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ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH OF THE COSSACKS IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Abstract: This article presents the results of a historiographical study of the entire body of research and publications devoted to Cossack issues, including scientific and popular literature, memoirs, fiction, legal, military, religious, reference, and other publications. It charts the history of the study of the Cossack phenomenon in Russia, beginning with the first mentions of Cossacks in Russian chronicles and continuing until the collapse of the USSR in the late 20th century. The emergence and development of a distinct Cossack historiographic tradition is examined separately. Particular attention is paid to the evolution of émigré Cossack historiography in the 20th century.

Key words: historiography, hypostasis, Orthodoxy, ethnocultural, demand, immunity, demography, political science, White Cossacks, Cossacks, geopolitical, stereotypical, sovereign, phenomenon, frontier.

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Introduction

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The revival of the Cossacks in Russia, which began in the last decades of the 20th century, continues actively to this day and is accompanied by

a Cossack renaissance in public life, culture, art, and academic research. Public and academic interest is primarily driven by historical studies, the study of the Cossacks' past in Russia, the assimilation of the historical experience of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, and the understanding of the process of

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Cossack revival in the modern history of the Russian Federation. Therefore, it is not surprising that in recent years, there has been a steady increase in the number of academic studies and publications on Cossack issues. Moreover, this increase is reflected in the growing number of defended dissertations and published articles and monographs. The relevance of this topic is largely due to the pressing political and practical challenges of reviving the Cossacks in the modern Russian Federation. The revival of the Cossacks and their incorporation into the socio-political, economic, and cultural life of the new Russia is receiving the utmost attention not only at the regional level but also at the highest state level. The Council for Cossack Affairs under the President of the Russian Federation is constantly active, and both the Government and the Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church pay attention to Cossacks. Various public and registered (state) Cossack societies and associations are rapidly growing and developing. Recently, the structure, organization, uniform, and procedure for conferring Cossack ranks and titles in Cossack associations included in the state register were approved at the state level.

On the other hand, the Cossacks, their history and modernity, have attracted the continued interest of researchers from various fields of history, politics, education, law, philosophy, and other scientific disciplines over the past two decades. If we consider the total number of published articles devoted to Cossack issues alone, their number would be in the hundreds. Similar figures describe the publication of popular literature on the Cossack question. The number of articles published in scientific journals and other periodicals is an order of magnitude greater.

Despite the abundance of publications, there is no consensus on the very essence of the historical and social phenomenon of "Cossackism" among either Cossacks themselves or researchers of Cossack history. The main stumbling block here is the problem of the social and ethnic identity of the Cossacks. Two main points of view exist on this issue. Some researchers consider the Cossacks a social phenomenon (a class or sociocultural group); conversely, their opponents tend to see the Cossacks primarily as an ethnic phenomenon (an ethnic group, subethnic group, or ethnocultural group). A number of researchers occupy intermediate, marginal positions. All of this applies equally to the Cossacks themselves and their associations. Among Cossacks today, there is an even greater diversity of opinion than among researchers of the Cossacks. The modern Cossacks are primarily divided between those who support and those who vehemently oppose the inclusion of Cossack public organizations in the state register and, consequently, their transformation into so-called registered associations. In this confrontation, the question of whether or not to recognize the Cossacks as a distinct people often becomes a significant

divisive factor. Against this backdrop, various pseudo-historical and pseudo-scientific "theories" inevitably emerge and flourish, and, to an even greater extent, diverse political speculations. The current state of affairs urgently requires a thorough, depoliticized, and unbiased academic study based on comprehensive historiographical research to analyze and verify the validity and validity of various perspectives on the Cossack issue in contemporary academic and public discourse. Within this informational context, another problem arises: the definition and precise scientific, including legal, definition of the concept of "Cossacks." However, it must be remembered that all of today's diversity of opinion ultimately stems from the problem of assessing the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War within the framework of two antagonistic historiographic schools: the "Reds" and "Whites," or, if you prefer, the "Soviet" and "anti-Soviet" historical schools. With regard to the Cossacks, this ideological and, consequently, historiographic antagonism is particularly acute, owing to their active participation as combatants in the Civil War. Moreover, the Cossacks themselves were ideologically and politically divided between the Reds, Whites, and Greens, with rank-and-file Cossacks directly participating in military operations on the side of both sides. Therefore, without analyzing the origins of the conflict and the programmatic views of its main participants, we will be unable to understand the current state of Cossack revival and the scholarly study of this phenomenon.

Another key issue in today's Cossack renaissance is the national question. The most pressing and in-demand issue in the late 20th – early 21st centuries was the revival of the Cossacks in the South of Russia as a whole and, especially, in the North Caucasus region. This fact has determined the heightened scientific and public interest in the phenomenon of the Cossacks of the South of Russia. At the same time, today there are turbulent processes of the Cossack revival in almost all macro-regions of the country. This has put the question of the ethnosocial nature of the Cossacks on the agenda. Who are the Cossacks – an estate, an ethnic group, or even a separate nation with the right to its own state subjectivity and sovereignty? These key questions were posed by life itself to the Cossacks, the academic community and the political class of Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and a number of other neighboring states. And, naturally, the Cossacks themselves – writers, public figures, the Cossack intelligentsia as a whole – military, scientific, cultural – are all trying to find answers to these questions.

Main part

The academic world and the political elite could not remain aloof from solving such problems that are relevant for millions of citizens (today, according to the official state television channel Vesti on

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07.12.2025 in connection with the presentation of banners to military Cossack societies by the President of the Russian Federation, 7 million citizens consider themselves Cossacks, and military societies unite 700 thousand people). The broad public and scientific interest in the problem is evidenced by the steady growth in the absolute number and thematic diversity of publications of scientific articles on Cossack issues in leading Russian peer-reviewed journals and journalistic articles in the press and other mass media.

One of the natural consequences of the actualization of the study of the phenomenon of the Cossacks has been a significant increase in the number of dissertations on this problem in recent years. A characteristic feature of the scientific understanding of the phenomenon of the Cossacks in today's Russian science has become a broad research interest in this subject of various humanitarian and social disciplines. Therefore, the scientific study and understanding of the phenomenological nature of the Cossacks in modern conditions requires the actualization of broad interdisciplinary connections in historiography, which allow the use of innovative research methods from various fields of knowledge.

