

THE AMBIGUITIES OF COSSACKDOM:
THE CASE OF THE PONTIC STEPPE
1775-1830s

by
Andriy Posun'ko

A DISSERTATION
in
History

Presented to the Faculties of the Central European University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Supervisor: Alfred Joseph Rieber

Budapest, Hungary

2018

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I hereby declare that this dissertation contains no material accepted for any other degrees and no materials previously written or published by another person unless otherwise noted.

Abstract

Traditionally, the history of the Pontic Steppe cossacks ends in 1775 with the dissolution of the Zaporozhian Sich by Russian troops. Indeed, after 1775 the majority of free cossacks communities had already been either dissolved or subjugated by the Russian Empire. On the other hand, in the late eighteenth century the Russian legislation was extremely vague and cossacks could not yet become a proper estate of the empire.

Studying the transitional period of 1775-1830s, I focus on the complexities of the borderland management in the Steppe region and imperial officials' attempts to win the loyalty of locals accustomed to the cossack tradition. Tracking various cossack formations, I demonstrate how competing understandings of cossackdom coexisted, influenced each other, and how cossackdom as a social category evolved.

Finally, paying attention to the under-represented cases of cossackdom – irregulars recruited from foreign subjects or from nomads, temporary raised cossack militias, etc. – I move towards more flexible understanding of the cossackdom with its varying contexts and attempt to answer the question – what could cossackdom mean at the turn of the centuries in the end?

Acknowledgments

This research would be impossible without the help of many wonderful people, whom I was extremely lucky to meet and whose assistance was crucial to the completion of this project. First of all, I should mention my supervisor, Alfred Rieber – his readiness to help extended far beyond advices on the text and his unwavering support was central in my undertakings during the last seven years. I learned much from him and I owe him a debt of most sincere gratitude.

Next, I thank my parents Serhii and Olena Posun'ko, my wife Anastasiia, and my son Savva, who were with me even when I hesitated and whose belief in me was my primary source of inspiration.

During my research in Ukraine, I received invaluable support and guidance from Svitlana Kaiuk and Oleh Repan (Dnipro), Liudmyla Malenko and Petro Boiko (Zaporizhia), Liliia Bilousova (Odesa), Mykola Riabchuk (Kyiv). As for my fieldtrip to Russian archives, I am extremely grateful to Andrei Doronin and Mariia Chasovskaia (German Historical Institute); Andrei Iserov, Irina Savel'eva, Aleksandr Kamenskii, and Evgenii Trefilov (Higher School of Economics); Aleksandr Beznosov and Oksana Beznosova (Russian-German House). I would also like to thank Mikhail Sergeevich from Russian State Archive of Military History, as well as all other archivists and librarians, who guided me through registers and inventories. Finally, I am grateful to Mert Sunar (Istanbul), Constantin Ardeleanu (Bucharest), Roman

Shyian (Alberta), whose advice was helpful both in framing current dissertation and preparing my next research project.

I also wish to express warm thanks both to professors and students at CEU, whose feedback was indispensable to the completion of this dissertation upon my return to Budapest. I would like to personally thank professors Mikhail Dmitriev, Domagoj Madunich, Tolga Esmer, Ostap Sereda, and Jan Hennings, who commented on working versions of this dissertation. I thank Agnes Kelemen, Anna Nakai, Dejan Lukich, and Agoston Berecz for their constructive peer-feedback during departmental seminars as well. I am also extremely grateful to Aniko Molnar whose steadfast support in all matters administrative and beyond allowed me to dedicate much more resources to this project.

Finally, this project was sponsored by a number of organizations – Open Society Foundation, Max Weber Stiftung, ZEIT Stiftung, Volkswagen Stiftung – to whom I express my gratitude for their generous support of my research. In the same vein, I would like to thank organizers, administrators, and fellows of the Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies (Budapest), Trajectories of Change Programme (Hamburg), and Pontica Magna Programme (Bucharest).

At the same time, any inaccuracies and oversimplifications in the text below are my sole responsibility.

A Note on Transliteration

- For the romanization of names, places and terms originally in Cyrillic, I use the simplified – without ligatures – Library of Congress transliteration system. When transliterating from the pre-reform Russian, I use the contemporary spelling: omitting “er”, etc.

- The exemptions from LoC transliteration are names of monarchs commonly used in the English-language historiography (thus, for instance, Alexander I, yet Aleksandr Ivanovich Chernyshev).

- When possible and relevant, I try to include alternative (Russian/Ukrainian/Moldavian) spellings for personal names; however, in the majority of cases I rely on the version present in primary sources I had access to.

- For the cossacks of Lower Dnieper I use compromise spelling Zaporizhia / Zaporozhians.

- I generally do not capitalize the term “cossack(s)” since in chronological and geographical frames of the study this term is primarily used not as an ethnonym (Russians, Ukrainians, Cossacks), but either to signify a type of troops (dragoons, hussars, cossacks) or a social category (peasants, merchants, cossacks). The term is capitalized when it is the part of the official unit name with all other words being capitalized (e.g. Bug Cossack Host).

- The term “host” is used to denote cossack units and is equivalent to Ukrainian “*viis’ko*” and Russian “*voisko*”.

- As for archival sources, I use translation instead of transliteration:

Fund – for “*fond*”

Inventory – for “*opis’opys*”

Bundle – for “*sviazka*”

File – for “*delo/sprava*”

Fol./Fols – for “*list(y)/arkush(i)*”

Abbreviations Used for Publications

PSZ – *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*

SIRIO – *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo Istoricheskogo Obshchestva*

ZNTSh – *Zapysky Naukovoho Tovarystva imeni Shevchenka*

ZOOID – *Zapiski Odesskogo Obshchestva Istorii i Drevnostei*

Abbreviations Used for Archives

ANRM – *Arhiva Nationala a Republicii Moldova, Chisinau*

DAOO – *Derzhavnyi arkhiv Odes'koi oblasti, Odesa*

GAKK – *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Krasnodarskogo kraia, Krasnodar*

ORRNB – *Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi natsional'noi biblioteki, St. Petersburg*

RGADA – *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov, Moscow*

RGIA – *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, St. Petersburg*

RGVIA – *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv, Moscow*

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Introduction

In 1774 several hundred migrants – previously Polish and Ottoman subjects – settled in the Russian Empire, along the Bug River. Having served in the Russian army as volunteers, they were promised generous rewards: land grants; the status of foreign colonists – i.e. exemption from taxes and conscription for thirty years; state-sponsored infrastructure for settlements founded by newcomers. Eight years later, however, the deal was revised by local administration and the colonists received a new status of cossacks. As such, they were obliged to serve the military – even if only as an irregular force. Newly created cossacks found themselves with no choice but to adapt their household economies to the new circumstances that involved providing the levy required by the empire. Without much time passing, in 1797, just fifteen years later, these cossack communities were deemed unnecessary – thereafter being appointed the status of state peasants and forced to pay taxes – only to be transferred back into their former cossack status in 1803.

This renewed cossack status, however, did not last for long. By 1817 the Bug cossacks were converted into “military colonists”: a social experiment engineered by General Arakcheev, where intense military drilling coexisted with farming obligations. While the majority of cossacks resented their new status – and rightfully so – some of their officers were allowed to organize a new cossack unit from local Moldavians in the recently annexed Bessarabia...

Leaving aside the fact of repeatedly broken promises – like only eight years of exemption from obligations instead of thirty and repeated forced

transfers of the population between social categories – this episode perfectly illustrates the situation of cossacks in the Pontic Steppe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – the period after the dissolution of the Zaporozhian Sich.

The Statement of Problem

Even if in the late eighteenth century large groups of the main protagonists, former Zaporozhian cossacks, either migrated to Ottoman lands or were resettled in the Caucasus – now re-coined as the Black Sea Host – the cossacks continued to exist in the Pontic Steppe in the most diverse of forms. Units having been recruited from foreigners joining the Russian army as volunteers; from local nomads as an attempt to settle them; from, after all, former Zaporozhians who were constantly reorganized, resettled, and reformed. Furthermore, the local militia raised during the Russo-Turkish and Napoleonic wars also enjoyed cossack status – even if only temporary.

These provisional and diverse cossack formations, which belong neither to the social category of traditional borderland warriors, nor to the already incorporated imperial cossackdom of the late nineteenth century, represent a largely understudied field of inquiry. The situation stirs the broader questions of: what does the category of “cossack” actually signify? To what degree can one use the term “cossacks” for foreign mercenaries, who may only be sporadically called cossacks by imperial officials? Should we use this term for Tatar or Nogai irregulars who were required to serve under models developed for the cossack hosts in this period, yet not explicitly called so? Or

should the term “cossack” be reserved only for traditional freebooter communities of Dnieper, Don, Volga, laik, etc? Should one use “cossackdom” when speaking of militias in neighboring Bessarabia, who like the peasants of the Hetmanate region also struggled for the recognition of their martial status; yet were denied it by imperial authorities in the end? What did “cossackdom” mean in the late eighteenth – early nineteenth centuries then? Should, after all, the very word cossack be capitalized or not in the period when it was used only as an umbrella term for practically any irregular and not as an ethnonym?

Consequently, as a step towards answering these questions, in my case study of cossackdom in the Pontic Steppe region during the transitional period of 1775-1835, this dissertation will be focused on three problems:

- the post-Zaporozhian cossacks and their transformation from a borderland warrior brotherhood to an estate (*soslovie*) of the empire;
- interaction between the ruling elites and their borderland subjects detailing the numerous reforms and reorganizations of cossackdom, undertaken by the Russian Empire, and the cossacks’ – both officers and rank-and-file – response to them, be it cooptation or resistance;
- finally, a comparative perspective on the post-Zaporozhian cossack hosts developed by placing them in a wider context, which includes the interrelated cossack hosts of the Romanov Empire and Zaporozhian participation in the military systems of the neighboring Habsburg and Ottoman Empires.

Chronological, Geographical, and Topical Framing

The timeframe covered in this dissertation is between the period of 1775 – 1835. The justification for this starting date is that it picks up on the aftermath of Pugachev's Rebellion 1773-1775 when the Russian government was concerned with cossack unrest and adopted new policies to deal with it. The mid 1770s thus marked a significant change in the governmental attitude towards the cossack borderlands.

In 1775 laik cossacks, the host that most actively participated in the Pugachev's Rebellion, was renamed the Ural Host, which severed the rebellious legacy at a symbolic level; while the Host's autonomy was greatly reduced. Besides, the Don cossacks received new imperial administrators for further control. While formally their task was to merely protect rank-and-file cossacks from abuses by officers, it was just a matter of time, till this new governing body tightened state control over the host's internal life. The Zaporozhian Host was dissolved completely; a few of its commanders were imprisoned; while the status of the cossack majority was undecided. Only twelve years later large cossack hosts were recreated in the Pontic steppe region. In general, instead of mid-eighteenth century policies aimed at peaceful and gradual cossack integration into imperial society, the state turned towards numerous reforms, splits, mergers, and reorganizations of the cossack units – looking for the best techniques to control these unruly borderlanders.

The closing date of my research is the year when the transformation of previously free frontier brotherhoods into the estate of the empire was at least

juridically completed. After the adoption of the Statute (*Polozhenie*) of the Don Cossack Host in 1835, cossack hosts of the Russian Empire primarily preserved only the formal and external attributes of their traditional rights and organizational privileges. In practice, they became much more similar to regular regiments of the Russian army than to their predecessors. Further, cossack lands became imperial provinces in practically everything but the name. The actual implementation of the 1835 Statute differed among the hosts, which meant that it took some time to finalize the reorganization of the cossacks. Nevertheless, by 1835, the empire had a defined course towards the cossacks that was pursued well up until the Great Reforms Era.

Three sub periods can be further outlined in these 1775 – 1835 frames. The first, 1775 – 1791, marks the period between the dissolution of Zaporizhia and the death of proconsul in the southern region, commander of all imperial irregular units, Prince Grigorii Potemkin.¹ On one hand, it was an era of uneasy expectations: mass cossack emigration to the Ottoman lands; Russian efforts to transfer populations that had previously been granted cossack status into regular soldiers, peasants, or farmers. At the same time, for various purposes, Potemkin actively exploited the cossack image. As Chancellor Aleksandr Bezborodko observed: “[...] deceased’s passion for cossacks reached the degree that he converted everything in sight into this [...]” Such was written in November 1791 on Potemkin’s activities in Ekaterinoslav province – a time when peoples of many origins and estates

¹ For the latest take on Potemkin’s biography see, Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Potemkin: Prince of Princes* (London: Phoenix, 2004).

had already been re-assigned cossack status.² By the time of Potemkin's death the number of people serving in cossack units in the Pontic Steppe even exceeded numbers in the Zaporozhian Cossack Host disbanded not that long ago.

Given the situation, the cossack hosts created in the land of the former Zaporizhia deserve special attention in that they demonstrate the empire's need for the cossacks after all. This is beside the reality of the specific terms of cossack service to the empire not being clarified, which set the conditions for the extent of the abuses, but also opportunities, for both servitors and their commanders.

The second sub period can be defined as 1792 – 1814. It was a time of rapid policy changes. Potemkin's successor in the south, Platon Zubov, had plans for the reorganization and resettlement of the cossacks in this region, yet, the death of Catherine and ascension of Paul meant a quick change of fortune for Zubov. His plans, in the end, remained only on paper without any implementation. This situation, among other factors, added up into an era of severe instability for the cossacks – their hosts being disbanded and recreated every several years due to empire-wide policy changes: the short reign of Paul and his regicide; Alexander's initial turn to Catherine's policies; the Napoleonic Wars, which distracted the attention of the court and the government and once again interrupted many plans for the cossacks reorganization.

² Petr Bartenev, *Arkhiv Kniazia Vorontsova*, vol. 13 (Moscow: Tipografiia Lebedeva, 1879), 227.

The third sub period will cover approximately 1814 – 1835. It was the time of post-Napoleonic developments in the military including Jomini's theories and Chernyshev's Committee on the reorganization of the Don Host – a model, which would later be applied to almost all other hosts of the Russian empire. At the same time these years were marked by Speranskii's activities and the imminent overhaul of imperial legislation that, finally, brought a certain clarity into the cossacks status within imperial society.

Moving to the geographical frames of this dissertation, the primary object is the Pontic Steppe. Located on the northern shore of the Black Sea it was formerly the land of the Zaporozhian cossacks, subsequently being turned into an imperial province of New Russia. Further, the Pontic Steppe was a region previously contested by several empires, which were mutually competing for the loyalty of the local population. However, in the early nineteenth century the Russian Empire practically transformed the area into an internal province.

A large part of the Pontic Steppe in the Early Modern period was considered the land of the Zaporozhian cossacks of the Lower Dnieper – *Vol'nosti Viis'ka Zaporoz'kogo Nyzovoho*. Upon the dissolution of the host in

1775 it was added to the province of New Russia.³ Geographically this land was an arid region approximately between the Bug River to the West and Mius River to the East; with other major rivers here being Dnieper, Ingul, and Samara.

This transformation from the open frontier to the contested borderland and then to the internal province meant tightened governmental control and attempts to integrate cossacks into the social and military structure of the empire.⁴ This caused discontent and later led to an exodus of many cossacks to Ottoman and Habsburg lands. At the same time, the Romanovs resorted to the use of local cossacks as manpower for the colonization of the Caucasus.

³ Before the eighteenth century, the Pontic Steppe was considered a part of the Wild Field or Tartaria. The *Novorossiia* as a *guberniia* (province) was initially created in 1764 from the Novoserbia settlements. The addition of former Zaporozhian cossack lands greatly increased the territory of the province in 1775. In 1783 the New Russian province was merged with the Azov province as Ekaterinoslav *namestnichestvo*. In 1796 the New Russian province was re-created, by that point including also Crimea (Tavrida), yet in 1802 the province was once again split into Ekaterinoslav, Voznesensk, and Tavrida provinces. The official toponym of *Novorossiia* got reassigned to the Governorate-General (*General-Gubernatorstvo*) in 1822. Nowadays, the Pontic Steppe lies primarily within the Southern Ukrainian region.

⁴ Despite this transition, certain reservations should be made. First, the “internal province” should not be treated as something static. The territorial governance of the Russian Empire underwent great changes during the reigns of Catherine II, Paul I, and Alexander I. Second, regions of the empire were not equal and much depended both on the nature of the province and on the personality – and personal connections – of the governor. On this issue see: John LeDonne, “Frontier Governors General 1772-1825. Part I. The Western Frontier (the Russo-Polish Border in the 18th and 19th Century),” *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* 47 (January 1, 1999): 56–88; John LeDonne, “Frontier Governors General 1772-1852. Part II, The Southern Frontier (the Russo-Turkish and Russo-Persian Border),” *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48 (January 1, 2000): 161–83; John LeDonne, “Russian Governors General, 1775-1825,” *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 42, no. 1 (2001): 5–30; John LeDonne, “Administrative Regionalization in the Russian Empire 1802-1826,” *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 43, no. 1 (2002): 5–34; John LeDonne, “Regionalism and Constitutional Reform 1819-1826,” *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 44, no. 1 (2003): 5–34; V. S. Shandra, “Formuvannia Derzhavnykh Instytutsii na Pivdni Ukrainy v XIX St.: Istorychnyi Invariant,” in *Skhid i Pivden’ Ukrainy: Chas, Prostir, Sotsium*, by V. A. Smolii, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Kyiv: Instytut Istorii Ukrainy NANU, 2014), 192–205.

Consequently, in tracing certain groups of cossacks, I will sometimes go beyond the boundaries of the Steppe and deal with such areas as: Danubian Principalities, Ottoman Dobruja, Habsburg Military Frontier stretching from Adriatic to Transylvania, Kuban', and Caucasus. Similarly, even if the internal life of the Don cossacks is beyond the scope of this thesis, I have to appeal to their case, as they were the model unit in the Russian Empire and often served as an organizational template for other cossack hosts.

From an organizational perspective, this thesis will deal with such units as:

- Black Sea cossacks, Danubian Delta cossacks, Danubian cossacks; Azov cossacks, who were recruited primarily from former Zaporozhians; as well as, Transdanubian cossacks – those Zaporozhians who preferred to serve Ottomans or Habsburgs;

- Bug cossacks, Moldavian cossacks, Wallachian cossacks, Bessarabian cossacks – who were primarily foreign volunteers serving in the Russian army; as well as Greek, Tatar, Nogai irregulars serving on semi-cossack terms;

- Ekaterinoslav cossacks who were raised as a temporary, militia-like, unit.

The main problem of this thesis is the transition of the region from an open frontier into a province of the empire and the corresponding reorganizations of the local cossacks.⁵ Besides the imperial administration

⁵ For more on this transition see Terry Martin, "The Empire's New Frontiers: New Russia's Path from Frontier to 'Okraina' 1774-1920," *Russian History* 19, no. 1/4 (1992): 181–201

coming to the region and attempting to control cossack migrations, local military communities had also to be integrated into the social system of the empire. This could involve the transfer of the cossacks to already established estates: common cossacks into peasants, cossack officers into nobility or the establishment of a separate cossack estate as such. Next, the continued existence of local cossacks also meant that very different types of landowning continued to coexist in the region and administrators had to balance interests of serf-owning nobility, semi-independent farmers – like foreign colonists – and cossacks who at this point owned their land collectively as a host. Finally, from the perspective of the military, reformed cossack units had to be included into the chain of local military command as well.

The transition from borderland into province influenced not only state policies, but also the life of the local population. From the cossacks' perspective, inclusion in empire meant not only the loss of traditional political autonomy, but also numerous changes in everyday life: former Zaporozhian cossacks had to adapt to new warfare practices and regulations; find new sources of income, instead of the traditional frontier practices of raiding and ransoming captives; they also had to adapt to the new, gradually regularized status of their military service – keeping in mind the usual undersupply of their units. In addition, cossack domestic relations changed gradually as well since cossacks moved from the brotherhood of bachelor warriors to more common family relations. Finally, there also came the perspective of those who had not been connected to the tradition of Zaporizhia, yet ended up in irregular units of the imperial army either by choice or by decree. Their cossack status –

even if temporary, unsteady, and controversial – should not be discarded, while their experiences can only contribute to the history of the borderlands.

Today, a fresh perspective on the late eighteenth-century cossackdom is needed. For a long time it was studied as only a part of local history: neither a part of the grand narrative, nor a case for wider conceptualization and interpretation. In my project, I hope to provide this fresh perspective by uniting numerous specific case studies of the cossack hosts in the region. In doing so I intend to transcend traditional national narrative by placing the Pontic Steppe cossacks into the general East and South-East European context of military developments and borderland management. Therefore, reinterpreting late eighteenth – early nineteenth century cossack transformation processes using a unified theoretical framework, which both takes into account the imperial – often contradictory and controversial – policies, the local populations reactions to said policies, as well as, the constant mutual influences and adaptations between policies and reactions.

In general, the topic of imperial transformations in the Pontic Steppe is important not only as a local case study, but also as part of a larger scholarship on contiguous empires and their borderland management. I sincerely hope that this project will strengthen the understanding of these transformations and in doing such will provide a helpful basis for further studies dealing with the problem of military borderland reorganization – a problem that should be viewed both as a historical phenomenon itself and as a powerful symbol, used in later myth-making and commemoration.

Existing Scholarship

While working on folklore collection, Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi and Mykhailo Drahomanov – the founding fathers of historical scholarship on Ukraine – noticed that there were quite a lot of folk songs on the dissolution of the Sich. At the same time, there was almost none about the integration of the Hetmanate and Slobodian regions into imperial administrative and military structure.⁶ Indeed, it might be much easier to romanticize genuine frontier warriors than registered servants of the crown – be this crown Polish or Russian – or militarized (*pokozachenni*) peasants.

The myth of the Sich proved to be extremely resilient, while cossackdom of the Hetmanate and Slobodian regions was, comparatively, quickly forgotten. Still, contrary to the enormous impact of Zaporozhian cossackdom on Ukrainian culture and national movements – or maybe precisely due to this impact – not much is really known about the cossacks after the dissolution of their stronghold in 1775. As such, this topic can be rightfully called understudied.

Furthermore, the history of the Pontic Steppe as a geographic region from the turn of the eighteenth throughout the nineteenth century is understudied in several senses – despite the importance of this region for both empire-building processes of the past and nation-building projects of the present. While one may find topical studies that deal with: specific cossack

⁶ Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi, *Iliustrovana Istoriiia Ukrainy* (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1992), 430; Mykhailo Drahomanov, *Novi Ukrains'ki Pisni pro Hromads'ki Spravy* (Geneva: Pechatnia "Rabotnika" i "Hromady," 1881), 17–25. For current approaches to folklore on cossacks see also Roman I. Shiyan, "Cossack Motifs in Ukrainian Folk Legengs" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2006).

units and their incorporation into the imperial army; religious minorities and foreign colonists; urban histories of newly-founded cities and biographies of well-known governors; they remain as disparate segments. An encompassing historical overview detailing the creation of *Novorossia*, its incorporation into the imperial space, and the variety of instruments, which the imperial government employed in the region in order to co-opt the local population is yet to be told.⁷

For a number of authors writing about Zaporozhian cossackdom, the abolition of the Sich in 1775 marks the end of the Cossack Era. Whatever happened afterwards is described as either an oppressive imperial policy: aimed at the ruthless elimination of any trace of the freedom-loving cossacks – as is popular in the pro-Ukrainian national narrative – or, as the pro-Russian statist narrative has it – a benevolent mission for stability, peace and order in the wild and unruly steppe. In either case, such reconstructions oversimplify a complex process, as well as, subjugate it to competing mythologies.⁸

Furthermore, Zaporozhian cossackdom continued to exist as a symbol and a myth for the emerging Ukrainian project. It was actively used by the

⁷ For now, the main generalizing monograph-level work on the region during the imperial period remains the four-volume study by Elena Druzhinina: E. I. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii Mir 1774 goda: Ego Podgotovka i Zakliuchenie* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1955); Druzhinina; E. I. Druzhinina, *Severnoe Prichernomor'e v 1775-1800 gg.* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1959); E. I. Druzhinina, *Iuzhnaia Ukraina v 1800-1825 gg.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1970); E. I. Druzhinina, *Iuzhnaia Ukraina v Period Krizisa Feodalizma 1825-1860* (Moscow: Nauka, 1970).

⁸ Due to the events of 2014 a surge in popular historical literature happened, furthering claims of either Ukraine or Russia over the steppe region. See, for instance, Galina Turchenko and Fedor Turchenko, *Proekt "Novorossiiia" 1764-2014 gg. Iubilei na Krovi* (Zaporizhia: ZNU, 2015). Works furthering Russian claims would be too numerous to list here, yet they are similar in the sense that as they become openly propagandistic, their scholarly value diminishes.

Little Russian gentry in the nineteenth century and by the intellectuals and revolutionaries of the early twentieth century. Zaporozhians, as many other frontier symbols, became both an obstacle and an opportunity to explore both for local autonomists and empire-builders. In more recent times it is actively used – or, sometimes, abused – for both political purposes and as part of commercials featuring proud steppe warriors merrily drinking *gorilka* (a brand of liquor). Despite this situation, the fate of local cossackdom after the dissolution of the Zaporozhian Sich is largely understudied as well.

Mentioning the great histories, created during imperial times, the late eighteenth century cossackdom is beyond the chronological scope of both Sergei Solov'ev's "History of Russia" and Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi's "History of the Ukraine-Rus." Solov'ev's, "Textbook on Russian History" portrays Zaporozhians as bandits, who opposed the development of their region and boldly pushed their irrational demands. Further, the later Black Sea host is barely mentioned.⁹ In his lecture course on Russian history, Vasilii Kluchevskii scarcely mentions cossacks as well; focusing on their participation in the Constitutional Assembly of 1767, rather than on the post-1775 situation.¹⁰

Speaking of local researchers, the classical work of Dmytro Iavornyts'kyi stands out. However, his narration is focused and detailed only till 1734. The history of later cossackdom is presented as a general overview. In addition, despite all its richness, this work already retranslates certain

⁹ Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi, *Istoriia Ukrainy-Rusy* (Lviv, Kyiv, 1898-1936); Sergei Solov'ev, *Istoriia Rossii s Drevneishikh Vremen* (St. Petersburg: Tovarishchestvo Obshchestvennaia Pol'za, 1851); Sergei Solov'ev, *Uchebnaia Kniga po Russkoi Istarii* (St. Petersburg: Tip. E. Barfkiekhta i Ko, 1860).

¹⁰ Vasilii Kliuchevskii, *Kurs Russkoi Istarii* (Saint Petersburg: n. p., 1904).

romantic myths – for example, the myth of the Sich destruction. In general, this myth ascends to Apollon Skal'kovskii's "The History of the New Sich or the Last Zaporozhian Host", while the critical approach to the events of 1775 appears only at the beginning of the twentieth century based on the sources published by Vasiliï Bednov. Nevertheless, studies, published during the imperial period are indispensable due to problems with the availability of surviving sources. Nineteenth century archaeologists, ethnographers, and antiquarians had access to documents, which are considered lost nowadays.¹¹

As for the mid-twentieth century – both in the USSR and the Ukrainian diasporas abroad – cossack studies were either focused on the heroic early cossacks, or emphasized the "reunification" of Ukraine and Russia in 1654. Because of this, there are only a few works that cover the late eighteenth century. In general, previous explanations of the Sich dissolution, which emphasized changes in international politics, were supplemented with narratives about the anti-feudal character of cossackdom. Of these, more interesting interpretations include the works of Vladimir Golobutskii, who

¹¹ Apollon Skal'kovskii, *Istoriia Novoi Sichi abo Ostann'oho Kosha Zaporoz'koho*, vol. 3 (Odessa: Gorodskaia Tipografiia, 1846), 204-10; Dmytro Iavornyts'kyi, *Istoriia Zaporozhskikh Kazakov* (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia I. N. Skorokhodova, 1892); V. Bednov, "Materialy Dlia Istorii Kolonizatsii Byvshikh Zaporozhskikh Vladenii," *Letopis' Ekaterinoslavskoi Uchenoi Arkhivnoi Komissii* 9 (1913): 168–215. See also Ioann Karelin, "Materialy Dlia Istorii Zaporozh'ia: Nikopol'," *ZOOID* 6 (1867): 523–38. Speaking of the sources, the majority of them were produced by imperial officials – be they decrees outlining what has to be done or complaints collected from illiterate locals. This one-sidedness should not be discarded when assessing the potential of each document.

emphasizes the growth of capitalistic relations in the cossack regions and the unavoidable conflict between the feudal center and the capitalizing South.¹²

If one makes an attempt to generalize recent developments in contemporary studies on post-Zaporozhian cossackdom, two main trends may be identified. First is the focus on rich, detailed, factual works, and source publications.¹³ This may be seen as a consequence of the previously understudied status of the topic and the lack of proper, deep, even if descriptive, studies on the early nineteenth century cossack hosts.¹⁴ While such approaches do allow deep, focused, case studies, they artificially breakdown the topic into many smaller sub-topics. It is hard to speak of

¹² V. A. Golobutskii, *Chernomorskoe Kazachestvo* (Kiev: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk Ukrainskoi SSR, 1956). Such interpretations, however, are strikingly similar with the recent works on the Ottoman Empire, which focus on janissaries as the emerging middle class who relied on privileges granted to martial estate. See Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010). As for diaspora and works by western scholars, works by Nataliia Polons'ka-Vasylenko and Avigdor Levy can be mentioned: Nataliia Polons'ka-Vasylenko, *Zaporizhzhia XVIII Stolittia ta ioho Spadshchyna* (Munich: Dniprova Khvyliia, 1965); Avigdor Levy, "The Contribution of Zaporozhian Cossacks to Ottoman Military Reform: Documents and Notes," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 6, no. 3 (1982): 372–413.

¹³ Svitlana Kaiuk, "Zadunais'ka Sich (1775-1828 rr.)" (Candidate of Sciences diss., Dnipropetrovs'kyi Derzhavnyi Universytet, 1999); L. M. Malenko, *Azovs'ke Kozats'ke Viis'ko 1828-1866* (Zaporizhia: Tandem-U, 2000); Volodymyr Mil'chev, *Zaporozhtsi na Viis'kovomu Kordoni Avstriis'koi Imperii 1785-1790 rr.* (Zaporizhia: Tandem-U, 2007); Volodymyr Mil'chev, *Sotsial'na Istoriiia Zaporoz'koho Kozatstva Kintsia XVII - XVIII Stolittia: Dzhereloznavchyi Analiz* (Zaporizhia: AA Tandem, 2008); Volodymyr Mil'chev, *Narysy z Istorii Zaporoz'koho Kozatstva XVIII Stolittia* (Zaporizhia: Tandem-U, 2009); V. V. Hrybovs'kyi, "Nohais'ke Kozats'ke Viis'ko: Peredumovy i Protsey Formuvannia," *Pivdenna Ukraina XVIII - XIX Stolittia* 6 (2001): 151–71.

¹⁴ On the other hand, noteworthy studies dealing with specific cossack units were created as part of local studies (*kraevedenie*). Such works as Anatolii Bachinskii, "Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei v 18 - Nachale 19 vv." (Candidate of Sciences diss., Odesskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet imeni I. I. Mechnikova, 1969); I. A. Khioni, "Bugskie Kazaki i Ikh Bor'ba Protiv Feodal'no-Krepostnicheskogo Gneta: Posledniaia Chetvert' XVIII - Pervaia Chetvert' XIX vv." (Candidate of Sciences diss., Odesskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet imeni I. I. Mechnikova, 1973) Even today they are barely surpassed in their meticulous study of primary sources and nuanced narrative – even if formally they are bound by certain limitations of Soviet historiography.

general trends when the history of late cossackdom is fractured into the histories of individual units. On the other hand, generalizing studies of post-1775 cossackdom in the region do exist – even if only several of them.¹⁵ If one turns toward, for example, textbooks or more popular historical works, the late cossack hosts created after the dissolution of Zaporizhia lose their importance for the grand Ukrainian narrative. They are portrayed – if mentioned – as servile units of the autocracy, not as the heirs of true Ukrainian free cossacks.¹⁶

Overall, scholarship on the topic presents a rather peculiar situation. While there are studies on the imperial transformations of practically all neighboring regions, there are almost no comprehensive, monograph level studies, on the Pontic Steppe becoming New Russia or of transformations of local cossackdom after the dissolution of the Zaporozhian cossacks.¹⁷ Yet, the studies on these neighboring regions may not serve as direct sources, but as inspirations for my project. They demonstrate the application of various

¹⁵ R. I. Shyian, *Kozatstvo Pivdennoi Ukrainy v Ostannii Chverti XVIII st.* (Zaporizhia: Tandem-U, 1998); I. A. Antsupov, *Kazachestvo Rossiiskoe Mezhdru Bugom i Dunaem* (Kishinev: ULIM, 2000); O. A. Bachyns'ka, *Kozatstvo v Pisliakozats'ku Dobu Ukrains'koi Istorii* (Odessa: Astroprynt, 2009). Mentioning generalizing works, I should mention that this dissertation relies upon my earlier findings – even if I do not cite them explicitly: Andriy Posun'ko, “After the Zaporizhia: Dissolution, Reorganization, and Transformation of Borderland Military in 1775-1835” (MA thesis, Central European University, 2012).

¹⁶ Ukrainian history textbooks are the natural example of such simplifying narrative. For instance, see Iurii Mytsyk and Oleh Bazhan, *Istoriia Ukrainy* (Kyiv: Kyievo-Mohylians'ka Akademiia, 2008); Bohdan Lanovyk and Mykola Lazarovych, *Istoriia Ukrainy* (Kyiv: Znannia-Press, 2006).

¹⁷ Zenon Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy: Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate, 1760s-1830s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Thomas Barrett, *At The Edge Of Empire: The Terek Cossacks And The North Caucasus Frontier, 1700-1860* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1999); Andrei Kusko and Viktor Taki, *Bessarabiia v Sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii 1812-1917* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012); Kelly O'Neill, *Claiming Crimea: A History of Catherine the Great's Southern Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

research methodologies: the placement of specific case studies into wider imperial and European contexts; and the combination of micro- and macro-approaches. Furthermore, the same way as Zaporozhian cossackdom is overrepresented in the studies of cossackdom that existed on the territory of contemporary Ukraine; western studies of Russian imperial cossackdom overrepresent the Don as the model – even if it was far from the only cossack unit in the empire.¹⁸

As for this dissertation, at least two approaches were needed to accurately depict this history from both the standpoint of imperial administration and the autonomous cossack borderlands. Thus, it seemed natural to apply both the Frontier thesis to the study of borderland warriors and scholarship on various trajectories of statebuilding.

Frontiers

The idea of great open spaces and their colonization as an important factor in history is not new. In the early 1830s Alexis de Tocqueville described the already existing poetic imagery of the virgin Wild West and its appeal to

¹⁸ Practically all periods of Don cossackdom are covered: Brian Boeck, *Imperial Boundaries Cossack Communities and Empire-Building in the Age of Peter the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Bruce Menning, “The Emergence of a Military-Administrative Elite in the Don Cossack Land, 1708-1836,” in *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratization of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Walter Pintner and Don Rowney (London: Macmillan, 1993); Shane O’Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000). As for other cossack hosts, they may be mentioned in generalizing works on the Russian military, still, they usually lack a deep study of their own. Practically the only exceptions are Thomas Barret’s already mentioned work on Terek cossacks and the recent Oleksandr Polianichev, “Rediscovering Zaporozhians: Memory, Loyalties, and Politics in Late Imperial Kuban, 1880-1914” (PhD diss., European University Institute, 2017).

the agrarian segment of American society.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the mid nineteenth century Russian historian Sergei Solov'ev emphasized the role of colonization in his country's history, being less optimistic and stressing the cost which the state had to pay in order to defend its vast borders from the nomads; supply the frontier population; and create a generally viable infrastructure. His followers Vasiliï Kliuchevskii and Matvei Liubavskii also held similar positions.²⁰ In this period, in 1885, the Italian scholar Achille Loria wrote:

*A tyranny ... is ... automatically regulated by the existence of free land, which of itself renders the exercise of true despotic government impossible so long as slavery is unheard of; for the subjects always have a way of avoiding oppression of the sovereign by abandoning him and setting up for themselves upon an unoccupied territory.*²¹

Still, the origin of the Frontier thesis is closely associated with the name of Frederick Jackson Turner who, presumably, was quite aware of and influenced by the works of Tocqueville and Loria. Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" was presented in 1893. For Turner, the Frontier was a moving border between the wilderness and civilization. Turner's terminology hence places emphasis on how the greatest challenge for colonial expansion were natural forces – possibly perceiving Native Americans as an element of the natural environment as well. At the same

¹⁹ Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: the American West as Symbol and Myth*. (New York: Random House, 1950), 135–40.

²⁰ For an overview of approaches to borderlands in the Russian imperial historiography see Alfred Rieber, "Changing Concepts and Constructions of Frontiers: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Ab Imperio* 2003, no. 1 (2003): 42. Noteworthy, contrary to Turner, Solov'ev does not connect vast open spaces as positive traits of Russian character, but with Russian backwardness compared to other European states.

²¹ Walter Prescott Webb, "History as High Adventure," *The American Historical Review* 64, no. 2 (1959): 280.

time, as per Turner, open frontiers provided a safety valve for social discontent in the central provinces.²² Even if the pillars of Turner's concept of the frontier have already been refined or discarded, the value of his work lies not only in the scholarly dimension. Turner created a resonating myth, which became a basis for historical narratives on the founding of the United States of America. Further, this myth is easily adapted to other narratives which has resulted in striking commonalities between popular images of, say, the cowboy, the cossack, and the hajduk. All of them are glorified during secondary education, all are popularized by mass culture, and all are exploited in all possible ways – commercially and politically.²³

The scholarly application of Turner's thesis to Eurasia began with works by Owen Lattimore. Lattimore's contribution to the Frontier concept was threefold. First, he replaced Turner's concept of empty land with pre-existing society, stressing the cultural influences between different cultures in the Frontier zones, constant movement of the population in and out, and the problem of incorporation of one society into the other. Second, he was the first to notice and outline the persistent habit of borderland inhabitants to shift their allegiances very easily, which could result in dual or even triple loyalties. Third, he emphasized the bi-directional exchange between the natural frontier

²² Frederick Jackson Turner, *Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt and Company, 1920).

²³ Speaking of the perspectives of the Frontier thesis application, the question remains open – whether, in general, it will help to transcend national narratives, or it will be a tool for emphasizing the differences between centers and peripheries of the past, thus providing legitimization for contemporary nations.

and society, thus initiating the tradition of studies and debate on the impact of colonists on the natural environment.²⁴

Next, William McNeil in his, “Europe's Steppe Frontier, 1500-1800” followed and developed Turner’s ideas as well. McNeil brought attention to the role of the frontier for nomads and the internal development of Eastern European states. This study also led to the development of the idea of the closure of the Frontier: even if by 1800 “assimilation to the [new] political, social, economic, and psychological conditions [...] was far from perfect [...] open frontier upon the steppe [...] ceased to exist anywhere west of the Don”.²⁵ Thus, if by the start of the nineteenth century bureaucratic empires were finally able to demarcate their borders, what did it mean for the borderlands? The presumed peace, order and progress or something else?

As for further studies of Eastern European frontiers, research has developed in several directions. Scholars of political history and international relations have adopted notions of core areas and their frontiers. John LeDonne and Dominic Lieven in emphasizing the frontier as primarily an intermediate zones between struggling empires, at least acknowledge the differences between the societies of core areas and frontiers.²⁶ Indeed, the influence of persistent warfare on borderlands is undeniable and the states and societies at the other side of the border should not be discarded. Besides,

²⁴ Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1940).

²⁵ William McNeill, *Europe's Steppe Frontier, 1500-1800* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 221.

²⁶ John LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World: 1700-1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

LeDonne raises an important question: is it possible for the borderland to cease to be one, to become a core itself, or is it destined to forever be contested by the already established powers?

Another scholarly tradition has focused more on Frontiers themselves. For example, Michael Khodarkovsky has highlighted the economic and cultural exchange between colonists and indigenous peoples. Here the focus shifts toward the impact of frontiers on cores, given the need of these imperial centers to adopt their policies to unique frontier circumstances. Thomas Barrett took this centering of frontier societies a step further by writing on the everyday life history of the frontier population.²⁷ As for specifically Ukrainian scholarship, contemporary Ukrainian historians of cossackdom almost unanimously use the concept of the Frontier in one or another form.²⁸

The concept of the Frontier was not only applied in local cases, but also conceptually refined. Andreas Kappeler distinguished four meanings of this term: geographical frontier between different climatic zones; social frontier between different lifestyles, for example, between nomads and sedentary peoples; militarized frontier between two military entities; cultural and religious frontier between different cultural traditions. The cultural frontier has been divided into additional categories, developed by Jurgen Osterhammel:

²⁷ Michael Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met The Russian State And the Kalmyk Nomads, 1600-1771* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

²⁸ Besides works already on the late eighteenth – nineteenth century cossacks by Kaiuk, Shyian, Mil'chev, one may mention studies of earlier cossackdom that use the frontier concept: Serhii Lepiavko, *Velykyi Kordon Ievropy iak Faktor Stanovlennia Ukrains'koho Kozatstva* (Zaporizhia: Tandem-U, 2001); Viktor Brekhunenko, *Kozaky na Stepovomu Kordoni Ievropy* (Kyiv: Instytut Ukrains'koi Arkheografii ta Dzhereloznavstva, 2011).

imperial-barbaric border; national state territorial border; inclusive Frontier border.²⁹

The central points, from the studies introduced above, were further developed by Alfred Rieber in his theory of complex frontiers – key idea being that there are three meanings of the Frontier: it can be a borderzone, contested by several imperial centers; a process of migration, colonization or deportation; or a symbolic line between civilization and savagery. Following Rieber, the advance and defense of frontiers played a crucial role in the creation, development, and fall of the Eurasian empires. The interplay between the natural environment, persistent warfare, and cultural changes could transform certain frontiers, contested by at least three powers, into complex ecological systems with long term effects on the demography and identities of the local population.

