-monks. Foreigners in their diaries singled out the unpretentiousness and asceticism of the Cossacks as the features of these steppe warriors. The Italian Alberto Vimina wrote that these were «noble people, but strict and rude», people «free-spirited, but who obviously do not value wealth» [8, p. 51].

The asceticism of Cossack life, particularly during the campaigns (in which they spent most of their lives), was well known. Paul Halebsky, who accompanied the Patriarch of Antioch during his travels through Ukraine in the mid-17th century, spoke enthusiastically of the modesty of Bohdan Khmelnytsky. He did not take valuable dishes with him on the campaign, which the Cossacks had in abundance [8, p.56].

Collective land ownership is another parallel between the archetypes of Cossack



culture and the late medieval chivalry of Western Europe. A. Skalkovsky noted that all actions of the inhabitants are always subordinated to the concept of «community» or «society». In the Zaporozhian army, no one was a person separated from society. All Zaporozhians, without exception, always acted on behalf of all or part of the army.

The Kurin Cossacks were not supposed to have any other property either in the army or outside it, except for a winter house built on Zaporozhian land, herds, wages and money earned by crafts or obtained in war. It is likely that in the 16th-17th centuries a Cossack did not own any other property except a horse and weapons. [9, p. 81].

According to D. Yavornytsky, in Zaporozhye all the land territory was communal, common property, and only what was built by the Cossacks on the lands of the society was private property. If we recall the ancient, annually repeated custom of casting lots for lands and rivers, this will confirm the idea of the existence of collective land ownership among the Cossacks, which closely connects the Zaporozhye society with the European knightly and monastic orders.[6, p.195].

Collective land ownership was preserved at a later stage of Zaporozhye's development. Thus, in 1772, the military clerk Ivan Globa asked the Shcherbinovsky kuren a small part of the yard. Ataman Ivan Stukonig «with the company» answered him: «Since the yard belongs to the kuren, and not to one owner, it cannot be given up for exchange or sale, so that there are no disputes between the company» [10, p.87].

The Zaporozhian, like the Western European knights, deeply honored many Christian saints, but some of them were valued most reverently, namely the Virgin Mary-Protection, Saints Michael and George (Yura).

Among the Zaporozhian Cossacks, the Holy Mother of God Virgin Mary was personified as the patroness of the Lower Army, and wherever Sich reigned, a church was immediately erected in the name of the Protection of the Holy and Immaculate Mother of God-Man [11, p. 49].

D. Yavornytskyi organized the evidence about the icon of the Protection of the Mother of God, which was kept in the city of Nikopol. It depicted the Mother of God, Nicholas the Wonderworker, and Michael the Archangel in a highly professional manner.



Below them were painted Cossacks in full armor, in boots, in wide trousers, girded with green belts, with carefully shaved heads.

The inscription, stretched in the form of a narrow ribbon almost to the very ear of the Virgin Mary, comes from the Cossack, who is depicted in the foreground on the right side: «We pray, cover us with your honest covering, save us from all evil». And a little above this inscription is another one: «I will save and cover, my people». According to legend, the icon immortalizes the last koshev Pyotr Kalnyshevsky with his company, who pray to avert the troubles threatening the Sich from Moscow. [6, p.203-205]

In their prayers, the Cossacks asked the Virgin Mary for intercession and patronage. They knew how to pray. Here is how one of the folk tales describes it: «He prayed, it was, not like us sinners, but when he turned to the east, you could hear him praying far away. And not the prayers like ours, but the old Cossack prayers, all about Nicholas and the Protection of the Mother of God» [12, p. 41].

In the village of Afanasivtsi (Lower Dnieper region), an iconostasis was kept in an old church until 1917. In the middle of the iconostasis, above the royal gates, was the image of the Lord God, and his throne was guarded by the archangel Gabriel on the right and the archangel Michael on the left. Both of these leaders of the heavenly forces were depicted as Cossacks: Michael even clearly in a smoky cap and with a sword. Probably, this iconostasis recreates either the awareness of the Cossacks of themselves as universal "knights" on sea and land, who have the great honor of protecting the throne of God, or the fact that the Cossacks, bringing their courage and bravery to the Throne of the Lord, are ready at any moment to lay down their heads for his name [14, p.90].

As you know, in the times of Kievan Rus-Ukraine, St. George (George the Victorious) – a warrior-horseman – was imagined as one of the patrons of the Kiev princes. In Cossack times, his importance somewhat decreased, but one way or another he was considered one of the defenders of the glorious Ukrainian knights. Thus, the Cossack korogvas (flags) depicted the images of the Savior, the Intercession of the Mother of God, the Archangel Michael and George the Victorious, who stood on a serpent [14, p.89-90].

Cossack culture also adopted the features of the chivalric heroic epic, which is



visible in: folk tales about Cossack exploits, iconography of the Cossack Mamai, chronicles that glorified Cossack valor [15, p.59-65].

Summary and conclusions.

Thus, the Zaporozhian Sich had analogies with the spiritual knightly and monastic orders of Western Europe of the XII-XIV centuries. The Sich combined with them the religiosity and asceticism of the Cossack brotherhood, collective ownership of land, the cult of the Virgin Mary, the veneration of Saints Michael and George the Victorious (St. George). These Western European late knightly influences were probably not direct, but rather indirect. The spiritual knightly and monastic orders were not only a model for the Zaporozhian Cossacks to follow. Sich chivalry developed old knightly traditions and created its own. Contacts with chivalric traditions occurred through numerous interactions: military alliances, cultural exchange, and the participation of Cossacks in European wars. As a result, the Cossacks adopted a number of traits that shaped their self-perception, ideology, and lifestyle.

For decades, Russian propaganda has tried to present the Cossacks as the «Russian world», ignoring their European features and democratic principles. However, historical facts testify to the close connection of the Cossacks with the European military and political tradition: the Cossacks served in the armies of European states (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, France, Austria), and used the military traditions of Western chivalry.

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