When studying the historiography of the Cossacks, it is important to consider the fact that the Cossacks constituted an almost exclusive phenomenon in Russian history. By the early twentieth century, this distinct, specific population group existed only in Russia. The first exception was the Ukrainian Cossacks during the period of Ukraine's incorporation into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The second is associated with the flight of some Zaporozhian Cossacks across the Danube, where they accepted the allegiance of the Turkish Sultan. This occurred after the defeat of the Zaporozhian Sich by General Tekeli during the reign of Catherine II in 1776. However, during the Second Turkish War (1787–1791), at the request of Potemkin, the former Zaporozhian Cossacks were pardoned, returned to Russia, and subsequently formed the core of the Kuban Cossack Host. It is clear from this that these exceptions are associated with the Zaporozhian Cossack Host, which, due to its location at the junction of the borders of Russia, Poland, and the Ottoman Empire, while remaining organically part of the Russian Cossacks, changed allegiance depending on the specific political situation, striving to preserve its traditional autonomy and independence. Also worth mentioning are the Nekrasov Cossacks, who fled to the Caucasus after the suppression of Bulavin's rebellion. Of course, individual Cossacks and their more or less significant groups found themselves outside Russia by various means. However, these episodes did not reach any significant scale until the mass emigration of Cossacks from Russia after the defeat of the Whites in the Civil War. Thus, it can be argued that the Cossacks had no analogues in either European or world history. In foreign historiography,

in general works devoted to the study of Russian history, the issue of the Cossacks is virtually ignored. Attempts to apply the historical analogy method in this case lead foreign researchers to incorrect results and, in fact, to abandon the study of the Cossack phenomenon altogether. The Cossacks first truly attracted the special interest of Western researchers after the Napoleonic Wars. During the latter period, their exceptionally high fighting qualities attracted widespread attention in Europe. However, the Cossacks attracted particular interest in France. A new surge of interest in the Cossacks in the West was triggered by the 1917 Revolution in Russia, the Civil War, and the subsequent emigration, including of the "White Cossack elite," or, in modern terms, the educated Cossack elite as part of the general imperial elite of "tsarist" Russia. Until the 20th century, While Western authors viewed the Cossacks primarily as an unexplored and misunderstood phenomenon of the Russian Empire and the enigmatic Russian people, after the Revolution, the Cossacks aroused political and applied interest in connection with attempts and projects to use the Cossacks to construct an anti-Soviet front of social forces in the USSR. In this context, speculative geopolitical (Thalassocratic) projects of "Cossackia" as a sovereign, independent "country" were born, encompassing all of southern Russia. The German Nazis were particularly successful in this regard during World War II. In the post-war period and during the Cold War, similar constructs, albeit mostly of a marginal nature, were also attempted in the United States. It should be noted, however, that both sides sought to recruit primarily White émigrés to address these issues, so this approach should be considered a bridge between émigré and Western historiography, or more accurately, political science.

The history of studying the Cossacks as a unique phenomenon of Russian history has long traditions and deep roots dating back to the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the New Time in the 17th century. It was at this time that the first mentions of the Cossacks appeared in Russian chronicles. The first undoubted mention of the Cossacks who lived in Chervleny Yar in the chronicle dates back to 1444. In the 17th century, the first works of Russian authors appeared in which the Cossacks were mentioned and attempts were made to understand what the Cossacks were as a historical phenomenon. One of such historical works was the description of the Cossacks by Grigory Kotoshikhin in his work, widely known as "On Russia during the reign of Alexei Mikhailovich", written after his betrayal and flight abroad in the Swedish service in the period from 1666 to 1667. During this same period, the first Cossack historical works appeared – stories about the capture of Azov and the siege of Azov by the Don Cossacks. The scientific study of the history of the Cossacks began in the imperial Russian historiography of the 18th–19th centuries. At that

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time, the first searches for answers to questions about its historical roots, the reasons for its emergence, and the social and ethnic nature of the Cossacks took place. These questions remained relevant throughout the history of the study of the Cossacks.

The problem of the phenomenological nature of the Cossacks remains equally relevant today. In general, in modern historiography, after the heated discussions of the 1990s, several methodological approaches to the problem of the Cossacks can be distinguished. Having analyzed the main conceptual positions, it is possible to determine the structure of possible definitions of the concept of Cossacks. In our opinion, the Cossacks are a complex and original historical phenomenon in the history of Russia and therefore it is possible to define it on several grounds that need to be systematized in a certain way. We will try to cite and systematize all the interpretations of this word found in the literature. Cossacks are:

- service class (close in feudal status to the single-court nobles);
- a type of light cavalry (similar to the originally Hungarian "hussars", in this sense this name was used, for example, in Prussia, where during the Napoleonic wars a Cossack regiment was created, or in Russia during the organization of some "Cossack" regiments);
- the form of a border guard service (during the period of the Muscovite kingdom, when we are talking about city guards, service Cossacks, related to the analogue of the streltsy class);
- sociocultural group (demographic fluctuation, analogous to dialect as a linguistic fluctuation);
- ethnocultural group (subethnic group within the Russian people);
- class group (layer - kulak, petty bourgeois, initially the Cossacks, on the contrary, were the vanguard of the poorest peasantry in the anti-feudal struggle against serfdom, having defended their "freedom" by armed means, later incorporated by the feudal state into its structure by granting semi-feudal immunity rights);
- historical phenomenon (a special phenomenon of Russian, or, more precisely, Eastern European history);
- geopolitical phenomenon (at the junction of nomadic and agricultural civilizations of the Eastern European forest-steppe);
- social (behavioral) stereotype (the Cossacks themselves use the term "bravery" in this concept, i.e. "to act like a Cossack" means to behave like a real Cossack – boldly, cheerfully, passionately, adventurously, demonstratively showing one's daring, fearlessness, etc.);
- demographic frontier zone of acculturation and assimilation;

- an economic form of traditional semi-nomadic transhumance cattle breeding (meaning "to Cossack", as in "to steppe" among the Cossacks, i.e. to live in the steppe with a herd, flock or herd);

- a form of folk military-sport equestrian art ("to Cossack" in the meaning

"to perform acrobatic tricks, i.e. to perform acrobatic stunts on or without a horse, including with weapons);

- legal form of civil service;

- theocratic-proselytizing form of religious service, asceticism ("Orthodox knighthood", similar to the orders of the Crusaders among Catholics);

- political (patriotic, in the extreme – national-chauvinistic, anti-communist) movement of citizens;

- people, as a historically established community of people (this is how the Cossacks are interpreted by the law of the RSFSR on the rehabilitation of repressed peoples, which is in force in the Russian Federation);

- ethnos (a distinctive people, a nation – this is the meaning in which the Cossacks are interpreted by "independentists", "autonomists" and "nationalists" from the so-called "natural Cossacks") according to the predominant sources of origin:

a) Slavic (from Russians, Ukrainians, Eastern Slavs, or even a separate branch of Slavism);

b) steppe (Tatar, or, more precisely, of Turkic origin);

c) mountain (North Caucasian autochthonous people or part of the Kumyks, "Black Hoods", "Yases and Kasogs", and even Chechens, but today there are also much more exotic variants);

d) complex ethnogenetic.

Thus, it can be seen that the Cossacks as a whole represent a complex, multifaceted and multi-level historical phenomenon, which can be considered as a unique phenomenon that requires a comprehensive study involving diverse sources and data obtained by various sciences.