In result, the possibility of a Frontier closure is challenged given that even if one power achieves military and political dominance in a region, the Frontier continues to persist as a symbol and a myth. This persistence requires additional resources from the empire not only to bring local administration in accordance with the imperial structure, but also to create a new identity for the local population, as well as, a new image of the acquired

²⁹ Andreas Kappeler, “The Russian Southern and Eastern Frontiers from the 15th to the 18th Centuries,” *Ab Imperio* 1 (2003): 47–64.

region for the general imperial society, and, in a way, to legitimize these new borders.³⁰

The concept of the Complex Frontiers aids the study of the Pontic region during its transition from an openly contested frontier to an internal imperial province. For through this approach I have been able to synthesize multiple factors that influenced this transition into a cohesive narrative approach: the role of other empires; population changes; and the persisting Frontier mythology and symbols. Furthermore, the complex Frontiers concept has already been applied in case studies on Eastern Europe. Ukrainian researcher Viktor Brekhunenko used complex frontiers in his “The Cossacks at the Europe’s Steppe Frontier”. Moldavian scholars Andrey Kusko and Viktor Taki appealed to it in their recent, “Bessarabia in the Russian Empire.” In Russia whole centers in Siberia and the Caucasus are dedicated to rewriting the history of their regions through the complex frontiers approach.³¹

However, the Frontier thesis, while perfectly suitable for the studies of Early Modern cossackdom, needs to be supplemented to deal with nineteenth century circumstances, where the Frontier was closing, state control over the region greatly increased, and the cossacks were ultimately disseminated into

³⁰ Alfred Rieber, “The Comparative Ecology of Complex Frontiers,” in *Imperial Rule*, ed. Alfred Rieber and Alexei Miller (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 177–207; Alfred Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5–79.

³¹ Besides the works mentioned above, one may also mention Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). Furthermore, heavy influence of borderlands scholarship can be found in the generalizing works on the history of Ukraine: Paul Robert Magocsi, *History of Ukraine: The Land and Its Peoples* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Serhii Plokhy, *Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

other social categories or incorporated as an imperial estate-in-the-making of their own. A possible solution to this problem may lie in the expansion of state and empire building scholarship, as to supplement the limitations of the frontier thesis. After all, in order to study the reaction of the population to imperial policies, these policies themselves have to be taken into account.

Empire-building

The same way as the lineage of borderland studies can be traced to at least the nineteenth century, generalizing theories of modern European state-building are far from recent. Traditionally, there are two main approaches to the problem. One looks for the primary moving forces of state creation and development inside the inchoate state: focusing on both internal conflict (e.g. class struggle) and cooperation between social groups. The other accentuates inter-state conflict, drawing attention to competition between states as central to the different paths of state building.

Since this dissertation focuses on a borderland region, where influences from foreign state entities were always strong, the second approach seems a better interpretative tool. In emphasizing this method I still taking into account the limitations of both approaches given that the roots of the modern state are complex and multi-causal; making it impossible to pinpoint one and only factor, while discarding all others.

There inter-state approach was already in use by 1906 when German historian Otto Hintze argued that:

*It is one-sided, exaggerated and therefore false to consider class conflict as the only driving force in history. Conflict between nations has been far more important; and throughout the ages pressure from without has been a determining influence on internal structure.*³²

Linking the geographical position of a state to the extent of its exposure to warfare and then linking this exposure to the emergence of absolutism, Hintze outlined two possible ways of development for European states: the parliamentary British model and absolutistic continental. While the presentation of almost all European continental states as absolute monarchies was indeed an oversimplification, Hintze's main point on the effect of warfare on state building and internal policies is sound – the concept being later developed and refined.

Later works by Charles Tilly, Michael Mann, Brian Downing, and Thomas Ertman deepened the understanding of the role of warfare in state building. Tilly accepted the importance of war pressure, but also linked it to economic factors; fostering the idea of an interplay between coercion and capital. Capital was primarily concentrated in cities, while rural lords possessed coercion: weapons and skilled men to use them. The conclusion being that the concentration of coercive means for warfare led to state-creation, since these coercive means could also be used for tax extraction, policing, and attacking internal rivals. Yet, the paths of further state development, as the many types of states from European history show, were different. There were many possible combinations between concentrated

³² Quoted by Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11.

capital, concentrated coercion, preparation for war, and positions within the international system – thus the victory of the nation state was far from certain before the twentieth century. Tilly suggests that states moved through four phases of organization: patrimonial monarchy; brokerage in which states contracted mercenaries and arranged finances through independent capitalists; nationalization in which states mobilized their national populations and their own fiscal apparatuses; and specialization in which states expanded into new kinds of activities and bureaucratized their activities.

The paths may be different but the initiatives behind them were quite similar: as wars became larger and more expensive, the state needed more resources. Consequently, the extraction apparatus had to grow and, what is especially important for my research, traditional indirect rule was replaced by direct rule. Russia, in Tilly's model, is an extreme case of the coercion-intensive path, where the state clearly dominated and communities were rather weak.³³

While Tilly's model does work as a general scheme, it has several weak points. First of all, for Tilly, the state is a separate entity, existing and struggling to survive in the world of other states, which become, in this process, more and more centralized. Although it is hard to argue that warfare did not influence state-building at all, Tilly's approach, which only presents two factors, may be seen as an oversimplification and reductionism.

³³ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 14, 30-33, 53-60.

Second, Tilly shows a great variety of historical state forms, but concludes that the nation-state was the most efficient in waging wars and that is why it became the dominant form. Yet, it is hard to accept this nation-state teleology, as well. After all, contiguous European empires were destroyed by their imperial rivals, not by nation-states.

Further, centralization was not the only way to extract resources from the provinces. As experience of many empires proved, indirect rule and negotiation had its merits: it could help to preserve stability and attract investments of local elites into the imperial projects.

In this sense, Tilly's model can be perceived as a refined version of Hintze's, while the works of Mann and Downing can be assessed as an evolution of Tilly's approach. Michael Mann's work was published a bit earlier than Tilly's study and Mann's polymorphous theory of state-building deserves an honorable mention as a valuable theoretical contribution.

Mann also linked the extraction of resources to the state infrastructure and the state infrastructure to the political regime. Following Mann, taxation of cities was much easier for states than extraction of resources from dispersed rural populations. This was the case given that trade taxation did not require excessive bureaucracy, while state revenues through coercive extraction did. Mann's model takes many factors into account, which in effect creates a complex, closer to reality, picture. Yet, in the end this complex mapping does not offer a useful interpretative tool for application in other case studies given that it is overloaded with parameters and factors too cumbersome for commensuration.

Nevertheless, the essence of Mann's contribution are the links between the extraction of resources and the state infrastructure, as well as, between the state infrastructure and the political regime.³⁴ This notion is especially important for my research since even if the empire had the intention to introduce a policy, the lack of infrastructure in the under-populated steppe region might prevent this policy's practical implementation.

Brian Downing expanded upon the previously mentioned models of state-building, adding alternative sources of income into the equation: income from the conquered lands and foreign subsidies – yet, in general, he still remains faithful to Tilly's and Mann's premises.³⁵

The scheme was further complicated by Thomas Ertman, who took the basic absolutism-constitutionalism mapping, added the factor of state infrastructure – ending up with four combinations: patrimonial and bureaucratic absolutisms, patrimonial and bureaucratic constitutionalisms.³⁶ Still, for Ertman the main factor which influenced the development of the state into one or another direction was interstate competition and warfare as well.

In general, state-building approaches will help me to work with long-term trends and macro-level pictures. They will prevent me from limiting my research to a small area, through constantly reminding me of the wider

³⁴ Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 456–79. On the other hand, the notion of great spaces and problems with their governance were already central to the Russian imperial historiography.

³⁵ Brian Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change: Origins of Democracy and Autocracy in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 9.

³⁶ Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 10–35.

perspective. After all, when we speak of military and social transformations of cossackdom, we cannot simply discard the state as an actor.

However, traditional state-building theories usually give over-centralized, too statist, accounts that lead to faceless perspectives – thereby obscuring the particular realities of the borderlands. Therefore, to compensate for the weaknesses of state-building approaches, I will also rely on the tradition of empire-building studies. This trend can be seen as a part of the history of state-building as well; yet due attention to the imperial projects leads to a more focused study of the inner life of empires, rulers, and well-connected individuals, powerful families; different and sometimes trans-imperial factions; and networks, which were capable of influencing decision-making processes.³⁷ Empire studies may also be characterized by the shift from states as primary actors to the recognition of the local elites as proper intermediaries between the center and the borderlands; attention to borderlanders themselves; bigger emphasis on human agency. The tradition of empires studies also leads to the recognition of different paths of state development: discarding the centralized absolutist state evolving into the nation-state teleology, while paying more attention to the non-European paths of state formation and development. Presumably, all of these aspects are

³⁷ Alexei Miller and Alfred Rieber, *Imperial Rule* (Budapest; Central European University Press, 2004); Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Alexander Martin, “The Imperial Turn,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 4 (2006): 705–12; Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires an Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Philippa Levine and John Marriott, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Modern Imperial Histories* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012).

important and should not be ignored in studies of imperial rule establishment and transformation in recently annexed regions.

Taking into account the approaches mentioned above – both frontier studies and empire studies – what could be said to be of particular note about the region in question? The Pontic Steppe possessed the traits of all four of Kapeller's Frontier types. It was a border between: steppe and forest-steppe; between farming and nomads; between Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims. It was a typical military frontier between Poland, the Crimean Khanate, and later Russia. Following Rieber's typology, it was a complex frontier with more than two actors competing for dominance and influence in the region.

Who were the actors here? First, it was the competing states themselves. Indeed, Lattimore's zone of contact and cultural exchange replaced Turner's open space as an interpretive tool, and in my study I will only benefit from taking into account the Ottomans, Poland, and western powers even in a period when the Russian Empire was dominant over the Pontic region.

Second, cossacks themselves cannot be denied agency. Following the contributions by McNeil and Khodarkovsky – as well as of later authors – the role that the local population played is not to be diminished. Furthermore, reaction from below could lead the state to adapt its policies to better manage the borderland population.

From the state-building perspective, the region of former Zaporizhia provides a rather peculiar case as well. On the one hand, the Frontier warriors, although a dispersed organization, were a coercive resource. As a

result of the stabilization of the borders in the late eighteenth century there was a decrease in nomadic raids and counter-raids, which led to a general drop in the quality of these armed resources. The cossacks were neither hardened by persistent Frontier warfare nor trained as regular troops.

On the other hand, relying on rights and freedoms usually granted to martial estates, cossacks developed their own economy. By the end of eighteenth century Zaporizhia became a grain-exporting region. This afforded cossack officers with the opportunity to steadily enrich themselves, while cossack society became bound to numerous loans and credits. It is viable to assume that the region could have possibly transformed into a capital-intensive economy. Paradoxically, the privileges initially granted to the martial society would allow middle and high-ranking cossacks to gradually transform into merchants. Yet at the same time, from an imperial perspective, the allotted privileges did not allow for efficient resource extraction from the region. Consequently, at some point, cossack rights and obligations had to be revised.

Next, by early nineteenth century Russian advancement, both to the West and to the South, transformed several former frontiers into internal provinces. Yet, the existence of borderland military communities – armed people with questionable intentions – in internal regions did not serve as assets for the stabilization and development of trade. Thus, the cossacks had to be either reorganized or resettled. Actually, the Russian Empire undertook both these measures. First, in the 1770s – 1780s local cossacks underwent several reorganizations. Later, in the 1790s – 1820s, many of cossacks were

resettled to the Caucasus region, where they could still be used in their traditional capacities.

As for the transformation of the region from an open frontier to borderland and later into a practically inner province, the idea of frontier closure draws attention. As for this procedure in the eighteenth century, even with the further advance of borders and the development of modern linear boundaries, the recently conquered region had to be colonized, which meant that both the local and arriving population had to be properly incorporated into imperial society. As the Frontier persisted both as an underpopulated land and mythology, it presented the reoccurring problem of imperial administration. Furthermore, this could mean that the local cossack tradition was able to force the state to adopt policies that at least partly complied with the interest of the borderland population, because the population still was able to migrate to other contested frontiers. On the other hand, the Russian Empire got the opportunity to fully exploit the Frontier tradition both in maintaining internal stability and in justifying further conquests. Finally, the notion of frontier closure becomes more problematic as the imperial toponym of New Russia resurfaced in political discourse for a brief period, 2014 – 2016. As the conflict still smolders, both sides lay claims over the Pontic Steppe through the exploitation of various versions of cossack imagination and mythology. The result of this struggle is yet to be known.

The Pontic Steppe and its Neighboring Regions

Communities living on the periphery of empires rarely evolve the same way as the societies of central regions. The remoteness of state control, the dangerous natural environment, the strong presence of the 'other,' and general instability, certainly influenced the lifestyle of the borderland population. Therefore, frontier inhabitants evolved among social structures, worldviews and stereotypes that were atypical, or even alien, to stable non-frontier areas.

Such borderland communities of the Eastern European steppes are known as the cossacks. The social origins of cossackdom were extremely diverse: hunters and gatherers, peasants escaping enslavement, nomads from the other side of the frontier, religious refugees, outlaws, landless gentry, higher nobility wishing to participate either in the glorious pillage of the Tatars or perceiving frontier warfare as an adventure and a source of tales. The ethnic and religious sources of the cossacks were no less diverse. Naturally, in the Black Sea region most of them were from either Slavic or Turkic peoples, but one can also find traces of Jews, Caucasian mountaineers, Greeks, or Western Europeans; sometimes it was possible to even find

Africans among the cossacks.³⁸

The varied origins of the cossacks and the dangerous environment around them brought egalitarian ideas to their organization. Cossack officers initially were elected and the sense of brotherhood was rather widespread – still one should not exaggerate this egalitarianism, taking into account that illiterate runaway serfs could reach higher ranks rather rarely. While social mobility was possible at borderlands, those of noble background who had the required education, training and ambitions, had a better chance to become cossack elites.

On the one hand, cossackdom is one example among many of societies having existed along the vast Eurasian frontiers. On the other, geographical and social factors shaped the cossack community in unique ways. First, cossacks were not just militarized, but a military community. Undoubtedly, on many frontiers existence would be impossible without arms. Even Western European resettlement to overseas colonies would require the bearing of weapons for survival. Still, the Eurasian frontiers, somewhere between settled communities and nomadic groups, gave rise to specific

³⁸ For the beginnings of the Zaporozhian cossacks see Brekhunenko, *Kozaky na Stepovomu Kordoni levropy*, 93-111, 147-165 as well as Serhii Lepiavko, *Kozats'ki Viiny Kintsia XVI st. v Ukraini* (Chernihiv: Siverians'ka Dumka, 1996); V. A. Smolii, ed., *Istoriia Ukrain's'koho Kozatstva* (Kyiv: Kyievo-Mohylians'ka Akademiia, 2006). For classical takes on the issue see Iavornyts'kyi, *Istoriia Zaporozhskikh Kazakov*; Mykhailo Hrushevskiy, "Kozats'ki chasy do roku 1625", vol. 7 of *Istoriia Ukrainy-Rusy* (Kyiv-Lviv, 1909); V. Kh. Kazin and V. K. Shenk, *Kazach'i Voiska* (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia V. D. Smirnova, 1912). For a broader overview of cossackdom – both Don and Zaporozhian – see Albert Seaton, *The Horsemen of the Steppes: The Story of the Cossacks* (London: Bodley Head, 1985). For practically the only study in English, which gives a proper introduction to the regional context see, G. Patrick March, *Cossacks of the Brotherhood: The Zaporog Kosh of the Dniepr River*. (New York: Lang, 1989).

military organizations – orders for some, bands for others – vastly subsisting from raids and pillages. In this sense, cossacks were typologically close to the Adriatic uskoks, the South-Slavic hajduks, or the Early Ottoman ghazis.

There is another distinguishing character derived from geographical positioning that must be noted. The great open spaces of the Eurasian steppes allowed cossacks to achieve much greater numbers than the military brotherhoods from, for instance, the Balkan Peninsula. By the early sixteenth century the first cossack hosts had already existed on the Dnieper, Don, and Volga rivers as powerful organizational centers. Further, the presence of the nobility among their ranks gave cossacks the idea of separate estate and the corresponding rhetoric of being a 'brotherhood of knights' striving to defend 'traditional freedoms and privileges.' While the hajduks, who organized in small units, waged guerrilla warfare in the forests and mountains, the Dnieper cossacks in the early seventeenth century could field 20.000 – 30.000 warriors and by the 1630s their numbers are estimated at 80.000.³⁹ Such numbers made possible the existence of large communities rather than dispersed bands.

The geographical factor played another role: the cossacks, unlike Balkan warriors, lived far from centers of power and could maintain their more or less independent status, while at the same time benefiting from inter-imperial struggle. From one point of view, this situation could not last forever given that at the moment one power achieved dominance in the region the fate of the cossacks' would be sealed. From another perspective, the long

³⁹ Brekhunenko, *Kozaky Na Stepovomu Kordoni levropy*, 159–63.

tradition of free life outside the empire was romanticized in the nineteenth century with both the Zaporozhian and Don hosts, as the most numerous and the most ancient, becoming powerful symbols in the shaping of regional and national identities.

Still, if one is to speak about cossackdom of the mid-eighteenth century Pontic Steppe and its neighboring regions, it would be misleading to speak of the cossacks as a homogenous group. For example, the cossackdom that would be coined 'Ukrainian' by the later national historiography consisted of at least five distinct groups: cossacks of Sich or Lower Dnieper; cossacks who served the Crimean Khan; cossacks of the Hetmanate region; Slodobian cossacks; cossacks inhabiting the Polish Commonwealth. One may also mention bandit-like Haidamaky, many of whom perceived themselves as cossacks as well.

The Zaporozhian Host of the Lower Dnieper was the cradle of cossackdom in the region. Zaporizhia formed due to the Polish defense policy of the fifteenth through sixteenth centuries – or, one can say, due to the lack of consistent policies in this sphere, thus locals had to organize themselves in order to survive. Bordering the Crimean Khanate, Zaporozhians were a typical borderland military community that attracted adventurers, warriors, and pillagers of all sorts.

The link between any state and Zaporizhia was traditionally weak, although in the sixteenth through early seventeenth centuries the cossacks struggled with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for recognition as a military estate, which would grant them the right to serve as the properly

recognized and properly paid defenders of the Southern border, which was threatened by the Tatars. This effort was only partially successful – a small number of cossacks would become registered mercenaries of the Polish Crown. Those left out of the register and without pay, stayed at Zaporizhia and often revolted – hoping to renegotiate the possibility and terms of their service.

In the mid seventeenth century the religious conflicts, peasant revolts, cossack discontent, and struggle for political autonomy coincided leading to the prolonged war of 1648 – 1686. As the Orthodox population rebelled against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Muscovy, Crimean Khanate, and the Ottoman Empire intervened at various points. In 1654, some of the cossacks agreed to serve Russia, giving the Russian monarchy claim over the region and a pretext to imagine Zaporizhia as a Russian vassal or protectorate. In reality, being on the edge of the frontier, Zaporozhians were adept in maneuvering between different states and continued negotiations with other powers, in pursuit of better terms. Thus, the growth of governmental presence in the almost independent Zaporizhia region was slow due to continued struggle.

By the end of the seventeenth century the political ties between the Zaporizhia and the dynasty were minimal. In order to expand its influence in the area, the Tsar's officials supported the construction of fortresses with Russian garrisons, tightening governmental control over the area. For example, from 1680 to the beginning of the eighteenth century, Russia constructed the *Novosergievskaiia*, *Novobogoroditskaia* and

Kamenoziatonskaia fortresses. In the most distant regions with the most questionable loyalties, active attempts to increase state control had to start earlier in order to ensure efficient control over borderland warlords. Yet Russian initiative did not go without resistance. The combined policies aimed at incorporation, including: limitations on political autonomy, further regulation of the cossack military service, and the use of cossacks as a construction workforce – would alienate the Zaporizhians.

Thereafter, Zaporozhian cossacks readily participated in Bulavin's revolt of 1707-1708 and in Mazepa's defection in 1708-1709. Further, by 1709 the Ataman of Zaporozhian cossacks, Kost' Hordiienko, joined Swedish forces during the Great Northern War – effectively sealing the fate of Zaporizhia. Sich, the Host's center, was razed to the ground by Russian troops, while ataman supporters and other survivors were expelled. The Zaporozhians, once again demonstrating their fluid mentality, resettled to the south and accepted a protectorate of the Crimea, which they would actually have until 1734.

In 1734, the majority of these cossacks decided to return to Russia and were pardoned by Empress Anna. Thereafter, Sich, the capital of Zaporozhian cossacks was rebuilt in Russian lands. Consequently, in the mid-eighteenth century there were two branches of Zaporozhian cossacks – those who migrated to Russia and those who stayed in the Khanate. However, due to immense population movements that happened in the Pontic Steppe region between 1760-1770s, it is barely possible to trace later destinies of those who stayed in Crimea.

As for those who returned to Russia, for a time, the government made efforts to avoid offending the cossacks and violating their traditional rights and freedoms. Still, St. Petersburg exploited the social conflicts between poor and rich cossacks – or even sharpened it by purchasing the support of cossack officers. Nonetheless, the initial aim was to foster a peaceful reorganization and integration of the Host into Russian imperial space and society.

From the 1750s the Russian government intensified its integrationist policy, which coincided with the Seven Years' War of 1756-1763. In other words, the pace of the integration of cossack lands, an intermediate region between Western and Southern military theaters, once again increased due to external challenges.

At the same time, Empress Elizabeth sponsored a state led colonization of the barely populated Zaporizhia region. Attempts of the Zaporozhians to defend their rights, via official complaints, were not successful. The Land Commission of 1756-1760 ignored claims of the Host, supporting the state colonies. This naturally caused resentment, making the prospect of peaceful integration problematic. Cossack elites initiated their own colonization of the Pontic Steppe lands and some were even ready to protect their colonies with weapons. By 1775, the conflict had sharpened, becoming another reason to simply disband the Zaporozhian cossacks, who, nevertheless, by the end of the eighteenth century, were a dominant social

group in the region – their numbers by 1775 estimated at 100.000 out of 260.000 of the total population.⁴⁰

Yet, even within this region the cossack population was far from being homogenous. First, the divide between the poor and rich, between the officers and the common cossacks, was growing. The divide greatly influenced the attitudes towards integration in the imperial estate structure – while the officers could hope for ennoblement and introduction into the all-imperial noble corporation, the common cossacks could fear transition into peasantry, loss of some traditional – and profitable – rights such as brewing, and, potentially, even enserfment. Furthermore, during the last years of Zaporizhia, thanks to the profitable grain trade, the category of middle-class cossack emerged, who appreciated both economically sound households and their own vision of the future of the region.⁴¹ The second divide was between the ‘people of war’: cossacks who wanted to preserve their traditional lifestyle as frontier warriors; and those who preferred peaceful farming and trading. The third rupture was between those who respected the authority of the ataman and the cossack assembly – members of the *Kosh*, and those who became part of the *haidamaky* movement – basically, common borderland bandits.

The picture becomes even more complicated if we take into account the fact that besides cossack by tradition there were those who were considered as such merely by imperial officials: servitors of various irregular

⁴⁰ Janet Hartley, *Russia, 1762-1825 Military Power, the State, and the People* (London: Praeger, 2008), 13.

⁴¹ On Zaporizhia transformation from a grain-importing to grain-exporting region, see also Philip Longworth, “Transformations in Cossackdom 1650-1850,” in *War and Society in East Central Europe.*, ed. Gunther Rothenberg and Béla Király (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1979), 395–97.

units quite often designated as cossacks, yet having little to no connection with the local tradition of Zaporizhia. As the frontier of the Russian Empire was advancing to the south, numerous military communities of former border guards were left behind as relics of previous times and the result of past necessities, who could sometimes preserve their status. Alternatively, however, they were often resettled to new frontiers or transferred into other social categories. Examples of such communities, which had existed in the Pontic Steppe prior to the dissolution of Zaporozhian cossacks, would be: land-militia, various settled units (*poselennye voiska*), one-farm holders (*odnodvortsy*), or toiling soldiers (*pakhotnye soldaty*).⁴²

Next, there were also migrants from the Habsburg Military Frontier in *Novaia Serbia* and *Slavianserbia* – areas, granted to them in the mid eighteenth century but later opened to other foreigners of various origins.⁴³ These migrants served in settled regiments (*poselennye polki*) until the 1780s, when an administrative reform integrated their settlements into the New Russian province, which also involved the reorganization of their regiments as regular ones. Other foreigners in the Russian service present in the region were volunteers and arnauts who as Ottoman subjects helped the Russian Army in the Russian-Turkish Wars and later resettled in Russia. They might live in their own compact communities or be spread among already existing

⁴² All these social categories were defined extremely vaguely in eighteenth century Russian legislation, thus delaminating them at the grassroots level may be barely possible.

⁴³ Habsburg Military Frontier was a region stretching along the southern border of the Habsburg monarchy and directly subordinated to the crown. Refugees, who agreed to serve as border guards in exchange for personal freedom and land allotments, inhabited it. As for Novoserbiia, see Ol'ha Posun'ko and Volodymyr Mil'chev, *Kantseliaria Novoserbs'koho Korpusu* (Zaporizhia: ZNTN, 2005).

ones.

Finally – and typical to other borderland regions – in the late eighteenth century Pontic Steppe there were also those fleeing from the Russian advance – besides former Zaporozhian cossacks who preferred to resettle elsewhere, these included: Nekrasovtsty cossacks, many of whom still roamed Caucasus, Steppe and Bessarabia; Tatars and other nomads striving to resettle in Ottoman lands; serf runaways; army deserters; various adventure seekers.

To the north of Zaporizhia was the Hetmanate (contemporary central Ukraine). Registered cossacks enrolled in the Commonwealth army and lived here until the mid-seventeenth century. As the insurrection in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth began in 1648, the Crimean Khanate intervened to support the rebels almost immediately. By 1654 Russia started a war against Poland and they joined the war. Next, in 1655, Sweden declared war on Poland as well. In 1656 Poland and Russia signed a truce and Russia joined the war against Sweden – this alliance did not last long. Ottomans used the lingering war in the region as an opportunity, intervening in 1676, 1683, and on several other occasions. Consequently, a civil war in the region continued until the late 1680s with Poland, Russia, the Crimean Khanate, and the Ottoman Empire supporting different factions of Hetmanate cossacks, as their clients. In the end, by 1686 the lands of Hetmanate were split among Poland, Russia and the Ottoman Empire.

In order to survive the turbulent events of the second part of the seventeenth century many parts of the society, in this vastly depopulated

region, were militarized – in part becoming cossacks themselves (*pokozachylysia*). Further, old regional elites of noble standing either had to escape the region or join the rebels in order to avoid being butchered. Parallel with these internal recompositions, was the influx of peasant refugees as rank-and-file cossacks. As for the cossack officers, they had to fill the power-vacuum and assume the role of former nobility. This polarized the previously, more or less, egalitarian cossack community and sharpened the social tensions within the cossacks.

As the region was primarily split between Russia and Poland, cossacks of Left Bank Ukraine and Right Bank Ukraine followed different trajectories. In the Commonwealth, the cossacks maintained a degree of autonomy till the early eighteenth century, yet in the end, due to being too unreliable, they were disbanded. As for the mid-eighteenth century, the term cossacks in the region was also used to denote so-called *nadvornye kazaki* – personal troops of local magnates.

In Left Bank Ukraine – the Little Russia – cossack autonomy was abolished in 1722 for several, coinciding, reasons. First, there was a precedent of switching sides, as was demonstrated when Hetman Mazepa joined the Swedes during the war. Second, local commoners complained about abuse by their elites, petitioned imperial officials, and, thus, gave the empire a motive to intervene. Third, it can be seen as a part of general centralizing policy of the empire. In 1750 – 1764 cossack autonomy was briefly restored and the title of Hetman was bestowed upon Kirill Razumovskii (Kyrylo Rozumovs'kyi) – brother of Elizabeth's favorite, Aleksei.

There were three important features of Little Russia cossackdom. First, many local commoners considered themselves cossacks – not peasants – leading to a struggle with imperial officials for their rights. Second, Hetmanate became part of Russia as a result of negotiations – i.e. privileges obtained were contractual, not granted by the Tsar from the very beginning, which meant that local elites, for a time, were in the position to re-negotiate their status within the Empire. Finally, cossacks of the Hetmanate region called themselves Zaporozhian cossacks as well. Thus, for the sake of clarity, in the text below I will use the term (post)-Zaporozhians to denote cossacks of the Pontic Steppe / Sich / *Viis'ko Zaporoz'ke Nyzove*. Cossacks of contemporary central Ukraine will be called Hetmanate or Little Russian cossacks.

The next cossack region was *Slobozhanshchyna*, with its name derived from *slobody*: large free settlements. Geographically it was positioned at the borderland between Great Russia and the Wild Field, to the east of the Hetmanate (approximately contemporary Khar'kiv and Sumy *oblast's*). If in the Hetmanate region, the social structure drastically changed as a result of the 1648-1686 war, in *Slobozhanshchyna* such a structure was only created in this period. The active colonization of this region began only in the second half of the seventeenth century; coinciding with the mass influx of refugees coming from the Hetmanate who were fleeing the atrocities of war. An important trait of this area was that autonomy and privileges for local colonists were granted by the sovereign. Hence, *Slobozhanshchyna* was a relatively young region, without lasting traditions of status to preserve, which allowed for all social rank to be derived from the will of the monarch – who in turn could

revoke such privileges at any moment.

As for other regions neighboring the Pontic Steppe, to the south there was the Crimean Khanate and to the south-west there were Danubian Principalities – all being subjects of the Ottoman Empire in the mid-eighteenth century. To the east lied the land of Don cossacks – another major cossack community with its own traditions and trajectories of development. While to the south-east there were tribes such as the Nogais, Kalmyks, and various Caucasian mountaineers.

The diverse nature of cossack regions and their varying traditions of autonomy heavily influenced their previous encounters with the Russian Empire. Initially, before the eighteenth century, traditional Russian policies aimed at the newly acquired or conquered regions were not very integrationist.⁴⁴ Usually, only a pledge of loyalty from the local elite was required, while, in the actual life of the region almost no change was experienced after inclusion into empire.⁴⁵ From the perspective of the borderlands, this was especially true for the complex frontier region, which required quite a lot of financial support and manpower for conquest and maintenance – not to speak of further expansion.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, more active policies of cossack integration into the imperial army and administration started at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

⁴⁴ For more on imperial policies towards the Ukrainian cossacks during the eighteenth century see Vladyslav Iatsenko, "Intehratsiia Ukrain's'koho Kozatstva do Sotsial'noi Struktury Rosiis'koi Imperii u XVIII st." (Candidate of Sciences diss., Kharkivs'kyi Natsional'nyi Universytet imeni V. N. Karazina, 2007).

⁴⁵ Marc Raeff, *Political Ideas and Institutions in Imperial Russia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 126–40.

⁴⁶ Rieber, "The Comparative Ecology of Complex Frontiers," 180.

This was a time when Russia was challenged both in the West and in the South. These two theaters were quite different but geographically connected: in the West powers competed for hegemony, thus, stability was at least theoretically possible to achieve; while in the South one found a centuries-old, unsteady, stalemate between the nomads and the settlers.

What could Russia gain in the Pontic region? Demarcation of the open steppes was practically impossible and the only way to change the situation was to force Crimea out of Ottoman influence – an act for which Russia was not ready in the early eighteenth century.⁴⁷ The project of the European Anti-Ottoman coalition, inspired by Peter the Great, failed as well. Conversely, what could Russia lose? The first line of the Russian defense was made from client cossack societies that pledged allegiance to Russia half a century before. The loyalties of these Frontier warlords, however, were rather fluid, therefore incentivising the empire's interest in strengthening the link between the dynasty and its clients.

At the same time, what was the situation in the West? During the Great Northern War 1700-1721 Russia faced Charles XII of Sweden – a monarch who enjoyed overwhelming popular support – an achievement rarely associated with absolutism.⁴⁸ Charles possessed a drilled regular army that easily proved its superiority to the Russian forces at Narva in 1700; consequently forcing Peter to re-evaluate the role of his own semi-privileged serving people.

⁴⁷ John LeDonne, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650-1831* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 28.

⁴⁸ Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change*, 11.

As to survive this inter-state struggle, Russia reformed both its army and administration in order to increase the efficiency of resource extraction from the provinces. Meanwhile, the state demanded more manpower from the cossacks to replenish troops fighting with Sweden. Yet, the cossacks capacity to provide this manpower diminished because of two problems: a problem of supply – irregulars had to sustain themselves – and long term campaigning, which impeded household economies and therefore willingness to fight far from their homes. These factors then led to broader ideological questions about the rationale behind their service for a tyrant who did not care for his subjects. Consequently, the waning of cossack military prowess led to efforts for the centralization of reform in order to further bolster resource extraction from the region and to prevent disloyalty of cossack warlords that could cost the Russian state a lot.

The need to tighten control over the provinces, however, launched a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts since cossacks themselves felt that their traditional rights and freedoms were violated. Local notables, for example, still held some degree of power and did not wish to relinquish it. As the defection of Hetman Mazepa and Ataman Hordiienko to the Swedes demonstrated, centralization policies had to be undertaken subtly and gradually, in order not to alienate the elites of the whole region. The goal was to incorporate them into the imperial project, while at the same time, gradually undermining their power.

Nevertheless, the alliance between the cossacks and the Swedes once again proved the unreliable nature of the cossack troops in the eyes of

imperial officials, which in turn justified St. Petersburg's further questioning of cossack loyalties. The questioning also involved the punishment of potential betrayers – thus intensifying integrationist reforms. While the centralizing project was delayed by the power-struggle in the capital during the mid eighteenth century, it was only interrupted, not discarded completely. Furthermore, the actual pace of centralizing policies had to account for local peculiarities – thus variations had to be taken into account from region to region.⁴⁹

The implementation of integrationist policies was the easiest in the Slobodian regiments. As was mentioned above, they did not have collective autonomy which meant that all of their privileges, granted by the Tsar, were not the result of pacts, treaties, or negotiations. Consequently, their transformations and reorganizations were the fastest and *Slobozhanshchyna* became a testing ground for reforms in other cossack units as well. At the start of eighteenth century Slobodian cossacks had to adopt Russian military organization models. In 1700 the reelection of the cossack colonels was forbidden and, once elected, a person could hold the rank till death. Officers were more and more frequently appointed by the Tsar, rather than elected. In 1706 all regiments from the Slobozhanshchyna and Hetmanate regions were included into the Ukrainian division, which was subordinated directly to Russian military command.⁵⁰ Since 1709 the cossacks were obliged to supply

⁴⁹ On integrationist policies in the Slobodian region see Vladyslav Iatsenko, *Intehratsiia Kozatstva Slobids'koi Ukrainy Do Sotsial'noi Structury Rosiis'koi Imperii: Druha Polovyna XVIII St.* (Kharkiv: KhNEU, 2009).

⁵⁰ Olena Apanovych, *Zbroini Syly Ukrainy Pershoi Polovyny XVIII St.* (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1968), 68.

the Russian army units situated in Slobozhanshchyna and the rights of the cossack administration in the civilian sphere were also limited with the introduction of Russian courts in the region. Next, the government strove to decrease the differences between the cossacks and the peasants, forbidding the resettlement of cossacks and their families and deploying them in different construction projects.

As for the imperial politics towards the integration of the Hetmanate, similarities could be drawn with the transformations in the Slobodian regiments. However, the autonomous status of Left Bank Ukraine and the rights of the cossacks were codified in various treaties between the Hetmanate and Russia during the second half of the seventeenth centuries. These rights and privileges had a contractual nature, thus not being as easily revokable as rights granted to the Slobodian cossacks.⁵¹ Thus, the main difference here was the slower pace of the reforms. Even if the majority of the cossacks did not join Mazepa and the Russian government managed to maintain control over the majority of the Hetmanate military, in order to not antagonize units still loyal, further integrationist attempts were undertaken – for a time – more carefully. At the same time, the hands of the central government was free – the claim of betrayal could be used against any local opposition struggling against the Tsar. In perspective, Mazepa's gamble only accelerated the integration of the Hetmanate, whose loyalties were now persistently questioned, which justified the additional control. Later, in 1722-

⁵¹ For a recent study on Russian-Ukrainian treaties of the late seventeenth century see, Tat'iana Tairova-Iakovleva, *Inkorporatsiia: Rossiia i Ukraina posle Pereiaslavskoi Rady (1654-1658)* (Kyiv: Klio, 2017).

1725, the Hetmanate were gradually subordinated to the imperial officials in the administrative, judicial, and fiscal spheres.

After Peter's death, Russia entered an era of constant palace coups: the resources of the country were completely exhausted in wars; the internal and external strategic courses were uncertain; the highest nobility struggled for power with the absolute monarchy; while the order of succession was uncertain. The situation in the capital was more crucial than the situation in the borderlands, and for a time, the court's attention was diverted. Weakened by power-struggle, successors were not ready to complete the course, started by Peter I.

Still, during the reigns of Catherine I and Peter II Slobodian and Hetmanate regiments were subordinated to the College of War; imperial officials surveyed the social and economic situation in Slobozhanshchyna; summer field exercises, as well as, regular companies were introduced to the regiments. During the reign of Anna Ioanovna (1730-1740) the Slobodian regional administration became more closely controlled by imperial officials. The number of regular dragoon companies in cossack regiments increased once more. Similar steps in the integration process were also undertaken in the Hetmanate region.⁵²

Given that the War of the Polish Succession 1733-1738 and the short campaign against Sweden in 1741-1743, were far less of a challenge for the Russian state than the Northern War, there was no need for radical shifts in

⁵² Apanovych, *Zbroini Syly Ukrainy Pershoi Polovyny XVIII St.*, 73–78.

domestic policies.⁵³ Yet, the war with the Ottomans in 1735-1739 significantly increased the impoverishment of the Hetmanate population and pressured the government of Elizabeth (1742-1762) to make some concessions to cossack regions: a number of regular companies were dissolved, taxes were decreased, but the previously bolstered role of imperial officials remained intact.

The integrationist project, however, meant not only the subjugation of traditional elites to a more centralized imperial administration. The same way as cossack regions had to be included in the administrative structure of the empire, the cossacks themselves, being distinct social groups, had to either become a separate estate, or be transferred into other estates of the empire. The same way as pre-1775 policies strove primarily for the gradual and peaceful integration of the cossack regions into the empire, there was a chance that cossackdom, as estate, could be peacefully formalized during Catherine's Legislative Commission of 1767-1768.⁵⁴ This project – should it succeed – could bring order into the most varied categories of irregulars, giving all cossacks from the Pontic Steppe to Siberia unified rights and obligations while officially acknowledging them as an estate of the empire.

Still, the same way as the integration of cossack regions was revised after the Russo-Turkish War of 1768 – 1774 and Pugachev's Revolt, the work of the Legislative Commission was halted and the project of a properly formalized cossack estate was forsaken for decades. In the end, at the turn of

⁵³ LeDonne, *The Russian Empire*, 30–37.

⁵⁴ RGADA, fund 342, inventory 1, file 220.

the eighteenth – nineteenth centuries cossackdom remained the most ambiguous and diverse – even within a single region of the Pontic Steppe.

Taking into account this diversity of cossackdom, I will structure the following chapters around it. The first chapter will be focused on former Zaporozhian cossacks, who after the dissolution, either stayed in the region, or migrated to the Ottoman lands. The second chapter will deal with other types of irregulars serving the Russian Empire in this region. These irregulars quite often were designated as cossacks even though they had little to no connection to the local tradition of Zaporizhia. In the third chapter, I will deal with the temporary, militia-like cossack units, making preliminary generalizations regarding the usefulness of cossacks for the empire and the empire's policies to reward its servitors in the late eighteenth century. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I will zoom-out to the all-imperial level tracing the formalization of cossackdom as a category within the imperial social structure that was actively happening during the 1810s-1830s.

Chapter 1: Abolished, yet Reborn

The advance of the Russian Empire into the Pontic Steppe in the late eighteenth century (Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca 1774, Russian annexation of Crimea 1783) resulted in a drastic shift of borders in the region, as well as, an unparalleled population movement. Local communities (Cossacks, Tatars, Russian and Polish runaways or deserters, etc.) felt uneasy with the imperial centralizing policies being carried out in these previously contested borderlands. Thus, many of locals decided to migrate to Ottoman lands in the hope of preserving traditional lifestyle.

As a result, the traditional frontier brotherhood of local Cossackdom splintered, along the divides of the new imperial border between the Russian and the Ottoman empires. Given the situation, both governments attempted to reunite former Zaporozhians under their rule: the Russian government offered frequent amnesties for “deserters” promising attractive terms of service and land grants. Ottoman propaganda promised respect for the Cossacks' traditional rights and entitlements, while portraying Russia as a country of cruel oppression, unlimited serfdom, and ruthless recruitment policies.

Thus, the aim of this chapter is to explore the fate of the former Zaporozhian Cossacks during the late eighteenth – early nineteenth century with the hypotheses being:

- By the late eighteenth century the Russian presence in the Pontic Steppe region strengthened to the extent that the local population on the old frontier was prevented from openly revolting against Romanov rule.

- The cossacks themselves, while indispensable to the defense of imperial borders, were nevertheless a borderland population and displayed both a high level of mobility and rather questionable loyalty. Their main form of resistance to incorporation in the Russian Empire was exodus to the rivaling Ottoman and Habsburg empires.

- Russian officials were not prepared for mass migration to the Ottoman lands and thus their policies were reactive, belated, and often inconsistent throughout the late eighteenth century.