Chronologically and in terms of content, the history of the study of the Cossack phenomenon is divided into five major periods: late medieval historiography of the Muscovite kingdom (15th–17th centuries); pre-revolutionary imperial historiography (18th century – February 1917); "Red," "White," and "independent" historiography of the Revolution and Civil War (1917–1920); Soviet and émigré historiography (1920s–1980s); and recent Russian historiography (from the mid-1980s to the present).

The first stage of Cossack studies was characterized by the following features. The absence of secular historical scholarship in pre-Petrine Rus' also determined the absence of attempts at rational analysis. At this time, the Muscovite state began its first contacts with the Cossacks, and contemporaries, Russian chroniclers, and diplomats were only making their first attempts to become acquainted with the

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Cossacks, to understand who they were, and where they came from. The main historiographical focus of this period was the accumulation of sources for future researchers.

The Russian Empire and its Orthodox-messianic ideology "didn't see" ethnic differences, but rather "noticed" only the religious affiliations of the empire's peoples. The social system of old Russia was structured along class lines. Therefore, within the empire's structure, the Cossacks functioned primarily as a military-serving class. During this same historical period, alongside the development of Russian historiography, scholarly understanding of the Cossack phenomenon began, with the first attempts to answer questions about its historical roots, origins, and social and ethnic nature. The accumulation of historical material, publication, introduction into scholarly circulation, and study of new sources continued.

The imperial stage of the development of Cossack historiography was primarily determined by strict censorship. The primacy of official imperial political and state ideology lends works of this period a certain rigidity (among semi-official authors), or an excessively politicized, polemical quality among opponents of official historiography. The contemporaneity, and sometimes even the researchers' involvement with the events they describe, to a certain extent brings them closer to the sources. On the other hand, sources (such as memoirs) were often "adapted" to official imperial historiography. Research on the Cossack phenomenon during the imperial period was primarily conducted by military specialists and historians, as well as a few enthusiastic amateurs from the small Cossack intelligentsia, which emerged primarily from the same military milieu. Academic scholarship in Tsarist Russia essentially paid no special attention to the study of the Cossacks in dissertation research. Naturally, military historians and memoirists could not ignore such a striking phenomenon of the Russian military system as the Cossacks. The Cossack phenomenon has been explored both in general works on the history of the Russian Imperial Army and in specialized studies on the history of individual wars and armed conflicts of the 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. This includes the history of the Red Army during the Civil War and the interwar period, and the Soviet Army in the Great Patriotic War. Even in their coverage of the most recent conflicts of the early 21st century, our contemporaries are paying attention to the Cossacks' role in interethnic and interfaith conflicts in the post-Soviet space, particularly in their coverage of armed conflicts in the North Caucasus, from the first "Chechen War" to the present day.

But perhaps the most important place in understanding the phenomenon of the Cossacks belongs to the historiography and memoirs of the Great Caucasian War of the 19th century. This was the

time of Kotlyarevsky, Velyaminov, Baklanov, Yermolov, Kazi Mullah, Shamil, Hadji Murat, Zass, Paskevich, Vorontsov, Milyutin, Baryatinsky, Griboyedov, Pushkin, Lermontov, Marlinsky, Leo Tolstoy, and many other heroes of the "Belle Époque" in Russian military history and the "Golden Age" of Russian literature. The study of the Cossacks in the twentieth century (after the 1917 Revolution) was also characterized by unique features. These were, above all, the insurmountable split between "Red" (Soviet) and "White" (émigré) historiography and the absolutization of the class approach, which together fundamentally precluded a balanced, non-politicized historical approach on both sides. During the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War, under the dictatorship of the proletariat and the ideology of class struggle, the Cossacks were naturally conceived of as a social class group. From this perspective, a Cossack was a "privileged peasant." The traditions established by Cossack historians and publicists—the "independenceists"—during the brief independence of the Cossack "military republics" during the Civil War of 1918–1921 were continued by the Cossack military, cultural, and scientific intelligentsia in exile. In exile, the Cossack "independenceists" split into two fundamental factions, which found themselves in open opposition to each other: the "nationalist" Cossacks and the "patriotic" Cossacks.

Of course, by formal criteria, émigré publications can be classified as foreign rather than domestic historiography. However, in terms of its content and methodology, the literature of the Cossack diaspora directly inherited the domestic historiographic tradition. It was its organic development and continuation, although, of course, it also experienced significant influence from Western culture, which, incidentally, was also characteristic of the Russian pre-revolutionary tradition. Moreover, if we consider White-patriotic Cossack historiography in its "indivisible" and "autonomist" interpretations, as well as "self-governing," "independent," and Cossack nationalist historiography, these scholarly and political trends originated in Russia. But, for obvious reasons, they continued their existence and further development only in exile. In the USSR, such trends, ideologically alien to the Soviet system, were completely eradicated, and their adherents were destroyed, sometimes not only ideologically but also physically. Therefore, emigration became the only environment where historical schools alternative to the Marxist-Leninist historical materialism that reigned supreme in the USSR could exist and develop. A significant feature of this period was the emergence of a Cossack national, so-called "independent" historiographic trend within the general flow of émigré literature.

Even during the years of revolutionary upheaval and the Civil War, the Cossack intellectual, cultural, and political elite, along with Russian society as a

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whole, found itself split into numerous political parties, factions, groups, movements, and various organizations. However, all these movements achieved full ideological, philosophical, historical, and political maturity in exile. Politically and ideologically, Cossack émigré thought fragmented into several alternative and sometimes opposing schools of thought. All these schools sought historical grounds to support their claims. Consequently, Cossack historiography in exile was more or less clearly divided into groups corresponding to particular political preferences. The most significant schools of thought in émigré historiography were the following:

1) The "United-indivisible" movement considered the Cossacks part of the Great Russian people, or, in the Pan-Slavic version, the Slavic people. At the same time, the Cossacks were to enjoy their traditional privileges, perform military service in exchange, and enjoy broad municipal (zemstvo, voivodeship, stanitsa) autonomy. In general, the "United-indivisible" movement was the direct heir to the imperial historiography of the 19th century, but they, in turn, were divided into two subgroups. The most orthodox and conservative monarchists and statistes advocated a full restoration of the "old regime" order, headed by an autocratic tsar from the Romanov dynasty. Essentially, they advocated the blind aping of their highest ideal—the Russian Empire "before 1905." The "constitutionalists," whose ideal was a Russia "after 1905," held a more liberal, Kadet-style position. Both of these indivisible forces enjoyed the greatest sympathy of the officer corps of the White armies.

2) "Autonomists" are supporters of a federal (and, as a rule, republican) state structure, in which the Cossack military regions were to become independent - autonomous quasi-state entities, preserving the full sovereignty in their internal life (up to the customs borders with Russia) similar to the Cossack troops of the 17th century.

3) "Separatists" were supporters of full or partial (within the framework of a confederation) state and political independence for the Cossack lands. They considered the Cossacks to be an independent people (narodnost), possessing their own language, culture, and political and historical traditions. They were generally close to Ukrainian supporters of independence. Together with them, they contrasted Cossacks and Ukrainians with "Muscovites"—Great Russians. They considered Cossacks and Ukrainians to be representatives of the "South Slavic tribe," while Russians were considered representatives of the "North Slavic tribe."

4) The "Cossacks" were separatists. Their views were close to those of the Eurasianists and they considered the Cossacks a non-Slavic people with a large proportion of Turkic and Caucasian peoples. They advocated the creation of a great Cossack state—"Cossackia"—uniting all of southeastern

Russia up to and including the lower Urals (Yaik).

5) "Nationalist Cossacks" were close to the European fascists. Supporters of the establishment of Hitler's "new order" in Europe, including Ukraine and the Cossack regions. During the period of fascist domination in Europe, a significant part of the Cossacks and Cossack nationalists, for well-known reasons, found themselves in the positions of German National Socialism. They found themselves in complete ideological subordination to the Nazi racial theory. Within the framework of the racist paradigm, the Nazi Cossacks were supporters of the Aryan theory of the origin of the Cossacks from the ancient Goths of the Northern Black Sea region. The ideological and political inconsistency of the Cossack Nazis, as weak-willed Goebbels's henchmen, was seen by the Cossacks themselves - contemporaries of the events. In particular, many Cossacks, even those who fought on the side of the Germans, noted the "operetta" position of the Krasnovites, the dual and insidious attitude towards them of both the Germans and the allies (especially after Lienz). These Cossacks understood that they were being used as free cannon fodder, an object of manipulation and propaganda, a bargaining chip in political bargaining. But, in the circumstances that had developed, the Krasnovites had no real alternative - the Hitler regime, with which they had pinned their hopes, was now irresistibly pulling these Cossacks to the bottom, and they were forced, sometimes against their will, to go with the flow, submitting to the force of circumstances. As has been repeatedly noted, including in Cossack fairy tales, the alliance with the devil against the Bolshevik devil, to which Krasnov called, did not lead the Cossacks to anything good. Cossack authors wrote a lot about this even before the war, and especially after, in the pages of the émigré press. Against this background, the glorification of Krasnov, Domanov, von Pannwitz and other leaders of the Cossack Nazis by some political forces in today's Russia looks especially strange.

For its part, Soviet historiography was the first to bring the study of the socio-economic nature of the Cossack economy, linguistic and ethnographic studies of the Cossacks and their folk culture in their traditional places of residence to a truly scientific level. When studying the early history of the Cossacks, it is necessary to note the great contribution of Soviet science to the archaeological study of the steppe regions of the USSR, where the Cossacks traditionally lived. It should also be said that it was in the 20th century, and above all in Soviet historiography, that the Cossacks first became the subject of study in special dissertation research in academic science. In the second half of the 20th century, after the "class battles" of the Revolution, the Civil War, "decossackization" and "dekulakization" had died down, the Soviet Union, in the context of the communist paradigm of socio-historical progress,

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constructed a “new historical community – the Soviet people”, devoid of social and national differences, within the framework of which the Cossacks were conceived, first of all, as an ethnographic historical-cultural phenomenon or a socio-cultural phenomenon.

Finally, the most recent stage in the evolution of Cossack historiography (1980s–2020s) is characterized by a rapid growth in publications that have finally broken free from the black-and-white confines of a class-based approach, sparking a fierce debate and clash of opinions in the development of a unified methodological approach to the problem of the Cossacks in Russian history as a whole. The study of the Cossack phenomenon has also been impacted by the general crisis of historical methodology that has arisen in modern Russian scholarship following the collapse of the Marxist-Leninist positivist scientific paradigm of “historical materialism.” Today, the study of the Cossacks and their phenomenological nature attracts the attention of both academic scholarship in numerous publications and a wide variety of pseudoscientific and pseudohistorical “researchers”—or, more accurately, writers—in the genres of so-called “alternative history” and “folk history.”

Some contemporary viewpoints suffer from a frank thirst for immediate political dividends in the turbid waves of state-building in the new Russia and the search for its national idea, the revival of the Cossacks, and a new Caucasian war.

Modern historical scholarship, having endured the turbulent and sometimes bitter debates of the last three decades, has come to the conclusion that a comprehensive and balanced examination of the problems of the Soviet period of Russian history is necessary, drawing on the entire body of diverse sources. The irreconcilable split in Russian historiography between “Red” and “White” is gradually coming to an end. In the new century, scholarship faces the task of objectively assessing the bygone 20th century and ending the political bias that characterized this turbulent and contradictory period in our history. Recently, a new trend has emerged toward creating a complementary conception of 20th-century Russian history that synthesizes previously irreconcilable contradictions. The dialectic of historical development once again demonstrates in practice the law of the unity and struggle of opposites. This trend is also evident in modern Cossack historiography. Some contemporary Cossack authors are attempting to overcome the centuries-old split between Red and White Cossacks, or at least to more objectively illuminate the history of both sides of the conflict. Today, in Russian Cossack historiography, there is perhaps no more pressing or controversial issue than the problem of Cossack ethnic identity. It is important to note the extreme contradictions and heterogeneity of the historiography on this issue. This is due to the insufficient development of the problem as a whole and the absence of mature conceptual

schools that provide comprehensive methodological and theoretical insights. Not least, the excessive politicization of many authors plays a significant role.

The problem of ethnic identity, in turn, is inextricably linked to the still unresolved question of the historical origins of the Cossacks and their integration into the orbit of Russian statehood. Resolving this entire complex of questions is complicated by the fact that, with the exception of a few foreign testimonies, the bulk of written sources on the early history of the Cossacks consists primarily of acts and documents of the Russian state, as well as those of several neighboring countries—the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Ottoman Empire, and Persia. In other words, the existing sources present the Cossacks only insofar as they interacted with Russian, Polish, and other state structures.

We have virtually no sources of our own “Cossack” origins, and this applies not only to the Cossacks but also to everything that happened on the vast steppe expanses of the “Wild Field.” This geopolitical space has been the arena of endless wars and conflicts for centuries.

The richest and most significant Cossack archive of the Don Host was irretrievably lost in the infamous Cherkasy fire of August 12, 1744, when the army chancery burned down, along with the entire ancient Cossack capital. The reliability of interpreting archaeological data in ethnic terms also poses significant difficulties, stemming from the fact that the southern Russian steppes and the Ciscaucasia have historically been a “crossroads of civilization” and a “melting pot,” where numerous waves of peoples and tribes migrated and intersected, where various cultures interacted, and where processes of assimilation and acculturation were actively underway.