- One of the main responses, by Russian administrators, to this migration process was to create or restore irregular military units in which cossacks could serve. However, the new units were undersupplied, poorly disciplined and, often, smaller than their predecessors. Their military value was questionable, but they were still granted land to settle and a certain degree of autonomy.

- It is quite possible to argue that the main purpose of these units was not military, but symbolic. That is to say, the Russian officials were largely concerned with showcasing traditional frontier freedoms as to entice the return of former Russian subjects who had migrated to the Balkans, as well as, to attract other potential volunteers and mercenaries.

- The main beneficiaries were the cossacks themselves and especially their elites, who were able to choose whether to give their allegiance to the Russian, Ottoman or Habsburg empires; ready, as they were, to sell their services to the highest bidder.

1.1 Dissolution of the Sich

In June 1775, after the first partition of Poland and the loss of Ottoman protection by the Crimean Khanate, the Russian imperial government resorted to the dissolution of the Zaporozhian Cossack Host and redistribution of its lands between the New Russian and Azov provinces. Still, the tropes of the dissolution of the Zaporizhia varied greatly according to context. In the manifest of August 3, 1775, the Empress used the words “destroyed” regarding *Sich* (the capital of the cossacks) and “extermination” regarding the very name of the Zaporozhians.¹

In the Ukrainian narrative, the idea of “destruction” persists,² while more nationally conscious authors also add epithets like “treacherous.”³ Textbooks go further and discuss actual demolition. However, few authors mention what exactly was destroyed at the Sich. Some insist that the whole settlement, except the fortifications, were razed; others limit the destruction to fortifications only. Expressions like “razed to the ground” also appear, further reinforcing the myth, even if evidence for this is hard to trace.⁴

In Western scholarship “destroyed” is also used, for instance by Philip Longworth, presumably following the original source and implying symbolic

¹ The word “*razrushena*” is used in the original document regarding the *Sich* – the fortified capital of the Zaporozhian Cossacks. PSZ, vol. 20, no. 14354.

² The wordings “*znyshchennia*” or “*zruinuvannia*” are usually used. They were already present in the classical works of nineteenth-century authors, such as Dmytro Iavornyts'kyi, *Istoriia Zaporozhskikh Kazakov* (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia I. N. Skorokhodova, 1892-1897).

³ I. V. Sapozhnykov, “Ivan Sukhyna – Nevidomyi Koshovyi Otaman Chornomors'koho Viis'ka,” *Pivdenna Ukraina XVIII - XIX Stolittia* 5 (2000): 259.

⁴ Presumably, the responsibility for the myth of the Sich destruction lies primarily with Apollon Skal'kovskii, *Istoriia Novoi Sichi abo Ostann'oho Kosha Zaporoz'koho*, vol. 3 (Odessa: Gorodskaia Tipografiia, 1846), 205.

destruction, destruction of organization, dissolution.⁵ Alternatively, Alfred Rieber uses “abolition”,⁶ while John LeDonne only mentions that the cossacks were disbanded.⁷ As one see's, these wordings have fewer connotations with actual violence and devastation than the above-mentioned demolition discourse in the Ukrainian.

The irony, however, is that the eighteenth-century Russian word translated as destruction, *unichtozhenie*, did not have the same implication of violence as it does in contemporary Russian. It was often used, for instance, to denote peaceful abolition of privileges or simple reorganizations of military units.⁸ Nevertheless, as Sich was no more, what were the possible motives for such a decision?

During the eighteenth century a transformation within the cossack communities was taking place as the warrior tradition gave way to farming and trading: common cosacks could not always afford weapons and horses, middle-rankers did not like the idea of leaving their property for long military expeditions, and powerful landowners could simply hire mercenaries instead of serving themselves.⁹ Other factors – stabilization of the southern

⁵ Philip Longworth, “Transformations in Cossackdom 1650-1850,” in *War and Society in East Central Europe.*, ed. Gunther Rothenberg and Béla Király (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1979), 395.

⁶ Alfred Rieber, “The Comparative Ecology of Complex Frontiers,” in *Imperial Rule*, ed. Alfred Rieber and Alexei Miller (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 187.

⁷ John LeDonne, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650-1831* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 121.

⁸ For instance, see registers of eighteenth century funds in RGVA – the word “*unichtozenie*” is encountered quite often meaning simply the dissolution of military units.

⁹ Olena Apanovych, *Zbroini Syly Ukrainy Pershoi Polovyny XVIII st.* (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1968); Longworth, “Transformations in Cossackdom 1650-1850,” 396–98.

borderland, governmental policies intended to create social division in the previously egalitarian cossack group, and technological and organizational developments in warfare – created more complex conditions which amounted in the increase of living costs.¹⁰

In the cossacks' case these problems were magnified. Irregular troops, a vestige of frontier warfare, could not match the large field armies of the late eighteenth century with their developed logistics systems. Consequently, irregulars either had to resort to the tradition of pillaging or be supplied by the state. In the case of state provisions, the problem of subordination sharpened as traditional elites and appointed officers struggled, between themselves, over control. Additionally, self-supply during long expeditions was also a problem in that many cossacks could not afford the required minimum of a blade, a gun and two horses each. Another problem appeared in the requirement for fast mobilization since many cossacks had to work their fields, hunt, fish and produce crafts to sustain themselves. In addition, the military skill traditionally acquired during frontier raids was waning with the stabilization of the frontier: cossacks lacked the constant training and field exercises that regular armies had.

Consequently, the idea that cossacks, as frontier warriors, were no longer necessary in the Pontic Steppe can be found as early as the 1760s in the works of the imperial ideologist Gerhard Müller. From his perspective, in

¹⁰ For the impact of military developments on European society in general during this period see also Brian Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change: Origins of Democracy and Autocracy in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

the internal provinces of the empire there was neither purpose nor place for these disobedient borderland military communities.¹¹

Although many cossacks were no longer fit or willing for borderland protection, they were very eager to preserve their rights – personal freedom, alcohol brewing, land owning, and the right to bear weapons, among others. Yet, they lacked the power to openly rebel against the empire, although there were many acts of everyday resistance throughout the mid-eighteenth century.¹² Already in the 1760s there were rumors among the poorest cossacks about a revolt against officers, the forced election of a new host leadership, and flight to the Crimea.¹³ In 1768 the rank-and-files rebelled against their officers once more, their goal being to: elect a new leadership, seize horses, artillery and the treasury, and to flee to Ottoman lands. During the Danubian expeditions of 1771 – 1774 almost a quarter of the participating cossacks decided not to return to the Sich – staying in the Ottoman Empire. Given that the frontier mindset and traditions were still alive among Zaporozhians, those who did not like the extension of Russian administration

¹¹ Gerhard Miller, *Istoricheskie Sochineniia o Malorossii i Malorossiianakh* (Moscow: Universitetskaia Tipografiia, 1846), 1–56.

¹² On the concept of everyday resistance see James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. (Yale University Press, 2008). Direct application of Scott's approach to armed – i.e. not so weak – estate may be problematic, still I find his notes on foot dragging, flights, petitioning and other forms of protest quite applicable to the cossacks case as well. Besides, other Scott's approaches may be beneficial to the study of Pontic Steppe – a region only barely known to imperial officials and with locals being experts in remaining "invisible" from the state. See James Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009).

¹³ Nataliia Polons'ka-Vasylenko, *Zaporizhzhia XVIII Stolittia ta ioho Spadshchyna*, vol. 1 (Munich: Dniprova Khvyliia, 1965), 136.

could easily resettle in places beyond its grasp as to preserve their traditional lifestyle.¹⁴

Furthermore, Zaporizhia remained volatile: some cossacks participated in the revolt of *Koliivshchyna* in Poland 1768 – 1769 and in Pugachev's revolt in 1773 – 1775. Zaporozhians could easily become a catalyst for wider social discontent throughout the Hetmanate as well. Smaller revolts against cossack officers or Russian officials during the 1750-60s were numerous. This disobedience weakened the position of the cossacks themselves by giving the empire a reason to intervene and punish rebels.

The treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774, between the Russians and the Ottomans, effectively turned Zaporizhia into an internal region of the Russian Empire. This led to further government measures to improve imperial control over the region in order to bring it to the standards of other provinces. While cossack land had always been a destination for runaway peasants, the protection of the land-owning nobility's interests assumed greater importance for the state. Consequently, cossacks had either to be resettled in new borderlands or enserfed. Thus, political, military, social, and economic reasons all coincided to reinforce governmental desires for the reorganization of Zaporozhia. However, the question as to whether there were also reasons not to dissolve the Host?

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century Russia faced considerable problems in its frontier regions. Uprisings of peasants in the Hetmanate,

¹⁴ Polons'ka-Vasylenko, *Zaporizhzhia XVIII Stolittia*, 1:107–36; Skal'kovskii, *Istoriia Novoi Sichi*, 2:346–65.

insurrections of laik Cossacks, Bashkirs, Kalmyks, Pugachev's revolt – they all demanded quick and decisive action and considerable imperial resources to be suppressed. Naturally, after the pacification of the rebellions, the state was interested in establishing closer control over its borderlands to prevent future uprisings. The laik cossacks were suppressed, renamed as Ural cossacks, and had their autonomy removed, but they were not completely disbanded even after their active participation in Pugachev's revolt. A new civil authority was also established on the Don to bring it closer in line with imperial law elsewhere. Only the Zaporozhian Host was liquidated thus becoming an exceptional case.

One possible interpretation could be that the empire no longer needed the cossacks of the Zaporizhia region and henceforth planned to transform them into peasants. Another interpretation is that the state perceived an opportunity to resettle the cossacks to other frontiers on the empire's own terms, which meant granting lands and rights to cossacks by the tsar's will, in return for absolute loyalty to the dynasty.

Turning to official decrees issued on the abolition of Zaporizia, the initial rescript on the possible liquidation of the Host by Catherine II to Prince Grigorii Potemkin was issued July 21, 1774. Given the date, one may assume that Potemkin postponed the plan until the suppression of Pugachev's revolt was complete.¹⁵ Next, in April, 1775, Petr Rumiantsev, Governor-General of Little Russia, sent a note to Petersburg on the Zaporozhian leaders' intentions to resettle the Host in Ottoman lands. The court immediately summoned

¹⁵ O. I Eliseeva, *Grigorii Potemkin* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 2005), 164–66.

Ataman Kalnyshevs'kyi to the capital, but for unknown reasons Kalnyshevs'kyi did not arrive. Consequently, Potemkin proposed a military operation and the arrest of cossack officers to prevent their escape.¹⁶ Thus, the authors of the plan to suppress and dissolve the Zaporozhian Host seem to be Rumiantsev and Potemkin.

In fact, the events of 1775 – 1776 were surprisingly peaceful. There are two sources from witnesses describing what occurred on June 4, 1775, the day of the Host dissolution. One is a report from a participant, General Petr Tekelli, to the Empress dated June 6, 1775.¹⁷ The second is an orally transmitted story, attributed to the former cossack Mykyta Korzh, collected in a romanticized form by local bishops in the early nineteenth century.¹⁸ Korzh's story acquired many accretions. For example, in his version, after the ceremonial meeting, lunch, and a tour for imperial officials around the Sich, Tekelli read Catherine's decree to the cossacks and ordered *Ataman* Kalnyshevs'kyi, Judge Holovatyi, and Chief Scribe (*pysar*) Hloba to prepare for travel to Petersburg.

On the contrary, the official document skips the introductory part, stating that cossack officers were arrested immediately, to prevent their possible escape. Military banners, archive, and treasury were transported to Petersburg, while church relics and icons were distributed among the closest

¹⁶ V. A. Smolii, ed., *Istoriia Ukrain's'koho Kozatstva*, vol. 1 (Kyiv: Kyievo-Mohylians'ka Akademiia, 2006), 615.

¹⁷ Gavriil, Arkhiepiskop Tverskoi, "Vsepoddaneishee Donesenie Imperatritse Ekaterine II General-Poruchik Tekeliia, ob Unichtozhenii Zaporozhskoi Sechi," *ZOOID* 3 (1853): 587–88.

¹⁸ G. Rozanov, *Ustnoe Povestvovanie Byvshego Zaporozhtsa, Zhytelia Ekaterinoslavskoi Gubernii i Uezda, Sela Mikhailovskogo, Nikity Leont'evicha Korzha* (Odessa: Gorodskaia Tipografiia, 1842).

eparchial centers.¹⁹ The members of the host reconfirmed its oath of loyalty to the empire. There was almost no bloodshed and only three arrests. All three, Kalnyshevs'kyi, Holovaty and Hloba, were exiled to monasteries. A year later Potemkin deemed Kalnyshevs'kyi's crimes too horrific to be borne by the merciful heart of the Empress, but he did not specify what crimes the former Ataman had committed.²⁰

The reasons for this punishment are unknown. After all, both rank-and-file cossacks and officers yielded peacefully. The elimination or co-option of local elites was a common practice in borderland management for empires. Could these three officers have been a threat to the state, capable of organizing a revolt or becoming symbols of opposition? They certainly became martyrs, albeit only after the imperial intervention, yet was there a need to create these martyrs?

From the other perspective, it is possible to argue that the accusations against Kalnyshevs'kyi were unjustified. They might have been false accusations by overzealous officials, or the results of a power struggle between old regional and new imperial elites, or just a mistake. Still, there are reasons to argue that the Ataman posed no great threat to the empire.

Two days after the dissolution of the host, imperial auditors arrived to create an inventory of the cossack leaderships properties and estates – this document is notable in that it gave scholars an account of the economic

¹⁹ Ioann Karelin, "Materialy dlia Istorii Zaporozh'ia: Nikopol'," *ZOOID* 6 (1867): 523–38; P. Ivanov, "K Istorii Zaporozhskikh Kazakov Posle Unichtozheniia Sechi," *ZOOID* 25 (1904): 20–40.

²⁰ V. S Lopatin, ed., *Ekaterina II i G.A. Potemkin: Lichnaia Perepiska 1769-1791* (Moscow: Nauka, 1997), 99–100.

situation in late Zaporozhia. As an authority figure, Kalnyshevs'kyi was one of the richest and most influential people in the region. His estates and villages were numerous, stretching as far as the northern part of the contemporary Poltavs'ka oblast'.²¹ Given that on a personal level he had much to lose, the idea of him organizing a cossack exodus to the Ottoman Empire does not seem very convincing.

Indeed, the idea of exodus or change of sovereign originated among poor cossacks, not the elites.²² By the late eighteenth century many cossack officers were awarded Russian military ranks, which many accepted. Some of them also had nothing against enserfment of their poor brothers-in-arms and were virtually incorporated into the imperial nobility. The rhetoric of 'traditional rights and freedoms', which a century before circulated among cossack elites, became the rhetoric of the commoners, for whom it was a matter of survival or starvation. Many starshyna, however, had nothing at all against their transformation into dvorianstvo.

Revolts of common cossacks against officers who betrayed their traditional brotherhood, becoming rich and spoiled, were very common in the 1760s. Kalnyshevs'kyi himself suppressed several peasant and cossack revolts, which makes the idea that he had popular support questionable. Presumably, at one point he even had to dress in the robes of a monk and

²¹ Imperial auditors found more than 47.000 roubles in cash when they arrested the Ataman. For the rather impressive inventories of cossack leaders punished in 1775, see Polons'ka-Vasylenko, *Zaporizhzhia XVIII Stolittia ta ioho Spadshchyna*, 1:186–381.

²² Smolii, *Istoriia Ukrain's'koho Kozatstva*, 1:616.

flee an angry mob.²³ The empire masterfully set – both by action and inaction – the lower and upper sectors of cossack society against each other, yet, surprisingly, was unable to decisively reap the fruits of this conflict.

Could Kalnyshevs'kyi have become a second Mazepa? This seems unlikely, as Russia had achieved dominance in the region which meant that there was no power willing to accept a protectorate over the cossacks and challenge Russia in the late 1770s – early 1780s. Could Kalnyshevs'kyi have become a second Pugachev and led a peasant war? The answer seems negative as well. His power derived from rank and money, he lacked popular support and the ataman himself had become enemy number one for rebellious commoners – not some distant emperor or empress. Could or would Kalnyshevs'kyi have organized an exodus to the lands of the Ottomans or Habsburgs? Such a move would not have been in his own interests. Moreover, it is highly improbable that other powers would welcome an organized influx of people. However, General Petr Rumiantsev's initial accusation of Petro Kalnyshevs'kyi's involvement in such a plan can be compared with Rumiantsev's letters a year after the dissolution of the Host: "To my surprise, I read ... on former Zaporozhians ... appearing in large numbers near Ochakov ..." ²⁴

The action against the cossack leaders may imply that imperial officials were nonetheless confident that any threat of exodus came only from them,

²³ Polons'ka-Vasylenko, *Zaporizhzhia XVIII Stolittia ta ioho Spadshchyna*, 1:107–26; Lopatin, *Ekaterina II i G.A. Potemkin*, 661.

²⁴ Quoted by Ivanov, "K Istorii Zaporozhskikh Kazakov Posle Unichtozheniia Sechi," 24.

thus discarding the possibility of emigration instigated from below. Alternatively, it may mean that Rumiantsev's accusations were false from the beginning. I will not speculate here on the problem of personal intrigues between old traditional and new imperial elites in the region, although some have taken up the question in greater depth. There are suggestions that the removal of Kalnyshevs'kyi from the region was in the interest of and largely instigated by Grigorii Potemkin;²⁵ while Andrey Zorin argues that Potemkin might have needed the ataman title for himself to inspire Orthodox insurrections in Eastern Poland and to weaken the Polish state before the next partition.²⁶ This interpretation is interesting as it highlights the importance of the cossack myth and cossack traditions not only for the management of internal provinces, but also interstate rivalry. Finally, it is possible to argue that the ataman was punished merely for his inability to control *haidamaky* movement – as banditry in the region grew, imperial officials could simply deem the last ataman as incompetent.

As for the cossacks' response, the documentary sources do not mention any disorder or revolts during the months following the dissolution. When General Matvei Muromtsov appointed Colonel Petr Norov as new commander (*komendant*) of the former host capital, his order was to repress any signs of disobedience without hesitation in the use force. However, there was no need to apply it. The former center of the Host became an ordinary

²⁵ S. M. Kaiuk, "Znyshchennia Zaporoz'koi Sichi i Dolia P. Kalnyshevs'koho.," *Sichslavs'kyi Al'manakh*, no. 2 (2006): 12–19.

²⁶ Andrei Zorin, *Kormia Dvuglavogo Orla: Literatura i Gosudarstvennaia Ideologija v Rossii v poslednei treti 18 – pervoi treti 19 veka* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2004), 144–48.

town after the requisition of military symbols – Pokrovsk (or Pokrovskoe). The Russian noble Vasilii Abaza, who traveled there in autumn 1775, left his memoirs and did not notice any signs of significant dissent.²⁷ On the other hand, the arrival of imperial administration was not idyllic. Before 1775, the region was practically terra incognita for imperial officials: no proper maps of the region existed, there was no data on local population and their households. Surveyors working for the provincial administration could easily be beaten by cossacks, who did not want interference in their lands – “their” as they perceived it. Speaking of land-owning, from the legal perspective, all lands under former jurisdiction of the Sich became state-owned (*v kazennom vedomstve*) with local inhabitants thus becoming either state-peasants or temporary leaseholders without rights to immovable property. It took time for locals to accept this change and attempts to purchase, or to sell, allotments were numerous for several years after the shifts of 1775.²⁸

While the status of commoners in the region remained uncertain, former *starshyna* saw opportunities in being incorporated into the all-imperial noble corporation. With the exception of the noted imprisoned officers, the majority of former cossack elites remained in the region. Imperial administration looked favorably on these traditional elites, whose possible contribution to the imperial project could be significant: after all, as for 1775

²⁷ V. V. Kravchenko, “Nove Dzherelo z Istorii Zaporoz’koi Sichi,” *Pivdenna Ukraina XVIII - XIX Stolittia* 5 (1999): 28–31.

²⁸ Nadiia Shvaiba, “Derznul Rugat’ Ukaz: Buvshi Zaporozhtsi ta Mezhuvaunia Novorosii’skoi Gubernii,” in *Naukovi Zapysky* (Kyiv: Instytut Ukrain’skoi Arkheografii ta Dzhereloznavstva, 2011), 92–97.

they were the only experts on the regions geography, demography, economics, and administration.

Consequently, those who did not participate in the 'crimes' committed by the former ataman, retained the army ranks they were awarded during the 1768–1774 campaign, as well as, their land allotments and property. Initially, they were converted into *kazennye poseliane* together with common cossacks, yet they had several options to improve their social standing. The traditional way to achieve nobility in the Russian Empire was through military service and the government generously granted regular officer ranks to former leaders of irregular troops. While these ranks were usually lower than their traditional status in the cossack hierarchy, they were still enough for the official recognition of one's noble status. Besides, this window of opportunity was open for only several years and in the 1780s it became more difficult to get army rank based on one's previous achievements as cossack *starshyna*. Another option to achieve nobility was through participation in regional colonization efforts: the land-owner, who brought a certain amount of peasants into the region and settled them could be enrolled into *dворянство* as well. Finally, there was also an option to invent a genealogy: linking oneself to those whose nobility had already been recognized. Even if fake, it was hard to prove the opposite – little proof could be found in the south – the testimony of several peers was often enough to be recognized as a noble.²⁹

²⁹ D. H. Kaiuk, "Nobilitatsiia Zaporoz'koi Starshyny Naprykintsi XVIII - Pochatku XIX St.," *Naukovi Pratsi Istorychnoho Fakul'tetu Zaporiz'koho Natsional'noho Universytetu* 8 (1999): 259–63. At this point Russian legislation did not equate irregular ranks with regular ranks, i.e. status of *starshyna* could not be a reason for ennoblement per se. This way Potemkin could grant army ranks for those whom he wanted to elevate and vice versa, could deny ennoblement for others.

Another option for former cossacks became viable in the 1780s and was connected with the restoration of cossack units in the region. Since July 1, 1783, it became possible to serve in recently established volunteer regiments organized by former Zaporozhian officers Sydir Bilyi and Zakharii Chepiha.³⁰ Working together with Potemkin, they attempted to attract cossacks to military service once again – thus allowing at least some degree of control over them. By November 1783, however, only eight hundred cossacks enrolled. Uncertainty of terms of service, indecisiveness of imperial administration to enlarge the unit and to officially settle it, cossacks' skepticism towards serving in the Russian army after 1775 – all played a role at this point. However, the events of 1783 can be seen as a certain prologue to the creation of the Loyal Cossack Host – the first name of the later Black Sea Cossacks – in 1788.

Striving to field more troops during the ongoing war with the Ottomans, the Russian government gave rich provinces to those who would serve in the unit: cossack status, i.e., tax and other obligation exemptions, service under former Zaporozhian officers, prospect of ennoblement, salaries, and provisions supplied by government. Agitation was successful and former Zaporozhians – together with various outlaws, fugitives, army deserters, runaway serfs, and adventurers – eagerly enrolled in the unit. In half a year – between February 12, 1788, and June 22, 1788, the number of cossacks

³⁰ O. A. Bachyns'ka et al., *Kozatstvo na Pivdni Ukrainy Kinets' XVIII-XIX Stolittia* (Odessa: Druk, 2000), 95.

more than doubled from 944 to 2.436. By November 30, 1791, the host numbered 1.2620 cossacks in total with 7.500 of them in active service.³¹

Thereafter, the renewed cossack host actively participated in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1787 – 1791; Black Sea cossacks fought in the assaults of Ochakov, Ismail, Berezan', and many others. Still, as the war ended, there was almost no space for these cossacks in the New Russian province. Further, with the death of Potemkin, who was behind the idea to create the unit; the impossibility of settling so many at the western border, near Ochakov; the complaints by local landowners, whose serfs were attempting to join the host – made the previous direction promised, more and more inviable.

In the summer of 1792 Colonel Antin (Anton) Holovatyi travelled to St. Petersburg to personally petition Catherine in order to prevent the dissolution of the unit. In the end, a decision was made to resettle the cossacks in the new frontiers of the empire. The Kuban' river, a region prone to raids by Circassian mountaineers, was, presumably, the perfect place where those cossacks, who would like to preserve their militaristic lifestyle could prove themselves. Black Sea cossacks were re-subordinated to the Georgian (Caucasus) Corps command only in 1820, yet this later decree merely reconfirmed the reality. Practically, from the 1790s, the destinies of Black Sea cossacks were now connected with the colonization of the Caucasus and less with the previously Zaporozhian Pontic Steppe.

³¹ Bachyns'ka et al., *Kozatstvo na Pivdni Ukrainy*, 96–97.

The case of Black Sea cossacks demonstrates several noteworthy points. First, the dynamics of host growth further emphasizes the power of the cossack image in the popular imagination. If only a few locals joined the volunteer regiments in 1783, once the host was called “cossack”, its numbers grew rapidly. Second, the cossack host remained a viable tool for population control as it attracted those, who would otherwise become wanderers, criminals, or emigrants. Third, the will to re-create large cossack hosts soon after the dissolution of Zaporizhia, illustrates the flexibility required from imperial administrators in these vaguely controlled borderlands. Still, as the imperial law and imperial bureaucracy advanced into the Pontic Steppe, some former cossacks decided to emigrate – their fate will be discussed in the next subchapter.

1.2 Danubian Alternatives: From Betrayers to Prodigal Sons

While many of the traditional cossack elites decided to stay and integrate into Russian society, with the options of: becoming nobles and abandoning military service, transferring to the regular army as officers, or serving in the re-created cossack units – thousands of common cossacks were not satisfied with their situation and migrated to Ottoman lands to preserve their traditional lifestyles.³² New warlords, naturally, arose to lead these groups of emigrants in their quest for a better life.

³² It should be mentioned that it was a minority who migrated – even if there were thousands of emigrants, there also were tens of thousands of those who preferred to stay and adapt. Nevertheless, migration on such a scale was a considerable hit to the prestige of the Russian Empire, which was struggling to attract settlers to the under-populated New Russia.

Following the story by the former cossack Korzh, Zaporozhians petitioned Russian officials for travel documents to the shores of the Black Sea, explaining their need to have access to fishing grounds. Korzh also claimed that in one night 1.000 men fled abroad.³³ In a later, romanticized version, of this story, the figure grew to 5.000.³⁴ Recent studies treat this migration process as not a one-time exodus but as something that occurred over several decades of migration in both directions.³⁵

Indeed, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century there were several reasons why one may have wanted to move from the former lands of Zaporizhia. Those frontier inhabitants who strove to preserve their ancient traditions and life-style were discontented with the dissolution of the cossack host and did not wish to become regular soldiers or peasants owned by the state. For these traditionally inclined groups emigration was a natural, if not the only practical, choice. Next, with the impositions of a new imperial administration, a number of locals were forced to resettle from their farms to newly founded villages and cities – this breeding resentment as well. Even if this group was not initially ready to migrate to Ottoman lands, they found little opportunity to the contrary, given the direct threats presented to their lifestyles.

Next, there were those cossacks, who were fishing in lands of the Khanate when the dissolution happened. They had very little incentive to

³³ Rozanov, *Ustnoe Povestvovanie Byvshego Zaporozhtsa, Zhytelia Ekaterinoslavsckoi Gubernii i Uezda, Sela Mihailovskogo, Nikity Leont'evicha Korzha*, 44–55.

³⁴ Skal'kovskii, *Istoriia Novoi Sichi Abo Ostann'oho Kosha Zaporoz'koho*, 3:234.

³⁵ Svitlana Kaiuk, “Zadunais'ka Sich (1775-1828 rr.)” (Candidate of Sciences diss., Dnipropetrovs'kyi Derzhavnyi Universytet, 1999), 175–79.

return home as the Russian laws of that time held punishment for both the crossing of state borders without official permission and desertion from military service. As a result, these fishermen, having heard rumors of the ongoing changes in the region: new state borders, abolition of traditional autonomy, and new imperial laws in the newly created provinces, etc. – had all the reasons to fear potential punishment; preferring, logically, to stay in the Crimean Khanate lands. Moreover, after the June 1775 dissolution of the Zaporozhian cossacks, the legal status of the local population was extremely uncertain. The imperial manifest on this issue was published only two months later, in August.

Finally, the empire organized censuses (*revizii*) in 1782 and 1795 to better know its provinces and to more efficiently manage them. Furthermore, in 1796 serfdom and then compulsory military recruitment were introduced to New Russia, which brought the social life of the province in line with other provinces of the empire. The frontier population, however, was not accustomed to this extent of state intrusion in their communities.³⁶ Cossack communities: both commoners and elites, runaway serfs and marginal elements like brigands and deserters – those, in other words, who were accustomed to frontier opportunities and freedoms, who were determined to preserve their traditional lifestyle – were rarely ready to submit to imperial law.

Consequently, the unwilling segments of the borderland population, joined cossack emigrants, bolstering their numbers. Furthermore, the southern border was long and porous: escape was easy for locals who knew

³⁶ PSZ, vol. 21, no. 15278.

the region and the state did not have enough resources to properly patrol it. In result, Russia's loss of thousands of armed and skilled men became a considerable gain for the rivaling Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the existence of alternative cossack communities in borderland regions of this rival state made it far more difficult for the Russian Empire to construct a new local identity for both New Russia, as a province, and for cossackdom as a loyal estate in the empire. Still, despite such implications, Russian officials were not prepared to stop this spontaneous emigration. As a result, by 1778 6.000-7.000 men, mainly former Zaporozhians – but not only – took an oath of loyalty to the Ottomans.³⁷

What then was the situation for those who decided to resettle in the Ottoman Empire? The natural environment of the Danube was similar to that of the Dnieper, boasting rich fishing grounds, which were a traditional cossack trade, making for an extremely profitable enterprise. Social conditions were, at the first glance, favorable as well, in that the administrators of the Ottoman Empire did not interfere in the inter-communal life of the cossacks. Besides, already in 1778 Zaporozhians were allowed to elect their own officers, who were promptly approved by Pasha of Ochakov and to contact the Ecumenical Patriarch in order to receive his blessing as well. Furthermore, military banners, confirming the acceptance of Zaporozhians into the Ottoman service, were granted to cossacks in September, 1778.³⁸ The Sultan required only military service, while the nature of the Ottoman state allowed

³⁷ Kaiuk, "Zadunais'ka Sich," 77-85.

³⁸ Kaiuk, "Zadunais'ka Sich," 87.

Zaporozhians to improve their position by bargaining both with different local pashas and the central government in search of the most beneficial terms. For instance, from the very beginning of migration, Istanbul demanded that the cossacks settled on the right bank of the Danube, a location distant from Russian territory.³⁹ However, many cossacks preferred the Ochakov steppe – a region dangerously close to Russia and still contested – and simply refused to resettle peacefully. Only in 1780, when the new sultan's *firman* (decree) was supported by military might, the cossack settlements were relocated in accordance with the needs of the Ottoman government.⁴⁰

However, not all conditions were so favorable in the Ottoman lands. The Ottoman Empire accepted not only the former Zaporozhians, but also Old Believers from the Don (*Nekrasovtsy*), who had been settling along the Danube from the early eighteenth century. The two groups competed for access to the best fishing grounds and to the most profitable markets. This competition led to conflict, eventually erupting in open violence. Several settlements, from both sides, were destroyed between the 1790s and 1810s.⁴¹ Here economic interests prevailed over whatever Zaporozhians and *Nekrasovtsy* could otherwise have had in common.

In the late 1780s the Zaporozhian Sich, which by that time had become

³⁹ According to the Treaty of Aynalykavak, the Russian government agreed to recognize Ochakov steppe as Ottoman territory, while the Ottoman government was obliged to resettle former Zaporozhians – now Ottoman subjects – to the right bank of the Danube. For more on this, see E. I. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii Mir 1774 Goda: Ego Podgotovka i Zakliucheniye* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1955), 363.

⁴⁰ Volodymyr Mil'chev, *Zaporozhtsi Na Viis'kovomu Kordoni Avstriis'koi Imperii 1785-1790 rr.* (Zaporizhia: Tandem-U, 2007), 25–27.

⁴¹ On conflict with *Nekrasovtsy* see Kaiuk, "Zadunais'ka Sich," 105–10.

Transdanubian, was rebuilt in Katyrllez (the Danubian Delta region, contemporary Romania). While this was the center of the Transdanubian host – at this point – it was not the only cossack settlement. There also existed temporary camps for migrants, such as Vylkove, villages for married cossacks or for instance, Karaurman, as well as, dispersed settlements all over the Balkans. Katyrllez was abandoned in 1806 due to lasting conflict with Old Believers and the advance of the Russian army, which was stationed dangerously close to the Sich, in the war of 1806 – 1812. The new and last Sich was rebuilt in Dunavets in 1814.⁴²

Fulfilling their military service for the Sultan, Transdanubian cossacks had to suppress a number of revolts, including that of: the pashas who were fighting against the reforms of Selim III in 1798; the Serbian uprising of 1804 – 1813, and the Greek Revolution in 1821 – 1830. As warfare diminished their numbers the cossacks were permitted to replenish themselves with Russian deserters. Consequently, the borderland between Russian and the Ottoman empires became a zone of competing propaganda – neither empire raising obstacles to the recruitment of foreign subjects.

What were the responses of Russian officials to the challenges posed by the Ottomans? First, the spread of rumors encouraging emigration was severely punished. Corporal punishment and exile to Siberia were used to suppress “empty talk” about the existence of “free” cossack communities outside the Russian Empire. Second, the empire stationed both regular troops

⁴² For more on Zaporozhian settlements, see A. D. Bachyns'kyi, *Sich Zadunais'ka 1775-1828: Istoryko-Dokumental'nyi Narys* (Odessa: Hermes, 1994), 12–15.

and cossack units to catch runaways and bring them back – even though the empire lacked manpower to properly control the whole border. Third, Russian agents spread anti-Ottoman propaganda among those who had already migrated and threatened to punish them severely should the Russian army advance into the Balkans. At the same time, Russian agents promised freedom, wealth, and other rewards for those who would return. Fourth, using diplomatic channels, Russia influenced princely courts in Moldavia and Wallachia to repatriate migrants to the Russian Empire. Initially these methods were only partially successful.⁴³

For instance, the Russian government constantly issued amnesties.⁴⁴ The fact that amnesties were issued repeatedly suggests that they were not that successful, having to be constantly renewed. In the summer of 1784 only 83 persons returned, whereas 7.000 – 10.000 continued to serve the Sultan.⁴⁵ Furthermore, in 1785 another 1.000 Transdanubians, unsatisfied with the Ottomans, moved to Banat and pledged their loyalty to the Habsburgs –

⁴³ Kaiuk, “Zadunais’ka Sich,” 83–88.

⁴⁴ For examples of such amnesties see: PSZ, vol. 20, no. 14870; PSZ, vol. 20, no. 15006. Similar amnesties were also issued or prolonged by the governments of Alexander I and Nicolas I.

⁴⁵ Kaiuk, “Zadunais’ka Sich,” 94, 141; Mil’chev, *Zaporozhtsi na Viis’kovomu Kordoni*, 28–32. Noteworthy, as truly borderland population, Zaporozhians could get monetary subsidy from the Russian consulate for relocating to Russia and then simply disappear with money.

instead of returning to Russia.⁴⁶ As this episode perfectly illustrates the flexible loyalties of Zaporozhians demands further attention.

Still not only Russian consulates were interested in former Zaporozhians. Habsburg emissaries, acting in Iassy and Bucharest, were also interested in attracting those, who were not satisfied with life under the Ottomans, for resettlement in Habsburg lands – this did not exclude those who had deserted from Habsburg service previously. In 1783 the Habsburg consulate in Iassy published an amnesty for army deserters, promising their total forgiveness and the issuance of travel documents for repatriates. As a result, in 1783, Iassy became a place where both Russian and Habsburg agents gathered groups of their respective deserters in preparation to send them home.⁴⁷

Following evidence recently discovered and subsequently published by Volodymyr Mil'chev, contacts, at this point, between former Zaporozhians and deserters from the Habsburg Military Frontier were almost certain. Taking into account the widespread borderland practice of feigned origins, one may also assume that some Zaporozhians could present themselves as former Serb grenzers from the Military Frontier, while some of the grenzers could join

⁴⁶ The following episode on Zaporozhians in Habsburgs service is based primarily on work by Volodymyr Mil'chev, who introduced a number of archival documents from Central European archives in his study: Mil'chev, *Zaporozhtsi Na Viis'kovomu Kordoni*. For earlier works on the issue – based primarily on ethnographic evidence – see: M. S. Hrushevs'kyi, “Zapysky Hend'lovyka pro Banats'kykh Zaporozhtsiv,” *ZNTSh* 101, no. 1 (1911): 134–43. As for number of Zaporozhians resettling to Habsburg lands, a figure of 8.000 is also mentioned sometimes - this is a number of Zaporozhians in Principalities mentioned by starshyna enrolling into Habsburg service. Some of cossacks simply did not know about the opportunity, some decided not to resettle, some were not accepted by Habsburgs as physically unfit, so the figure of those who crossed the border is closer to 1.000.

⁴⁷ Mil'chev, *Zaporozhtsi na Viis'kovomu Kordoni*, 34–35.

Russian deserters returning home. Even more, several Zaporozhian warlords expressed interest in becoming Habsburgian subjects – in pursuit of either a viable alternative to both Ottoman and Russian loyalties, or simply having been bribed by local Habsburg agents.⁴⁸

The main problem of Zaporozhians at this point was their lack of properly recognized social status and properly defined land to settle – and this was true both for the Russian and the Ottoman empires. Steps to properly institutionalize both Black Sea and Butkal (Transdanubian) cossacks would come only with the Russo-Ottoman War of 1787-1791. Thus, it is quite possible that some Zaporozhians would have tried an alternative course. What were the specific terms of this alternative and what did Zaporozhians encounter upon their resettlement to the Habsburg Military Frontier? Cossack starshyna did not receive the ranks of officers in the Habsburg army, while Habsburg officers supervised groups of Zaporozhians. Further, empty land was assigned for temporary camps, which generally meant that Zaporozhians were scattered throughout existing military units. At the same time, the Habsburg government promised Zaporozhians tax exemptions, land to settle, state-supplied provisions and the right to forage.⁴⁹ Why would Habsburgs make moves that could be easily interpreted as unfriendly towards their Russian, at-that-point, allies? Zaporozhians could be used as a skilled manpower that was accustomed to frontier warfare, thus becoming a natural choice of reinforcement for existing grenzer settlements. Besides, maintaining

⁴⁸ Mil'chev, *Zaporozhtsi na Viis'kovomu Kordoni*, 34-35.

⁴⁹ Mil'chev, *Zaporozhtsi na Viis'kovomu Kordoni*, 80.

cossack presence in the Habsburg lands could be a tool to counteract flirtations of the Russian government with Orthodox subjects of the Habsburg Empire. If, for instance, Russians would go too far instilling anti-Habsburg sentiment among Serbs, the existence of cossack communities would allow a response through the employment of the myth of free cossackdom – therefore sowing discontent among cossacks serving in Russia. Finally, draining manpower from the Ottomans was in Habsburgs' best interest as well.⁵⁰

Still, the real situation of the Habsburgs Military Frontier – the one that caused a number of Serbs to migrate to Russia thirty years earlier – was far from the conditions generally associated with traditional cossack freedoms. To begin, grenzer autonomy had already been abolished by 1748 which meant that many spheres of life had already been unified and dictated by Austrian military command. Some grenzer units that received new coming Zaporozhians – for instance Chaikash battalion – were further reformed in 1784.⁵¹ According to this reform, practically all spheres of a servitors life were regulated by governmental instruction – for example, officers had to submit reports on their subordinates every week.⁵² The Chaikash community, according to imperial vision, had to foster paternalistic virtues, while vices like drunkenness and gambling were severely punished. On the other hand, the state sponsored healthcare and education; regulated prices on food, to prevent speculations by merchants; officers were forbidden to possess lands

⁵⁰ Mil'chev, *Zaporozhtsi na Viis'kovomu Kordoni*, 32–34.

⁵¹ Chaikashy were troops serving on river boats - rowers, marines, etc.

⁵² On the reforms of Habsburg Frontier see Gunther Rothenberg, *The Military Border in Croatia 1740-1881. A Study of an Imperial Institution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 40–79. The problem of possible Habsburg influences on the Russian military reform will be further analyzed in the Chapter 4 of this work.

near the battalion in order to prevent them from exploiting grenzers as their own serfs; rank-and-file servitors had easy access to courts and could even complain about their superiors, etc.⁵³ The life in this community, built according to such enlightened ideals, could have a certain attraction, yet, needless to say, it was far from the traditions of the Sich.

Besides joining grenzer settlements, some Zaporozhians ended up serving Adam Chartoryis'kyi, a magnate from Podillia region. The historian Volodymyr Milchev, has suggested that the choice of stationing Chartoryis'kyi's personal troops not far from the recently settled Zaporozhians could have been a conscious move by the Habsburg government.⁵⁴ As Chartoryis'kyi was a Habsburg protégé, allowing him to recruit more cossacks into his personal guard could have been a step forward in bolstering the magnate's influence.

Zaporozhians disappeared from the grenzer rosters by 1791. Leaving aside possible casualties of the 1787-1791 war, it seems plausible that many of them deserted, once more, deciding to return to Russian or Ottoman lands.⁵⁵

Indeed, by this point, the Russian government took additional

⁵³ The problem of abuses by elites was recurring in cossack hosts serving Russia in this period, as many officers used cossacks to work on their own land. This, in turn, impoverished cossack commoners and reduced the military value of the units – rank-and-file cossacks often could not afford to maintain a weapon and a horse, while cossacks' desire to fight was undermined by the mentioned abuses.

⁵⁴ Mil'chev, *Zaporozhtsi na Viis'kovomu Kordoni*, 71–72.