The history of relations and interaction between the Russian state and the Cossacks goes back hundreds of years. These relations were not always smooth and conflict-free. There were periods of open confrontation, including military actions during the peasant wars and the Cossack uprisings of Razin, Bulavin and Pugachev. The last and most acute conflict was the Civil War, during which the Cossack republics united on the side of the Whites against the Republic of Soviets – the RSFSR, the direct successor of which at the end of the 20th century became the Russian Federation. But crises were always followed by long periods of more or less close and active interaction between the state and the Cossacks. This was the case at the end of the Time of Troubles, when it was the Cossacks who spoke out at the Zemsky Sobor in support of the election of Mikhail Romanov. This was also the case in the interwar years of the “Stalinist revival of the Cossacks” and the ensuing Great Patriotic War. We have seen the same trend since the early 1990s and continuing to this day in the processes of Cossack revival in the new Russia.

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Throughout the historical development of "Russian great power" status, establishing interaction with the Cossacks was accompanied by a search for solutions to the problem of the political, social, and national "definition" of the Cossacks, and the forms of their "inclusion" in the system of Russian statehood. This very problem has often become the main stumbling block in the relationship between the state and the Cossacks, a source of conflict and misunderstanding. This problem has been addressed and understood in different historical periods, naturally, in different ways. From the semi-vassal dependence during the time of the first Romanovs, when the "White Tsar" sent "salaries to all atamans and Cossacks" to the Don, and the consolidation of a special class status during the imperial period, to the recognition of the Cossacks as a "distinctive socio-cultural group" in Soviet times. Cossacks also understood their relationship with the state in different ways. But one way or another, this problem always had to be addressed.

During the period of overcoming the vestiges of feudal fragmentation and the emergence of autocracy, the Muscovite Tsardom built relationships of subjection. It is significant that the word "Russian" is an adjective, not a noun. Not "who," but "what," "whose." Above all, a subject of the Russian Tsar. In this model of relations, Cossacks served as a form of service, and the Cossacks negotiated their own liberties and rights, the most important of which was "no extradition from the Don," that is, the right of immunity from prosecution and feudal immunity. The form of interaction between the Cossacks and the state was the conclusion of contractual vassal-suzerainty relations through the Foreign Prikaz. The Cossack "Host-Republics" of the 16th and 17th centuries fully retained practical sovereignty, even to the point of conducting their own foreign policy and wars. The first attempt to explain the origins of the Cossacks was the widely known "runaway serf theory," based on an uncritical reading of sources from the Muscovite period. Similar explanations for the Cossacks' willfulness and their "unauthorized" raids on the lands of the "Turkish king" were offered in embassy documents as early as the reign of Ivan the Terrible, and possibly even earlier. It was in this way that the Russian tsars were able to shamelessly use the Cossacks as a military force and a means of weakening their potential adversaries in Poland, Turkey, and Persia. At the same time, if necessary, they could avoid answering for Cossack raids to the official diplomatic missions of these countries, blaming them on the fugitive and unruly Cossacks, who were "thieves and bandits to us, just as they are thieves to you."

The first chronicle mention of the Don Cossacks, dating from 1549, speaks of a complaint from the Nogai Prince Yusuf to Tsar Ivan IV, stating that "his Cossacks have destroyed cities in three or four places, are collecting tribute from Azov, and are not allowing

anyone to drink the water from the Don." To this, the Tsar responded that "there are no Cossacks of our own on the Don, but those who live on the Don are fugitives from our states... bandits, without our knowledge... we have sent before to exterminate them, but our people cannot reach them." The founder of this view of the Cossacks in historiography, as we believe, can be considered the already mentioned fugitive clerk of the Ambassadorial Prikaz G.K. Kotoshikhin, who wrote back in the 17th century: "And there will be their Cossacks on the Don with 20,000 people, created to protect the Lowland cities from the arrival of the Turks, and Tatars, and Nogai people, and Kalmyks. And these people are of Muscovite origin and from other cities, and newly baptized Tatars and Zaporozhian Cossacks, and Poles, and Lyakhs, and many of them Moscow boyars and merchants and peasants, who were sentenced to death for robbery and in taty and vigilante affairs, and having stolen and plundered their boyars, they go to the Don; "And having been on the Don for at least one week or a month, they would be lucky enough to return to Moscow with something, and no one would have any business with them in anything, no matter what anyone stole, because the Don frees them from all troubles. And they are given their own freedom to live on the Don, and they elect their own atamans and others as leaders, and judge all matters according to their own will, and not according to the Tsar's decree." Such freedom, honor, and Tsarist salary were given to the Cossacks, according to Kotoshikhin, because "And when they come to Moscow, they are honored as distinguished foreign people; "And if they hadn't had their own will, and hadn't taught themselves to serve and obey on the Don, and if they hadn't been Don Cossacks, the Kazan and Astarakhan kingdoms, with their cities and lands, would not have been strengthened and long ago subordinated to the Tsar of Moscow." Thus, Kotoshikhin highly valued the military and foreign policy significance of the Cossack factor and attached great importance to the political alliance between Moscow and the Don. This explains why the Cossacks preserve and carefully guard their freedom and independence from Moscow, with which they are in a foreign policy alliance, not as allies.

The first unambiguous mentions of Cossacks in Russian chronicles date back to the mid-15th century. Some researchers believe that earlier sources can be found, including in the Russian north, where the word "Cossack" meant a free, hired laborer. Cossack authors attempt to trace both pre-Mongol and even more ancient roots of the Cossacks. However, all early sources (before the 15th century) raise numerous questions regarding interpretation. First and foremost, the etymology of the word "Cossack," and subsequently "Cossackship," "to Cossack," and other derivatives, is problematic. One of the first attempts to understand this issue from a historical perspective was

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made in his comprehensive monograph, written in the 1840s–1860s but published much later, only in 1890, by V. M. Pudavov, one of V. D. Sukhorukov's successors. This will be discussed in the next chapter. All the main versions of the etymology of the word "Cossack" were already outlined at the beginning of the 20th century in the Imperial Headquarters' reference book on Cossack troops. It lists eight possible origins of the word "Cossack," namely:

- 1) from the "Kosogi" - the people of the Caucasus;
- 2) from "Khazar" – the Scythian people;
- 3) from "Kasakhia" – the Transcaucasian region mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenitus;
- 4) from "kaz" – a Turkish-Tatar word meaning "goose";
- 5) from "ko" and "zakh" – Mongolian words meaning: the first – "armor, plate, protection";
- 6) from the second - "boundary, border, frontier"; from where "kozakh" means "border defender";
- 7) from the name given by the Tatars to familyless and homeless wandering warriors who formed the vanguard of the Tatar hordes in the 14th century;
- 8) from the meaning of this word in the Polovtsian language - "guard", "vanguard".

And then follows the sad conclusion that "none of these interpretations can be considered absolutely correct." As a comment, we note that the Khazars (Kazars) are now considered Turks. And the meaning of kaz (goose) + ak (white) from interpretation #4 echoes an ancient Cossack legend, reflected in a song about the capture of Kazan, which, in particular, tells of the Cossacks, setting out for Kazan, covering themselves with the white feathers of the still-unidentified "baba-birds." In a rare textbook on Don geography from the period of the Don's independence, its author, Cossack local historian V. Bogachev, asserts that the "baba-birds" are two species of pelicans, found (rarely) on the Manych and on the coast. This legend, in turn, echoes a well-known motif in Russian folk tales about "white swan-geese."