⁵⁵ Mil'chev, *Zaporozhtsi na Viis'kovomu Kordoni*, 79–81. Speaking of reasons for cossacks' discontent, they were numerous: Zaporozhians were used as workforce at construction projects, they could not publicly celebrate religious holidays, they could not hope for promotions due to lack of German knowledge, hardships of 1787-1791 war coincided with cholera epidemic in the region.

measures to attract cossacks, which resulted in an increase in re-emigration from both Habsburg and Ottoman lands. Rumors that the cossack hosts were being restored in Russia ignited the initial interest. Small numbers of cossacks started to defect to Russia during the war of 1787 – 1791, joining the recently established Black Sea Host.⁵⁶

Russian agents also actively worked to bring cossacks back; the Russian consulate in Iassy organized groups of repatriates and supported them materially, while those cossack warlords who returned and brought back their followers could obtain high ranks in the Russian army, becoming examples of an all-forgiving motherland.

The following case of the Ataman Trofim Pomelo perfectly serves to illustrate this phenomenon.⁵⁷ Trofim Pomelo served as a Zaporozhian cossack till 1775, after the abolishment of the Zaporozhian Sich resettling in the Ottoman Empire. There he continued his service, first as esaul (irregular officer rank approximately equivalent to captain) and later as koshevoi ataman.

Since Transdanubian cossacks actively participated in the fish trade, they had contacts with numerous merchants in the region. Some of these merchants were working for the Russian authorities, collecting all sorts of information in Ottoman lands. In 1791 Pomelo met the merchant Evtei Klenov, who was corresponding with high-ranking Russian officials and, presumably,

⁵⁶ Anatolii Bachinskii, "Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei v 18 - Nachale 19 vv." (Candidate of Sciences diss., Odesskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet imeni I. I. Mechnikova, 1969), 114.

⁵⁷ RGVIA, fund 846, inventory 16, file 288, fols 405 – 420; RGADA, fund 1239, inventory 3, file 54725, fols 3 – 6.

was a Russian agent from the very beginning. It is hard to say which of these two proposed the resettlement of former Zaporozhian cossacks in Russia. The plan aimed not only to organize a group of migrants, but to resettle the majority of cossacks with all their banners and military relics; thus pledging the allegiance of all the Transdanubian cossacks to the Russian Empire at a symbolic level as well.

As an officer serving the Ottomans, Pomelo had the power to issue traveling documents to those who wished to return to the Russian Empire. Aiding this capacity was Klenov's ownership of a number of fishing grounds where it was possible to hide migrants and organize their transportation. Ultimately the plan failed and the organizers managed to bring only around five hundred men to Russia. Pomelo, however, continued his service to the Romanovs by gathering miscellaneous intelligence in the Ottoman lands - progress of ships and fortress building, rumors regarding relocation of troops, and so on. For these services he was awarded the rank of second-major in the Russian army in 1795, which according to the Table of Ranks meant also personal ennoblement.

The death of Empress Catherine in 1797 and the ascent of the new tsar became an important event for the Transdanubian cossacks. Several high-ranking cossack officers immediately asked the Russian consulate for recommendations so they could cross the border without difficulties. The consul, however, was cautious, fearing a possible provocation and merely reminding the cossacks about the existing prolongation of the amnesty. Besides, with the ongoing revolts in the Balkans after 1798 and the

participation of Transdanubians in their suppression, further delayed the resettlement of those cossacks, who wished to return.⁵⁸

The first peak of the Zaporozhian repatriation movement to the Russian Empire occurred in 1806 – 1807. First, the conflict between the Transdanubians and the Nekrasovtsy intensified, with the Nekrasovtsy destroying the Transdanubian settlement in Katyrléz. Second, with the start of the Russian-Turkish War of 1806 - 1812, the cossacks were forced to participate in the war. However, the idea of war in general and in particular, war with Russia, was not that popular among rank-and-file Transdanubians. Third, the rapid advance of the Russian troops to the Danube under the command of General Ivan Mikhel'son directly endangered the Transdanubians, who in December 1806 were in close proximity to the Russian army. Fourth, Alexander I allowed the creation of a new host – the Budzhak Host of the Danubian Delta (*Ust' Dunaiskoe Budzhatskoe Voisko*) – specially for the repatriates.⁵⁹ The events surrounding this unit further exemplify the inconsistency of imperial policies in the borderlands.

So, partly due to the success of Russian propaganda, among former Zaporozhians; partly due to disillusionments with life in Ottoman lands; and partly due to fear of the advancing Russian troops; on December 23, 1806 Ataman Haidabura – one of Transdanubian cossacks' leaders – together with his squad of 103 men arrived to Kiliia, pledged allegiance to the Russian Empire, and was enlisted into the local irregular unit.⁶⁰ Haidabura was

⁵⁸ Bachyns'kyi, *Sich Zadunais'ka*, 32.

⁵⁹ PSZ, vol. 29, no. 22465.

⁶⁰ Bachinskii, "Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei," 271–72.

rewarded with the rank of *khорunzhyi*, while Russian provincial administration started to consider further measures to attract cossacks – especially taking into account the ongoing war with the Ottomans.⁶¹

On January 21, 1807, Ivan Mikhel'son, commander of the Moldavian Army, wrote to Duke de Richelieu, New Russian Governor General, with the idea to create a new irregular unit based in the Danube and serving in a manner similar to the Black Sea cossacks. Mikhel'son explained that this would certainly attract more cossacks from Ottoman lands, however, as for him, abundant promises were not needed at the stage of recruitment – the point was to give cossacks a chance to earn further benefits themselves.⁶²

Practically at the same time, on January 22, 1807, – before even receiving Mikhel'son's letter – de Richelieu wrote to Mikhel'son expressing the same idea: since previous propaganda brought its fruits, additional proclamations had to be made, inviting cossacks to serve in the Russian army and navy. Richelieu's position, however, was to promise everything that could be promised. As for other groups of runaway Russian subjects in the region, Richelieu proposed to renew amnesties for those who would return to Russia, while threaten execution, as traitors, for those that did not take the offer.⁶³ As Richelieu himself admitted, such a combination of generosity and intimidation would certainly attract migrants and serve state interests. As the opinions of both local civil administration and local military command perfectly coincided,

⁶¹ RGVIA, fund 14209, inventory 165, bundle 23, file 36, fols 4-5.

⁶² RGVIA, fund 14209, inventory 163a, bundle 17, file 1, fol. 11.

⁶³ RGVIA, fund 14209, inventory 165, bundle 26, file 66, fol. 23.

the points mentioned above were outlined in a note (*predstavlenie*) sent to the Tsar in just a few days – on January 25, 1807.⁶⁴

On February 18, 1807, Mikhel'son, acting on his own initiative published a manifest, in which he declared the establishment of the new cossack host. In order to attract more cossacks, Mikhel'son promised to establish this unit using the model of former Zaporozhia. Furthermore, the payment for cossacks was promised inline with the salaries of Black Sea cossacks. On the other hand, all further benefits were vague, depending on cossack performance during the ongoing war – in other words, only if the cossacks were brave and zealous, were they to be awarded with the monarchs' benefaction, lands to settle, and other benefits similar to those of other cossacks serving the empire.⁶⁵ On February 20, 1807, the highest sanction followed, formally acknowledging the existence of the unit and officially naming it as the Host of the Danubian Delta (*Ust'-Dunaiskoe Voisko*).⁶⁶

Riabinin-Skliarevskii points out that Mikhel'son was acting on his own initiative when he proclaimed this manifest, as there was no guarantee that St. Petersburg would approve it.⁶⁷ Besides, the very idea of this unit is not attributed to Mikhel'son, but to Ivan Kotliarevskii, working together with the head of Mikhel'son's chancellery – Iurkovskii. Major Podlesetskii (*Pidlesets'kyi*) – former scribe of the Black Sea cossacks – was appointed

⁶⁴ Bachinskii, "Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei," 274.

⁶⁵ Kaiuk, "Zadunais'ka Sich," 152.

⁶⁶ PSZ, vol. 29, no. 22465.

⁶⁷ Cited from Bachinskii, "Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei," 276.

ataman for the Danubian Delta cossacks and instructed to gather both Transdanubian cossacks, wishing to return, and those former Black Sea cossacks who had not previously resettled to the Kuban' with their host – having preferred to stay in Bessarabia.⁶⁸

According to rosters of the host, dated August 1807, and written in accordance with the self-identification of volunteers, there were 1,388 Danubian Delta cossacks.⁶⁹ Of those, 354 were former Zaporozhians returning from the Ottoman lands; 279 were former Black Sea cossacks, who stayed in Moldavia after the war of 1787–1791. The other 754 represented varied origins, being subjects of the Ottomans, Romanovs, and Habsburgs. Among the servitors in the host there were deserters, peasants, owners of fish farms, merchants, petty clergy, gentry, and former starshyna. For instance, in April, 1807, Dmitriy Potylitsa – wealthy second guild merchant from Odessa and the owner of local quarries – joined the Danubian Delta cossacks as well. Having somehow received the rank of *voiskovoi tovarishch* (the rank approximately similar to cornet), Potylitsa returned to Odessa with no intent to serve personally and, most probably, hiring some substitute mercenaries in his place.⁷⁰ For comparison, attaining a rank similar to regular troops would require at least ten years of service. Similarly, and presumably with similar motives, a third guild merchant from Ovidiopol', Staryshin joined the host. Having fast-tracked to the rank of officer – even if in the irregular unit – they

⁶⁸ Bachinskii, "Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei," 280-82.

⁶⁹ Bachyns'kyi, *Sich Zadunais'ka*, 43. For comparison, Avigor Levy, citing other sources, mentions that only five hundred Transdanubians joined the host. Avigor Levy, "The Contribution of Zaporozhian Cossacks to Ottoman Military Reform: Documents and Notes," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 6, no. 3 (1982): 377.

⁷⁰ Bachinskii, "Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei," 309.

could have hoped for rather quick ennoblement. Ennoblement was also desired by former Transdanubians as well. Such cossack atamans as Ivan Guba, T. Gaidabura and Roman Tsyganka petitioned for ennoblement, appealing not only to their recently received military ranks, but also to the fact that they returned to Russia, bringing their troops as well.⁷¹

However, as in other borderland regions, it was barely possible to determine one's true background: while the majority of those enrolling into the unit proclaimed themselves as coming from beyond the Danube (*vykhodtsy iz-za Dunaia*), for many of them this could have been a feigned origin. As it turned out, accusations of Podlesetskii accepting runaway serfs and deserting soldiers appeared quite soon. Noteworthy is the fact that many cossacks, instead of serving at the front, served as recruiters themselves, traveling all over the Danubian Principalities – sometimes even beyond – and inviting people to join the new host.⁷² Thanks to this, at some points, the unit's size reached 2.000 men.⁷³

The main military purpose of the Danubian Delta cossacks was to demoralize the garrison of the Brailov fortress that included 1,500-2.000 Transdanuban cossacks, loyal to the Ottomans. To do so, Russian command camped its headquarters of the host (Kosh) near Galats. Danubian Delta cossacks were tasked with the spreading pro-Russian narratives so that, in the best case, Ottoman cossacks were to switch sides or at least become less

⁷¹ Bachinskii, "Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei," 310.

⁷² RGVIA, fund 14209, inventory 165, bundle 32, file 19, part 2, fol. 35.

⁷³ Bachinskii, "Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei," 351.

willing to fight – once again, one sees how cossackdom became a propagandistic tool in the inter-imperial struggle.⁷⁴

To sway the loyalty of the Brailov garrison, starshyna of Danubian Delta cossacks cooperated with agents working for the Russian Foreign Ministry, as well as, with the agents of the Moldavian Prince who were sympathetic to Russia. The use of tropes for purposes of agitation was not original – among them was: the story of abuses, by Ottoman command and the undersupply of Transdanubian cossacks – an endemic and recurring problem not only in the Russian Empire;⁷⁵ and amnesties and rich promises for those who would join the Russian army. While the whole Transdanubian force could not switch sides due to the presence of other Ottoman troops, as per March-May 1807, several defectors each day were coming to the Russian camp.⁷⁶ Furthermore, propaganda was not the sole purpose of the Danubian Delta host. Cossacks served as infantry, cavalry, and at the Danubian flotilla; they participated in battles near Kiliia, Ismail, Galats, and Brailov.

On the other hand, Danubian Delta cossacks were not only an asset for Russian troops, but also a magnet for all kinds of wandering people – drawing even deserting soldiers from regular regiments and Black Sea cossacks hoping to get better terms in the recently created host. The rumors of a re-created cossackdom also led serfs to leave their masters and attempt to join the host.

⁷⁴ RGVIA, fund 14209, inventory 165, bundle 23, file 36, fol. 16v.

⁷⁵ RGVIA, fund 14209, inventory 165, bundle 32, file 41, part 2, fol. 49.

⁷⁶ RGVIA, fund 14209, inventory 165, bundle 24, file 56, part 1, fol. 82; fund 14209, inventory 165, bundle 24, file 56, part 2, fol. 63.

Prince Aleksandr Prozorovskii, General-Lieutenant Aleksandr Lanzheron, and even former supporter of the host, Governor de Richelieu; all considered the Danubian Host more problematic than beneficial already by the summer of 1807.⁷⁷ Reacting to the flights from regular units, on July 2, 1807, Ivan Mikhel'son sent General-Major Koliubakin to arrest the ataman of the Danubian Delta cossacks Podlesetskii, find army deserters who joined the host, whip them, and bring them back to their previous units.⁷⁸ Ataman Buchinskii was appointed to replace Podlesetskii and faced the problem of barely being able to sort true Transdanubians from recent Russian deserters – almost everyone who joined the host claimed to be former Zaporozhian.⁷⁹ Despite the difficulties in proving cossack backgrounds, imperial inspectors quickly found more than sixty deserters from the regular army and more than twenty runaway serfs among the cossacks. Supplemented by complaints by local noble landowners, this news reached St. Petersburg and with such a number of flights documented, the issue could no longer be ignored. The Committee of Ministers discussed the matter and by July 20, 1807, the decision was made to disband the host.⁸⁰ Thus, the Danubian Delta cossack host was disbanded exactly five months after its creation.

Around August 20, 1807, General Lieutenant I. Nikoritsa arrived to the Danubian Delta Kosh with the mandate to prosecute all deserters and runaways. Together with the appointed ataman Buchinskii, they started mass

⁷⁷ Bachinskii, "Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei," 302.

⁷⁸ RGVIA, fund 14209, inventory 165, bundle 32, file 41, part 2, fols 35-36.

⁷⁹ Kaiuk, "Zadunais'ka Sich," 155.

⁸⁰ Bachinskii, "Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei," 315–33.

arrests. Those arrested were sent to their rightful owners, while the rest of the cossacks had to be disarmed and escorted to Kuban' in order to settle them among the Black Sea cossacks. At the same time, as soon as rank-and-file cossacks saw that even their atamans were eagerly collaborating with imperial inspectors – sometimes even sending former Zaporozhians to local landowners in place of their runaway serfs – another wave of flights happened.⁸¹ The same way as Transdanubian cossacks easily crossed the front-line to join the Danubian Delta host, former Danubian Delta cossacks returned to Ottoman lands. In all, the episode with the Danubian Delta host nicely illustrates the challenges that empire met in governing its borderlands: while the creation of cossack units could attract potential migrants – be they former Zaporozhians or originally Ottoman subjects – it also created a space conducive to the influx of Russian deserters, serfs, brigants, etc. Maintaining a balance between the need for extra manpower and interests of local landowners was indeed a challenge and finding a consistent solution was barely possible. This lack of consistency, however, countered the attraction migrants – disillusioned Transdanubians would become reluctant to return to Russia since 1807 and well until 1820.

The others factor that slowed repatriation was the new border between the empires. The Treaty of Bucharest, in 1812, considered the Danube islands a neutral territory and it became forbidden to settle there. Both Russian and Ottoman administrations worked together in order to demarcate the border, while the Ottomans, having experienced the cossacks' unstable

⁸¹ Bachinskii, "Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei," 340–42.

loyalties, resorted to another resettlement – further from the border, thus, making it more difficult to reach Russia. On the other hand, life in the Ottoman Empire was not the paradise some Zaporozhians may have hoped for. Persistent conflict with the Old Believers, the constant threat of resettlement or occupation by the Russian army, the natural aging of the holders of the old tradition – all played a role and maintained a flow of repatriates wishing to return to Russia – even if in fewer numbers than before 1807. Besides, the stratification of cossack society, which was already visible in the mid-eighteenth century, only sharpened with the emigration. Some of the cossacks had nothing against military service, receiving money for it and living like the frontier warriors of old. With time, however, another group emerged. Those cossacks who were more interested in fishing or trade, those preferring married life, and those deserters, who joined the Transdanubians only to avoid service in the Russian army, did not wish to fight with the Russians – be it the war of 1787 - 1791 or 1806 - 1812. Nor did they wish to serve the Sultan and suppress Greeks and Serbs. Cossacks like these remained a perfect target for Russian propaganda. As the flow of repatriates started to grow again in the 1820s, it is possible to assume, that with time this group was becoming a majority.⁸²

A large repatriation wave started in the 1820s, receiving impetus from the Greek Revolution; 5.000 cossacks participated in the suppression of this uprising. Many, however, preferred to resettle in Russia instead, being granted the status and privileges of foreign colonists. With the chance of

⁸² Kaiuk, “Zadunais’ka Sich,” 161–65.

Russian intervention and the close proximity of the Russian army it was an appealing choice. There was also a fear that the Ottomans would resettle the Host in Anatolia – a region completely unknown and therefore a potential threat to the traditional lifestyle of the cossacks.⁸³ As a result, the number of those returning to Russia grew immensely. Whereas, for comparison, in 1784 only eighty-three men returned during a three-month period, in the 1820s a group of 1.000 could move in one exodus to become Russian subjects.⁸⁴

Thus, the Russo-Turkish War of 1828 – 1829 only intensified an already ongoing process. In May 1828, the Russian government succeeded in delivering the return of the last major group of the Transdanubians led by Iosyp Hladkyi, bearing banners and relics. Military banners and regalia granted by the Ottomans bore great value and symbolized the return of the cossacks as a whole to Russia – Hladkyi received the rank of colonel and the Cross of St. George, even though the group led by him consisted of fewer than a thousand men. By various means, the Russian government was able to prepare and organize the re-emigration of practically all cossacks, who wished to return – the group of 1828 being the last big one.⁸⁵

While the initial plan was to resettle these cossacks to Kuban' as well, Iosyp Hladkyi – ambitious enough to strive for ataman title – did not wish to become one of many petty officers in the Black Sea host. He persuaded the

⁸³ Kaiuk, "Zadunais'ka Sich," 166–71. It is unknown, however, whether it was an actual plan of Istanbul or a rumor spread by Russian agents to demoralize cossacks.

⁸⁴ Kaiuk, "Zadunais'ka Sich," 157.

⁸⁵ Speaking of the number of former Zaporozhians who remained in Ottoman lands, figures vary greatly. Pujade estimates that in the 1850s there were 50.000 Zaporozhians in Dobrudja. Iorga reports that in 1850 a traveler counted 1,092 Zaporozhian families in Dobruja. See Levy, "The Contribution of Zaporozhian Cossacks to Ottoman Military Reform," 376.

Russian government to allow him to create a new cossack unit – the Azov Cossack Host – settled at the northern shore of the Azov Sea. Those few cossacks who did not wish to resettle at all, remaining in Bessarabia, were organized into Danubian Cossack Host as well. The Danubian cossacks served as border guards of the south-western border, while Azov cossacks served as a coast patrolling force; preventing Ottoman smugglers from supplying weapons to Circassian tribes, thus, helping other Russian troops to advance into the Caucasus. These two units were rather small – by the 1840s the Danubians counted 8.213 persons, including families. In the same period, the Azov Host consisted of 8.748 people. However, the state bolstered the numbers of these hosts by transferring state peasants into cossacks; an attempt to give these cossacks a viable, self-sustaining, economy.⁸⁶ These were among the smallest cossack hosts in Russia, yet they existed till the Era of Great Reforms: in 1865 Azov cossacks were resettled to Kuban', where they were finally merged with their Black Sea brethren, while in 1868 Danubian cossacks were disbanded, being unable to sustain themselves. Even if the military value of these units was questionable, the Russian government was flexible enough to allow the existence of these minor hosts for forty years – most probably as a gesture of gratitude to Hladkyi and other Transdanubian warlords who led lost sons back to Russia; thus solving the problem of the compact – often imagined as free – cossack communities

⁸⁶ O. A. Bachyns'ka, *Kozatstvo v Pisliakozats'ku Dobu Ukrains'koi Istorii* (Odessa: Astroprint, 2009), 145–49. For the currently most detailed study of the later Azov cossacks see, L. M. Malenko, *Azovs'ke Kozats'ke Viis'ko 1828-1866* (Zaporizhia: Tandem-U, 2000).

settled outside the Russian Empire, which could serve rival powers. Besides, the symbolic return of Zaporozhian cossacks – or their descendants – could serve to further legitimate Russian rule over the Pontic Steppe.

The story of Transdanubians and their return to the Russian Empire illuminates another problem of cossack societies in this period. Many cossacks did not even raise the question of their traditional rights as their primary interests were economic. The frontier did not close; it shifted, yet the cossack community underwent a transformation. More and more cossacks were beginning to abandon their militaristic lifestyle in order to become peasants and fishermen.

Besides, if forty years before cossacks were still able to maneuver between several powers, looking for the highest bidder, while at the same time not always performing service in return; in the 1830s their possibilities were much more limited. Moreover, cossack warlords, who lead groups of migrants, were rewarded generously by governmental authorities (be they Russian or Ottoman, with Habsburgs being an exemption in this case) and could easily make a fortune for themselves - even if that meant certain compromises with imperial officials and the betrayal of 'traditional rights and freedoms' held in honor by rank-and-file cossacks.

Chapter 2: Almost Cossacks, but Not Quite

The contested legal status of cossacks – vaguely defined and extremely ambiguous – perfectly highlights the transitional nature of the period under study. For instance, civilian tax-collectors and military officers often could not agree on the specific benefits to be granted to the cossacks of certain units: would benefits be limited to unit members or cover immediate and extended family? To what degree could the cossacks be equated with the status of foreign colonists? And what were the rights of the South Slavic volunteers, originally Ottoman subjects, who joined the Russian army and then asked to continue their service in cossack hosts? Further confusion resulted from the tendency of officials in the recently conquered, under-administrated region, to promise the same land to cossacks, foreign colonists and Russian noble landowners. The uneasiness, which ordinary cossacks felt as result, led to a proliferation of petitions, quarrels, open fighting, and various other forms of everyday resistance.

Making the situation even more complex was the fact that several types of cossackdom coexisted in New Russia after 1775. First, there were cossacks by tradition: those who perceived themselves as cossacks due to either previous personal service in the Zaporozhian Host, or participation in the *haidamaky* movement, or descent from Zaporozhian or Little Russian cossacks. Second, there were those who were regarded as cossacks by imperial officials: various categories of irregulars united under the umbrella term of cossacks yet coming from diverse backgrounds and serving on

different terms. Third, there were other categories of military servitors in the Russian Empire: homesteaders (*odnodvortsy*), soldiers engaged in tilling the land (*pakhotnye soldaty*), and domiciled troops (*poselennye voiska*). These groups could be easily (mis)named as cossacks by neighbors or travelers because these categories were vaguely defined; their similarity with cossacks masking their real status, which varied greatly from region to region.¹

Consequently, as a step towards a better understanding of the late eighteenth – early nineteenth century cossackdom in its diversity and multiplicity of forms, this chapter will focus on irregular units that served in the New Russia region and were designated as cossack by imperial officials, yet which had little connection to the local tradition of Zaporizhia. Given that in the late eighteenth century of the Russian Empire cossackdom was not consistently defined as a legal framework, the terms of service and conditions of life for many cossacks were regulated by separate and often contradicting edicts. The broader question being asked is: what did the naming of a military unit as cossack mean, if anything? Thus, this study of cossacks recruited from foreign subjects and from allogenes (*inorodtsy*), will serve to further emphasize the vagueness and ambiguity of cossackdom.

¹ For a brief overview of various military servitor categories in the Russian Empire see: Janet Hartley, *Russia, 1762-1825: Military Power, the State, and the People* (London: Praeger, 2008), 14–24.

2.1 Foreign Volunteers in the Russian Imperial Army

From a state-building perspective, the migration of people from one state to another is a double loss for one side and a double gain for the other. Whereas enlightened monarchs of the late eighteenth century were conscious of the value of a population, the population of the borderland regions was not always conscious of the benefits of being under imperial rule. The interstate rivalry in the Eurasian Steppes – especially in the Balkans where the Ottomans, the Habsburgs and the Romanovs competed — led not only to the emergence of borderland military brotherhoods like *uskoks* in the Adriatics, *grenzers* in Croatia, *hajduks* all over the South Slavic lands, *klephts* in Greece and cossacks in Eastern Europe, but also to constant migrations between the empires.²

Migrants from borderlands, being knowledgeable of the terrain, languages and customs, were indispensable in the creation of imperial military defense systems as well. As early as 1553 Ferdinand I Habsburg established the Military Frontier, granting land allotments and a degree of autonomy to both his own subjects settling in the borderland and to refugees coming from the Ottoman Empire. Neighboring empires followed the Habsburg example.

² For more on the eighteenth-century state-building and the importance of population in it see: Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 2013); Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 2015); Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Alfred Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). As for military brotherhoods inhabiting Eurasian borderlands and potential of comparative approach in their studies, see Serhii Lepiavko, *Velykyi Kordon Ievropy iak Faktor Stanovlennia Ukrain's'koho Kozatstva* (Zaporizhia: Tandem-U, 2001).

The Ottomans repeatedly welcomed those who considered themselves oppressed in the Russian Empire: the *Nekrasovtsy* cossacks after Bulavin Rebellion, the Zaporozhian cossacks during the Great Northern War 1700 – 1721; both the Zaporozhian cossacks and the Crimean Tatars after the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca; as well as army deserters and runaway serfs throughout the centuries.³ The Russian Empire replied in kind and during every war with the Ottomans relied on the Defender of Orthodoxy rhetoric, which attracted numerous Serbs, Bulgarians, Moldavians, Macedonians, and Greeks. In the mid-eighteenth century, the Russian government also managed to resettle a number of Habsburg Serbs. These Serbs – former *grenzers* from the Military Frontier – were dissatisfied with the reform of their military service as well as with religious pressure coming from the state-sponsored Uniate Church and, at least in the beginning, were eager to resettle in New Russia.⁴

Given that the practice of attracting foreigners for irregular military service was not unknown in the Russian Empire, what was the status of non-Russian subjects serving in the irregular units of the Russian army? In documents of the Russian Imperial College of War, terms like “arnaut

³ On Tatar migration see Alan Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1987). For *Nekrasovtsy* cossacks see Dmitrii Sen', *Voisko Kubanskoe Ignatovo Kavkazskoe: Istoricheskie Puti Kazakov-Nekrasovtsev (1708 g. – Konets 1920-kh gg.)* (Krasnodar: Kuban'kino, 2002), 75–112. On various Russian runaways in Bessarabia and Bessarabia as safe haven for them see Anatolii Bachinskii, “Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei v 18 – Nachale 19 vv.” (Candidate of Sciences diss., Odesskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet imeni I. I. Mechnikova, 1969).

⁴ John Keep, *Soldiers of the Tsar: Army and Society in Russia 1462-1874* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 277–78; E. V. Belova, “Granychary Novoi Serbii: Iuzhnoslavianskaia Kolonizatsiia Rossii v 1740-1760-e gg.”, *Vestnik Rossiiskogo universiteta druzhby narodov. Seriia Istoriiia Rossii*, no. 1 (2008): 82–94; Alfred Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands*, 55.

cossacks” and “volunteer cossacks” are employed to designate irregular regiments recruited primarily from foreign populations.⁵ Thus, in the eyes of at least some Russian officers, *arnauts* and volunteers could be a subcategory of cossacks. Then, the term cossacks served as an umbrella term for several categories of irregulars recruited both from Russian and foreign subjects.⁶

Yet, the opposite may be true and these volunteers may be considered distinct from cossacks for the following reasons. First, units such as the Black Sea cossacks and the Bug cossacks, began as volunteers before being formally reorganized later as cossack hosts. If volunteers and cossacks were identical, there would be little sense in issuing separate orders and decrees to grant these irregulars official status as cossacks. Furthermore, there was a sharp rise in numbers of Black Sea cossacks when they were reorganized from volunteers into a cossack unit. This increase may be explained by the reluctance of the former Zaporozhian cossacks to accept the designation of volunteers because they thought it unworthy of their traditional cossack status.⁷ Second, a similar approach was taken by imperial officials with regard to Moldavian volunteers recruited during the 1787 – 1792 Russo-Turkish war: if a sufficient number of volunteers had been recruited, they were designated

⁵ The executive body that supervised the majority of irregulars in the Russian army in 1721–1812 was the Cossack Section (also called Cossack Expedition) within the College of War Chancellery. For examples of the mentioned wordings see RGVA, fund 13, inventory 1/107, bundle 145, file 32; RGVA, fund 13, inventory 2/110, bundle 155, file 140.

⁶ *Arnaut* was originally an ethnonym for Albanian, used also to denote bandits, mercenaries serving local notables in the Danubian Principalities, as well as volunteers joining the Russian forces during the Russo-Turkish wars.

⁷ O. A. Bachyns'ka et al., *Kozatstvo na Pivdni Ukrainy Kinets' XVIII-XIX Stolittia* (Odessa: Druk, 2000), 94–97.

as a cossack brigade.⁸ One may thus conclude that at least two understandings of cossackdom existed: one by imperial officials, who used it as an umbrella term to include almost any irregular servitor and another by local population, for whom it meant personal freedom, social prestige and material benefits. Such generalizations would be a perfectly viable first step towards a better understanding of cossackdom, yet, what were the specifics?

To answer this question, in the subchapter I will focus on the Russo-Turkish wars of 1768 – 1774, 1787 – 1792 and 1806 – 1812 treated chronologically, and on the absorption of volunteers and *arnauts* from Ottoman, Habsburg or Polish backgrounds into the Russian army. Also, I will address the irregulars recruited from the Nogai hordes, a special case since they were nomads who wandered beyond the Kuban' River in the Ottoman Caucasus, in the Ottoman lands along Danube, and in the Russian Pontic and Azov Steppes.

While occasionally called cossacks in some documents, all these irregulars were not consistently perceived as such either by imperial officials or by cossacks of other units. Consequently, the study of traditional cossacks together with these neighboring categories of cossacks recruited from foreign subjects and *inorodtsy* will contribute not only to a deeper understanding of cossackdom as a social category within the Russian Empire, but will also shed light on the movement of people and ideas across the imperial borders thus connecting the history of the Pontic Steppe to that of Central Europe, the Balkans and the Mediterranean.

⁸ V. Kh. Kazin and V. K. Shenk, *Kazach'i Voiska* (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia V. D. Smirnova, 1912), 32.

2.1.1 Volunteers in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768 – 1774

The Russo-Turkish War of 1768 – 1774 was not unique in providing the opportunity to recruit foreign subjects, even enemy fighters into a rival imperial army. As was mentioned above, it was a quite common practice in early modern Central and Eastern Europe. As the Russian army advanced, it enrolled primarily Ottoman, but sometimes also Polish and other subjects, to serve in its irregular volunteer units. The irregular nature of volunteer units, the high rates of desertion, and the constant influx of newcomers willing to serve make it difficult to estimate the number of these irregulars. Volunteers who knew the terrain, sometimes in units numbering as few as fifteen men, were used for scouting without any official documentation of their existence. Thus, the numbers of volunteers can be estimated only roughly. Kazin and Shenk mention four regiments acting on the Russian side during this war.⁹ At that time one regiment could be up to one and a half thousand men, but usually just around one thousand. So, in following Kazin's estimate, one could say that up to four thousand volunteers were present. Andrei Petrov mentions four thousand *arnauts* as well.¹⁰ However, both authors count primarily volunteers drawn from the Danubian, Moldavian and Wallachian principalities. If we estimate there were up to one thousand Polish subjects and up to two thousand Greeks in addition, the total would be approximately seven thousand men.¹¹ Still, caution should be exercised in attributing ethnic origins

⁹ Kazin and Shenk, *Kazach'i Voiska*, 32.

¹⁰ Andrei Petrov, *Voina Rossii s Turtsiei i Pol'skimi Konfederatami s 1769-1774 God*, vol. 2 (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia Eduarda Veimara, 1866), 18–19.

¹¹ Petrov, *Voina Rossii s Turtsiei i Pol'skimi Konfederatami*, 2:212-18.

to irregular servitors given that – as in other borderland regions – the practice of feigned origins was widespread and those, who are listed, for instance, as Ottoman or Polish, could easily be runaway Russian subjects and vice versa: foreigners could falsely claim to be Russian subjects when it was more profitable.

The kind of payment arnauts and volunteers received during the 1768 – 1774 war is also uncertain. Some authors mention that arnauts had their own horses and received neither provisions nor forage from the Russian authorities.¹² College of War correspondence shows that volunteers received a stipend at rates equal to other irregulars — around twelve rubles per year — and also forage.¹³ Most probably, various forms of remuneration and supply were used in different units, depending on circumstances. Though the source documents sometimes mention treasury expenditures, if we are to take into account eighteenth-century infrastructure, logistics, and corruption, there is no way to determine the final amount that reached the military servitors. Thus, the possibility of plunder as a source of income should not be discounted. The number of Russian officers overseeing volunteer units was scarce, and even those who could see what was going on may have easily turned a blind eye to this practice.

As for the post-war situation, volunteers were an ill-defined group with uncertain status in Russian society and in this sense they were similar to the

¹² I. A. Khioni, “Bugskie Kazaki i Ikh Bor’ba Protiv Feodal’no-Krepostnicheskogo Gneta: Posledniaia Chetvert’ XVIII – Pervaia Chetvert’ XIX vv.” (Candidate of Sciences diss., Odesskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet imeni I. I. Mechnikova, 1973), 29–31.

¹³ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 1/107, bundle 145, file 32; RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 2/110, bundle 149, file 21.

cossacks. Consequently, the benefits that volunteers expected to receive after the end of the war did not, in large part, depend on formal legislation, but on rumors and the abundant promises made by recruiters who worked with volunteers at the grass-roots level. These recruiters may have had little or no connection with the official policies of the Russian government. While it is impossible to trace the exact promises made by low-level recruiters, official manifestos issued by the Russian monarchy survived and can be used to compare what was promised and what was actually granted.

Leaving aside purely rhetorical proclamations on the upcoming liberation of Balkan peoples from Ottoman rule, the first practical reward for volunteering was the chance to become a subject of Russia. This was valuable in protecting Ottoman subjects, who helped the Russian army, by settling them in the Russian Empire beyond the reach of Ottoman retribution.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it merits further consideration that Russo-Turkish wars, compared to wars in Europe, are considered relatively brutal, with beheadings of prisoners, mass executions of those suspected of treason, and other acts of savagery. In such a context, a question that requires further investigation is why Ottoman subjects who helped Russians would even consider staying in Ottoman lands.¹⁴ The emerging problem of international law applicability to the fates of prisoners,

¹⁴ For more on the issues of prisoners of war, mutual imaginaries, and international law emergence and its applicability in the Russo-Turkish wars see William Smiley, "When Peace Is Made, You Will Again Be Free": Islamic and Treaty Law, Black Sea Conflict, and the Emergence of 'Prisoners of War' in the Ottoman Empire, 1739-1830." (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2012); Viktor Taki, *Tsar and Sultan: Russian Encounters with the Ottoman Empire* (London: Tauris, 2016); Julia Leikin, "The Prostitution of the Russian Flag": Privateers in Russian Admiralty Courts, 1787-98," *Law and History Review* 35, no. 4 (November 2017).

both soldiers and volunteers, lies in the fact that even if more or less applicable to “natural” Turks or Russians — as perceived by contemporaries, the identities of borderlanders were much more complex; they could be considered as lacking loyalty to either empire and thus considered traitors helping both sides at the same time. For instance, during the following war of 1787 – 1792 a number of Nogais fighting in the Turkish army, who were imprisoned by Russians, were deprived of the rights of prisoners of war, later enserfed and offered to local landowners.¹⁵ Besides, there were many Russian deserters and runaway serfs in the borderland regions of the Ottoman Empire. By joining the Russian army, they hoped either for amnesty or for the opportunity to return, even if under a different name.¹⁶

Generally, volunteers had two options when settling in the Russian Empire. The cossack status itself, along with the benefits associated with it in the popular imagination, could be considered a reward by those who were interested in continued military service. As noted above, precedents existed for reorganization of volunteers into cossack units.

Alternatively, for several decades the Russian government had issued manifestos promising foreign colonists free land and tax benefits, which provided an option for those who preferred peaceful farming to military service. From a legal perspective, this usually gave the subject the status of a foreign colonist. A classic example would be the manifesto of July 22, 1763,

¹⁵ Vladislav Gribovskii, “‘Anapskie Nogaity’ v Pomeschich’ikh Khoziaistvakh Iuzhnoi Ukrainy v Kontse XVIII – Nachale XIX vv.,” in *Felitsynskie Chteniia (IX): Materialy Regional’noi Nauchno-prakticheskoi Konferentsii* (Krasnodar: A-Adams, 2007), 12–18.

¹⁶ Bachinskii, “Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei,” 129–44.

according to which, all foreigners choosing to settle in the Russian Empire — but not in existing cities or towns — were exempt from all taxes and obligations for thirty years.¹⁷ In practice, however, different groups of settlers were treated in different ways and the exemptions they received often lasted less than thirty years.

When the war ended in 1774, the majority of volunteer units were disbanded as unnecessary. The two units that were preserved became later known as the Bug cossacks and the Greek cossacks. Their story enables us to examine closely the rewards the volunteers received and how they corresponded to the promises given earlier. This is, in turn, a step towards understanding both the formal and real status of irregulars — be they designated cossacks or not — in the Russian Empire of the period.

One of the relatively widespread misconceptions regarding the volunteers during the war of 1768 – 1774 concerns the story of a cavalry regiment under the command of Colonel Petr Skarzhinskii (Petro Skarzhyns'kyi) that was recruited by the Ottomans from their Moldavian, Bulgarian, and Serb subjects in 1769. Ostensibly, during the same year the whole regiment switched sides and joined the Russian army near Khotin, and after the war served as a founding unit for the Bug Cossack Host. Indeed, this story even made its way into Speranskii's complete collection of laws and was

¹⁷ PSZ, vol. 16, no. 11880.

retold numerous times as a result.¹⁸

However, this was just a founding myth. The emphasis on foreign origins and voluntary service to Russia was used by officers of the Bug Cossack Host as a bargaining tool in petitions to improve their station. I. Khioni proposes a more critical approach towards the establishment of the Bug cossacks and deconstructs this misconception.¹⁹ According to Khioni, Russian officers, in their reports, would have almost certainly mentioned an event as momentous as a whole regiment switching sides. However, neither reports of the Russian commanders from Khotin, nor Rumiantsev's report (*reliatsia*) about the Battle of Khotin contain this tale. In the following years no regiment under the command of Colonel Skarzhinskii is mentioned in official reports either. Furthermore, Skarzhinskii received the rank of colonel only in 1788, during the Russo-Turkish War of 1787 – 1792.

Moreover, many volunteer units did not have a name. Taking into account this anonymity and the fact that many of them were never mentioned in Russian military documents, Khioni concludes that the origins of the Bug cossacks are to be sought elsewhere. He suggests that they were originally called Newly Recruited (*Novoverbovannyi*, *Novonabrannyi*) Cossack

¹⁸ PSZ, vol. 28, no. 20754. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century authors actively cited this law, although it provided a distorted version of the Bug cossacks origins: Apollon Skal'kovskii, *Khronologicheskoe Obozrenie Istorii Novorossiiskago Kraia, 1730-1823*, vol. 1 (Odessa: Gorodskaiia Tipografiia, 1836), 224–49; Evdokim Ziablovskii, *Statisticheskoe Opisanie Rossiiskoi Impeii v Nyneshnem Eia Sostoianii s Predvaritel'nymi Poniatiiami o Statistike i o Evrope Voobshche v Statisticheskom Vide*, 2nd ed. (Saint Petersburg: Morskaiia Tipografiia, 1815), 120–23; Kazin and Shenk, *Kazach'i Voiska*, 16. Later this story was repeated as an established fact in the encyclopedias published during the Soviet period. See the “Bug Cossack Host” in the Big Soviet Encyclopedia and the Soviet Military Encyclopedia.

¹⁹ Khioni, “Bugskie Kazaki i ikh Bor'ba,” 27–36.

Regiment.²⁰

This regiment was recruited in 1769 from the cossacks of the Right-Bank Ukraine, who were subjects of the Polish Commonwealth at that time. The Bar Confederation, an association of Polish nobles hostile to the pro-Russian King Stanislaw II and thus to Russia, was an ally of the Ottomans in 1768 – 1772. Cossacks from the Right-Bank Ukraine served in both Confederate and Russian forces either as mercenaries or as forced recruits.²¹

The Newly Recruited Regiment is known to have been organized along lines similar to the regiments of Don cossacks. In October 1769 the regiment numbered five hundred men and was commanded by Second-Major Kasperov. Importantly, it was not disbanded after the war like many temporary units. Together with other volunteers, the Newly Recruited Regiment was settled along the Bug River in 1774 – 1775 — hence the name Bug cossacks. From 1783 onwards, they had to provide military service as a frontier force. At this point, the Bug cossacks were able to field a one thousand strong regiment.²² Military service, however, was not the sole function of Bug cossacks. According to Potemkin’s letter to Catherine dated January 3, 1788, the creation of cossack settlements (*slobodas*) along the border would bolster migration to the Russian Empire as potential migrants would be attracted by

²⁰ Generally, however, the debate on the Bug cossacks origins devolved into argument on the primacy of ethnic component in the founding core of the unit – Ukrainian or Moldavian – whatever these ethnonyms would mean in the eighteenth century borderlands. Cf. V. Zagoruiko, *Po Stranitsam Istorii Odessy i Odesshchiny*, vol. 1 (Odessa: Odesskoe Oblastnoe Izdatel’stvo, 1957), 25–27; M. S. Kovbasiuk, “Buz’ke Kozats’ke Viis’ko,” in *Radians’ka Entsyklopediia Istorii Ukrainy*, 1969; I. A. Antsupov, *Kazachestvo Rossiiskoe Mezhdru Bugom i Dunaem* (Kishinev: ULIM, 2000), 195–198.