As for interpretation No. 5, it was proposed by A. A. Gordeev, who will be discussed later. The very fact of the presence of numerous borrowings from Turkic and Mongolian in the Cossack language does not raise doubts among researchers today. As an example, we can cite such words as "ataman" from "ata" - father (cf. the Cossack "batka-ataman"), "yasaul" or, later, "esaul" from "yasa" - the law of Genghis Khan and many other specific Cossack terms. Studying this etymological issue today, we can see that after a century, the situation has not changed dramatically and, unfortunately, the general conclusion of modern scientists coincides with their pre-revolutionary predecessors. Therefore, this etymological problem remains without a satisfactory solution. We can only assume that the word "Cossack"

probably had several meanings among different peoples. Modern researchers, as a rule, limit themselves to only stating that the word "Cossack" is probably of Turkic origin. Moreover, the determination of the exact etymology is inextricably linked with the resolution of the question of the origin of the Cossacks.

Finally, it should be noted that from the point of view of the Cossack "separatists", "autonomists" and "nationalists" this etymological question does not make sense at all. Or, more accurately, it presents a problem similar to clarifying the meaning of the roots "ros", "rus". Since, according to the separatists, "Cossacks" is the self-designation of the people. In the spirit of the well-known old Cossack folk saying: "Cossacks are descended from Cossacks", which emphasizes (in the vernacular) the "ethnicity" of the name Cossack, the origin of the "natural" Cossacks only from the Cossacks themselves. Below, in the relevant section, we will dwell in more detail on the analysis of the historiography of the separatists (using the example of E. P. Savelyev and A. A. Gordeev, who succeeded him in emigration), but for now, without delving into etymological discrepancies, we will limit ourselves to stating the appearance of reliable and indisputable historical sources on the Cossacks in Russian chronicles of the mid-15th century. As noted earlier, the first mention of the Cossacks in the chronicles dates back to 1444, where, in the story of the raid of the Horde prince Mustafa on Pereyaslavl-Ryazansky, it is said about the Cossacks who lived in Chervleny Yar. It is characteristic that the first mention of the city, that is, service, Cossacks dates back only to 1502 in a letter from Ivan III to the Ryazan princess Agrippina, that is, service Cossacks appear on the pages of the chronicles half a century later than the free ones. In 1549, the chronicle first names the Don Cossacks, which was already mentioned above, and in 1560 the Volga Cossacks are mentioned for the first time. Moreover, it is reported that the systematic eradication of the Cossacks on the Volga was initiated by Moscow: "the Cossacks were stealing along the Volga... The pious Sovereign sent his commanders with many military men against them and ordered them to be captured and hanged." Thus, we can see here the first open conflict between the Cossacks and the Russian state, which also became the first experience of "repression" of the Cossacks, which ended with their complete extermination on the Volga by 1577 by the troops of the steward Ivan Murashkin. A number of Cossack and other authors today assess this act of Moscow as the first case of deliberate genocide of the Cossacks in Russia. It was this conflict with Moscow that caused the Cossacks to leave the Volga for the Urals (Yaik), and the detachment under the command of Yermak and further - to Siberia, which served as a prologue to the famous story of the conquest of Siberia.

On the other hand, as early as 1552, a chronicle

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describing the conquest of Kazan first mentions Cossacks serving in the Russian army and their participation in the capture of Kazan. There is some evidence of Cossack participation as early as the Battle of Kulikovo in 1380, though it is unclear on whose side they fought—perhaps on both sides. However, these and similar accounts remain dubious and are not universally accepted by historians. In 1570, the first mention of the payment of royal salaries to the Cossacks is found, delivered to the Don by boyar Novosiltsev. And in 1571, the boyar Prince Vorotynsky compiled the first "Charter of the Stanitsa Guard Service," which clearly divided the Cossacks into "gorodovyi" (Russians) and "stanitsa" (most likely free, "natural" Cossacks who performed border service in Pole). This document clearly regulated border service and, incidentally, became the first Russian military regulations. Thus, the very first documentary evidence about the Cossacks tells us both about conflicts and about the interactions between the Russian state and the Cossacks. This confirms the general conclusion of source studies regarding the paucity of historical sources of specifically Cossack origin and the predominance of information in surviving domestic sources reflecting only those aspects of Cossack history that directly concern the relationship between the Russian (and other) state and the Cossacks or Cossack military republics. In general, chronicle and other sources about the Cossacks of the 15th-17th centuries were merely a continuation of medieval chronicling and, along with a few testimonies from foreign authors, can provide only a limited historical framework for Cossack history. However, we emphasize that, to date, this is essentially all the little we have as sources for the medieval history of the Cossacks. Domestic chroniclers and church publicists of this period touched on the Cossacks only to the extent that they found themselves embroiled in Russian, Turkish, Persian, or Polish-Ukrainian relations, internal (the Time of Troubles, S. Razin's Uprising) and international conflicts, and the numerous wars of the time. What was happening in the independent Cossack republics remained largely unknown to outside observers and, accordingly, was not reflected in Russian sources and other documents of state origin. Of particular interest in this context are the questionnaires of atamans and Cossacks of the "winter stanitsas," that is, embassies sent to Moscow by the Cossack republics to maintain diplomatic relations with Russia. However, even here we find little objective information. The Cossacks themselves were not interested in providing such information to the Moscow government. On the contrary, the Cossack embassies-stanitsas sought to achieve their own diplomatic objectives, often deliberately distorting the actual situation in the military republics. For example, the Cossacks sought to receive the "royal salary" in money, but most importantly in bread, Gunpowder,

lead and other metals, cannons and other weapons, cloth and other similar handicrafts and agricultural goods that were not produced in the Cossack territories or whose military capture was difficult for the Cossacks. Furthermore, the Cossacks strove in every way to prevent Moscow's overt or covert interference in their internal affairs. The Moscow government, meanwhile, sought to secure the submission and allegiance of the Cossack troops by any means necessary, seeking a foothold in the turbulent and turbulent Cossack democratic environment, which Moscow did not understand. In particular, the Moscow government sought to rely on the Cossack elders, transform them into a familiar and understandable feudal class, "feed" them with salaries and royal favors, and ultimately make them a conduit for Moscow's influence. The Cossacks, for their part, though unsuccessfully, as subsequent events showed, nevertheless strove to prevent such a development, defending freedom and equality for all Cossacks. All this made Cossack diplomacy a highly unreliable source of information. But once again, it must be emphasized that these sources are the only ones that have come down to us directly from the Cossacks of that era.

Among pre-Petrine sources, the cycle of versions of the tales "On the Capture of Azov" and "On the Siege of Azov by the Don Cossacks" stands out. These works can be considered the first surviving historical writings by Cossack authors. The tale of the Siege of Azov entered the annals of Old Russian literature and was published in the academic series "Literary Monuments." This work became a staple of the required curriculum in history and philology departments. It became a model of military-patriotic literature and was widely published in relevant anthologies.

The original title of the Cossack work is "A Tale, or History of the Azov Siege of 5,000 Don Cossacks Against 300,000 Turks." Researchers suggest that the author of the tale was "Yasaul Fyodor Ivanov" mentioned in the text's preamble. This was Fyodor Ivanovich Poroshin, the head of the military chancery of the Don Host, and, in essence, the head of the Don government. The historical narrative is based on the famous military feat of the Don and Zaporozhian Cossacks. In 1637, the Cossacks independently captured the Turkish fortress of Azov, which led to the outbreak of a difficult war between the Don Host and Turkey. This war was carefully prepared and planned in the strictest secrecy from Moscow, which, still recovering from the aftermath of the Time of Troubles, did not wish to antagonize the Turkish Sultan. The Cossacks, citing their extreme shortage of ammunition, managed to secure an extraordinary "royal salary" on the eve of the war. However, the Cossacks suspected Thomas Cantacuzene, the Turkish ambassador to the Tsar, of "treason" (espionage), and killed him along with his entire embassy of

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"Armenians and Greeks." This was done to prevent the ambassadors from informing the Azov Pasha of the Cossacks' military preparations. The Cossacks justified the murder of their co-religionists by claiming they had betrayed the cause of faith and the holy war against the "infidel" Turks. At the same time, the Cossacks did not hesitate to enter into open conflict with both Turkey and Russia, which had guaranteed the embassy's immunity.

The Don Cossacks coordinated their actions with the Zaporozhian Cossacks and agreed on the latter's participation in the campaign against Azov. This fortress city, according to Cossack legend, was "in ancient times" the main capital of the Don. It housed the most ancient and revered Cathedral of St. John the Baptist among the Don Cossacks. Therefore, the Azov epic was presented by the Cossacks as a crusade and received a corresponding ideological framework. The war was conceived as a liberation campaign, the return of desecrated shrines, the restoration of the ancient Cossack capital, and the defense of the holy faith. The return of Azov to the Orthodox world and its transformation into the Don capital were associated with access to the sea, the restoration of full Don sovereignty, and the transformation of the Don Host into a great maritime power capable of challenging the Ottoman Empire or standing on par with any other European power of the time, including Russia.

Beyond ideology, military and political considerations were apparently more significant. In the 17th century, the Azov Cossacks were the main opponents and competitors of the Don Cossacks. Early sources refer to the Azov Cossacks, just like the Don Cossacks. Thus, in the first chronicle mention of free Cossacks from 1538, in the Moscow government's response to the claims of the Nagai Cossacks, we encounter a very characteristic formula, with which Moscow always absolved itself of responsibility for the Cossacks: "And you know very well where there are no evil ones. Many Cossacks roam the Field: Kazan Cossacks, Azov Cossacks, Crimean Cossacks, and other spoiled Cossacks, and even our Ukrainian Cossacks, having mixed with them, also roam those people who are both thieves to you and thieves and bandits to us." Documents from that time are replete with reports of "peace wars" between the Don Cossacks and the Azov Cossacks. Moreover, the former write about their offenders to Moscow, while the latter to Istanbul. Such references are always given by the Cossacks and Azovites to justify their unauthorized military undertakings, pirate expeditions "for zipuns," the capture of "captives" (slaves) and other similar deeds.

Azov was a strong Turkish fortress, blocking the Cossacks' free access to the Sea of Azov. Furthermore, control of this major port allowed the Cossacks to conduct free international trade throughout the Mediterranean. Some researchers cite evidence that Cossack barges appeared not only off the coast of

Spain but even sailed into the Atlantic. Alexander Smirnov, in his monograph, notes that in 1646, 2,400 Zaporozhian Cossacks on their ships besieged Dunkirk from the sea.

Thus, the Azov epic was a major international undertaking by the Don and Zaporizhzhia alliance, conceived with far-reaching goals. In the story, the Cossacks respond to ambassadors' proposal to surrender Azov for a large ransom. The Cossacks say they will only rest when they take Constantinople from the Turks, kill Sultan Ibrahim, shed all the "infidel blood," and restore the "peasant" faith in Constantinople. In other words, the Cossacks threaten to do the same thing they claim the Turks did to the Byzantines.

Soon after the Cossacks captured Azov in 1637, the Turkish Sultan Murad suddenly died. This gave the Cossacks time to fortify Azov, collect and deliver supplies in case of a siege. Only in 1641, the new Sultan Ibrahim I sent a huge army to the walls of Azov. The Turks understood perfectly well the importance of Azov for the Cossacks and for domination of the entire Azov Sea. Therefore, the Sultan gathered, according to the Cossacks, a three-hundred-thousand-strong army, modern researchers speak more cautiously about the number of Turks: "more than 100 thousand", supported by a fleet of 300-400 ships. The Ottoman army sent to Azov was equipped with excellent siege artillery, included regular regiments of European mercenaries and European military engineers to organize a proper siege. The commander of the Turkish army received a categorical order from the Sultan: "Pasha! Take Azov, or give up your head! ". The Turks were opposed by five (or five and a half) thousand Cossacks, including women and other civilians of Azov. The Turks conducted a devastating multi-day artillery preparation. They managed to destroy the walls and buildings of the city. Escaping from the fire of the Turkish cannons, the defenders of Azov went over to the earthen fortifications - they dug trenches. The Cossacks heroically repelled 24 attacks by the Turks, repeatedly went on sorties, skillfully waged counter-mine warfare, captured weapons and ammunition from the enemy. As a result, the Cossacks managed to inflict a crushing defeat on the Turks, the Turkish army shamefully fled (!) from under the walls of Azov. In the story, the Cossacks claim that they witnessed direct divine intervention. The Turks were frightened and struck by God's wrath, holy men of enormous stature descended from the heavens and struck the fleeing Turks with swords. However, this brilliant victory came at a high price for the Cossacks and especially the fortress fortifications. In essence, Azov, both the city and the fortress, was destroyed to the ground. It was necessary to restore the fortress and city buildings, warehouses, etc. It was necessary to replenish the fortress artillery, stocks of gunpowder, cannonballs, lead, grain and other supplies for the

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garrison. Finally, the Cossack garrison itself and the entire population of the city suffered great losses. Almost all the surviving Cossacks were wounded, and it was clear that the Sultan would not give up Azov so easily. As the author of the Tale writes: "we are all crippled old men: we will no longer be in business or battle." Under these conditions, the Cossacks were forced to turn to Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich Romanov with a request to accept the city under his sovereign hand. The Tsar convened the Zemsky Sobor, which was to decide the fate of Azov. However, after the defeat in the war with Poland, the Zemsky Sobor feared confrontation with Crimea and Turkey. As a result, having repelled all Turkish attacks, the Cossacks left Azov, which was destroyed to the ground, in 1642.