²¹ Petrov, *Voina Rossii s Turtsiei i Pol’skimi Konfederatami*, 1:132–54.

²² Khioni, “Bugskie Kazaki i Ikh Bor’ba,” 26.

the neighboring free cossack settlements.²³ Although large landed estates worked with serf labor had advantages for St. Petersburg, in borderland regions they offered no attraction to potential migrants. Catherine agreed with the proposal and decree of January 14, 1788 officially permitted the purchase of lands and transfer of serfs living there into the cossacks.²⁴

As was mentioned, foreigners resettling in the Russian Empire, and especially colonists in the New Russia region, were exempt from any taxes and obligations for thirty years. This included an exemption from military service as well, a promise that was quickly forgotten by Russian authorities. In the end, the former volunteers settled at Bug had their obligations waived only for the first eight years of their life in the Russian Empire. After that they had to provide military service as was expected from the cossacks. Besides, the Bug cossacks received empty land for settlements — having to cultivate the land and build their settlements practically from scratch at considerable cost to them.

While volunteers who later were designated as Bug cossacks were useful to the Russian Empire in various ways – performing military service, colonizing the barely settled region, attracting other migrants – the empire was not so keen to implement the promises of earlier issued manifestos of benefits to be granted to migrants settling in New Russia.

²³ “...*nakhozhu ia vse milostiveishaia gosudarynia, neobhodimo nuzhno skupat’ u pomeshchikov Khersonskogo i Elisavetgradskogo uezdov seleniia, mezhdru Buga i Ingul’tsa lezashie, daby tut vse byli obyvateli, voisko iz sebia sostavliaiushchie. Sie polezno i teper’ i na budushchee vremia. Oni sdelaitsia bol’shimi uzhe slobodami, i narodu bolee vykhodit’ budet v takie slobody iz-za granitsy, nezhe k pomeshchikam.*” Cited from E. I. Druzhinina, *Severnoe Prichernomor’e v 1775-1800 gg.* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1959), 188.

²⁴ PSZ, vol. 22, no. 16605.

Another example of discrepancy between the promised benefits and actual rewards in the absence of a comprehensive legislative framework is the case of the Greek irregulars — also called Greek cossacks by some authors.²⁵ Appearing as a unit during the 1768 – 1774 war under the Baltic Fleet commanded by Count Orlov and Admiral Spiridov, which operated in the Aegean Sea in the so-called First Archipelago Expedition, their later story was quite similar.²⁶ The mission of the fleet was not only to fight the Ottoman navy and to disrupt Ottoman communications in the Mediterranean, but also to ignite revolts among the Orthodox Balkan peoples. Those who participated in these revolts or helped the Russian fleet and feared Ottoman retribution were promised the right to resettle in the Russian Empire. The territory near the fortresses of Kerch and Yeni Kale was reserved for these Greek migrants. Further allotments near Taganrog were provided a little later.²⁷

On March 28, 1775 the so-called Albanian Host was created: an irregular unit made up of Greeks who wished to continue their military service for Russia. Service there was, however, an option, not an obligation. At that point all Greek migrants to the Russian Empire were granted exemption from taxes for twenty years and were promised an annual subsidy for the initial settlement. Additional monetary rewards were promised for those who

²⁵ Kazin and Shenk list Greek irregulars together with other units “of cossack status” (*na polozhenii kazach’ikh*): Kazin and Shenk, *Kazach’i Voiska*, 25. Shyian explicitly calls the unit Greek (Albanian) Cossack Host: R. I. Shyian, *Kozatstvo Pivdennoi Ukrainy v Ostannii Chverti XVIII st.* (Zaporizhia: Tandem-U, 1998), 26–31.

²⁶ For more on Archipelago expedition and Greeks joining the Russian army see E. V. Tarle, *Tri Ekspeditsii Russkogo Flota* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel’stvo, 1956); Nicholas Pappas, *Greeks in Russian Military Service in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1991).

²⁷ RGADA, fund 16, inventory 1, file 689 part 1, fols 213-216v; Bachyns’ka et al., *Kozatstvo na Pivdni Ukrainy Kinets’ XVIII-XIX Stolittia*, 6–7.

attracted further migrants from the Ottoman lands to resettle in the Russian Empire, thus making Greek irregulars not only a military force, but also recruiting agents, just like the Bug cossacks.²⁸ The state treasury was also committed to supporting hospitals, churches, barracks, and schools in the Greek settlements. In addition, the Greeks who had served in the military during the war of 1768 – 1774 received permission to trade anywhere in the Russian Empire, being also exempt from trading fees and taxes.²⁹ Although the Albanian Host was not officially called “cossack,” the benefits granted to Albanian irregulars were similar to those granted to cossacks.

All in all, at least in the 1770s and at least formally, the benefits granted to the Greeks exceeded those granted to other volunteers. One possible explanation of this would be the role of the Greek / Byzantine legacy in Russian imperial ideology. With the advance of the borders and inclusion of new territories, the state had to conceptualize both the temporal and spatial dimensions of New Russia, succinctly: the empire included it in the all-imperial narrative to make the most efficient use of local symbols for both internal borderland management and for external claims in case of further conquests.

The northern shore of the Black Sea had almost sacral meaning for the Russian Empire. It was symbolically connected with the legacies of Ancient

²⁸ RGADA, fund 16, inventory 1, file 689 part 1, fols 213-216v. One other aspect of migrants attraction deserves attention. If in the majority of Russian regions one had to be a noble in order to own serfs, in the late eighteenth century New Russia for the sake of colonization the opposite was true: if an individual could settle a number of colonists, he could be ennobled. If he was crafty enough, he could also make these colonists his own serfs. See V. I. Mil'chev, “Nezdiisnenyi Kolonizatsiinyi Proekt 1786 r. (Nevdala Sproba Vidstavnykh Chyniv Albans'koho Viis'ka Peretvorytysia na Tavriis'kykh Pomishchykiv),” *Pivdenna Ukraina* 7, 2002, 256–59.

²⁹ PSZ, vol. 20, no. 14284.

Greece, Kievan Rus', and the Byzantine Empire. "The Tavric Kherson – is the source of our Christianity and consequently – our humanity..." – Potemkin wrote to Catherine later in 1783.³⁰ Gavriil Derzhavin saw the annexation of Crimea as the recovery of the ancient Russian cities.³¹ Andrei Zorin interprets "the Greek project" as the return of an ancient sacred place to Russia and this return was accompanied by the hellinization of the region. The Russians came to the province, which belonged to the Greeks once, restored its original image, and regained their own historical roots. All of this could be perceived as a step toward the liberation of Greece, a powerful claim over the Byzantine legacy and an important strategy for the expulsion of Turks from Europe.³² Or it could have been just another diplomatic move in advancing the so-called Greek Project — an unrealistic scheme, which nevertheless was a powerful rhetorical tool in the competition with Ottomans and Habsburgs in the Balkans.³³ Every measure taken to attract Greek migrants to the region was not only a step towards the colonization of the steppe, but also a tool to bolster Russian claims over previously conquered territories – with Orthodox populations – as well as for the legitimization of further Russian advances towards both the Crimea and into the Balkans.

By 1781, however, practical concerns and an underdeveloped navy

³⁰ V. S Lopatin, comp., *Ekaterina II i G.A. Potemkin: Lichnaia Perepiska 1769-1791* (Moscow: Nauka, 1997), 180–81.

³¹ G. Derzhavin, *Sochinenia Derzhavina s Ob'iasnitel'nymi Primechaniiami Ia. Grot*, ed. Ia. Grot, vol. 1 (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1868), 182.

³² Andrei Zorin, *Kormia Dvuglavogo Orla: Literatura i Gosudarstvennaia Ideologija v Rossii v Poslednei Treti 18 – Pervoi Treti 19 veka* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2004), 102.

³³ Marc Raeff, *Catherine the Great: A Profile* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 201.

prevailed. A number of Greeks were forcefully resettled to Kherson where they were obliged to serve as shipbuilding experts, although this was a direct breach of previously promised exemptions.³⁴ On the other hand, Greeks themselves were not interested in delivering the services expected from them. In July 1778, the roster size of the Albanian Host was 1.003 men. In reality, the unit struggled to field even half of this figure. Planning to fully benefit from the tax exemptions granted to them, many Greeks dedicated themselves to trades and craft instead of military service.³⁵

To summarize, between the 1760s and early 1780s the status of volunteers or volunteer cossacks was not clearly defined. Consequently, the rights of these subjects were extremely vulnerable to the machinations of imperial administrators. In the end, both Greek and Bug irregulars received only a portion of the land and benefits they had been promised. Taking this into account, it is likely that disbanded volunteer units were not paid in full as well. Yet, officials were aware of the necessity to satisfy at least some promises in order to ensure that in the next war they could count on recruiting additional volunteers even if the promised rewards might fall short of expectations.

³⁴ RGADA, fund 16, inventory 1, file 689 part 2, fols 350-351.

³⁵ RGADA, fund 16, inventory 1, file 689 part 1, fol. 332.

2.1.2 The Russo-Turkish War of 1787 – 1792

In 1787 an attempt by the Ottoman Empire to regain previously lost lands to the north of the Black Sea led to war with the Russian and their allies Habsburg Empire. While the recovery of the Crimea was the Ottomans' primary objective, the Russian focus was Ochakov, a fortress at the junction of the Bug and Dnieper rivers, the last remaining Ottoman outpost on the Danube – Black Sea strategic line.³⁶

As the war progressed, the need for additional manpower motivated the Russian command to enlarge the old irregular units and to create new ones. The Russian government transformed local peasants into cossacks on a previously unprecedented scale. New volunteer units were created and deployed as well. The question for the imperial government was whether they would continue to treat volunteers in the same manner as during the war of 1768 – 1774 and if so in what way?

On November 9, 1787 a decree initiated the recruitment of foreign — South-Slavic, Albanian, Moldavian, and Greek — volunteers. They were to serve in two new cossack brigades, each brigade consisting of two regiments. The target numbers were never reached, thus only smaller-sized units – volunteers' squads (*komandy*) – were created in late 1787. On February 2, 1788, these volunteer squads were merged into cohorts named “*Bugskie spiry*.”³⁷ Some volunteer squads were later transferred to the larger Ekaterinoslav Cossack Host, also formed in 1787. Of all these volunteers,

³⁶ Virginia Aksan, *Ottoman Empire 1700-1918: An Empire Besieged* (London: Pearson, 2007), 160–67.

³⁷ Kazin and Shenk, *Kazach'i Voiska*, 32.

approximately two thousand decided to settle in the Russian Empire after the war, some with their families.

It is unknown what exact benefits were promised during this war to irregulars, except those mentioned in the manifesto. However, for almost a year after the war volunteers had no land to settle and were supported only by emergency funds (*iz summy chrezvychainoi*).³⁸ Formally they were not assigned to any estate, thus making their exact rights and obligations in Russia unclear. Details on the volunteers' later fate were decided upon and made public only on October 6, 1792.³⁹

According to the October 6 decree, the governor of Ekaterinoslav province, Vasiliï Kakhovskii, was authorized to assign land to the volunteers, while the volunteers themselves were offered a choice regarding their future legal status. One option for them was to formally enlist as cossacks: volunteers stationed in Ekaterinoslav Province could join the Ekaterinoslav Cossack Host, while those, stationed in Tavrida Province could enlist in the Greek Regiment, which was a new name given to the Albanian Host upon one of its reorganizations. As a second option, volunteers had a choice to join the settled cavalry: another category of military servitors formally distinct from cossacks yet similar to them in vaguely defined status. The third and final option was to become townspeople, merchants, or to take up other ways of life (*rody zhizni*).⁴⁰ However, this meant that volunteers had to first obtain

³⁸ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 1/107, bundle 145, file 28, fols 311–314v; RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 1/107, bundle 155, file 140, fols 19-21.

³⁹ This date, however, is problematic. Different College of War documents mention this decree either as issued on October 6 or October 7. For instance, see correspondence stored as RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 1/107, bundle 145, file 28.

⁴⁰ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 1/107, bundle 145, file 28, fol. 312.

permission from the communities they planned to join. The practice of double-approval existed in Russia with regard to estates; if someone wished to change his community or estate, he usually had to obtain permissions from both the community he wanted to leave and the community he wanted to join.⁴¹

Provincial officials invested considerable time and manpower in gathering data on how many volunteers selected each of these options. Only on January 25, 1793 did Governor Kakhovskii of Ekaterinoslav report that 466 asked to become settled cavalry and 188 decided to become cossacks and were henceforth reassigned to the Ekaterinoslav Cossack Host. The majority, however, asked for travel documents to settle where they wished.⁴² Formally, this was a completely legitimate request, detailed in the third option of the decree. After all, those who wanted to enroll, for instance, into town communities had to travel and to negotiate directly about their possible acceptance.

This request, however, created a dilemma for the Russian administration. Besides having military experience, volunteers, as a typical borderland population, possessed high mobility, good knowledge of the region, and questionable loyalties. Issuing travel documents in such numbers meant that it would be impossible to control their movement: volunteers would be able to settle in the unstable borderlands. In this case, there also was a

⁴¹ For a recent take on peculiarities of the Russian estate system see Alison Smith, *For the Common Good and Their Own Well-Being: Social Estates in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴² RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 2/110, bundle 151, file 111, fols 3-7.

high-risk of their passing beyond the control of Russian authorities, across the border into Poland or Moldavia, or in becoming troublemakers, causing disruptions in the interior provinces.

Indeed, the problem of what to do with armed populations after the wars was a recurrent one in many empires. The large masses of armed and experienced irregulars engendered during each war had to be carefully disarmed, disbanded, and settled; otherwise they could resort to banditry, raiding not only settlements of their former employer, but also operating across the borders and harming international relations.

A final decision on May 23, 1793, reversed the earlier decree. Volunteers were deprived of the choices outlined above. To prevent flights, they were relocated to the Left Bank of the Dnieper River under the guise of military maneuvers. There they were demobilized, provided with payment for their service, and given land allotments in the already existing Moldavian and Wallachian settlements. Such a change in policy reflected a growing mistrust by the officers who served alongside the volunteers and reported mass flights, robberies, and disorderly behavior (*razvratnost' sostoiania i mnogie proderzosti*) among irregulars to their superiors.⁴³

This episode demonstrates several important points regarding the status of irregular military servitors in the late eighteenth-century Russian Empire. The volunteers' legal status, although undefined and temporary, could provide a choice of which estate servitors want to join after the war. In reality, however, this choice was limited by practical considerations. Provincial

⁴³ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 1/107, bundle 145, file 32, fol. 322.

imperial administrators could easily reward volunteers with land and could even allow volunteers to select specific allotments themselves. Yet, they were not ready to issue travel documents en masse fearing the flight of potential colonists urgently needed to settle the recently annexed and underpopulated Steppe region – another recurring problem along porous frontiers and under-administered borderlands.⁴⁴

The fact that less than two hundred men out of 2.200 decided to continue service as cossacks is also revealing. If runaway serfs entertained utopian perceptions of cossackdom – often inspiring them to seek ways to become cossacks – people who had first-hand experience with irregular service in the Russian army preferred to seek their fortunes elsewhere, either by asking for travel documents or by deserting. This case illustrates both the state of affairs in the Russian army, where logistical and administrative inefficiencies led to supply shortages and delayed payments, as well as, the character of the volunteers themselves, who, being borderland inhabitants and having a choice, preferred the individual freedom of the Old Steppe to cossack service in the imperial army.

As for the volunteer units that existed before the war of 1787 – 1792, Greek irregulars served as border-guards, sailors, and marines. Many of them, however, were unhappy with life in Russia. Caught between delayed payments and deadly epidemics, some Greeks even defected back to the

⁴⁴ For more on demographics and colonization processes in the region see Druzhinina, *Severnoe Prichernomor'e*, 69–100; E. I. Druzhinina, *Iuzhnaia Ukraina v 1800-1825 gg.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1970); V. M. Kabuzan, *Zaselenie Novorossii: Ekaterinoslavskoi i Khersonskoi Gubernii v XVIII - Pervoi Polovine XIX Veka (1719-1858 gg.)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976).

Ottoman Empire – further illustrating the shifting loyalties in borderland regions.⁴⁵

For their service in 1787 – 1792, Greek irregulars ought to have received 13.000 *desiatin* of land, 10.500 rubles for development of Greek settlements, 20.000 rubles as a ten-year loan, and a certain degree of intra-communal autonomy, which included the right to maintain their own police.⁴⁶ Given that petitions and complaints were submitted well into the 1820s, however, it is clear that the promised sum was never paid in full.

The initiative to reform and enlarge the unit did exist. In July 1794, Governor Kakhovskii proposed the creation of two or three extra cavalry divisions from Greeks and Armenians living in Crimea. He considered such units useful for both coast patrol and police functions.⁴⁷ This proposal, however, was never implemented. One may presume that the interests of both officials and irregulars coincided: some officials could see no use of such a unit, while Greeks preferred to exploit benefits granted to them and to become traders even if formally retaining their status as cossack-like irregulars.

Furthermore, on May 20, 1797, the unit was disbanded and former irregulars — if they wished to continue military service — had to join the regular army.⁴⁸ Those who did not want to serve had, at least formally, a choice of estate where to belong (*obratit' v to sosnoianie, kto kuda vpisat'sia*

⁴⁵ N. F. Dubrovin, ed., *Bumagi Kniazia Grigoriia Aleksandrovicha Potemkina-Tavrisheskago, 1774-1788* (Saint Petersburg: Voenno-Uchenyi Komitet Glavnago Shtaba, 1893), 187–88.

⁴⁶ RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 927, fols 67-74v; PSZ, vol. 23, no. 17320.

⁴⁷ RGIA, fund 41, inventory 1, file 253, fol. 23.

⁴⁸ PSZ, vol. 24, no. 17967; PSZ, vol. 24, no. 17972.

pozhelet). While estate boundaries in the Russian Empire were still in the making, military service, at least formally, allowed a degree of social mobility.

The dissolution of the unit also illustrates the situation with irregulars' property rights in the empire: according to governor Vasiliï Kakhovskii's logic, since the land had been awarded to an irregular unit for collective land-owning — largely the same way as the land of cossack hosts — the dissolution of the unit meant the termination of their right to hold land as well.⁴⁹ Faced by this loss, the Greeks had either to continue their service in the regular army, in hope of payments, or to become hired workers, craftsmen, petty traders, etc.

Bug cossacks served in the war of 1787 – 1792 as well and their participation, both valiant and tragic, further demonstrates insecurities of cossack status. On the one hand, the unit was reinforced by no less than three thousand state peasants and personal serfs of Prince Grigorii Potemkin — the commander of the Russian forces in the South. This measure of support was exceptional for the empire with serfs being purchased from private landowners by provincial treasury and later converted into cossacks.

On the other hand, the addition of new settlements to the unit and the fact that old settlements were dangerously close to the front, led to Potemkin's decision to resettle cossack families further from the border. The forced resettlement was undertaken without prior preparations in early February 1788 — in winter and during the war. Keeping in mind the undeveloped infrastructure of this barely-colonized region; inevitably casualties caused by this resettlement were large, although it is impossible to assess them

⁴⁹ RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 927, fols 68-68v

accurately. Furthermore, the rationale behind this measure is not clear, especially since several weeks later on February 25, 1788, Potemkin allowed cossacks who were unhappy with the resettlement to return to their initial villages along the Bug River.⁵⁰ This episode raises questions about the nature of cossack land-ownership once more, as cossacks could be easily forced to resettle somewhere else by a simple decree from above.

Still, despite all the difficulties, Bug cossacks fought bravely at Ochakov, Bendery, Akkerman, Kiliia, and Izmail.⁵¹ After the war, they served in Poland and as border-guards along the Dniester River. And what was the reward that the Bug cossacks received after the war of 1787–1792? For the time being they retained their cossack status and were thus exempt from taxes. They were not, however, exempt from other public obligations (*obshchestvennye povinnosti*).⁵² In theory, Bug cossacks were to receive money for their military service. In practice, at this point, the imperial treasury owed 81.490 rubles to the Bug cossacks, which was never paid in full.⁵³ On July 27, 1797 the unit was disbanded and cossacks were designated as state

⁵⁰ Khioni, “Bugskie Kazaki i ikh Bor’ba,” 38-39.

⁵¹ Khioni, “Bugskie Kazaki i ikh Bor’ba,” 67-72.

⁵² In Imperial Russia there were two primary obligations (*povinnosti*) – payment of taxes to the treasury (*kazennye*) and public or common (*obshchestvennye*) – maintenance of post-stations, bridges and roads in the province, billeting, etc. While the general principle of cossack service was exemption from taxes, not all cossack units were exempted from these *obshchestvennye povinnosti*.

⁵³ Khioni, “Bugskie Kazaki i ikh Bor’ba,” 99. Such delays with payments were not unique and were known to other units in the Russian army. For instance, the Greek irregulars received the money for the war of 1787-1792 only in 1796 – see RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 3/111, bundle 186, file 107, fols 1-5.

peasants.⁵⁴ Besides the loss of social status, former cossacks were obliged to start paying taxes. This was another breach of the promised tax-exemption, previously used to attract foreign subjects to settle in Russia, yet never completely fulfilled.

The dissolution of Bug cossacks and reorganization of Greek irregulars into a regular unit may be seen as a part of the eccentric policies of Paul I, who revised many decisions made by his mother and her favorites. On the other hand, due to the ongoing colonization New Russia became a more stable and secure region, thus monarchs and their officials could conveniently ignore promises made by their predecessors in order to set up this colonization in the first place.

2.1.3 Moldavian, Wallachian, and Bessarabian cossacks

The recruitment, service, and subsequent dissolution of irregular formations in Bessarabia during the war of 1806 – 1812 further underline the confusion surrounding the process of identifying and counting the number of armed men in Russian service who were named or misnamed cossacks. In the first decade of the nineteenth century the Russian army fought against opponents who were widely separated geographically. The European theater of the Napoleonic wars required Russian troops in the west, yet the same troops were necessary also in the north to fight Sweden, in the Balkans to

⁵⁴ RGIA, fund 1286, inventory 1, file 219a, fol. 43. For reasons unclear and contrary to situation with Greeks and other volunteers, Bug cossacks did not receive even a formal choice of future estate, being converted into state peasants. The few of them who served as border-guards continued their service till 1801, under even more vague social and military status as their unit had already been officially disbanded.

fight the Ottomans, as well as, in the Caucasus to fight both Ottomans and Persians.⁵⁵ From the recruiters' point of view the Balkans were a special case. Just as during the previous Russo-Turkish wars, Russian propaganda once again invoked the tried and tested trope of the liberation of Principalities from the Ottoman yoke, thus enabling Russian troops to count on the support of the local population.⁵⁶

Preparations for the influx of volunteers, however, had already begun in 1803. The Bug Cossack Host, previously disbanded in 1797, was re-created on May 8, 1803, while irregulars previously known as the Albanian Host or Greek Regiment were re-enlisted into active service as the Odessa (*Odesskii*) Greek Battalion on October, 22, 1803. Several factors coincided for the decision to restore these units: on the one hand, local military command — New Russian Governor Ivan Mikhel'son included — was preparing for a potential war with the Ottomans by developing irregular units in the region; on the other, Alexander I, upon his ascension to throne, proclaimed a return to the policies of Catherine, giving hope to petitioners interested in the restoration of their hosts. As the later history of Bug and Greek irregulars

⁵⁵ As a brief list of the wars fought by Russia in the early nineteenth century: War of the Second Coalition 1799-1802; War of the Third Coalition 1805; War of the Fourth Coalition 1806-1807; War of the Fifth Coalition 1809; War with Persia 1804-1813; conflict with Austria over Krakow in 1809; War with Sweden 1808-1809; War with the Ottomans 1806-1812. The formal reason for the 1806-1812 war was the dethronement of the Principality princes Alexander Mourouzis and Constantine Ypsilanti (Ypsilantis) by the Ottomans in breach of the previously signed Treaty of Jassy. For more on the war of 1806-1812 see Aleksandr Mikhailovskii-Danilevskii, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, vol. 3, *Opisanie Turetskoi Voiny s 1806 do 1812 goda* (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia Shtaba Otdel'nogo Korpusa Vnutrennei Strazhi, 1849).

⁵⁶ G. S. Grosul and R. V. Danilenko, "K Voprosu ob Uchastii Volonterov iz Dunaiskikh Kniazhestv v Russko-Turetskoi Voine 1806-1812," *Izvestiia Moldavskogo filiala Akademii Nauk SSSR* 80, no. 2 (1961): 7.

demonstrated, irregular units settled near the border once again had to not only provide manpower during the war, but also to attract migrants as a tactic for draining manpower from the Ottoman Empire.

The Bug Cossack Host was restored as an officially recognized cossack unit, formed on the basis of the Don cossack regulations, with one exception: the units recruits had to be foreigners.⁵⁷ This was intended, on the one hand, to prevent runaway Russian subjects from joining the host, and, on the other, to increase its attraction in the eyes of Ottoman subjects. Furthermore, at this point, the presence of Russian officers in the unit was formally limited, which gave volunteers hope for quick promotions to fill officer vacancies. In reality, however, there were three problems:

1. Taking into account the combination of population movement and limited imperial capability to gather information on its subjects in the borderlands, not all former Bug cossacks were enlisted in the restored host. The opposite was true as well – those people, who had not been cossacks previously, yet settled near the would-be Bug cossack settlements ended up being granted cossack status.

2. There was a literacy qualification in the Russian army for ranks above corporal. Naturally, this regulation was primarily intended for regular units. However, it is quite possible that it could be selectively applied to irregular units to better control promotions.⁵⁸

3. Finally, the petitions of various people wishing to serve in the Bug

⁵⁷ PSZ, vol. 28, no. 20754.

⁵⁸ For complexities surrounding the promotion of illiterate volunteers to officer ranks see also: RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 2/110, bundle 149, file 18, fols 28-31.

Host could be both rejected on the basis of the regulation restricting enrollment to foreigners or approved despite of it. For instance, Kantakuzin's aides who were Russians yet commanded volunteer units during this war were forbidden to join Bug cossacks and were sent to serve at Chuguev instead. At the same time, some other Russian officers managed to slip into the unit.⁵⁹ The practice of selective regulations was not unknown in the Russian Empire, after all.

The Greek Battalion was an ethnically based unit, formed primarily, but not entirely, from those Greeks who had resettled in Russia earlier. Once the war started and the Russian troops advanced into the Danubian Principalities, the Greek Battalion served as a core for the new Greek Corps of five battalions, formed from local volunteers.⁶⁰

On January 10, 1805, a retired brigadier — a rank between colonel and general — of the Russian army Il'ia Katarzhi presented a project for a Moldavian Cossack Host to the government. Katarzhi himself was originally a Moldavian noble, thus having good connections across the imperial border. In Russian service he became a powerful landowner in New Russia, commander of borderguard forces (*nachal'nik pogranichnykh del*) and later would also receive rank of general. The idea of his project was to expand the Bug Host to the extent that all territory between the Bug and Dniester rivers would be granted to cossacks. Moldavian cossacks would serve as a showcase of the

⁵⁹ For the rejections see RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 3/111, bundle 183, file 57, fols 28-30. In the end, Don cossack officers were appointed to lead Bug cossacks despite the said regulation.

⁶⁰ Grosul and Danilenko, "K Voprosu ob Uchastii Volonterov," 5–8.

Russian Empire, free from taxes, conscription, billeting, or abuses by landowners. According to Katarzhi, such a demonstration of life in the Russian Empire would attract large numbers of Moldavians, Bulgarians, and Serbs willing to serve the Russian Empire both as warriors and as colonists of a barely settled area.⁶¹ It was an ambitious project, yet it was never implemented, possibly because it was too radical for Russian administrators. After all, cossack units attracted not only foreigners, but runaways as well, who would drain the New Russia region at a time when numerous settlers and workers were needed for the process of colonization.

Although unimplemented, this project deserves mention for at least two reasons. First, Katarzhi practically repeated Potemkin's argumentation supporting the settlement of Bug cossacks along the border which demonstrated continuity in the approaches of Russian officers to the problem of irregulars and their role in the attraction of migrants. Second, Katarzhi's project contained numerous references to the Habsburg Military Frontier another example of the transfer of ideas on the organization of imperial borderlands across imperial borders. Katarzhi's project was not the only one, in this sense. The Habsburg Military Frontier was repeatedly mentioned in the correspondence, projects, or reform proposals by the Russian military officers of the early-nineteenth century.

Returning to the case of irregulars actually recruited in the Principalities, instead of Katarzhi's plan, the term "Moldavian cossacks" was used to identify six volunteer regiments, made up of three cavalry and three

⁶¹ RGIA, fund 1286, inventory 1, file 219b, fol. 226.

infantry units.⁶² These regiments were recruited during late 1806 and early 1807 by another Moldavian noble in Russian service, Colonel Nikolai Kantakuzin (Kantakuzen).

Kantakuzin was the appointed ataman of the Bug Cossack Host, yet during the war of 1806 – 1812 he was assigned primarily the task of recruiting additional volunteers in the Principalities. In the documents of the College of War, cavalry units recruited by Kantakuzin were called the First, Second, and Third Moldavian Volunteer Cossack Regiments – with the two terms “cossack” and “volunteer” being used at the same time.⁶³ These cossack regiments were formed on the model of the Bug cossacks — who in turn had been organized as Don cossacks — while infantry volunteers served under the model of the Greek battalion. Consequently, the restored and reorganized Bug and Greek irregulars not only attracted volunteers but also served as an organizational template, which could easily be applied to other irregulars as well.

Due to source limitations, it is difficult to assess the numbers of Balkan volunteers who joined the Russian army in 1806 – 1807. The Romanian historian Radu Rosetti states that by April, 1807 there were around 10.000 volunteers in Wallachia, while the Moldavian scholars G. Grosul and R.

⁶² RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 3/111, bundle 181, file 71; fund 13, inventory 3/111, bundle 183, file 57; fund 13, inventory 3/111, bundle 183, file 121.

⁶³ Despite being described by contemporaries as a coward in battle and corrupt in administration, Kantakuzin nevertheless was quite successful in the recruitment and equipment of volunteers. For more on him see: A. F. Lanzheron, “Zapiski Grafa Lanzherona: Voina Rossii s Turtsiei 1806-1812 gg.,” *Russkaia Starina* 130, no. 6 (1907): 600–602; A. S. Lozheshnyk, “Otamany Buz’koho Kozats’koho Viis’ka: Prosopohrafichnyi Portret,” *Naukovi Pratsi Istorychnoho Fakul’tetu Zaporiz’koho Natsional’noho Universytetu* 36 (2013): 57.

Danilenko estimate the number of volunteers there as 20.000 by August, 1807.⁶⁴

There are, however, some problems with these figures, which will further illustrate the controversies over cossack status. In his calculations, Rosetti includes two hussar regiments of Prince Constantine Ypsilanti's bodyguards. Grosul and Danilenko, in contrast, do not consider these units as volunteers. They, however, include the Danubian Delta Cossack Host, recruited primarily from the former Zaporozhian cossacks and not from the locals, into the category of volunteers. The Ukrainian historian Anatolii Bachinskii, followed by later Ukrainian historiography, emphasizes the Zaporozhian origins of the Danubian Delta cossacks and thus counts them separately from other volunteer units.⁶⁵

Taking into account the surviving sources and the impossibility to find out real backgrounds of the early nineteenth century irregulars, the debate on the ethnic origins of Danubian Delta cossacks will be largely pointless – the same way as the debate on the primacy of one or another ethnicity in the Bug Cossack Host. At the same time, one should not discard the perceived or imagined distinctions between the former Zaporozhians and Principalities locals in the eyes of imperial officials – their contemporaries.

Furthermore, two volunteer units were called Wallachian (*Valashskie* or *Valakhskie*) Cossack Regiments — a name that can be encountered in both

⁶⁴ Radu Rosetti, *Arhiva Senatorilor din Chisinău si Ocupatia Rusească Dela 1806-1812*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Inst. de Arte Grafice Carol Göbl, 1909), 122; Grosul and Danilenko, "K Voprosu ob Uchastii Volonterov," 11.

⁶⁵ Bachinskii, "Narodnaia Kolonizatsiia Pridunaiskikh Stepei," 269.

primary sources and in literature.⁶⁶ Organized as cavalry regiments, they fielded up to 1.000 men each and served in the corps commanded by Russian general-lieutenants Miloradovich and Kamenskii. Not much is known about these units, besides their combat history: they helped Kara-George in Serbia, participated in the Russian advance on Giurgiu fortress and later fought at Obileshti (contemporary Romania).

On August 12, 1807, the Truce of Slobodzeia was signed, ending hostilities until March 12, 1809. In the absence of conflict, the majority of volunteer units were disbanded, including one Wallachian Cossack Regiment. The few irregulars that remained patrolled the border along the Danube and repressed banditry in the Principalities.⁶⁷ As for volunteers recruited in 1809 – 1812, they were often used to replace casualties in existing units, both regular and irregular, making estimation of their numbers practically impossible.

The turn toward scattering the volunteers among Russian soldiers deserves attention. The Russian officers' quite possibly were simply unable to properly control separate units that consisted of volunteers only.⁶⁸ As was common in frontier warfare in general, and a recurring factor in the Russian-Ottoman wars in particular, volunteers were extremely prone to desertion and banditry. Both sides were eager to deploy masses of irregulars during

⁶⁶ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 3/111, bundle 185, file 144; fund 13, inventory 3/111, bundle 186, file 107; Rosetti, *Arhiva Senatorilor din Chisinău si Ocupatia Rusească Dela 1806-1812*, 1:122; Grosul and Danilenko, "K Voprosu ob Uchastii Volonterov," 10–12. Consequently, if we take the figures of Grosul and Danilenko, and deduct both Wallachian and Danubian cossack numbers, we will have approximately 17.000 volunteers.

⁶⁷ Grosul and Danilenko, "K Voprosu ob Uchastii Volonterov," 17–18.

⁶⁸ Sergei Voskoboinikov, "Uchastie Donskikh Kazakov v Russko-Turetskoi Voine 1806-1812 gg." (Candidate of Sciences diss., Rostovskii Gosudarstvennyi Pedagogicheskii Universitet, 2006), 72.

wartime, yet it was a high-risk measure. Armed and experienced people had to be dealt with extremely carefully in order to not become destabilizing forces during peacetime.

What happened after the war relating to rewards given to cossacks and other irregulars, sheds additional light on the vagueness of cossackdom. According to the documents certifying military service given to volunteers by the Russian command, foreign volunteers were allowed to resettle in the Russian Empire. Some volunteers used this opportunity and settled in Bessarabia, New Russia, or elsewhere.⁶⁹ Once again, volunteers were promised exemption from taxes, but, as had happened with other irregular units in the past, overzealous tax collectors often ignored the volunteers' documents.⁷⁰

The situation with the Wallachian cossacks, however, was even more complicated and reinforces the impression of the vague and contentious nature of cossack status. In 1810, Poruchik Georgii Dmitriev who had previously served with the Greek irregulars and later in the Wallachian Regiment, petitioned the College of War to grant him documents certifying his right to live in the Russian Empire and conferring military rank. His petition was rejected on revealing grounds. As stated in the correspondence between the Ministry of War and generals in Moldavia, there had been no Wallachian Cossack Regiment in the Russian army.⁷¹ According to the Ministry of War officials, this unit was both organized and funded personally by Moldavian

⁶⁹ ANRM, fund 1, inventory 1, file 74; fund 1, inventory 1, file 366.

⁷⁰ Grosul and Danilenko, "K Voprosu ob Uchastii Volonterov," 23–24.

⁷¹ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 3/111, bundle 186, file 107, fols 1-22.

Prince Ypsilanti.⁷² Even if commanders of the Russian forces knew about this regiment existence, no one from the Russian side had sanctioned its creation. Consequently, there was no one of official status who could be referred to in the contract with the volunteers.

This case provides additional evidence of the lack of coordination between imperial institutions: even if the Ministry of War officials had no data on the unit, the representatives of the Russian Senate supervised the Divans of Principalities during the war. It is a fair assumption that they at least knew about the unit, given that, according to Dmitriev's petition, Ypsilanti claimed that he organized the Wallachian Regiment at the behest of the Russian Emperor. In retrospect, however, it is very difficult to prove Ypsilanti's claim. It is even unclear whether the claim itself was really his or that of a lower-level recruiter.

The organization of the Wallachian Cossack Regiments did not differ from other volunteer units. Their pay was slightly higher than that of infantry volunteers, but this was the norm for mounted irregulars, who had to maintain their mounts. In this case the term cossack appears to signify only their role as light cavalry. On the other hand, Ypsilanti might have used the term "cossack" for his regiments as an advertisement for attracting more volunteers. As will be demonstrated below, cossackdom was known and respected in the Principalities; it even carried expectations of privilege and welfare compared to other forms of military service.

The experience of the cossacks recruited in Principalities exhibits

⁷² RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 3/111, bundle 186, file 107, fols 13-13v

elements of continuity in 1812 and 1817. In autumn of 1812, the proposal to establish a new cossack unit in Bessarabia was submitted by Hryhorii Shostak. Hryhorii was a member of the Little Russian dynasty, which traced its roots to the Kiev region in the fifteenth century. His forebears were also quite prominent as Zaporozhian starshyna in the eighteenth century. Shostaks successfully integrated into the imperial nobility and preserved their vast landholdings. For instance, the son of Hryhorii Shostak, Vasyl', inherited 20.000 *desiatin* and 700 serfs.

Hryhorii Shostak's possible motivation behind this proposal was studied by Anatolii Khromov, who not only mentions the potential usefulness of cossacks as border guards in the region, but also Shostak's wish to implement the project himself — most probably bidding for the title of ataman. It appears that Shostak's mixed motives included personal ambition, a celebration of his origins, and more generalized aspiration to restore cossack glory, if only on a local level.⁷³

The project was submitted to Admiral Pavel Chichagov, who, commented favorably and forwarded it to the civilian governor of Bessarabia Scarlat Sturdza. Sturdza, however, was critical of the proposal. The governor singled out the Danubian Delta cossacks of 1807 as an example of a unit causing disorder and attracting numerous runaway serfs. Furthermore, Sturdza doubted that a cossack unit recruited from a random mix of peoples would be as effective as proper cossacks living on wild frontiers, say Black

⁷³ Anatolii Khromov, *Kozatstvo v Politytsi Pivdenoukrains'kykh Upravlintsiv XIX st.* (Odessa: n.p., 2014), 49.

Sea cossacks. Personal conflicts between Shostaks and influential families of Moldavian *boiars* were probably another factor that led to the eventual rejection of the project.⁷⁴ Shostak's project, however, was not the last one to surface at this time.

The idea of recruiting cossacks in Bessarabia was reconsidered once again in 1817.⁷⁵ According to the documents of the General Staff Inspectorate (*Inspektorskii Departament Glavnogo Shtaba EIV*), in October, 1817 Emperor Alexander I ordered 3.000 sabres to be delivered from arsenals to Bessarabia for the arming of the cossacks being recruited there.⁷⁶ Indeed, at that point, two factors coincided in favor of creating a new cossack unit in the region.

First, Count Ioannis Kapodistrias received a petition from Bessarabia – a project regarding the establishment of a local militia called *kalarashi*. At that point, Kapodistrias was serving in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, yet he was the person responsible for the administrative division of Bessarabia, which had been ceded to the Russian Empire in 1812, according to the Treaty of Bucharest. The authorship of the project is uncertain. It may be attributed either to the Bessarabian proconsul General Alexei Bakhmetev or to local notables interested in raising some sort of provincial guard. What is striking, however, is the use of the local term *kalarashi*. In Moldavia and Wallachia the term was applied to a category of military servitors who instead of paying

⁷⁴ Khromov, *Kozatstvo v Politytsi Pivdenoukrains'kykh Upravlintsiv*, 50.

⁷⁵ On the Russian annexation of Bessarabia see George Jewsbury, *The Russian Annexation of Bessarabia 1774-1828: A Study of Imperial Expansion* (New York: East European Quarterly, 1976); Andrej Kusko and Viktor Taki, *Bessarabiia v Sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii 1812-1917* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012).

⁷⁶ DAOO, fund 1, inventory 214, year 1817, file 13, fol. 19.

taxes maintained their own weapons and mounts, and served as local mounted police. According to the project, there had to be 2.700 *kalarashi*, serving a minimum of four months every year — i.e., nine hundred men on active service rotated two times a year — who were exempted from all kinds of taxes and public duties.⁷⁷

Second, on October 8, 1817 Emperor Alexander signed a decree for the reorganization of Bug Cossack Host into a regular Bug Uhlan Division.⁷⁸ Former cossacks became military colonists — a fabled yet stillborn social experiment devised by Aleksei Arakcheev and supported by Alexander. The revolt of Bug cossacks that followed was brutally suppressed.⁷⁹

A contradiction, however, arose from the fact that the majority of former cossacks, who turned into military colonists, were forced to take oaths of fealty in front of loaded cannons, given that the Russian command perfectly recognized that a considerable number of former cossack officers “hated” (sic) regular service.⁸⁰ Consequently, the Emperor believed that these experienced officers could serve as a cadre for a cossack host being recruited in nearby Bessarabia. Bakhmetev objected, declaring that the Bug officers knew neither the local customs nor the Moldavian language, so they would

⁷⁷ DAOO, fund 1, inventory 214, year 1817, file 13, fols 8-18.

⁷⁸ PSZ, vol. 34, no. 17081.

⁷⁹ For a detailed reconstruction of the revolt see Khioni, “Bugskie Kazaki i Ikh Bor’ba,” 176–95.

⁸⁰ From correspondence between Arakcheev and Bakhmetev in January 1818: “... *po preobrazovaniiu bugskikh polkov ... nemaloe chislo byvshkih v nikh ofitserov po nenavisti ikh k reguliarnoi sluzhbe ...*” DAOO, fund 1, inventory 214, year 1817, file 13, fols 26-30.

not be welcomed in Bessarabian units.⁸¹ Important is the fact that at some point during discussions of the project the term *kalarashi* from the original proposal, was replaced by cossacks — a term much better known to imperial administrators and officers in St. Petersburg.

Soon, officers from the Dubny Commisariat reported that the unit had been established and the recruitment process had started.⁸² Recruitment, however, was not very successful — by September 1819 approximately two hundred men had joined the unit.⁸³ One reason for this unpopularity may be found in a petition, submitted in mid-1819, where *kalarashi* requested Bakhmetev to publicly rename them cossacks.

According to this document, local peasants did not recognize the petitioners' military status: locals not only denied supplies to *kalarashi*, but even insulted and beat them. From the perspective of petitioners, an official designation as cossack would increase the social status of the servitors, prevent those who had already joined the unit from leaving, as well as attract new volunteers.⁸⁴

It turns out that although this irregular unit was decreed to be cossack in St. Petersburg, the decree was not implemented by the Bessarabian administration. Indeed, in official correspondence the unit was variously called

⁸¹ DAOO, fund 1, inventory 214, year 1817, file 13. This objection was true only partially. As mentioned above, Bug cossacks were envisioned as a unit recruited from foreign subjects and many Moldavians were most certainly present among their ranks. Furthermore, taking into account the borderland nature of the region, mixed marriages, seasonal work, and the fact that Moldavia was a traditional haven for Russian deserters and runaways, it is likely that Bessarabians and former Bug Cossacks were quite aware of each other's languages and customs.

⁸² DAOO, fund 1, inventory 214, year 1817, file 13, fols 31-32.

⁸³ DAOO, fund 1, inventory 214, year 1817, file 13, fols 86-88.

⁸⁴ DAOO, fund 1, inventory 214, year 1817, file 13, fol. 83a.

kalarashi, Bessarabian Local Militia (*zemskaia strazha*), Bessarabian cossacks or cohort (*kogortnye*) cossacks. In their petitions *kalarashi*, however, continued to express the belief that an official recognition of cossack status, even if in name only, would be much more prestigious.⁸⁵

During January, 1820, the unit was still well understaffed, consisting of only 400 men instead of the required 2.700. Later 1820, this number further decreased, as dozens of irregulars found out that supplying their own weapons, mounts, and ammunition could be more expensive than paying taxes. A petition by Khorunzhyi Lozebnikov also indicates that the recruiters were not totally honest with the recruits. According to Lozebnikov, when he enlisted, *Sotnik* Krupenskii, the commander of the *kalarashi*, assured him that the host was established along the lines of Don cossacks, meaning not only an elevation of social status, but also payment of a salary during active service. *Kalarashi*, however, received no salary since exemption from taxes was considered as an equivalent payment. Still, due to miscommunication between the military and civilian authorities — an occurrence unfortunately all too common in the Russian Empire — lists of Bessarabian cossacks were not properly forwarded to tax-collectors. As a result only some of these cossacks were granted exemption from taxes and other duties.⁸⁶ Consequently, the number of Bessarabian cossacks decreased till the unit faded away. During an inspection in 1824, the new Governor-General of New Russia and Bessarabia, Mikhail Vorontsov, mentioned this unit as “already non-

⁸⁵ I could not locate any official reaction to the above petition – if such there was.

⁸⁶ DAOO, fund 1, inventory 214, year 1817, file 13, fols 120-160.

existent.”⁸⁷

And what about those 3.000 sabres, which were sent to arm the Bessarabian cossacks? In the same 1824 inspection the Artillery Department found out that of the 3.000, seven disappeared in unknown circumstances while only 400 were given to the cossacks and were then returned upon the dissolution of the unit. The remaining two and half thousand just rusted away in the arsenals, many of them beyond repair by that date.⁸⁸

The practice of using volunteers from the Balkans in the Russian army established during the previous wars continued in the later Russo-Turkish Wars of 1828 – 29, 1853 – 1856, and 1877 – 1878. Still, the histories of short-lived, semi-ghost, volunteer units throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century demonstrate the persistence of blurred social categories in the Russian Empire and competing interpretations of cossackdom.

Volunteers did not become a distinct social group, yet neither were they designated in official correspondence as peasants or soldiers. Sometimes volunteers could be named cossacks, even though they had little or no connection to local traditions, but it remained unclear to what degree. Since there was little or no legislation covering the status of volunteers, the fate of volunteers after each war was decided on a case-by-case basis. Even after the end of a war, various groups of volunteers could receive separate decrees outlining the terms of their future life in the Russian Empire. With each group of volunteers treated separately and differently, the result was a prolonged

⁸⁷ DAOO, fund 1, inventory 214, year 1817, file 13, fols 193-195.

⁸⁸ DAOO, fund 1, inventory 214, year 1817, file 13, fol. 204.

three-way correspondence between local civilian authorities, the regional military command, and St. Petersburg. All in all, volunteer status was similar to cossack status in the sense that both were barely defined at this point.⁸⁹

Furthermore, the cases of the Moldavian, Wallachian, and Bessarabian cossacks illustrate the difficulties that the empire faced when attempting to implement its policies in borderland regions. It also demonstrates how the fluidity of frontier categories influenced the range of interpretations about their place in Russian society. Cossackdom could mean the promise of status and income to locals serving as Bug or Bessarabian cossacks. In St. Petersburg, however, cossackdom could be understood simply as an umbrella term for any irregular, and thus, like any broad term, could be indiscriminately used or ignored as any author of a document or clerk writing it thought fit.

The difference between the promises given to attract military servitors during the war and the actual rewards given to them was vast. In manifestos and proclamations which were not binding documents, benefits mentioned could be easily disregarded in favor of numerous practical considerations such as the need to colonize specific regions, control the movement of population, or to field more troops.

Nevertheless, the Russian propaganda was successful in attracting volunteers to serve in cossack-like units. There still were hundreds or even thousands wishing to help the Russian army during each Russo-Turkish War

⁸⁹ As a side note, in the neighboring region of Little Russia the similar distinction between various categories of military servitors existed as well – fully-pledged cossacks (*tovarystvo*) and hired mercenaries or volunteers (*okhotnyky*). For more on this see Oleksii Sokyрко, *Lytsari Druhoho Sortu: Naimane Viis'ko Livoberezhnoi Het'manshchyny 1669-1726 rr.* (Kyiv: Tempora, 2006).

– even if promises made to their predecessors had never been properly fulfilled. While sources that can shed lights on volunteers' true motivations barely exist today, various factors may be attributed to the success of the Russian recruitment of foreign servitors: common Orthodox fate, trust in the Russian monarch as a person, the status of the Russian Empire as a state, or in the Russian army as an institution, possibility to plunder during the war, or chance to get better allotments after. In the end, one should not discard the utopian expectations associated with the cossackdom in the popular imagination either.

2.2. Tatar and Nogai cossacks

Another example of the multiplicity of forms and functions of cossack hosts, deals with groups recruited from *inorodtsy* living in the Russian Empire and nomads wandering between the Russian and Ottoman Empire with little respect for the imperial borders.⁹⁰ As has been demonstrated, the cossack host, as a form of both administrative and military organization, was widely used by Russian imperial officials and could denote not only the traditional cossack communities, but many other irregular units as well. The creation of cossack units from Tatars and Nogais not only relates to the recruitment of military servitors, but represents a step towards their inclusion into the broader imperial social structure. Cossackdom, in this case, served as an organizational framework — once again vague, but performing a useful

⁹⁰ John Slocum, “Who, and When, Were the Inorodtsy? The Evolution of the Category of 'Aliens' in Imperial Russia,” *Russian Review* 57, no. 2 (1998): 173–90.

function for Russian administrators.

The three main groups of *inorodtsy*, which inhabited Pontic Steppe and were called cossacks at certain points, were Kalmyks, Crimean Tatars, and Nogais. Kalmyks were famous for preserving their distinct Buddhist beliefs while being surrounded by Muslim neighbors.⁹¹ In the mid seventeenth century part of Kalmyk hordes became Russian subjects, while attempts to enroll Kalmyks into cossack-like service can be traced to the 1730s, when Kalmyk irregular regiments were established near Stavropol' on Volga River and in Astrakhan.⁹² Besides, Kalmyk communities were scattered across the steppes and later could be found in many other cossack units: hosts of Don, Black Sea, Astrakhan, Chuguev and Orenburg. Since Kalmyks were called to serve in cossack units, one may conclude that it was a measure to limit Kalmyks' mobility and to attach them to whatever cossack community they lived close to. At the same time, when fielded in European campaigns, Kalmyks were feared the same way as cossacks – be it for their savage appearance or for their fighting qualities.

Irregulars recruited from Crimean Tatars were a phenomenon of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and their functions were slightly different. Just after the 1783 annexation of Crimea, imperial officials started working on the inclusion of the Tatar *murzas* into the all-imperial nobility.⁹³

⁹¹ For more on Kalmyks' encounter with Russia see Michael Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met: The Russian State And the Kalmyk Nomads, 1600-1771* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

⁹² Kazin and Shenk, *Kazach'i Voiska*, 34.

⁹³ On the controversies and complexities of inclusion of Tatar *murzas* into *dvorianstvo* see Kelly O'Neill, "Rethinking Elite Integration: The Crimean Murzas and the Evolution of Russian Nobility," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 51, no. 2–3 (2011): 397–417.

Besides being another step toward incorporating the local population into imperial society, there were also benefits from the establishment of five, two hundred strong, Tavrida (*Tavrisheskie*) Divisions in 1784.⁹⁴

Tatar irregulars first served as ceremonial illustrations of the indigenous local population and its loyalty during Catherine's journey to the south in 1787. During the war of 1787 – 1792, however, the Russian government was not completely convinced about the true loyalty of Tatars, and thus, the number of armed Tatars decreased, while those who continued their service were used either as a part of larger army units, or as auxiliaries serving as police, assigned to the delivery of mail, and other communications services. Later, in 1790, Tatars were sent to serve in Poland distant from the Russo-Turkish front. Later, it was largely the same story as with Greek irregulars and Bug cossacks: the Tatar unit was disbanded in 1796 as unnecessary only to be restored in 1806 to help alleviate the pressure for additional manpower during the Napoleonic wars. Four Tatar irregular regiments served till the end of the War of the Sixth Coalition (*Zagranichnyi Pokhod 1813 – 1814*).⁹⁵

Another envisioned feature of Tatar irregulars emerges in the correspondence between the Ministry of War and governor de Richelieu in 1807. According to Richelieu, Tatars could not be proper farmers (*khoziaevami*) due to their religious beliefs, which forbade women from leaving their houses. With only men able to work in the field, farms would not prosper, which in turn meant, for the empire, that it would be more beneficial

⁹⁴ PSZ, vol. 22, no. 15945.

⁹⁵ Kazin and Shenk, *Kazach'i Voiska*, 24; Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, 87–88; Bachyns'ka et al., *Kozatstvo na Pivdni Ukrainy Kinets' XVIII-XIX Stolittia*, 42–43.

to employ Tatars as irregular troops instead of as a tax-paying population. Richelieu, however, recognized that for political reasons it would be best to employ Crimean Tatar irregulars as police in regions with Tatar populations that had been integrated into the Russian society long before: Kazan and Astrakhan.⁹⁶

Following Richelieu, the deployment of Crimeans in those regions would be a double gain: on the one hand, they would assist local police in their daily duties, on the other, Crimeans would better adopt themselves to the ways that Islam could coexist with Russian legislation and traditions.⁹⁷ In 1827, Tatars were also included into the Life-Guards, where they served not only as the Emperor's personal bodyguards, but also as manifestations of ethnic diversity and evidence of a successful conversion of a former opposition to loyal servitors.⁹⁸

In comparing Tatar irregulars from 1784 – 1796, to other cossacks, one finds many similarities, such as tax exemption in return for military service. Almost the only difference was the absence of an Orthodox priest attached to the unit. Tatar regiments of 1806 – 1814, however, are more similar to *opolcheniia* of 1812 and other temporary units maintained only for the duration of specific campaigns. As for other functions — in the case of

⁹⁶ “... *kakomu zhe byt' khoziaistvu kogda vse raboty ispravliaiutsia odnimi tol'ko muzhcinami ...*” RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 13/111, bundle 183, file 20, fols 3-4.

⁹⁷ “... *gde uvidia raznosti khoziaistva edinoversev ikh udostoverias' chto ot peremeny obychaia kotoroi zakonom oni pochitaiut religiia ikh ne teriaet svoei sily a imushchestvo priobretaetsia ...*” RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 13/111, bundle 183, file 20, fols 4-5.

⁹⁸ On the importance of such manifestations in monarchies see: Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Richelieu's plan being adopted — the Tatars' irregular status would later be used as a model for the incorporation of groups into imperial society and means of education in ways of coexistence between religious customs and imperial legislation.

So, by the early nineteenth century the Russian Empire had already gained considerable experience in assigning *inorodtsy* to irregular units, whether or not they were designated as cossacks. Thus, the following case of Nogai cossacks is not unique, yet, is quite illustrative. First, it once more emphasizes the variety of cossackdom forms and functions. Second, it is a proper example of both vagueness of cossack status and abuses which could follow from it. Finally, it represents characteristic example of a divided frontier community which ended up on different sides of the imperial borders — in this sense comparable to Zaporozhian and Nekrasovtsy cossacks, Crimean Tatars, and inhabitants of the Danubian principalities. As in other cases of divided communities, imperial officials were interested in creating favorable conditions on their side of the border that would be attractive for potential migrants wishing to join their brethren.

The Nogais, wandering the Pontic and pre-Caucasian Steppes, were the remnants of the once powerful Nogai Horde of the fifteenth – seventeenth centuries. Later, as the Nogai Horde fell due to internal strife and feuds, the Crimean Khanate subjugated them. Upon the annexation of the Crimeans in 1783, Russian officials considered several options to settle Nogai: between

Volga and Don or even in Saratov, Penza, or Tambov provinces – *Priural'e*.⁹⁹

Rumors of possible resettlement to the Urals caused mass migration of Nogais to the Ottoman Empire. Russian attempts to control these nomads' movement and prevent emigration from the Russian Empire was counterproductive, as Nogais rebelled in August – October, 1783. The brutal suppression of the revolt only bolstered the numbers of those who were fleeing from Russian rule to the Ottoman-controlled Caucasus and Bessarabia. If before the revolt approximately 80.000 Nogai nomadic households (*kibitki*) lived in the territories controlled by Russia, after October 1783 there were only 3.000.¹⁰⁰ Having failed with the stick, the Russian government switched to the carrot: army ranks, grants of patents of nobility along with thousands of desiatina land for loyal Nogai elites – *murzas*; tax exemptions for commoners; lavish promises for those who would return from the Ottoman lands. Ironically, some Ottoman administrators considered Nogai troublesome enough to welcome rather than oppose Russian attempts to relocate them. For instance, in 1801 Pasha of Anapa wrote that he would be happy if Nogais living near the Kuban' River were resettled somewhere and made assurances that in no way he would oppose Russian attempts to attract Nogais to the Russian lands.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ The episode on Nogai cossacks below is based primarily on RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 916, fols 78-78v and comments on it by Vladyslav Hrybovs'kyi published in V. V. Hrybovs'kyi, "Nohais'ke Kozats'ke Viis'ko: Peredumovy i Protse Formuvannia," *Pivdenna Ukraina* 6 (2001.): 152–55. See also Fedor Lobzhanidze, "Nogaitsy Severo-Zapadnogo Kavkaza vo Vneshnei Politike Rossii vo Vtoroi Polovine XVIII – 20kh gg. XIX vv." (Candidate of Sciences diss., Institut istorii, arkheologii i etnografii DNTs RAN, 2005).

¹⁰⁰ Hrybovs'kyi, *Nohais'ke Kozats'ke Viis'ko*, 156.

¹⁰¹ RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 916, fols 13-13v.

In the 1780s – early 1790s the status of the majority of Nogais was not defined, hovering between that of state peasants and foreign colonists. On the one hand, Nogai were not supervised by the Foreign Colonists Custody Office (*Opekunskaiia Kontora Inostrannykh Poselentsev*), on the other, they enjoyed tax exemptions thus were treated preferably compared to state peasants.¹⁰² Indeed, such an undefined status was characteristic of many other communities inhabiting New Russia and other borderlands. As for those Nogais who were fighting alongside Ottomans in the 1787 – 1792 war, and were taken as prisoners of war, some of them were assigned to the existing Nogai communities, while some were assigned as serfs for landowners in Crimea.¹⁰³

In general, however, the government postponed any attempts to forcefully settle nomadic Nogais — taking into account the need to preserve traditional rights and way of life in hopes of attracting emigrants back. The state also allotted Nogais around 350.000 desiatinas of land along the shore of the Azov Sea — between Berda and Tokmak rivers. The available sources on Nogai population mention 5.062 males and 4.828 females as for January 1794 in this region. On June, 1801, the figure was revised to number 7.883 males.¹⁰⁴

The status of Nogais, the same way as the status of other communities in the region, was far from stable and secure. In 1799, as part of Paul's

¹⁰² E. I. Druzhinina, *Iuzhnaia Ukraina v 1800-1825 gg.*, 124–26.

¹⁰³ Gribovskii, “Anapskie Nogaitsy' v Pomeschchich'ikh Khoziaistvakh Iuzhnoi Ukrainy v Kontse XVIII – Nachale XIX vv,” 12-18.

¹⁰⁴ RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 916, fols 67-68.

attempts to revoke his mother's policies, Nogais were fully converted into state peasants and obliged to both pay taxes and provide recruits. The Senate decision of October 15, 1800, listed a number of other social categories, among those living in Tavrida, who would be transferred into state peasants altogether: Nogais, Kirgiz, former Tatar irregulars, former Greek irregulars – even if some of them had previously been exempted from taxes as colonists or cossacks.¹⁰⁵

The transformation of Nogais into state peasants reduced the personal power of their previous leader, Baiazet Bei (Beyazet Beg), the former chief of Nogai Hordes and the Commander (*nachal'nik*) of the Nogai Expedition, previously appointed as such by Tavrida Governor Semen Zhegulin.¹⁰⁶ In effect, there was an overlapping jurisdiction between the previous indirect rule by local elites and new attempts to introduce an imperial provincial administration. Needless to say, the provincial administration encountered serious difficulties in working with the nomadic society.

By early 1801 approximately 10.000 Nogai families still remained in Ottoman Bessarabia. Yet, the rebellion started by Osman Pazvantoglu – the Ottoman governor of Vidin Sanjak (contemporary Bulgaria) who had turned against his masters in 1793 – was still raging throughout the Ottoman Balkans. Consequently, the Bessarabian Nogais contacted Baiazet Bei in order to assist with their resettlement to Russia. Baiazet Bei sent this request to governor Mikhel'son, who in turn, forwarded it to Paul I.¹⁰⁷ Paul ordered

¹⁰⁵ RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 916, fols 33-33v.

¹⁰⁶ RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 916, fols 49-51.

¹⁰⁷ RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 916, fols 13-17.

preparations for such resettlement to start, yet due to the coup of March 11, 1801, he did not live to see its results.

Alexander, however, did not wish to provoke the Ottomans immediately upon his ascension. He ordered the preparations for resettlement to be slowed down and proceeded to consult with Istanbul on the possibility of the Nogais' shifting their allegiance of their own free will. At the same time, Baiazet Bei, feeling an opportunity to improve his own stance departed to St. Petersburg to personally petition new Tsar on the future status of Nogais in the empire. On June 14, 1801, he submitted a project of the Nogai irregular unit to Alexander.¹⁰⁸

The timing for such a petition was perfect. First, Alexander had announced a return to the policies of his grandmother. Second, Nogais already living in the Russian Empire were complaining about provincial administrators. Third, a large group of Ottoman Nogais was ready to resettle in Russia. The creation of irregular unit from Nogais would presumably both appease Alexander's own dissatisfied subjects and attract migrants.

In the aftermath of the project approval Baiazet Bei not only became the ataman and the only intermediary between the Nogais and St. Petersburg, but also received the rank of Collegiate Councilor: the sixth rank according to the Table of Ranks.¹⁰⁹ His subordinates formally ceased to be state peasants and were granted military banners, yet their actual status warrants further consideration.

¹⁰⁸ RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 916, fols 45-46.

¹⁰⁹ RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 916, fols 70-74.

According to the project submitted by Baiazet Bei, Nogai as natural riders and warriors, sought to field and supply one 1.000 man regiment instead of paying unjustly imposed taxes. Furthermore, the system of several households providing and supplying one warrior was quite familiar to Nogais themselves. Next, traditional elites — murzas — would continue their service as *starshyna*, providing officers for the unit. This service would be also recognized as a step towards ennoblement into the all-imperial *dvorianstvo*. Further, the former Nogai Expedition rights would be restored, transforming it into a sort of Host Chancellery overseeing the Nogai community and providing it with a degree of autonomy. During wartime, some supplies might be required from the government; otherwise, the unit would be self-supplying. Local administration was also to provide extra land grants in case more Nogais would migrate to the Russian Empire.

Alexander promptly approved the project on July 16, 1801, followed by an order dated October 5, 1802, which specified the rosters and general terms of service for Nogai regiments.¹¹⁰

As for the differences between formal and real status of Nogais, it remained blurred. Explicit designation of a unit as cossack was missing both in Baiazet Bei's project and the decree that followed. However, in a memo by governor Ivan Mikhel'son, the following statement appears: "Nogais are required to serve just as Don cossacks, being in constant readiness to raise the regiment, but without other obligations." Thus, unit size,

¹¹⁰ PSZ, vol. 26, no. 20445.

organization, and weaponry were to be identical to that of the Don cossacks.¹¹¹

Baiazet Bei collected the funds for weapons and ammunition throughout the Nogai settlements, totaling approximately 16.000 rubles. Besides, he collected extra money for seemingly legitimate reasons like the purchase of cavalry mounts and forage.¹¹² On February 20, 1803, Baiazet Bei ordered 1.000 rifles, 1.000 sabres, 800 spears, and 500 pairs of pistols from Andrey Veshnikov — a weapon maker from Tula. When, in 1805, imperial officials were assessing the quality of the purchased weapons, they indicated that the reasonable price for them would have been no more than 1.740 rubles altogether. One may only wonder, where the difference between funds collected and funds spent on weapons might have disappeared.¹¹³

As for the recruitment of cossacks, Baiazet Bei used them as his personal guard — similar to *nadvornyye* cossacks of Polish magnates. These cossacks were also useful as a showcase for the inspections of imperial officials in demonstrating that the recruitment process had already started — along with ensuring security from disobedience to the ataman.¹¹⁴

Clearly, Baiazet Bei was taking steps to both enrich himself and to consolidate his own power over Nogais. Such indirect rule could serve as an acceptable compromise for St. Petersburg as well; given that governing

¹¹¹ RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 916, fols 78-78v.

¹¹² RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 917, fols 20-26.

¹¹³ Hrybovs'kyi, "Nohais'ke Kozats'ke Viis'ko," 163.

¹¹⁴ O. Varneke, "Kliasova Borot'ba Sered Nohaitshiv na Pochatku XIX st.," *Skhidnij Svit* 12, no. 3 (1930): 157–62.

over nomads through provincial administration was impossible, while settling nomads forcefully would not only require funds and building materials — scarce in the steppe region — but would cause discontent, potentially leading to revolts or flights across the border. For Baiazet Bei the formation of an irregular unit enabled him to pose as a loyal servant of the Russian Empire and also as a legitimate leader of the Nogais; ruling over his subjects in the manner and style of his ancestors. As Vladyslav Hrybovs'kyi notes, under the guise of cossack host, Baiazet Bei was free to restore the traditional power of bey without any interference from the central government.¹¹⁵

Yet, opposition to Baiazet Bei grew, however, not only, and perhaps not even primarily from commoners, but from other murzas. After all, Baiazet Bei's lineage was not the noblest, according to Nagai standards, and there could be other pretenders to lead the Nogais even if under Russian protection.¹¹⁶ Abuses by Baiazet Bei led both to resistance ranging from numerous complaints to imperial officials in the region to open revolts in 1797 and 1803.

The need to divert regular military forces to suppress Nogais revolts forced imperial officials to reconsider the usefulness of Baiazet Bei's services and to revise the arrangement. There was also concern that the spread of rumors of his abuses could hamper further immigration of Nogais to Russia. Rather than be subordinate to Baiazet Bei,

¹¹⁵ Hrybovs'kyi, "Nohais'ke Kozats'ke Viis'ko," 161.

¹¹⁶ Hrybovs'kyi, "Nohais'ke Kozats'ke Viis'ko," 156.

approximately five hundred group of Nogais who resettled to Russia in 1803, preferred to cease their nomadic way of life and to settle down rather quickly.¹¹⁷

Still, until 1804 imperial officials were reluctant to interfere with the internal affairs of Nogai clans. Instead they preferred to rely completely on indirect rule, recognizing the ataman as an intermediary and believing that the preservation of traditional Nogai ways of life would continue to attract more Nogais from Ottoman lands. On the other hand, they might have been seduced by various favors and bribes offered by Baiazet Bei. The Tavrida governor, Dmitrii Mertvago, characterized Baiazet Bei as a rogue who resorted to every possible trick to cajole officials by gifts.¹¹⁸ This tolerant not to say complicit style of operating in the borderlands has to be put into the context of the period when a high level of corruption was widespread even if it was severely punishable according to the letter of law.

The process of removing Baiazet Bei from power and, thus, of the reorganization of Nogai unit took time and was connected with a competition, if not rivalry, between the Kherson governor Rozenberg and Tavrida governor Mertvago. Mertvago accused Rozenberg of taking bribes from Baiazet Bei and in dragging out the investigation, while Rozenberg accused Mertvago of exceeding the power of his office.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 913, fols 6-17.

¹¹⁸ D. B. Mertvago, *Zapiski 1760 - 1824* (Moscow: Tipografiia Gracheva i Ko, 1867), 190.

¹¹⁹ For more on this rivalry between governors see Hrybovs'kyi, "Nohais'ke Kozats'ke Viis'ko," 167-168.

On May 30, 1804, the commission led by Nestroev — marshal of nobility in Dnieper district (*uezd*) of Tavrida province — was dispatched to the Nogai lands. According to Nestroev, Baiazet Bei ordered his subordinates to keep silent about the irregularities in the administration of the host. On June 1, Nogais of two village communities (*auls*) replied to questioning that they were completely satisfied with the rule of Baiazet Bei. The following day, however, they indicated that they were forced to perjure themselves by Alchyk, one of Baiazet Bei's lieutenants, who was present during the first interviews but had already left by the time of the second round. Some auls abstained from complaining, but the imperial inspectors amassed sufficient evidence of the character and scale of Baiazet Bei abuses and the fact that many Nogais did not want to serve as cossacks. Rather they expressed a preference for a status similar to that of the Tatars, who at that point were exempted from taxes and conscription, yet had to bear communal obligations. Tavrida vice-governor Shostak was sent to Nogai settlements to confirm whether the data gathered during the initial inspection was true. Shostak's revision brought the same results: only one community wanted to be cossacks, while forty one communities preferred to be farmers (*zemledel'tsam*).¹²⁰ This wording, however, requires attention since these were nomads and, quite probably, their understanding of *zemledelie* differed from the understanding of imperial officials.

Regarding the future status of Nogais, the rivals Rozenberg and Mertvago submitted two competing projects. Mertvago's project imagined

¹²⁰ RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 917, fols 20-44.

rapid and enforced transfer of Nogais into state peasants, which would mean not only a change in Nogais' obligations, but their settlement and abandonment of their nomadic ways. Administratively, Nogais would be under a provincial administration, i.e., direct rule of an all-imperial institution that would replace an indirect one managed by intermediaries drawn from the traditional elites. Such a radical change might possibly have stemmed from misunderstandings during the investigation of the complaints of the Nogais. Most probably, the return to their original agricultural status (*pervobytnoe zemledel'cheskoe sostoianie*) meant a reversion to the traditional, pre-cossack way of life for Nogais, yet was taken quite literally by officials.

Rozenberg's project implied that the governmental control over Nogais would nonetheless preserve some aspects of their life style. The office of bailiff of the Nogai hordes (*pristav nogaiskikh ord*) would be established, but settling them down while being encouraged would not be enforced.¹²¹ In the end, Rozenberg's project was approved in St. Petersburg, most probably, due to the lack of resources for carrying out the settlement of Nogais. The Nogai Cossack Host ceased to exist even before its actual creation with the decree on formal dissolution of the unit ordered on May 13, 1805.¹²² Those few murzas, who wished to continue their service as cossack officers, however, were permitted to continue service in the Don Cossack Host.¹²³

¹²¹ Hrybovs'kyi, "Nohais'ke Kozats'ke Viis'ko," 168-169.

¹²² PSZ, vol. 28, no. 21752.

¹²³ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 2/110, bundle 173, file 163, fol. 258.

Another controversy, rising from the short existence of the Nogai Cossack Host, concerned the future legal status of murzas. In 1801, Nogai elites were recognized as nobles by the empire and received corresponding civil status according to the Table of Ranks. Few murzas, however, managed to obtain military officer ranks during these four years of service with Nogai cossacks.

The natural question, which bothered local administrators was how to consider these murzas? Should their military rank be accounted or not? To what degree should brief service in the unit that had been already disbanded — or in some sense never existed — be recognized and rewarded? The question led to a correspondence between provincial officials and the Ministry of War. Unfortunately it was not possible to locate any satisfactory resolution to this case, while the case may never had been resolved at all.¹²⁴ Nogai murzas, who for some time possessed rather ambiguous legal and social status, once more illustrate complexities of traditional communities integration into imperial social space.

Besides, the case of Nogai Cossack Host demonstrates two more functions of cossack units in the Russian Empire: the cossack host could be an instrument of indirect rule based on the local elites with a degree of autonomy for the community. Presumably, if not for Baiazet Bei's abuses, the complaints and the rebellions against him, Nogais could have continued to exist within the official framework of an irregular cossack-like host supervised by their own ataman. After all, the provincial

¹²⁴ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 2/110, bundle 173, file 163, fols 259-260.

administration assigned vast lands to Nogais so that they could preserve their nomadic lifestyle and allowed them to provide troops instead of paying taxes. Yet, due to Baiazet Bei, the rationale behind Nogais as cossacks became questionable as well. If the Nogai neither paid taxes to the treasury nor provided troops to the army, what would be the rationale behind granting them benefits and exemptions?

In the relationship between St. Petersburg and the variety of cossack hosts both sides benefited from a loose organizational arrangement. The government gained from maintaining a structure that assisted them in managing a turbulent frontier without a crushing financial burden. The local elites found a way to preserve their power, improve their status and enrich themselves. Such was the case of Baiazet Bei who did not even speak Russian, yet was able to successfully navigate the intricacies of the imperial bureaucracy. Even when the abuses of Baiazet Bei became known, his punishment was mild, being merely exile to the Don, not to Siberia, and without his belongings being confiscated that he could freely sell before his forced relocation.¹²⁵

The problems of communication over vast, sparsely inhabited frontier zones forced the imperial government to engage intermediaries to rule over peoples whose way of life differed widely from those in the inner provinces and who required innovative and untried forms of imperial legislation. The reality of the situation was that the quality of such intermediaries was not the best, nor were they the most effective servants

¹²⁵ On Bayazet Bei's further fate see Hrybovs'kyi, "Nohais'ke Kozats'ke Viis'ko," 169.

of the empire.

Chapter 3: Promises Unfulfilled

In order to successfully supply the army with men and supplies in the Steppes a tremendous effort was required from both the Russian army and Russian society. By the mid eighteenth century, the Russian army was trained up to European standards of the time; requiring immense quantities of arms and equipment. Yet, these requirements were nearly impossible to fulfill in the arid, under-populated steppe, where distances between supply outlets necessitated forced marches of more than 1.000 kilometers.

Under such conditions the losses from disease, exhaustion, and desertion could easily reduce the force that reached the battlefield or undertook the siege of a fortress on the Black Sea by half. Attrition took a particularly high toll among regulars and cossacks redeployed from other areas such as the Don or Ural. The geographical factor and the difficulties it caused for army logistics in the steppe was a recurring problem for the Russian Empire throughout the period; having previously had great influence on Peter's Azov campaigns of the 1690s, marshal Munnich's crossing of the steppe in 1735, and the above mentioned war with the Ottomans of 1768 – 1774.¹

In addition to the problems posed by geography, the Russian army — as other European armies of that time — suffered from discrepancies

¹ On the logistical difficulties of military campaigns in steppes see A. P Pronshtein, *Don i Steпноe Predkavkaz'e: XVIII – Pervaia Polovina XIX: Sotsial'nye Otnosheniia, Upravlenie, Klassovaia Bor'ba* (Rostov: Izdatel'stvo Rostovskogo Universiteta, 1977), 21–26; Martin van Crevald, *Supplying War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

between the book and actual number of men under arms. Officers themselves were often motivated to leave dead soldiers on the books so that they could receive additional rations and payment. On the other hand, sheer numbers were necessary both to control vast open spaces and to assault Turkish fortresses: undertaking lengthy sieges without properly functioning and secured supply lines was barely possible and could cause even more casualties than a rapid assault.²

In such context, cossackdom in the Russian Empire was not only an instrument for administrating and colonizing the borderlands. It was also useful in raising large numbers of temporary, militia-like troops, which were called cossacks as well. To this end imperial officials exploited the cossack image in popular imagination as a dashing, free defender of the imperial borders from dangerous enemies while at the same time they did not shrink from forceful mobilization and employing coercive measures to recruit and discipline unruly irregular elements.

Thus, in this chapter I will focus on one of the most unorthodox decisions by the Russian command undertaken to field more troops was the establishment of Ekaterinoslav cossacks during the war with the Ottomans

² There were seventy-three levies in the Russian army between 1705 and 1802. These were primarily serfs conscripted for life (before 1793) or for twenty-five years (after 1793). In the mid eighteenth century 3.3 percent of the total eligible male population were under arms in Russia – compared to European average of 1.5 percent. See Christopher Duffy, *Russia's Military Way to the West: Origins and Nature of Russian Military Power 1700-1800* (London: Routledge, 1981), 126–29; Johh Keep, "Feeding the Troops: Russian Army Supply during the Seven Years War," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 29, no. 1 (1987): 24–44. On the problems of mobilization specifically in the Pontic Steppe region see also: Virginia Aksan, "The One-Eyed Fighting the Blind: Mobilization, Supply, and Command in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774," *The International History Review* 15, no. 2 (1993): 222–26.

from 1787 – 1792. On a previously unprecedented scale, locals were transferred into a newly created Ekaterinoslav Cossack Host, also known as Ekaterinoslav Cossack Corps or New Don (*Novodonskoe*) Cossack Host, numbering 15.000 sabers with another 50.000 cossacks assigned to supply and reinforce the regiments in the field. It was a bold decision given the fact that the government had previously disbanded a much smaller number of 12.000 Zaporozhian cossacks as a potentially troublesome force. Next, I will move to preliminary generalizations on the functions of cossacks in the Russian Empire at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Finally, the same way as in the previous chapter, I will compare to what degree the promises to militia-like cossacks stated in manifestos and proclamations made at the stage of their recruitment were fulfilled? The answer to this question will illustrate the gap between the will of the imperial authorities and their capability to carry out their intentions in the southern borderlands remote from the center of power.

3.1 Cossacks as Opolchenie: Ekaterinoslav Cossack Host

As the war with the Ottomans loomed in the summer of 1787, Prince Potemkin, the Commander of all irregular units in the Russian Empire and the principal organizer of cossack units in the Pontic Steppe region in the 1780s, found himself facing a double challenge; he had not only to defend New Russia, but also to consolidate Russian claims over it by forcing Ottomans to accept previous territorial gains made by the Russian Empire.

Having considered the geography and vulnerability of the regular army

in the steppe, Potemkin, grasped the growing importance of locally raised irregular units that could be at least partially self-sustaining. Besides, locals also possessed the advantage of knowing the region. Furthermore, light infantry and light cavalry organized on the cossack model were necessary to counter masses of light cavalry employed by the Ottoman army. Zaporozhian cossacks, however, had already been disbanded, while foreign volunteers while valuable were yet insufficient to meet the requirements of the time. Taking these factors into account, Potemkin approached the Empress with a proposal to create a new cossack unit to defend the southern border.

Catherine looked favorably on this idea and on July 3, 1787, issued a decree, which allowed transfer of *odnodvortsy* who lived in Ekaterinoslav province along the former Ukrainian defense line into cossack units.³ Next, on September 11, the Senate approved the resettlement of former *odnodvortsy* as well as state peasants from the overpopulated province of Kursk to the province of Ekaterinoslav. The same edict accepted 762 petitions previously submitted by Kursk inhabitants. These individuals also ended up as Ekaterinoslav cossacks. So did the recruitment begin for the unit that would later, on November 12, be named the Ekaterinoslav Cossack Host.

Two more groups were added into the Ekaterinoslav Host on January 14, 1788. These were *odnodvortsy* and state peasants living near Chuguev together with Old Believers living in free villages (*slobodas*) of Ekaterinoslav

³ PSZ, vol. 22, no. 16552. The Ukrainian defense line was a series of fortifications built in 1730-1740s and active till 1760s. The importance of line decreased with the Russian advance and the need for a new line to the south – the Dnieper defense line. After the annexation of Crimea in 1783, both lines were no longer needed. All in all, Ukrainian lines were similar to other movable frontiers of the empire in Caucasus, Siberia or Central Asia.

province.⁴ The same decree also allowed Potemkin to purchase private estates between Bug and Ingulets Rivers on behalf of the provincial treasury and to convert serfs living there into cossackdom. Some of Potemkin's personal serfs were sold to the treasury this way in order to become cossacks.

Burghers (*meshchane*) of Ekaterinoslav, Voznesensk, and Kharkov provinces were transferred into cossacks later in January – only townspeople rich enough to be enrolled as merchants (*kupechestvo*) and foreigners were exempt.⁵ Taking into account that by this time the Charter to Towns of 1785 had already been announced and the estate boundaries of town communities were outlined, the question remains how recruitment into cossacks by decree corresponds with the benefits previously promised to urban dwellers.

In April 1788, monastery peasants from Kursk, Voronezh, Khar'kov and Ekaterinoslav provinces were recruited into Ekaterinoslav cossacks.⁶ In parallel, previously separate Bug cossack regiments and Chuguev cossack regiment were reorganized to become parts of the emerging Ekaterinoslav Host.⁷ Furthermore, local Kalmyks, foreign volunteers and arnauts, some former Zaporozhian and Little Russian cossacks ended up in this mix. Rosters also mention special, more exotic, cases like members of the Georgian, Polish and Hungarian nobility or baptized Turks having been recruited into the

⁴ PSZ, vol. 22, no. 16572, 16605, 16607. 16649; vol. 23, no 16849.

⁵ O. A. Bachyns'ka et al., *Kozatstvo na Pivdni Ukrainy Kinets' XVIII-XIX Stolittia* (Odessa: Druk, 2000), 74.

⁶ PSZ, vol. 22, no. 16650.

⁷ Town cossacks lived in Chuguev region since mid seventeenth century. Officially they became organized as Chuguev Cossack Host in 1700. By the late eighteenth century they had already been regularized and served as regular cossacks.

unit as well.⁸

Finally, officers from Don arrived to assume command over this heterogeneous collection of individuals coming from different ways of life and traditions. They were assigned to lead the host until own starshyna from the Ekaterinoslav cossacks would have emerged. Matvei Platov was appointed as Ataman of Ekaterinoslav cossacks.⁹

According to the decrees, Ekaterinoslav cossacks had to serve like the Don Host (*po primeru Donskogo voiska*). Still, the regulations guiding the Don Host were at this point characteristically vague with regard to the organizational structure of the units and the payment they could receive. The regulations that dealt with the internal life of the Don Host — stemming not only from the Don reform of 1775, but also from centuries of tradition could not be easily copied in other units.

Potemkin himself declared that the service obligations of the Ekaterinoslav unit would be similar to that of Don cossacks, as well as the uniform weapons, dress, and limited course of military training.¹⁰ In practice, however, these unifying regulations were never enforced in the Ekaterinoslav Host service. Some regiments did serve on Don model — partly self, partly, state-financed and performing irregular service. Some were considered regular and hence received a higher salary. Some served as volunteers

⁸ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 2/110, bundle 149, file 18, fols 32-102.

⁹ Matvei Platov was a prominent Don officer. Later – since 1801 – he became the ataman of Don Cossack Host and participated in Paul's expedition to India that was called off after the palace coup. Since 1807 Platov commanded all the cossacks in the active army and is usually portrayed as a hero of 1812.