The Tale of the Siege of Azov vividly and vividly describes all the twists and turns of the Azov epic of the Don Cossacks, as only an eyewitness could. The author constantly emphasizes the ascetic character of Azov's defenders and their ideals of struggle for the true faith. God and holy men are on the side of the defenders. On the last night of the siege, when the defenders' forces were already exhausted, the Cossacks saw "two men of ancient years, one wearing a shaggy hair shirt"—apparently John the Baptist and St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. The men reported to the Cossacks that "the Turkish pashas and the Crimean king fled from the camp, Cossacks, and victory came upon them from Christ, the Son of God, from heaven by the power of God." Overall, The Tale of the Siege of Azov is written in the spirit of classical medieval literature. The author of the Tale was undoubtedly a bookish man, well-versed in chronicles and church journalism. In particular, the author was undoubtedly familiar with the Tale of the Battle of Mamai. At the same time, the Tale is distinguished by the presence of direct speech by the Cossacks and their opponents, and is written from the perspective of a participant in the events. The author is a Cossack, who describes in Cossack language the story of the great Cossack feat for freedom and the holy faith. The Tale of the Siege of Azov became an outstanding work of medieval Cossack historical literature, expressing the ideals of the Cossacks in their struggle for freedom and Cossack republican statehood.

The entire Azov epic is widely reflected in Cossack folklore, particularly in epic heroic songs. In this regard, the unique source base for studying the early history of the Cossacks is particularly evident. As we have seen earlier, this uniqueness lies in the extreme paucity of written sources of Cossack origin. The overwhelming majority of documentary evidence comes not from the Cossack republics, but from neighboring states, primarily Russia, Poland, Turkey, and Persia. Archaeological research into Cossack cultural monuments is still in its infancy. The accidental—or, as some researchers believe, intentional—destruction of Cossack military archives

creates significant difficulties in the objective study of medieval Cossack history. Due to these circumstances, Cossack folklore has become one of the most important sources. Historical epic songs, recounting the military exploits of the Cossacks in the distant past, are prominent among them. In particular, ancient epics - "old fatherland" and "great-grandfather" songs about the "old Cossack Ilya Muromets", about "Dobrynya-Donchak" and other similar works of folk art of the Cossacks.

Historical Cossack epic songs, describing the events of the 16th–19th centuries, are entire song cycles about the decisive participation of the Don Cossacks in the capture of Kazan under Ivan the Terrible, about the conquest of Siberia by Yermak, about the capture and siege of Azov, about Alexei Mikhailovich and the Razin Uprising, about Peter the Great, about Bulavin and Nekrasov, about the Seven Years' War and Krasnoshchyokov, about Suvorov and Pugachev, about Efremov and Ilovaisky, about the Caucasian War, Gudovich and Shamil, about 1812 and the whirlwind ataman Platov, about the defense of Sevastopol, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, and many other historical events in the lives of the Cossacks. Cossack historical songs cover events up to the Russo-Japanese War, World War I, the Civil War, and the death of Nicholas II and the royal family. Moreover, each song cycle can contain up to several dozen individual songs. For example, the most popular Cossack hero, Stenka Razin, is dedicated to over three dozen songs with varying plots. More than a dozen song plots are dedicated to Peter the Great. Similar subject diversity applies to themes such as "The Seven Years' War," "1812," "The Caucasian War," and many other song cycles. It's no coincidence that collectors of Cossack folklore always pay attention to the assessment of Don songs first given by V. G. Belinsky in an anonymous work known as "Articles on Folk Poetry," published in Otechestvennye Zapiski in 1841. "Don Cossack songs can be classified as part of the historical cycle, and they are indeed more deserving of the name historical than the so-called purely historical Russian folk songs. They contain the entire life and history of this military community, where Russian daring, courage, bravery, and revelry found a wide, spacious, and free nest. They are incomparably more numerous than historical songs, they contain more historical reality than the latter, and their poetry is more sweeping and daring." This well-known quote from Belinsky is invariably cited in the introduction by all authors, compilers, and researchers of Cossack songs. As an example, we can cite the classic work "Songs of the Don Cossacks" by A. M. Listopadov and the recent edition "Cossack Songs" by Yu. E. Biryukov, published in 2024.

Indeed, Cossack songs often served as a kind of oral folk chronicle, reminiscent of epics. It is significant that Cossack songs often provide precise dates for the events they describe, and in 19th-century

Impact Factor:	ISRA (India)	= 6.317	SIS (USA)	= 0.912	ICV (Poland)	= 6.630
	ISI (Dubai, UAE)	= 1.582	ПИИИ (Russia)	= 0.191	PIF (India)	= 1.940
	GIF (Australia)	= 0.564	ESJI (KZ)	= 8.100	IBI (India)	= 4.260
	JIF	= 1.500	SJIF (Morocco)	= 7.184	OAJI (USA)	= 0.350

songs, even the exact date of the month. For example, one song is called "Oh, Yes, in the Year Eight Hundred and Forty in the Second Year." Cossack songs poetically describe very specific, datable historical events, such as Peter the Great's Prut Campaign ("Ay, not a threatening cloud rose upon us"), the Battle of Kunersdorf during the Seven Years' War ("Not the King of the Prut"), the death of Alexander I ("Oh, how Alexander rode"), and many other historical events significant to the Cossacks.

In Cossack epic songs, we find the real names of historical figures and similar details. For example, in one of the most epic songs about the conquest of Siberia, "How It Was on the Glorious Steppes of Saratov," we find not only the names of "Ataman Yermak Timofeevich" and "White Tsar Ivan Vasilyevich," but also "Esaul Astashka son of Lavrentyevich," "Tsar Kuchum," and other historical details. The song tells how "the Cossacks, friends, free men, gathered, brothers gathered in a single circle: like the Donskoys, Grebenskoys, and Yaikskoys; their Ataman was Yermak, son of Timofeevich."

Conclusion

As in many other Cossack epic songs dedicated to the era of Ivan the Terrible, the historical narrative

in this song about Yermak is crowned by a justification for the ancient Cossack rights to the Don River with all its lands and Cossack freedom. These rights were acquired by the Cossacks for their heroic deeds and service to the Tsar, who bestowed "the glorious, quiet Don" upon Ataman Yermak and the entire Don Host.

In summary, we can conclude that there was no scholarly study of the Cossacks in the 15th–17th centuries, due to the absence of historical science itself in pre-Petrine Rus'. At this time, the source base for subsequent study of the Cossack phenomenon in the imperial historiography of the 18th–19th centuries was only just beginning to emerge. However, already in that historical period of Muscovite Rus', the first attempts were made to understand the Cossacks as a phenomenon, to find an explanation for them, and to provide a definition. The first "official" version of the origin and ethnic identity of the Cossacks, the "runaway serf theory," also dates to this time. A distinctive Cossack historiography also emerged at this time, in the first historical works of Cossack origin—the tales of the capture of Azov and the siege of Azov by the Don Cossacks.

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