¹⁰ N. F. Dubrovin, ed., *Bumagi Kniazia Grigoriia Aleksandrovicha Potemkina-Tavricheskago, 1774-1788* (Saint Petersburg: Voenno-Uchenyi Komitet Glavnago Shtaba, 1893), 271–72.

without being provided with any regulations at all.¹¹ The term of service in Ekaterinoslav cossacks was fifteen years opposed to twenty-five years in the regular army. Ekaterinoslav cossacks' salaries were in line with the payment other cossacks received in the Russian Empire: colonels were to receive 849 rubles per year, esauls – 448.5, sotniks – 339, quartermasters – 207, poruchiks – 219, khorunzhii's – 175.5. Rank-and-file cossacks could receive from twelve to thirty five depending on the status of the regiment in which they served. Irregulars received less, regular cossacks – more due to stricter requirements concerning their weapons and uniforms.¹² Furthermore, by trial and error Potemkin himself kept reshuffling the organization of Ekaterinoslav cossacks – on February 11, 1788 the Host was composed of four cossack brigades designated as Vanguard Corps (*Korpus peredovoi strazhi*). On June 23, 1789, however, these brigades were disbanded and another, separate from Ekaterinoslav cossacks, unit received their name, while the Ekaterinoslav Cossack Host was reorganized from brigades into regiments.¹³

Ekaterinoslav cossacks lacked a clear-cut economic and administrative structure as well. According to the decrees, four households had to supply one cossack. In practice, however, there were regiments with no settlements

¹¹ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 2/110, bundle 149, file 21, fols 1-6.

¹² Usually the regularization is portrayed as something dreadful for cossacks – see for instance David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye and Bruce Menning, *Reforming the Tsar's Army Military Innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011), 282-283. Yet in the case of the Ekaterinoslav Host – where cossacks serving on different terms interacted – the difference in payment for irregular and regular cossacks led to petitions, where irregulars themselves were asking to serve on the Chuguev cossacks regulations – i.e. to regularize them. See RGVIA, fund 41, inventory 1, file 230, fols 24-25v.

¹³ V. Kh. Kazin and V. K. Shenk, *Kazach'i Voiska* (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia V. D. Smirnova, 1912), 17.

assigned to supply them at all. For instance, in his letter to Potemkin, Platov described the situation with the Little Russian Cossack Regiment. The regiment was created initially in 1788 from conscripts drafted in the Little Russia provinces; later it was reassigned to the Ekaterinoslav Host but without any settlements to supply and reinforce it. Platov proposed to convert additional *odnodvortsy* settlements into cossack ones and to assign them to this Little Russian regiment.¹⁴ It is unknown, however, the extent to which this proposal was implemented. At least, Potemkin acknowledged that problem existed and expressed interest in cossacks' welfare. In his order to Platov dated March 22, 1790, he commanded Platov to further instruct colonels on matters of the host internal affairs.¹⁵ Again, there is no evidence whether the order was carried out and to what degree colonels concerned themselves with well being of their subordinates.

So, the Ekaterinoslav Cossack Host was created from people of various ways of life impressed into cossackdom by decree. The Host underwent several military reorganizations with its regiments and brigades being created, reshuffled and disbanded; consequently its economy was chaotic since new settlements and regiments were being added to and subtracted from the host. Finally, no extra land was assigned to Ekaterinoslav cossacks, thus settlements and households had to adapt their existing economies in order to properly reinforce and maintain standing cossack units.

Despite all these problems, the unit was able to field a considerable

¹⁴ RGVIA, fund 41, inventory 1, file 89, fol. 12.

¹⁵ RGVIA, fund 41, inventory 1, file 89, fol. 13.

force. In February 1788, brigades of the host numbered 3.684 men strong.¹⁶ By January 1792 Ekaterinoslav Host could field nine cossack regiments, one infantry squad and several volunteer units altogether counting 11.196 men.¹⁷ By May 1792 the host further expanded to numbering 14.445 cossacks in active service, who served in ten 1.000 – 1.500 man regiments, one 1.500 man infantry squad and a squad of attached volunteers numbering approximately five hundred men.¹⁸

For comparison, Russian troops committed to the 1787 – 1792 war numbered 124.100 men in total: 82.000 men in Ekaterinoslav Army, 30.100 men in Ukrainian Army, and 12.000 men in the Caucasus Corps.¹⁹ This means that Ekaterinoslav cossacks represented around ten percent of total Russian forces in the region. Ekaterinoslav cossacks in reserve or assigned to the supply service in January 1792 numbered 41.955 increasing to 50.562 persons of both sexes by 1796.²⁰ Another figure exists, however. Platov's correspondence mentions that the Host included 62.024 males only – thus the figure including both sexes would be even larger.²¹

Despite various backgrounds and lack of cohesion within the Host, Ekaterinoslav cossacks fought well at Ochakov in 1788 and at Izmail in 1790. Besides participation in battles and sieges, Ekaterinoslav cossacks – similarly

¹⁶ RGVIA, fund 41, inventory 1, file 186, fols 16-17.

¹⁷ Bachyns'ka et al., *Kozatstvo Na Pivdni Ukrainy*, 75.

¹⁸ RGVIA, fund 41, inventory 1, file 186, fol. 13.

¹⁹ A. N. Petrov, *Vtoraia Turetskaia Voina v Tsarstvovanie Imperatritsy Ekateriny II 1787 - 1791 g.*, vol. 1 (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia R. Golike, 1880), 82. Petrov's figures, however, do not include Black Sea cossacks.

²⁰ R. I. Shyian, *Kozatstvo Pivdennoi Ukrainy v Ostannii Chverti XVIII st.* (Zaporizhia: Tandem-U, 1998), 40.

²¹ RGVIA, fund 41, inventory 1, file 89, fols 7-12.

to other cossack units in Russian Empire – patrolled the border, delivered mail, and escorted officials. Bodyguard service should be mentioned as well, since Ekaterinolsav cossacks contributed men to the personal guard of Potemkin, where they not only ensured the safety of the Most Serene Prince, but also exercised various ceremonial purposes. Thus, exemplifying imperial presence in the New Russia and the benefits of cooption into the imperial project was another function of this cossack unit.

According to the Treaty of Jassy, signed in late 1791, the new Russian-Ottoman border was along the Dniester River in the West and along the Kuban' River in the East. During times of peace, the Russian Empire no longer needed masses of irregulars called to serve during the war on an unprecedented scale. Moreover, decisions had to be made quickly, since irregulars held in active duty over long periods of time could not adequately supply themselves and imposed a burden on the imperial treasury. Provisions and forage for irregulars in New Russia in 1794 required 511.123 out of 1.351.835 rubles available for all irregulars in the Empire — half of the budget — and 187.491 out of 1.180.759 rubles in 1795 — one sixth, still an extraordinarily large sum.²²

As it turned out, however, decisions on Ekaterinoslav cossacks — the largest irregular unit in the region — took time possibly due to the death of Potemkin and lack of Zubov's interest in the region. Such dependence on the personality of the high officials involved, with all benefits and insecurities

²² RGVA, fund 13, inventory 2/110, bundle 150, file 47, fols 16-18; bundle 152, file 209, fols 2-48.

stemming from it, may be considered characteristic not only to the formation and regulation of cossack units, but also to the New Russia region in general. The combination of offices held and personal connection to the Empress, allowed Potemkin to practically rule the recently annexed region by decree. From the perspective of implementation of imperial policies, this was generally effective during the period of initial colonization and persistent warfare with the Ottomans. Yet, such personal rule — even if not arbitrary — left many problems and uncertainties after Potemkin's death for the common people of barely defined status.

Judging from the size of the Ekaterinoslav cossacks and the circumstances of their recruitment, it seems that the primary function of the host was a military one. As the war ended a unit of such size had to be somehow reorganized in order to adapt to peace. In this transitional moment the destiny of Ekaterinoslav Host sheds considerable light on the peculiarities of the cossack status both in New Russia and in the Russian Empire.

Despite the end of the war, cossacks were still needed in the region. Reluctant to accept their loss in the war, the Ottomans began to cultivate Nogai nomads, who lived between the Danube and the Dniester, encouraging them to raid Russian settlements already in 1792. Taking into account the risks of such attacks and the likelihood of future wars with the Ottomans, the Russian government started to fortify the new border alongside Dniester River. In November 1792, Aleksandr Suvorov was appointed to supervise the construction of large fortresses in Tiraspol', Ovidiopol', Odessa as well as a

system of fortifications between them. This represented a new defense system to secure the new imperial borders and to control the new frontiers. As the construction process proceeded slowly, both the new border and construction sites had to be defended from raids. This was a task perfectly suited for cossacks who were supplied locally and served on the frontier not only in war, but also in peace time. With the resettlement of Black Sea cossacks to the Kuban' and the redeployment of foreign volunteers to the Left Bank of the Dnieper, this mission fell to the cossacks of Ekaterinoslav and Don Hosts. Ekaterinoslav regiments arrived to their posts in 1793 and their duties included not only patrolling the border, but also manning quarantine stations to prevent the spread of epidemics — another important responsibility of the cossacks.²³

The physical and human geography of the area, which the cossacks patrolled, is also important for understanding the nature of cossack service. It was a steppe climate with harsh winters and hot summers. Furthermore, the region was ravaged by the previous war and depopulated, thus there were no proper places to stay or get provisions. Further complicating the situation was the danger that food could be spoiled and water polluted by the time they were delivered to border guards. No wonder that many cossacks fell victim to hunger, exhaustion, or disease.²⁴ Yet cossacks were still a force best suited to

²³ For a recent take on the quarantine system along the imperial border and the cooperation of local officials from both empires in order to prevent epidemics see Andrew Robarts, *Migration and Disease in the Black Sea Region: Ottoman-Russian Relations in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

²⁴ I. A. Antsupov, *Kazachestvo Rossiiskoe Mezhdru Bugom i Dunaem* (Kishinev: ULIM, 2000), 186.

operate in low-supply environments. Although military officers might regard them as expendable, cossacks' deployment in such environments could be seen as a lesser of evils, given that the toll of regulars would be even higher.

So, as Ekaterinoslav cossacks were still required to control the area, which delayed their disbandment, what was their status? First, the decrees on recruitment included only information on the transfer of population from other estates — an interesting note, as the omission of information of post-war cossack status may be seen as either self-evident or unimportant in the eyes of imperial administrators. Moreover, the creation of an all-imperial legislative framework on the cossack estate was still a thing of the future. Consequently, it is necessary to refer to documents issued during the recruitment process that outlined the terms of service — even if they only represented an ideal form — to obtain a picture of the subsequent real situation of cossacks.

Potemkin's proclamation issued on January 26, 1788, listed exact benefits allotted after a successful transfer of subjects from other estates into Ekaterinoslav Cossack Host, including exemption from any taxes, land grants “for eternity,” freedom of religion — targeting Old Believers — and, state support for those in material need.²⁵ Potemkin also gave assurances that cossack communities would have their own elites as opposed to officers appointed from other units. Military service would be undertaken only in neighboring regions and cossacks would not be used in distant campaigns. Rank-and-file cossacks on active service would receive twelve rubles per year

²⁵ Dubrovin, *Bumagi Kniazia Grigoriia Aleksandrovicha Potemkina-Tavrisheskago, 1774-1788*, 107.

during war and nine rubles per year during peace, while starshyna would receive the same amount as Don cossack officers. The state would also provide provisions and forage.

Potemkin, however, did not live to see his promises fulfilled. His untimely death on October 5, 1791, in the steppes between Iassy and Nikolaev, presented his successors with a problem of how to deal with tens of thousands of people with questionable origins and uncertain legal status, who served as cossacks during the war — this included not only 65,000 Ekaterinoslav cossacks, but also other irregulars in the region: Bug, Greek, Tatar, Black Sea cossacks as well.

In a litany of broken promises, the first casualty was the assurance that only locals would be promoted to officer rank. Among former peasants it was difficult to find enough candidates who both passed the literacy qualification for administrative tasks while experienced in warfare to be proper officers. Don officers, on the other hand, organized and led the unit as they saw fit. In one of his reports, governor Kakhovskii described the situation listing numerous abuses. Former urban dwellers and *odnodvortsy* massively submitted petitions requesting return to their previous estates as their household economies were completely ruined by military service and deploring enormous abuses by Don commanders who shamelessly despoiled their subordinates. Even if communities, like the Bug cossacks, wished to retain their cossack status, they systematically requested the removal of Don officers. To quote one of the petitioners, “they [Don officers] ... regarded us

[subordinates] neither as human beings, nor as Christians.”²⁶ As enormous abuses of officers led to disillusionment with cossack service, the number of petitions grew and, presumably, became a factor influencing future imperial policies regarding the Host.

On the other hand, literate officers from other units were essential for the Ekaterinoslav Host to function as both a military formation and administrative unit. In his report dated November 27, 1792, Fedor Levanidov, the governor of the Kharkov province, characterized the leaders of Ekaterinoslav cossacks as follows: “these so-called *atamans*, were just townsmen under a different name, primarily illiterate and not holding any rank in the Table [of Ranks].”²⁷ The lack of literate representatives led to a situation where there was no one capable of representing interests of Ekaterinoslav cossacks in local courts — not to mention the more general problem of overseeing the organization and functioning of cossack’s own courts. Indeed, while in theory crimes committed by cossacks had to be tried by their own cossack courts, the lack of literate officers forced such cases to be transferred to provincial courts. The idea that cossacks were a distinct social group with their own courts proved to be illusory in practice.

Regarding other issues treated during the process of recruitment, such as payments and state support for those in need, a similar gap opened between promises and practices. In 1796, five years after the war, the Treasury still owed Ekaterinoslav cossacks 184.356 rubles. As for land grants

²⁶ OR RNB, fund 609, inventory 1, file 213, fol. 91.

²⁷ RGVIA, fund 8, inventory 5/94, file 1730, fols 13-13v.

for eternity, no additional lands were granted until the Host was disbanded on June 5, 1796.²⁸

Only the Bug and Chuguev regiments preserved their cossack status and continued to exist as separate units, living on lands previously assigned to them. Others were exempt from taxes for two years as a reward for their service and could return to their previous estate, or become urban dwellers or merchants; or they could continue to serve as Voznesensk cossacks another ad hoc unit scheduled to be organized from those Ekaterinoslav cossacks who wanted to continue military service and were ready to resettle closer to the borders. Several hundred Ekaterinslav cossacks were deployed as border guards up until 1800, without a chance to return home. It is unknown whether the period of their tax exemption had already expired by the time of their return, yet, taking into account the cumbersome cooperation between imperial institutions, it is quite likely that they even had to pay overdue taxes upon their return.

On the basis of the available documentation it is not possible to determine whether the discrepancy between promises and policies can be blamed on Governor Platon Zubov for failing to fulfill Potemkin's promises or whether the initial promises were feasible at all. It is not even clear whether Potemkin himself envisioned Ekaterinoslav cossacks as a temporary or a permanent unit. Both these options are possible.

Evidence exists that Potemkin could envision the unit as a long-lasting. In 1776 a number of smaller cossack units — Volga Cossack Host, *Terskie*

²⁸ PSZ, vol. 23, no. 17468.

and *Grebenskie* cossacks, Mozdok Cossack Regiment — were merged into the Astrakhan Cossack Host.²⁹ The Don Host, reformed after Pugachev's Rebellion, together with neighboring Astrakhan and Ekaterinoslav cossacks became a part of what can be regarded as a single military frontier stretching from Bug to Caspian. As some scholars state, by 1792 a draft Statute for Ekaterinoslav cossacks had already existed. Initiated during Potemkin's tenure in office or even by Potemkin himself, this document outlined the terms of future Ekaterinoslav cossacks.³⁰

Another important rationale for the creation and continuous existence of the Ekaterinoslav cossacks was the possible extension of warfare along Russian western as well as southern frontier. Besides the 1788 – 1790 war with the Ottomans and war with Sweden, in early 1789, there was a danger of the Russian Empire being involved in another conflict in the west. The Pro-Prussian party had gained an upper hand in the Polish Sejm, increasing – in the eyes of Russian officials – the possibility of war with both the Polish Commonwealth and Prussia.

Even if Habsburgs were to honor their alliance with Russia, a war with the 160.000 strong Prussian army, 50.000 strong Polish army, and 25.000 Saxon army posed a serious threat, especially in the midst of war with the Ottomans and the additional risk of England coming to their support in the case of conflict escalation. The situation was further inflamed by the raids of former Zaporozhian cossacks who resettled to the Ottoman lands and raided

²⁹ PSZ, vol. 20, no. 14464.

³⁰ Antsupov, *Kazachestvo Rossiiskoe*, 190.

Polish settlements along the Russian-Polish border, further compromising the Russian Empire. Gaining confidence from a belief in Prussian support, Poland even forbade the passage of supplies to the Russian army engaged against the Ottomans throughout the territory of the Commonwealth.

On November 9, 1789, Potemkin sent his thoughts on the situation to St. Petersburg. In the case of hostilities, Potemkin proposed igniting an insurrection of the Orthodox population living in Eastern Poland (Right-Bank Ukraine). To do so, Catherine would formally grant Potemkin the cossack title of Hetman, which would only confirm to the realities of his command over both the Black Sea and Ekaterinoslav cossacks. In his plan, Black Sea cossacks under Potemkin as Hetman would enter Poland and proclaim the restoration of cossackdom among the Orthodox population. Should Potemkin's plan succeed, the Russian Empire would gain a force of about 150.000 practically at no expense.

The Empress approved the plan in order to distract Prussia and its possible allies by launching large-scale revolt in Poland.³¹ On January 10, 1790, Catherine appointed Potemkin as Great Hetman of Ekaterinoslav and Black Sea Hosts, warning him, however, to be ready for possible hostilities with Prussia.³² Yet, the 1789 revolution in France shifted the attention of European powers, while the death of Joseph II Habsburg and ascension of Leopold II in 1790 further diverted the attention of the Habsburg Empire. The

³¹ For more on Potemkin's adoption of the title see T. H. Honcharuk, *Hryhorii Pot'omkin – Het'man Ukrain's'koho Kozatstva* (Odessa: Astroprynt, 2002).

³² O. I. Eliseeva, *Geopoliticheskie Proekty G.A. Potemkina* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2000), 244–72.

implementation of Potemkin's risky plan was postponed and in the end due to unforeseen events a realignment of Austrian, Prussian and Russian interests began to coincide in the partition of Poland.

The second and third partitions of Poland took place after the death of Potemkin. If he had lived to see it, it is quite possible that Great Hetman would have united all the cossack lands under his supervision. This dominion would have included both banks of the Dnieper as well as Black Sea and Ekaterinoslav cossacks in the lands of former Zaporizhia. In this context, numerous Ekaterinoslav cossacks would be a stepping-stone towards Potemkin becoming a full-pledged Hetman, a part of strategy for preservation of the title, and further legitimization of the Russian rule over several cossack regions together.

On the other hand, from the long term perspective the Ekaterinoslav Cossack Host, as it existed in 1787 – 1792 would have been difficult if not impossible to sustain. The Host had no communal land; it existed as small separate communities of cossacks, both in towns and in the countryside, scattered across the province and having little connection among them. The Don Host, the model for Ekaterinoslav cossacks, could maintain itself economically through the exploitation of forests, salt lakes, and other resources besides arable lands. This was not a case for Ekaterinoslav Host. The widespread dispersal of the host and the lack of adequate resource base prevented its separate parts from being economically sustainable – to say nothing of further development — but also made mobilization nigh impossible. Even if the host continued its existence, the civilian administration would

always raise questions over whether host usefulness outweighed the loss of masses of potential tax-payers. Local landowners, often regarding cossack units with skepticism and hostility as a magnet for runaway serfs would surely oppose any decision to preserve or expand the unit as well.

An alternative option to preserve the Ekaterinoslav cossacks was to resettle them similarly to the Black Sea cossacks. This would open an option to: assign them adequate land and to locate them closer to open frontiers distant from New Russia, which was now envisioned as a model province displaying all the progressive aspects of state-sponsored colonization and imperial rule.

Yet, there were obstacles on this path as well. The resettlement of 60.000 persons would drain the population and run counter to the purpose of the colonization of New Russia itself. Additionally, it is doubtful that the empire possessed an adequate infrastructure to manage the resettlement on such a scale — much less the funds to properly finance it. The colonization of Caucasus, for instance, took decades and proceeded at a much slower rate than anticipated. Finally, there was no need to maintain such a mass of irregulars along the more or less stable Western border, while resettlement farther to the East would be even more expensive, difficult, and without a guarantee that the cossacks themselves might favor the location. The sheer scale of the resettlement was daunting.

Whatever the advantages accruing to Potemkin, the act of returning large parts of the region back to the cossackdom abolished in 1775 would have been a highly controversial experiment. Seen in this light, an alternative

explanation of events is possible. Ekaterinoslav cossacks from the very beginning were expected to serve only during the 1787 – 1792 war and to be disbanded afterwards. The promises given during the creation of this unit were unrealistic from the very beginning and the recruiters knew it perfectly well. From such a perspective, Ekaterinoslav cossacks must be seen to resemble other groups of temporary irregulars in the Russian Empire — foremost the militias (*opolchentshy*, *opolcheniia*).

Several militias were close in space and time to Ekaterinoslav cossacks. First, in 1790, the Little Russian Infantry Corps of 5,600 men was formed from cossacks of Little Russia provinces. Owing its existence to Potemkin, this Corps existed only till 1792, when it was disbanded. Later it was briefly re-created in 1794 – 1796.³³ Second, on October 7, 1788, the Iamskoi Cossack Regiment was established from coachmen of Moscow, Tver, Novgorod, Pskov, Smolensk, Iaroslavl', Vologda, and Kostroma provinces. The regiment participated in the 1788 – 1790 war with Sweden yet it was officially only disbanded on December 19, 1797 long after the war.³⁴ Finally, *opolchenie* of 1812 also resembled the Ekaterinoslav Cossacks in several ways. Recruited from peoples of various ways of life all over Little Russia and Great Russia, it included a number of regiments that were called cossack, yet were disbanded after the war without permanent transfer of former servitors from their previous estates into the cossackdom.

In all these cases the cossack status of irregulars was only temporary,

³³ Kazin and Shenk, *Kazach'i Voiska*, 32.

³⁴ PSZ, vol. 22, no. 16718; vol. 24, no. 18283.

yet expectations of benefits after military service were usually high. The temporary cossacks were disillusioned when they were dismissed and returned to their previous estates instead of becoming free and receiving land for eternity. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly where officials consciously exploited the image of cossack rights and freedoms and where misunderstandings about the nature of cossackdom led to confusion. Nevertheless, the cossackdom as a form of temporary service should not be discarded.

Returning to the case of Ekaterinoslav cossacks, there was one more round of promises and assurances. The benefits, advertised to would-be Voznesensk cossacks are listed in a letter dated June 19, 1796 by Platon Zubov, the Governor General of New Russia from 1793-1796, to the governors of Little Russian provinces. They were instructed to spread the word regarding the opportunity to gain benefits, including:

1. exemption from taxes – the usual norm for cossacks.
2. land grants on the average of fifteen *desiatina* for each male in the family along the Bug River – a standard allotment of a state peasant in the South. Naturally, the lands promised were described as “the most abundant and fertile” (*plodorodneishie i vsem izobilnyia*).
3. construction of new houses would be financed from imperial treasury, encouraging people to sell their old houses before resettlement.
4. four year loan of thirty rubles for each family
5. only a civilian administration would supervise cossack settlements

and officers would not interfere in administrative matters.³⁵

In return only one person from sixteen would be required to serve as cossack. The lists of those willing to serve were compiled slowly because at the same time the Fifth Revision (Census) was in progress. The data is available for Khar'kov and Chernigov provinces, from where correspondingly only 4.508 and 3.501 people of both sexes were willing to resettle to Voznesensk province as cossacks.³⁶ For comparison, in 1792, 9.467 males serving in Ekaterinoslav Host were from Khar'kov province – another illustration of former cossacks' disillusionment with the imperial army and lack of interest in continued service.

The story repeated itself, however, on November 6, 1796. In the same way as many projects of Potemkin were allowed to lapse after his death, Zubov's plan was abandoned with the ascension of Paul I and Zubov's subsequent disgrace. The creation of Voznesensk Cossack Host came to an abrupt halt. Unfortunately for those who believed in the dazzling prospects of cossack service and sold their homes in order to resettle, no further action was taken.

In such a situation what were the prospects of the former Ekaterinoslav cossacks? Of those, who returned to their previous estates, many were impoverished already by 1792 due to war-time demands and the loss of their old households forcing them to roam New Russia searching for a new place to live.³⁷ In the early nineteenth century, 3.655 were resettled to Kuban'

³⁵ RGVIA, fund 41, inventory 1, file 365, fols 21-26.

³⁶ RGVIA, fund 41, inventory 1, file 365, fols 50-60.

³⁷ Antsupov, *Kazachestvo Rossiiskoe*, 158.

becoming a part of the Black Sea Cossack Host.³⁸ In 1812, former Ekaterinoslav cossacks were once again called to man quarantine stations and to battle the cholera epidemic that threatened the southern provinces of the empire.³⁹ Those, who wished to continue cossack service, could petition individually and, if successful, they could resettle and join other cossack units. For instance Esaul Kalinovskii, who previously had served in the Ekaterinoslav Cossack Host, was allowed to enlist into the Don Cossack Host — even if only in 1811.⁴⁰ Petitions to restore the Ekaterinoslav Host like the one submitted by Esaul Bulatov in 1803 were, however, unsuccessful as imperial officials by that point considered the number of irregulars as adequate and hence the creation of a new unit in New Russia as unnecessary.⁴¹

After the unit was disbanded, the few *starshyna* fell into a legal limbo; they were neither enrolled in service, nor considered to be retired, causing another wave of complaints and petitions in order to clarify their status.⁴² Furthermore, in the Russian army there was a custom to award the next rank upon retirement. This was not true in cases like Ekaterinoslav cossacks who were disbanded to be reorganized and were left forgotten in the process of reorganization. All-in-all, the destiny of Ekaterinoslav cossacks shows that the empire was not interested in their well-being. As it happened in Russia before, social groups were primarily defined by their obligations and not by their rights

³⁸ Bachyns'ka et al., *Kozatstvo na Pivdni Ukrainy*, 76.

³⁹ Antsupov, *Kazachestvo Rossiiskoe*, 185.

⁴⁰ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 3/111, bundle 189, file 116, fols 4-6.

⁴¹ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 2/110, bundle 174, file 8, fols 14-19.

⁴² RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 2/110, bundle 177, file 56; inventory 3/111, bundle 181, file 42; inventory 3/111, bundle 183, file 46.

and benefits.

Privileges promised during the war in order to rapidly deploy ten regiments of Ekaterinoslav cossacks went hand in hand with forced transfers of population between estates. The promises themselves, however, were unrealistic and chances to fulfill them were slim even in the best-case scenario. For many cossack status was too uncertain to be considered as a reward since, as this case demonstrated, it could be as easily taken away as it was granted. In addition, two years tax exemption was hardly enough even to cover the costs incurred by cossacks during the war. All in all, Ekaterinoslav cossacks received neither land allotments, nor proper payment.

In the same way as the two categories of cossacks and volunteers could partially overlap, cossackdom as category also overlapped with temporary units like *opolchenie*. Thus, imperial cossackdom can be treated both as a skeletal structure of the envisioned fixed estate with fixed boundaries — a project in making during the eighteenth century — and as its opposite, a form of temporary service, a more fluid and flexible category, that allowed a change in status either by imperial decree or local practice. Mass transfers of population to and from cossackdom also demonstrate how practical wartime concerns could prevail over the enlightened idea of a well-constructed society with clearly defined estates.

3.2 Preliminary Generalizations: Cossacks' Functions in the Empire

Despite the official imperial rhetoric and accusations of banditry against Zaporozhian cossacks that eventually led to the dissolution of the Host and their conversion to other estates, irregular military units continued to exist in New Russia even after 1755.⁴³ The Greek (Albanian) Host was created in 1775 and existed as an irregular cossack host until 1797, while later was reorganized into a regular unit. The Tatar irregulares formed in 1784 were continuously in existence until 1796 and were recreated several times later, e.g., during the Patriotic War of 1812, the Russo-Turkish War of 1828 – 1829, and the Crimean War 1854 – 1855. Bug cossacks, former volunteers of the 1768 – 1774 war, were again in service after 1783. As a result of the growing military needs in the Russo-Turkish War of 1787-1792, former Zaporozhians were also called back to serve in the Black Sea and Ekaterinoslav Hosts. These units, at least officially, were endowed with a unified organization, similar to the Don Host. On the other hand, the degree of imperial control over the borderlands should not be overestimated as in practice the conditions of service within each unit could differ widely. Under any guise cossacks and irregular units fulfilled important functions for the empire. Foremost, they were a tried and tested way to mobilize troops, even if in ad-hoc fashion. As was previously demonstrated, Bug, Greek, Tatar, Ekaterinoslav and other irregular units were comparatively cheap to recruit and supply. All of the above mentioned units participated in the war with the Ottomans 1787-1791. Greeks

⁴³ Gerhard Miller, *Istoricheskie Sochineniia o Malorossii i Malorossiianakh* (Moscow: Universitetskaia Tipografiia, 1846), 1–36, 50–56.

served primarily in the fleet. Tatars were employed as light cavalry and police. Other hosts participated in various battles and the sieges of Ochakov, Kinburn, and Izmail.

The military value of these hosts may also be judged by their number of men enrolled and their reputation for reliability. Basing on financial records, the Greek-Albanian Host in 1785 consisted of only 567 soldiers and officers, notable for their lack of discipline.⁴⁴ According to the official rosters Tatar irregulars were supposed to field 950 soldiers and 85 officers in five divisions (*diviziony*).⁴⁵ Despite the fact that seven divisions were created instead of the planned five, due to mistrust of the Russian officials they were not employed primarily as front line fighters, but as police in Poland. Bug cossacks fielded a full regimental roster in 1792 of 1.534 men.⁴⁶ The Black Sea Host in 1791 fielded 7.500 men at any one time, while counting a total of 12.620 warriors.⁴⁷ At the same time, the Ekaterinoslav Host was the largest and fielded 10.052 men.⁴⁸

So, it seems that only the Black Sea cossacks, formed from former Zaporozhians, and militia-like Ekaterinoslav cossacks could field a more or less full complement of soldiers. Other, smaller hosts, while certainly having their uses in war, did not serve primarily as military units. Their other functions may be summarized under five categories.

⁴⁴ RGADA, fund 16, inventory 1, file 689 part 2, fols 89-90.

⁴⁵ PSZ, vol. 22, no. 15945.

⁴⁶ I. A. Khioni, "Bugskie Kazaki i Ikh Bor'ba Protiv Feodal'no-Krepostnicheskogo Gneta: Posledniaia Chetvert' XVIII - Pervaia Chetvert' XIX Vv." (Candidate of Sciences diss., Odesskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet imeni I. I. Mechnikova, 1973), 44.

⁴⁷ Bachyns'ka et al., *Kozatstvo na Pivdni Ukrainy*, 96.

⁴⁸ Shyian, *Kozatstvo Pivdennoi Ukrainy*, 40.

First, in under-populated regions, with underdeveloped infrastructure, irregulars raised from local sources, fulfilled functions of both regular army and police. In case of war, they could be used as rapidly deployable reserves, but they also could serve at border checkpoints, as customs, and quarantine officers. They could assist in conducting searches for runaway serfs, provide escorts for official on missions, deliver mail, and undertake other official duties requiring armed and mounted men. As these irregulars were often locals, they provided valuable information and specialized knowledge of terrain, climate, languages, and customs.

The second major function of the cossack unit, especially in the borderlands, was to provide a magnet for potential cross border migrants. This was a particularly valuable service in the situations where the imperial border separated a previously existing unified community. Such was the case with former Zaporozhian cossacks, part of whom remained in the Russian Empire, and part crossed over into the Ottoman Empire. Yet, The Zaporozhians, with their Transdanubian and Black Sea branches were not unique. The Bug cossacks and Nogai irregulars also performed the function of attracting migrants in the Russian Empire. There were several aspects of this attraction; the first was connected to the general prestige of military service over farming and the second was the power of the cossack image. In either case it worked.

Third, cossack units could be envisioned as a magnet for a floating population within the empire even if there were conflicting interest at stake here. Runaways were a problem both for noble landowners and communities

of state peasants. Yet if not always able to prevent flight as such, the imperial officials could at least count on some of the runaways joining the Russian cossack units instead of, for instance, fleeing to the Ottoman lands. The trade off was based on the need for working hands. Certain limits on the exercise of population control had to be accepted in the under-administrated under-populated borderland region. When the dissolution of irregulars after the war threatened to promote banditry, preservation of irregular units could also be a way to prevent irregulars from becoming criminals. Thus, irregular units offered ways to organize and control highly mobile borderland populations.

Fourth, as the Steppe region was undergoing colonization, taxation of communities was not always the best method of mobilizing resources for the state. It was especially true in the cases of migrants who had little to start a new life. Imposing taxes on recently established households could lead to starvation or force people to uproot themselves again in search of better places to live. In the economically underdeveloped region replacing monetary obligations with military service could, at least in theory, also be a way to help households in becoming economically sound and to contribute to the stabilization of population.

Finally, the creation of cossack units could serve as a form of indirect rule, where imperial officials accepted the limits of their power and relied on the traditional elites; this was the case of Nogai irregulars. Thus, multiplicity of cossackdom functions can be connected to the multiplicity of forms – as either a cause or as an effect. Multiplicity of cossackdom forms, in turn, makes the social category of cossackdom even more vague. This vagueness, however,

was extremely prone to competing understandings and discrepancies between the expectations of servitors and the benefits which empire was ready to grant.

This analysis, however, raises the question of why the Zaporizhia was dissolved in the first place. Many of the functions mentioned above could easily have been fulfilled by Zaporozhian cossacks. Why was the original Host dissolved and not just resettled to the new borderlands or reorganized just like the Don and laik Hosts? At first glance, such an alternative would seem to offer a viable solution: cossacks wishing to preserve their borderland lifestyle could continue to serve the empire on new frontiers, while the empire could remove disorderly elements from its internal provinces. The empire could either side with the cossack starshyna who were practically incorporated into nobility as an instrument to suppress an insurrection of the common cossacks, or vice versa, play upon the dissatisfaction of the discontented poor cossacks with the old officers and replace these officers with newly appointed ones — just like in the Don case. Potemkin perceived the advantage of reorganizing the Don cossacks so that they did not rebel against appointed Atamans and could resort to imperial law in the courts of appeal.⁴⁹ Presumably, the Zaporozhian case was different.

First, the Zaporozhian cossacks had the reputation of being not just rebels, but traitors. As a typical frontier community, they served, at times, the Polish and Swedish Kings, the Crimean Khan, or even the Ottoman Sultan directly. If the Russian officials wished to consolidate the frontier as a secure

⁴⁹ Marc Raeff, *Catherine the Great: A Profile* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 207.

region as well as a symbol of own success, then such a treacherous behavior had to be suppressed. Consequently, both the image and the name of this notorious cossack host had to be wiped out. Indeed, Catherine initially demanded not only dissolution of the Host, but also abolition of its name. It is doubtful that severe punishment inflicted on the Zaporozhians was only retaliation for their acts of raiding and pillaging state-sponsored settlers in the lands of traditional cossack freedoms.⁵⁰

Second, with the advance of the borders and inclusion of new territories, the state conceptualized both the temporal and spatial dimensions of New Russia. Even when the Greek Project was discarded in St. Petersburg as unrealistic, it remained, even if in a different form, in New Russia. It evolved into the New Russian Project – an attempt to transform the province, by forging out of an amalgam of disparate social groups a unified, loyal and stable population ready to defend the imperial frontiers rather than exploit their open and fluid character, as the Zaporozhians had done, to foster their own interests and well-being.⁵¹ In the context of these two projects Potemkin started numerous toponymic changes: Tavrida replaced Crimea, Khersones reemerged as Sevastopol', Akht Mechet was renamed into Simferopol', Kafa became Feodosiia, Taman' transformed into Fanagoriia, there was a plan

⁵⁰ PSZ, vol. 20, no. 14354. In the manifest the Empress provided six reasons to disband the host. Three of them concerned banditry, two – occupation of lands without permission, one – acceptance of runaways and criminals into the cossackdom.

⁵¹ Vladyslav Hrybovs'kyi, "Istoriia Nikopolia na Perekhresti Istoriografichnykh Tradytii," *Prydniprov'ia: Istoryko-Kraieznavchi Doslidzhennia* 8 (2010): 88.

even to change Taganrog into Sparta.⁵² In the same context, the companies of the Greek irregulars were named after ancient Greek cities: Macedonian, Epirote, Spartan.⁵³

The Russian government shaped imperial time the same way as it managed imperial space. The history of New Russia, ordered by Potemkin from archbishop Evgenii Bulgaris had to emphasize the legacy of Ancient Greece, the mission of St. Andrew, the brave Rus' princes, and the glorious advance of the Russian Empire.⁵⁴ Whereas the times of the Tatars and Zaporozhian cossacks were portrayed as a dark era, when barbaric hordes ruled an empty space, the Enlightened Empire would bring order and light, restoring the province to its ancient glory. From such a perspective, Greek host could be portrayed as the symbol of unity between ancient and recent glory. The Tatar irregulars, formed from those Tatars who decided to stay in Russia, and the Bug cossacks, formed initially from South Slavic refugees and colonists, could be extolled as an exemplar of New Russian identity. Zaporizhia, the vestige of the dark times, was to be not just reformed, but erased completely only to be later reborn as Black Sea Host. Thus, the empire included both Pontic Steppe and its population into the all-imperial narrative, and made the most efficient use of the local symbols both for internal borderland management and for possible further claims.

⁵² Andrei Zorin, *Kormia Dvuglavogo Orla: Literatura i Gosudarstvennaia Ideologija v Rossii v Poslednei Treti 18 – Pervoi Treti 19 veka* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2004), 101-103.

⁵³ PSZ, vol. 20, no. 14901.

⁵⁴ A. A. Vasil'chikov, comp., "Iz Bumag Kniazia Potemkina: Pis'ma Ego k Ekaterine II-i, k Arkhiepiskopu Evgeniiu, k Mitropolitu Platonu, s Otvetami Platona, Pis'ma k Nemu Preosviashchennykh Gavriila, Innokentiiia, Fel'dmarshala Grafa Rumiantsova, Sumarokova, Kheraskova," *Russkii Arkhiv*, 9 (1879): 19.

Yet there were advantages of converting the legend of the Zaporozhia into a myth. Borderland warriors of the complex frontier still bore great symbolic value. Potemkin himself adopted the traditional cossack title of Hetman in order to manipulate the cossack myth, to inspire revolts in Poland, and potentially to gain control over Right-Bank Ukraine; even if not as a king bearing the Piast crown, but as Hetman recognized by the Orthodox population. We can assume that this title could also play a role in Potemkin's plan to gain the Moldavian crown as well.⁵⁵

The same way as the Russian Tsar could be the Khan for the East, Basileus for the South, and Emperor for the West, Proconsul Potemkin could be the President of the War Collegium in Saint Petersburg while the Hetman of the Cossack Hosts in the South. Potemkin used cossacks both as troops to defend imperial border and as a myth to strengthen the imperial claims over conquered lands. At the same time he could use this myth to consolidate his own power over New Russia or even Right-Bank Ukraine and Danubian Principalities. Yet, after Potemkin's death in 1791 the new administrators of the region had neither the power nor the trust of the Empress to build plans rivaling Potemkin's ambition. They could not pretend to add the Polish lands to their domains, while the Greek Project, even if it was ever feasible, was gradually becoming just an illusion.

"In a vast state governed by laws, to allow derogating from them just for one insignificant settlement would violate the order of things..." – such was

⁵⁵ For Potemkin's potential claims over Dacia see Zorin, *Kormia Dvuglavogo Orla*, 145-148.

the comment by Count Fyodor Palen, New Russian Governor General, on the complaint lodged in 1826 by former Greek irregulars, who were once more reminding officials about the benefits promised to their ancestors fifty years before, yet unimplemented even by the mid 1820s.⁵⁶ Indeed, while the uses of cossacks for the empire were numerous, what was the empire's attitude to its subjects? To what degree were the promises made at the stage of recruitment fulfilled?

During the Russo-Turkish wars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Russian army command, civilian officials, and agents of consulates abroad all promised untold benefits and privileges for irregulars called to serve in the Imperial Army — be they Russian subjects or foreign volunteers. According to manifests and proclamations used during the recruitment process, these benefits included rights to settle in Russia, or permission to change one's estate, personal freedom, tax exemptions, and land grants. Yet, when peace treaties were signed and no pressing war concerns could prevent Russian administrators from justly rewarding warriors for their service, the promised benefits were not quick to materialize.

The discrepancy between what was promised and what was granted can be interpreted in a number of ways. First, promises made under the pressing war demands could be unrealistic from the beginning – being made only to rapidly create and deploy units required. It is unlikely that there could be any real plans to grant land to 50.000 cossacks from Ekaterinoslav Host or

⁵⁶ “*V obshyрном gosudartve upravliaemom odnimi zakonami dozvolit' otstupleniia ot onykh dlia odnago nichego ne znachushchago seleniia sovsem bylo by protivno poriadky veshchei...*” RGIA, fund 383, inventory 29, file 927, fol. 66.

to permanently exclude them from the tax-paying population. Still, judging from the success in the rapid deployment of Ekaterinoslav cossacks, lavish promises used together with forced population transfers between estates and exploitation of possible popular perceptions of cossackdom in the lands of former Zaporizhia, could be quite effective in the end.

Second, much depended on the personality or even on the whim of monarchs and their favorites. This state of politics would allow Potemkin, in the 1780s, given his personal presence in the South, his authority, influence, and combination of offices to take and implement decisions rather quickly and efficiently. As John LeDonne notes, the whole imperial border from the Caucasus to Poland was under a single military command.⁵⁷ For instance, in 1776 he was the Vice-President of the College of War, the Commander of the light cavalry and irregulars, the Viceroy of Astrakhan, New Russian, Azov provinces. In practice, Grigorii Potemkin, besides being prince, field marshal, lover of the Empress, and the second person in the empire, was the real ruler of the New Russia region.

This was no longer true in the early 1790s when Count Ivan Saltykov assumed leadership over the College of War and Prince Platon Zubov became the Governor General of the Ekaterinoslav, Voznesensk and Tavrida provinces. Not only did the number of actors increase, but Zubov also preferred to stay at court, never visiting the provinces and content to govern them remotely. While Potemkin could be an active proponent of light cavalry

⁵⁷ John LeDonne, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650-1831* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 121.

and could manipulate cossack symbols to better control borderlands; Saltykov and Zubov were not tempted to continue Potemkin's endeavors. Paul I revoked the privileges granted by his mother, while Alexander I had no intention of continuing Paul's eccentric policies.

In terms of shifts in administrative practices, it is important to note the gradual transition from the era of all-powerful favorites in the eighteenth century and the related governing of New Russia by decree — as a recently annexed region — to the nineteenth century when provincial bureaucracy was instituted. If in the late eighteenth century promises given to irregulars were basically decisions taken by Potemkin and Catherine, several decades later they became the responsibilities of a rapidly expanding number of institutions: the Governing Senate, the College (later – Ministry) of War with its expeditions and departments, the Treasury (*Kazennaia Palata*), the Custody Office (*Opekunskaiia Kontora*), Heraldry, regional Noble Assemblies, and local courts. The cumbersome cooperation between imperial offices, promised a grim situation for cossacks especially given the fact that lists of irregulars in the College of War and lists of taxpayers in *Kazennaia Palata* often did not correspond to one another. Those who were still cossacks in the eyes of the military could be sent to serve as border guards; but in the eyes of the civilian authorities, they might already be state peasants having already accumulated arrears. Thus, even in those cases when the government was keen on keeping its promises and, for instance, had assigned funds as payment for volunteers, the lack of an orderly infrastructure could prevent it from doing so. The communication between center and province, between military and

civilian officials was not always effective.

Third, irregular units established in the New Russia after the dissolution of the Zaporizhia lacked their own elites. Appointed leaders often engaged in corrupt practices while the control from above was loose. Problems ranged from the undue influence of patronage networks to officials' lack of interest toward several small settlements on the fringes of the empire. In contrast to the long-standing cossack communities in shortly lived units there were no traditional mechanisms – like honor and shame – to prevent abuses by appointed officers. While many rank-and-file irregulars were reduced to near starvation, local landowners appointed to leadership positions or officers transferred from Don were able to enrich themselves with tens of thousands of rubles.

In turn, the hasty, improvised, and contradictory aspects of mobilization of both men and resources on the Southern frontier stemmed from several factors. The nature of the steppe warfare carried out in large, uninhabited arid space required local intelligence and familiarity with the terrain. The elusive nature of the enemy – mounted warriors who were highly mobile – and the difficulty of supplying the regular army in the region demanded a special kind of military organization. These challenges forced the imperial center to pursue a variety of innovations in order to defend the frontiers, advance them across inhospitable terrain and exercise control of population. Officials manipulated communities both by assigning locals to cossackdom and by depriving them of that option. On the evidence available it seems reasonable to conclude that St. Petersburg had little concern over the future fate of military servitors

besides preventing them from becoming bandits.

Consequently, the prevailing interpretation of “double imperial control over cossacks by both civilian and military authorities”⁵⁸ should be adjusted to include the complex and often contradictory decisions of the imperial officials in a borderland region presenting challenges that could not be resolved by a single consistent policy.

The ambiguity of cossackdom in the imperial order, on the other hand, led not only to manipulation and abuses. Many locals could easily feign their origins, passing as foreigners wishing to resettle to Russia or as former Zaporozhians wishing to return. Taking into account the limited capabilities of empire to effectively trace its own subjects over the porous frontiers, feigned origins was a widespread and recurring problem. At the same time, due to distances involved and loose administrative control, the government was obliged to put its trust into local elite, who, in turn, could abuse the ambiguity of their status by enriching themselves at the expense of their subordinates.

Exemplified by the case of Ekaterinoslav cossacks, the practice of Russian administrators to transfer dozens of thousands of people between estates – into the cossackdom and back – perfectly illustrates the specifics of the borderlands management and the fluidity of social categories that went along with it. Due to the demands of war, Russian administrators easily transferred tens of thousands of people between estates, thus suddenly changing both the obligations of subjects and benefits these subjects were to

⁵⁸ V. A. Smolii, *Istoriia Ukrain's'koho Kozatstva*, vol. 2 (Kyiv: Kyievo-Mohylians'la Akademiia, 2006), 309.

receive. The question remains open, however, as to how certain were the benefits granted to other estates? Especially, if one takes into account that they could be easily revoked by one's transfer to cossackdom. This, in turn, leads to further questions about the rigidity of the Russian social structure in general and the practical limits of the idea of structured society with well defined estates.

In sum, as the cases of temporary cossack units demonstrate, it should now be clear that cossackdom was a fluid and flexible category. Despite their brief existence, short-lived cossack units perfectly illustrate the multiple and various forms of cossackdom. This, in turn, makes generalizations about cossacks as estate more difficult and reinforces the need to treat each unit individually illustrating the flexibility of methods, which empire used to defend, control and advance its borderlands.

Just as cossacks were an elusive, highly mobile peoples living on the frontier, so their name was often employed in ambiguous and ill-defined ways. Potemkin's initial settlement of Bug cossacks along the border and Katarzhi's plan to create Moldavian cossacks demonstrate that officials knew the symbolic power of cossackdom and exploited it in order to attract more migrants. Indeed, the image of the cossackdom in the eyes of Danubian Principalities inhabitants could be shaped not only by contacts with cossacks of the Russian army during the Russo-Turkish Wars, but also – and perhaps even primarily – by the centuries-long tradition of the neighboring Zaporozhian Sich: a place imagined to be free from exploitation and abuses. There is no concrete evidence of the true motives of the organizers of Wallachian

cossacks behind their calling their unit cossack, but, recruiters could exploit popular imagination to use this name as a recruiting devise.

The story of *kalarashi*, even if indirectly, provides further proof for this contention. One of the many reasons behind the gradual disappearance of the unit, together with lack of payments and improperly implemented tax exemption, was the failure to apply the naming term cossack. Furthermore, as in many other cases of cross-cultural exchange, the meaning of cossackdom in Principalities may have been misunderstood and transformed to an extent that was barely recognizable by the cossacks of traditional hosts – say Zaporizhia or Don.

Russian imperial officials also applied the term cossackdom even if as an extremely broad one, covering all sorts of irregulars serving the empire, from the Baltic to Kamchatka. In their eyes, cossacks could include diverse groups ranging from troops provided by allied Moldavian Princes and former Polish gentry (*shliakhta*) to Nogai, and Kalmyk nomads in the steppe provinces, christianized *Nagaibaki* Tatars in the Urals and Chinese cossacks in Siberia. In sum cossackdom came to denote only the status of an irregular military unit used as light cavalry or light infantry.

The legal ambiguity of the term cossack shows up by virtue of its absence in the collection of Russian laws. During the Legislative Commission of 1767 there were projects of a charter for the cossacks similar to the charters granted to nobles and towns that would formalize existence of cossacks in the imperial society.⁵⁹ Yet, these projects were never

⁵⁹ RGADA, fund 342, inventory 1, file 220.

implemented. Only Code of Laws (*Svod Zakonov*) published much later in 1832 attempted to clarify the issue by describing cossacks as a subcategory of peasants.

Even if the idea of a unified cossack estate with a more or less defined set of rights and obligations was not completely unknown to the Russian legislators, in practice the distinctions between different cossack units were only increasing at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These differences were even stronger between traditional hosts, which existed for centuries, and hosts, which were created for the purpose of only one or two wars and were disbanded afterwards. The multitude and diversity of units covered by the umbrella term of cossackdom created problems, when the empire sought to impose some kind of order and regularity in governing the borderlands. These rules and regulations aimed at unity are the topic of the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Problems and Proposals on the Reform of Cossacks

The death of Prince Grigorii Potemkin can be seen as one of the major turning points in the history of the Pontic Steppe cossacks. Under his direction, great authority over irregulars was concentrated in the hands of the all-powerful proconsul who was often present in the south. Even if cossack rights were not adequately defined in the Russian legislation in the late eighteenth century, Potemkin's penchant for cossackdom provided local cossacks with another rationale for securing their place in the imperial structure.

Much changed with the death of Potemkin indeed. After 1792, cossacks were obliged to correspond with the College of War in St. Petersburg. Nikolai Saltykov, Vice President of the College of War, and Platon Zubov, General Governor of New Russia, then began to work out new regulations for irregular units, bringing a certain degree of order into what had become an ad-hoc militarized population. Yet, with these projects far from being complete, new revisions were introduced into all-imperial policies towards the cossacks once again upon the death of Catherine in 1796, and ascension of her son Paul.

Paul's attitude to the cossacks was contradictory at best. On the one hand, he treated cossacks of traditional units favorably: cossack delegates were allowed to be present at coronation festivities; the number of cossack units in the imperial guard increased; Ural cossacks were pardoned after a period of disfavor, during Catherine's reign, and introduced into the Life

Guards. Even if Paul himself was a proponent of Prussian style warfare emphasis on discipline — contrary to Potemkin's, Suvorov's, and Rumiantsev's emphasis on personal courage and initiative — he understood the limitations of regular units and relied on Don cossacks as an uniquely suited mobile force to ride across half of Asia, reach India, and attempt to undermine the British rule there.¹ On the other hand, Paul's policies towards smaller and temporary cossack units were far less sympathetic. As was mentioned above, he disbanded the Bug cossacks, Greek, and Tatar irregulars and brought to a halt the formation of the Voznesensk cossacks.

Nevertheless, on September 22, 1798, he issued an important decree affecting the crucial problem of standardization of cossack units, "On the equality of Don Host ranks with regular army ranks."² The equality between cossack ranks and ranks in the regular army finally enabled cossacks *starshyna* to obtain officially recognized noble standing in the empire. Many benefits were associated with regular army officer rank: higher salary, social prestige, and the opportunity to be ennobled. Yet, there were drawbacks as well. Once having obtained regular army rank and taken the oath of office, it was no longer possible to bargain further or to cite traditional rights; in fact, these actions could be treated at the very least as insubordination.

The practice of awarding regular ranks to cossacks was not new — after all, both Potemkin and Zubov rewarded numerous cossack officers from

¹ For more on the Russian military thought of the eighteenth century in general and outlooks of Potemkin, Rumiantsev, and Suvorov see V. S. Lopatin, *Potemkin i Suvorov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1992). On Paul's praise of Don cossacks and his planned invasion to India see OR RNB, fund 73, inventory 1, file 328, fols 1-2.

² PSZ, vol. 25, no. 18673.

Zaporizhia, Don, and other units personally or collectively, in order to ensure their loyalty. Paul's vision to link officers' promotions directly to the favor of the monarch, however, led to a situation where several promotions previously made by Zubov were simply nullified.³

The 1798 decree, which consisted of only one sentence and dealt with only one cossack unit, caused much confusion and was open to competing interpretations. These stemmed from the fact that many irregular units had been identified as “organized according to the Don Host model” in their statutes or rosters. Thus, an interpretation that 1798 decree could also be applied to other hosts was perfectly viable. A stricter reading would, however, limit the application of the decree to Don officers only. The legal loophole that resulted is another illustration of the uncertainties of cossack status during this transitional period.

Different interpretations of the decree led to different assessments in the historiography. For instance, Aleksandr Soklakov is skeptical towards the real impact of the decree and emphasizes that it was applied only to the Don Host, while Sergei Volkov argues that the decree meant an elevation of status for almost all cossack officers in the Russian Empire.⁴ My approach to this debate is to analyze petitions of that time, keeping two questions in mind: whether Paul's decree was applied to other units in practice? Moreover, if yes, did it work retroactively? In other words, could *starshyna* and *chinovniki* of

³ GAKK, fund 249, inventory 1, file 359, fol. 1.

⁴ Cf. S. V. Volkov, *Russkii Ofitserkii Korpus* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1993), 42–44; Aleksandr Soklakov, “Komplektovanie Kazach’ikh Formirovanii i Poriadok Sluzhby Kazakov Rossiiskoi Imperii v 19 – Nachale 20 v.” (Candidate of Sciences diss., Voennyi Universitet, Moscow, 2004), 90.

already disbanded units, say Bug or Ekaterinoslav, be granted equal rights with retired regular officers?

Hoping for the best, starshyna from Siberia Cossack Host submitted a collective petition in order to get army ranks in 1803; General Glasionov asked for clarification regarding the status of Caucasus line cossacks in 1805; Sotnik Kukhtin from the disbanded Ekaterinoslav Host petitioned in 1808 for a noble status for his child on the basis of Kukhtin's previous service.⁵ These are just several examples out of many. While petitioners from non-Don units hoped that the decree would work for their unit as well, officials of the College of War preferred a strict reading that the decree applied only to the Don.

On the other hand, the College of War, as a response to Kherson provincial administration, in 1807 produced an obscure wording regarding the former officers of Ekaterinoslav Host:

Even if [such cossack officer] will not be granted a real army rank [...] he should be generally treated as if he had it ... both when having been awarded according to his services and merits and when having been punished for his vices.⁶

This was an overcomplicating answer to a simple question: "how did ranks of these cossacks correspond to the civil service ranks?" In the end, it seems that the Don decree was not easily applicable to other units, even if they were organized on the model of Don Host as the empire continued the practice of dealing with each cossack unit separately.

⁵ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 2/110, bundle 178, file 128, fols 1-3; inventory 3/111, file 46, fol. 1.

⁶ RGVIA, fund 13, inventory 3/111, bundle 181, file 42, fols 7-8.

The next reversal in cossack policies occurred as a consequence of the palace coup of 1801 and the regicide of Paul. The first years of Alexander's reign can be characterized by greater attention to cossack units and attempts to unify their terms of service and establish a common denominator for the status of all cossacks.⁷ Taking into account the multitude and diversity of cossack forms described in the previous chapters, such imperial policy seems logical and consistent. Nevertheless, the form of these regulations that were issued separately for each unit requires close examination. The idea of a unified cossack estate, supported by legislation applicable to all cossacks in the empire, was, for the time being, either neglected or postponed; at the same time the policy of treating each cossack unit individually only prolonged the situation, in which cossacks and officers of different units retained vastly different status.

It is a speculation, however, what the cossack reforms of Alexander's early reign would have produced if they had been put in place. The challenge of new wars in Europe diverted both attention of government and resources thus ending the ambiguous transitional period between the death of Potemkin

⁷ On February 25, 1801, new host chancelleries were introduced to administer Don and Black Sea cossacks – PSZ, vol. 27, no. 20508. On September 29, 1802, new regulations of officers' promotion were introduced to Don – PSZ, vol. 27, no. 20436. On November 13, 1802, the internal administration of Black Sea cossacks was slightly revised and reconfirmed – PSZ, vol. 27, no. 20508. Similar decree dealing with Orenburg cossacks appeared on June 8, 1803 – PSZ, vol. 27, no. 20786. On August 31, 1803, new staff tables for cossack regiments were issued – PSZ, vol. 27, no. 20921. On November 2, 1803 administration of Stavropol Kalmyk cossacks was readjusted – PSZ, vol. 27, no. 21025. The same went for Ural cossacks on December 26, 1803 – PSZ, vol. 27, no. 21101. Besides, decrees equating elites of other, non-Don, hosts to army officers were issued separately for Ural, Black Sea, Stavropol', Orenburg, as well as for the recently reorganized Bug Cossacks. All-in-all, these decrees can be treated as an attempt to bring a degree of uniformity both into the administration of cossack settlements and the organization of cossack military units.

and the Patriotic War of 1812. Different circumstances influenced and changed the further evolution of cossackdom.

Consequently, the following subchapters will review the factors that had an effect on imperial policies towards the cossack hosts in the early nineteenth century. Taking these factors into account, I will study the range of alternatives open to imperial administrators regarding the scope of the reforms; the activities of Aleksandr Chernyshev, the Russian Minister of War since 1832, who largely influenced the legislation on cossackdom in this period; and other, more symbolic aspects introduced to instill dynastic loyalty into the cossackdom as an estate of the Russian Empire.

4.1 New Challenges...

Several important factors influenced the evolution of the Russian military — and of the cossacks as part of it — in the early nineteenth century. First, it was the experience of wars with Napoleonic France and the reassessment of the functions that various types of troops had to fulfill in the new era of warfare. Second, it was a matter of expenses, since the Russian treasury struggled mightily in order to finance the biggest army in Europe. The coincidence of these two factors led the Russian military and civilian officials to reassess the importance of the cossack hosts and to search for ways to preserve and perpetuate them. The need to perpetuate cossackdom, in turn, led to the recognition of the existing problems facing cossack units: the passing of frontier in some areas; the growing population and a shortage of arable lands; the corruption of cossack elites. On the other hand, the long-

lasting Caucasus War and the need to use the cossacks for their traditional roles, acted to prevent some of the more radical reform projects from being implemented.

Since cossacks were a military society, the first factor in influencing the evolution of cossack communities in early nineteenth century Russia was the changes in warfare. Under the impact of the French Revolutionary wars, improvements in armament, the introduction of new battlefield tactics, techniques of mobilization, and supply challenged the traditional attitudes.⁸ One of the most profound changes was the nation-in-arms concept that yielded mass armies, well exceeding several thousands of men. For comparison, in 1789 Potemkin estimated the potential conflict with Prussia and indicated that in total the enemy army would be around 235.000 men – Prussian, Saxon, and Polish forces included.⁹ In 1812, during the French invasion in Russia, the army of Napoleon, supported by French satellite-states, was around 600.000 men.¹⁰ The total size of the Russian regular army in the first years of the nineteenth century is estimated as 446.000.¹¹ By 1812, this figure grew up to 622.000, 480.000 of which were stationed on the western border.

⁸ On the warfare of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars see: Janet Hartley, Paul Keenan, and Dominic Lieven, eds., *Russia and the Napoleonic Wars* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Dominic Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon: The Battle for Europe, 1807 to 1814* (London: Penguin Books, 2017); Gunther Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

⁹ O. I. Eliseeva, *Geopoliticheskie Proekty G.A. Potemkina* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2000), 244–72.

¹⁰ Modest Bogdanovich, *Istoriia Otechestvennoi Voiny 1812 Goda, Po Dostovernym Istochnikam*, vol. 1 (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia Torgovago Doma S. Strugovshchikova, G. Pokhitonova, I. Vodova i Ko, 1859), 59-60, 512-513.

¹¹ Walter Pintner, "The Burden of Defense in Imperial Russia, 1725-1914," *The Russian Review* 43, no. 3 (1984): 246.

Still, serious weaknesses loomed behind these impressive numbers. The events of 1812 vividly exposed the great vulnerability of large armies: their supply lines exposed to raids by light cavalry where cossacks excelled. These raids on supply columns, together with guerilla activities, scorched earth, and maneuvers over greatly expanded operational areas could easily exhaust the enemy well before the crucial battle.

Therefore, as in any large conflict, the war of 1812 – 1814 as well as preceding coalition wars caused a boom in literature on military affairs. Russian officers eagerly published their reflections both on the successes of 1813 – 1814 and on the earlier defeats of Austerlitz, Friedland, and during first days of 1812. These works ranged from memoirs to treatises on the conduct of war in general. Partisan leaders like Denis Davydov, Ferdinand Vintsengerode, Aleksandr Seslavin, Petr Chuikov quickly became legendary figures due to numerous articles and books dedicated to their heroic — even if exaggerated — exploits.¹²

A number of senior cavalry officers also shared similar visions on the importance of partisan-like warfare combined with deep raids performed by light cavalry. Aleksandr Chernyshev, for instance, already in 1815 argued that

¹² John Keep, “From the Pistol to the Pen: The Military Memoir as a Source on the Social History of Pre-Reform Russia,” *Cahiers Du Monde Russe et Sovietique* 21, no. 3–4 (1980): 295–320.

the new age of warfare required a reassessment of the role of cavalry.¹³ Composed from several to a dozen regiments, light cavalry units supported by mobile horse artillery could easily conduct both independent and supporting operations while at the same time maintaining contact with the central command, so that they could be recalled to join the main force on the eve of a full scale battle. It was outside the battlefield, however, where light cavalry could display its true strength. It could operate in advance of the main force; serve as recon; seize objectives deep in the enemy rear. Besides, it could also serve as a mobile strike force engaging in large-scale raiding operations. Relentless, these operations would keep the enemy distracted while isolated units, lines of communications, and sources of supply, would be destroyed. According to Chernyshev – who naturally based his observations on his own experience of 1812 – small light cavalry detachments could demonstrate a military value greatly exceeding their size. Indeed, the events of 1812 proved that small mobile detachments could easily deny large enemy formations provisions and forage.¹⁴

¹³ “Dokladnye Zapiski i Donesenie A. I. Chernysheva Imp. Aleksandru I 1814-1815 Gg.,” *SIRIO* 121 (1906): 291–93. For more on Chernyshev’s views see: Bruce Menning, “Military Institutions and the Steppe Frontier in Imperial Russia, 1700-1861,” *International Commission of Military History* 8, no. 5 (1981): 10–17. Bruce Menning, “G. A. Potemkin and A. I. Chernyshev: Two Dimensions of Reform and the Military Frontier in Imperial Russia,” in *The Consortium on Revolutionary Europe 1750-1850: Proceedings 1980*, ed Donald Howard, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Athens, 1980), 237–50; Bruce Menning, “A.I. Chernyshev: A Russian Lycurgus,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 30, no. 2 (1988): 190–219; David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye and Bruce Menning, *Reforming the Tsar’s Army Military Innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011), 273-291; Ol’ga Evgen’evna Khmel’nitskaia, “A. I. Chernyshev - Gosudarstvennyi Deiatel’ Rossii Pervoi Poloviny 19 Veka” (Candidate of Sciences diss., Tomskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, Tomsk, 2003).

¹⁴ “Dokumenty, Otnosiashchiesia k Voennoi Deiatel’nosti A. I. Chernysheva v 1812, 1813, i 1814 Godakh,” *SIRIO* 121 (1906): 235-37.

Besides, Chernysev was not alone in such thoughts. Konstantin Benkendorf presented ideas on the importance of the cossacks, similar to Chernyshev's, in his memoirs of 1816.¹⁵ A bit later, Ivan Vitt agreed on the growing importance of light cavalry and the need to bolster cossack hosts by solving problems that had arisen in their employment.¹⁶ Moreover, Antoine Henri Jomini in his "Art of War" stressed the importance of cossacks or similar units acting en-masse, raiding enemy supply lines, and gathering intelligence as well.¹⁷

What is more important, however, is the fact that all these men occupied high offices in government during the second half of Alexander's and Nicolas' reigns and could turn their ideas into state policies, thus shaping the cossacks according to their vision. For instance, Chernyshev became the Minister of War in 1827 and the Head of the State Council in 1848. Vitt was the commander of the Southern Settled Cavalry — a post that even allowed

¹⁵ C. De Benkendorff, *The Cossacks. A Memoir, Presented to H.M. the Emperor of Russia in 1816*, trans. George Gall (London: Parker, Furnivall and Parker, 1849).

¹⁶ RGVIA, fund 405, inventory 6, file 392, fols 1-4.

¹⁷ G. Zhomini, *Analiticheskii Obzor Glavnykh Soobrazhenii Voennago Iskustva i Ob Otnosheniiakh Onykh c Politikoiu Gosudarstv* (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia Vremennago Departamenta Voennykh Poselenii, 1833), 269–90; Antoine Henri Jomini, *The Art of War*, trans. G. H. Mendell and W. P. Craighill, reprint (Westport: Lanham: Start Publishing LLC, 2012). For more on Jomini see John Shy, "Jomini," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, eds. Peter Paret, Gordon Alexander Craig, and Felix Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 143–85. Besides, as an illustration of certain continuity in the Russian military thought cf. Petr Chuikov, *Podvigi Kazakov v Prussii* (Saint Petersburg, 1807); Petr Chuikov, *Strategich. Rassuzhdeniia o Pervykh Deistviiakh Rossian za Dunaem* (Saint Petersburg, 1810); Denis Davydov, *Opyt o Partizanakh* (n. p., n. d.). For the Russian military thought of this period in general see Frederick Kagan and Robin Higham, eds., *The Military History of Tsarist Russia* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

him to approach Tsar directly, without the intermediation of Arakcheev — chief of all settled units.¹⁸

Naturally, cossacks were perfectly fit for the operations envisioned by military theorists. Mobility, lightness, and speed were all traits that they had fostered because of previous centuries of frontier raids and counterraids. After 1815, the same qualities became virtues according to the new roles established for light cavalry. Indeed, focus on light cavalry operations can be treated as a response of the Russian military establishment to the creation of European mass armies. In the early nineteenth century, the total mobilization of cossacks could provide Russia with more than 100.000 men. These numbers enabled Russia to surpass the ability of other European powers to quickly mobilize considerable masses of cavalry.¹⁹

At the same time, cossacks were still needed in their traditional roles. In 1817, Russian forces advanced deeply into the Caucasus, fighting local

¹⁸ In the early nineteenth century, the ministerial reform took its place in the Russian Empire. Previously, the Cossack Expedition of the College of War oversaw cossack units. From the 1810s as departments within the War Ministry replaced expeditions of old, there was no specific office to deal with cossacks and several various departments dealt with irregulars. Only in 1835 the Department of Military Colonies took over the centralized control over irregular troops in the empire. As for Vitt, he stood behind the transformation of the Bug cossacks into military colonists – it was his idea to create military colonies not on the basis of regular units like Arakcheev envisioned, but on the basis of the already existing cossack households. Under Vitt's guidance Bug Cossack Host quickly underwent regularization dreadful for many cossacks – even if some coercion had to be applied.

¹⁹ Menning, “A.I. Chernyshev: A Russian Lycurgus,” 199. Noteworthy, this figure almost equals to the number of Habsburg grenzers – see Gunther Rothenberg, *The Military Border in Croatia 1740-1881. A Study of an Imperial Institution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 108–9. Still, grenzers were not able to actively participate in the later Napoleonic wars as according to Treaty of Schonbrunn 1809, Croatia on the right bank of Sava River was ceded to Napoleonic Italy. Who knows, what could be the assessment of grenzers performance and its influence on the military thought of Central Europe if Habsburgs were able to use manpower from their Military Frontier in the later campaigns.

Circassians and Chechens. This was a typical frontier campaign, with some local tribes joining the Russians, while others fiercely resisted. Therefore, the nature of the fighting required light, usually self-sustained, units capable of operating in low-supply environments. The Ottoman Empire got involved as well, readily supplying weapons and supplies to those who opposed the Russians. This practice continued into later decades, even if formally the Ottoman Empire had to withdraw its protectorate over mountaineers' tribes as the result of the Russo-Turkish war of 1828 – 1829. The Caucasian war, at certain point having become a religious one, raged well until 1864 with many cossacks participating in the pacification of the Caucasus.²⁰

In addition to the needs of the campaigning in the Caucasus, the deployment of cossacks was essential in operating on the vast open steppe between the Orenburg and Siberian defense lines exposed to raiding by Kirgiz and Turkmen nomads, who were enslaving Russian colonists. The colonization of Transbaikal region was far from being complete as well.²¹ Unlike other European powers, except for the Ottomans, the Russian Empire had to defend different types of borders, those which were more or less stable facing regular European armies in the West and the open frontiers to the South and to the East, which were subject to persistent raids, pillage, and other acts of everyday warfare, by local tribes. Creating a military system

²⁰ For the classical works on the Caucasian War see: Rostislav Andreevich Fadeev, *Shest' desiat Let Kavkazskoi Voiny* (Tiflis: Voennno-Pokhodnaia Tipografiia Glavnago Shtaba Kavkazskoi Armii, 1860); Vasili Aleksandrovich Potto, *Kavkazskaia Voina v Otdel'nykh Ocherkakh, Epizodakh, Legendakh i Biografiakh*, 5 vols. (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia E. Evdokimova, 1887).

²¹ A. I. Nikol'skii, *Stoletie Voennago Ministerstva: Voinskaia Povinnost' Kazach'ikh Voisk*, ed. D. A. Skalon, vol. 11, part 3, (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia Postavshchikov Dvora Ego Imperatorskago Velichestva Tovarishchestva M. O. Vol'f, 1907), 225-422.

capable of performing well in two vastly different theaters was a challenging task.²² Ideally, in the eyes of imperial officials, cossack hosts could be shifted from one frontier to another, filling both functions, preserving reservoirs of skilled manpower for the wars in the West while colonizing and protecting the borderlands in the East.

For this reason alone, the cossacks were regarded as an essential arm of the Russian military forces. To be sure, Russia already used cossacks in Prussia during the Seven Years War 1756 – 1763. Similarly, Habsburgs employed their grenzers in Europe on many occasions. Ottomans fighting European powers also made frequent use of irregulars as well. There were even cases of Western European powers bringing colonial troops to Europe.

However, the cossacks occupied a special place in these formations by virtue of their dual function, their permanent organization, and their growing reputation as formidable fighters among both European and Asian opponents. In sum, the cossack hosts were a specific answer posed by Russian military officials as a response to both the new challenges posed by European mass

²² Consequently, contrary to previous policy directions of the cossacks, future reforms of cossack hosts in the Russian Empire were influenced not only by defense of prolonged, practically transparent borders, but also — and in some cases even primarily — by changing strategies for the anticipation of warfare with European powers. Furthermore, while studying the development of military systems, one should not discard the tasks set for this system influenced by geography, culture, neighboring countries, etc. For instance, from the perspective of the Western European warfare, focus on cavalry was becoming obsolete already in the seventeenth century. Still, in the Steppes cavalry reigned supreme much longer – i.e. armies of Poland, Russia, or Crimean Khanate of the eighteenth century with their large cavalry detachments should not be considered as backwards compared to Europe. For more on this see Carol Stevens, *Russia's Wars of Emergence, 1460-1730* (New York: Longman, 2007); Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History* (London: Routledge, 2004).

armies and to the cossacks' earlier function as fighters against the Asian nomads, still viable in the nineteenth century.

The experience of early nineteenth century wars and the corresponding development of military thought were not the only factors directing the reform of cossackdom. Russian military, the largest standing army in Europe, in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, frequently consumed more than half of the annual imperial budget.²³ The wars with Napoleonic France and its satellites brought numerous changes into the Russian military and required costly outlays of the State Treasury: the reorganization of the College of War, Ministry of War, and General Staff; introduction of divisions and corps system; new drill-books; development of topography schools; unification of artillery calibers, etc. With all these innovations, measures had to be taken in order to decrease the expenses of maintaining a modern army.

After the 1815 Congress of Vienna, when the post-war dust started to settle, the Tsar and his advisors returned to the question of reforming military conscription as a measure to both optimize costs and to remove other drawbacks of the existing system. The State Council had already discussed this project in 1811 yet the war of 1812 – 1814 interrupted the process and this reform had not left the preliminary stage of discussion.²⁴ After the war, however, the eighteenth century conscription system was left intact.

²³ According to calculations presented by Bogdanovich in various places, the total proportion of army expenses fluctuated between nineteen and sixty eight percent of Russian annual budget. The peaks were 1810 with sixty seven percent, 1813 and 1814 with fifty eight percent per year, 1815 with fifty percent, 1816 with fifty four percent. On this see also Anzhelika Iur'evna Kovalenko, "Voennye Reformy v Rossii v Pervoi Chetverti 19 Veka" (Doctor of Sciences diss., Rossiiskii Universitet Druzhby Narodov, 2004), 305.

²⁴ RGIA, fund 1164, inventory 1, file 1, fols 1-25.

The main problem was that any plan for introducing compulsory short-term service, followed by long-term reserve obligations — the alternative solution to the problem — was practically impossible to implement in a society with serfdom system left intact. Abolition of serfdom, on the other hand, meant no less profound reforms dealing with many other aspects of the imperial society. As such, universal military service was introduced in Russia only in 1874 being part of Great Reforms.

Besides general costs, another important issue with conscription was the low quality of conscripts. Since the whole agricultural community was a tax-paying unit, communities preferred to conceal from the recruiter their strongest and fittest men for agricultural work while surrendering the less than fit to fill their quota for the army. Bribes, self-mutilations, desertions by those who did not wish to serve, were also widespread.²⁵ Fresh efforts to reform cossackdom, as a martial society in the constant state of readiness, offered the possibility of a partial solution to both these issues.

Next, after the Decembrist Revolt of 1825, the question of ensuring loyalty among the regular army units became a worrisome question for the monarchy. The idea of creating a separate military estate loyally attached to the Tsar gained prominence. Experiments with military colonies and reforms of cossack units were attempts to solve this problem as well.

²⁵ Janet Hartley, *Russia, 1762-1825 Military Power, the State, and the People* (London: Praeger, 2008), 25–47. As per Arakcheev's calculations, Russian Army was losing 24.000 men every six months due to illnesses and desertion – i.e. army was losing one sixth of its size every year due to these reasons alone. See A. F. Lanzheron, "Zapiski Grafa Lanzherona: Voina Rossii s Turtsiei 1806-1812 g.," *Russkaia Starina* 131, no. 7–9 (1907): 575.

The transfer of knowledge about the Habsburg Military Frontier also influenced Russian military thinking about reforms. While not new, these ideas began to appear more frequently in the early nineteenth century in Russian proposals as a source of emulation. References to the Habsburg Military Frontier appeared not only in projects of local importance like that one of Katarzhi's Moldavian cossacks. Arakcheev, Barclay de Tolly, Chernyshev – all influential Ministers of War – at some point or another were exposed to information on the operation of the Habsburg Military Frontier, which they included in their projects.²⁶ Such transfers of knowledge should not be discounted as a general phenomenon of imperial rule. Still, while the mutual influences of Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russian models of the borderland military organizations deserve further attention, the importance of Habsburg model should not be overestimated either.

The principal difference between the Habsburg and Russian cases was that contrary to the generally static Habsburg Military Frontier, a number of Russian frontiers were movable. As imperial borders advanced, borderland communities – cossacks included – had either to resettle closer to new

²⁶ For Barclay de Tolly appealing to Habsburg example see RGVIA, fund 405, inventory 1, file 507, fols 25-26. For Chernyshev's note on the same issue see "Diplomaticheskaia Missiia A. I. Chernysheva v Vene v 1816 g.," *SIRIO* 121 (1906): 342–46. For reports on Habsburgs model presented to Arakcheev see RGVIA, fund 154, inventory 1, file 115, fols 9-15. As a side note, approximately at the same time, in the 1830-1840s, the French experimented with the military colonization of Algeria, presumably borrowing the Habsburgs model as well. Speaking of transfer of military knowledge between the empires, one should also mention the Prussian conscription reform by Gerhard von Scharnhorst. If in Prussia this was a step towards the universal military conscription, the Russians could adopt certain points regarding the establishment of trained reserve of manpower as well. For more on possible Prussian influences see A. N. Petrov, "Ustroistvo i Upravlenie Voennykh Poselenii v Rossii," in *Graf Arakcheev i Voennye Poseleniia 1809 - 1831*, ed. Mikh. Semevskii (Saint Petersburg: Pechatnia V. I. Golovina, 1871), 88.

frontiers or to somehow adapt to the life in the internal provinces of the empire.²⁷

The quantity of cossacks, who lived in stable regions like Don or Ural was growing. Without the daily threat of attack, these cossacks could easily lose their incentive to maintain a state of constant military readiness. Becoming, in fact, farmers and craftsmen, they might nevertheless cling to traditional rights and privileges granted to their ancestors for their previous service. Possible solutions, which had already been resorted to before, included resettlement of cossacks closer to the border or from stable regions to serve at frontiers; or imposition of regular-army-like training for these cossacks to enhance their skills without actual participation in frontier warfare. Still, in all these cases, the imperial policy had to be at least partially accepted by both rank-and-file cossacks and cossack elites.

On the one hand, no cossack rebellions broke out in the late eighteenth – nineteenth centuries. Cossack protests were limited to the outbreak of discontent among the Black Sea cossacks over the delay of their cash payments for serving on the expedition to Persia; quickly localized revolt of Bug cossacks upon their transition into military colonists; some revolts of

²⁷ Habsburgs and Ottomans borders were movable as well, however, the scale matters – one situation is Habsburg-Ottoman competition over relatively small Bosnia, the other is the Russian advance into Caucasus, Central Asia, Siberia. Therefore, if in Habsburg case it was just a matter of adding several settlements to the existing military system, in Russia whole areas were transforming from frontiers to borderlands and later to hinterland – situation unique for Europe yet similar to colonial frontiers worldwide. Besides, it was the experience of New Russia at this point, as with the additions of Bessarabia and advance into Caucasus the province was gradually becoming less of borderland. On the issue of cossack hosts left in internal provinces see also Brian Boeck, *Imperial Boundaries Cossack Communities and Empire-Building in the Age of Peter the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 239.

peasants settled on the land of Don officers in the 1820s; minor protests by Don and Ural cossacks – yet nothing comparable to the revolts by Razin, Bulavin, or Pugachev. On the other hand, even if open revolt was no longer a viable option there were other ways to frustrate the will of St. Petersburg, most of which relied on various forms of everyday resistance.

Another endemic problem requiring a solution was the corruption and abuses of officers that plagued the Russian imperial army. In the case of cossack units, the problem intensified due to the remnants of cossack autonomy still in place. On the one hand, given the fact that cossacks were not allowed to elect their own leaders many traditional mechanisms of deposing inefficient officers were rendered dysfunctional. On the other hand, the empire still relied on the rule of appointed atamans with little interest in interfering with the life of cossack hosts. Thus, the period of the late eighteenth – early nineteenth centuries provided cossack leaders — by that time appointed by imperial officials — with a unique opportunity. They could abuse common cossacks without fear of retribution from below and could easily embezzle funds assigned by the imperial treasury for cossack units into their own pockets without fear of punishment coming from above.

Besides traditional and well-known embezzlements of funds, the majority of cossack officers were officially ennobled in the early nineteenth century, which effectively meant they gained the right to acquire serfs.²⁸ This opened the way to various machinations, such as settling officers' own serfs on the communal cossack land or, vice versa, forcing cossacks to work on an

²⁸ PSZ, vol. 25, no. 18673.

officers' land as serfs. The appropriation of communal land for an officers' personal use, together with, natural growth of cossack population, led to the situation where rank-and-file cossacks increasingly often faced impoverishment and pauperization. Furthermore, rich cossacks often hired poor youth who were sometimes not proficient with weapons and horses, or worse, barely fit for service at all to serve instead of the rich.²⁹

The pauperization of common cossacks, in turn, could lead imperial officials to the questioning of the rationale behind cossack communities since the very idea of cossack obligations towards the empire relied on the principle of self-financed service. If the cossack could not maintain a weapon and a warhorse, of what use could he be? What would be the rationale for such cossacks' exclusion from tax-paying population and other — not to be exaggerated — still benefits? Naturally, such practices further decreased the fighting ability of cossack units, which, in cases of large-scale operations far from their homes, would require cossacks to be at least fit for prolonged service and to maintain their own horses and weapons during the campaign.

The following episode dealing with the adventures of several Bug cossacks officers helps to illustrate the abuses accruing in the internal life of cossacks units at the turn of the centuries as a major factor influencing the necessity of reform from above.

On September 12, 1801, Captain Vasilii Khmel'nitskii, former officer of the Bug cossacks and rich landowner himself, submitted a petition regarding the restoration of the Bug Cossack Host. Having been endorsed by the New

²⁹ Vitt's comments on this issue: RGVIA, fund 405, inventory 6, file 392, fols 5-18.

Russian military governor Ivan Michel'son, this petition, presumably written on behalf of common Bug cossacks, reached Alexander.³⁰ Khmel'nitskii, however, was not acting from pure altruism. As other petitioners striving to create or to restore cossack units, Khmel'nitskii, quite possibly, envisaged himself as the new ataman.

Furthermore, there was another motive behind Khmel'nitskii's mission to St. Petersburg.³¹ As for 1801, the state treasury still owed Bug cossacks 68,600 rubles for their previous military service in 1787 – 1789.³² Being the first to locate this money would allow Khmel'nitskii, acting as representative of Bug cossacks, either to embezzle it for himself or to distribute it to the host, building popular support for future atamanship.

As it turned out, however, Khmel'nitskii was not the only one on this treasure hunt. Practically at the same time another competitor emerged, by the name of General V. Orlov. Orlov was an officer from Don, assigned to command Bug cossacks in 1789. He remained at this post until 1797 — the year of the dissolution of the unit. Upon the dissolution of the Bug cossacks and Orlov's reassignment, he took all the documentation on the host with him in an attempt to conceal his own corruption. Not surprisingly, a fire at Orlov's

³⁰ RGIA, fund 1286, inventory 1, file 219a, fols 15-20v. The petition is also mentioned in the introductory part of PSZ, vol. 27, no. 20754.

³¹ For the primary source – meticulously detailed court case – serving the basis for the story below see RGVIA, fund 801, inventory 77/18, file 4, parts 1-12. For another take on reconstruction of these events see I. A. Khioni, “Bugskie Kazaki i ikh Bor'ba Protiv Feodal'no-Krepostnicheskogo Gneta: Posledniaia Chetvert' XVIII - Pervaia Chetvert' XIX Vv.” (Candidate of Sciences diss., Odesskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet imeni I. I. Mechnikova, 1973), 107–30.

³² RGVIA, fund 801, inventory 77/18, file 4, part 10, fols 90-91. The treasure owed Bug cossacks for their service from September 16, 1787, till April 16, 1789, 122,087 rubles in total. Of this sum only 53,487 were allocated, thus the debt was 68,600 rubles.

house followed soon and destroyed a wealth of documents valuable both for cossacks and for later historians.³³ These were important materials that could prove, among other things, the fact that, for instance, out of 58.487 rubles assigned by the College of War to Bug host in April 1787 – April 1789, only 14.256 reached the cossacks. Orlov and his aides — other Don officers, embezzled the remaining 44.231.³⁴ The College of War also subsidized the purchase and restoration of saddles for Bug cossacks – the sum granted was about 9.600 rubles. This money, stored by Orlov, never reached the common cossacks at all.³⁵ If we add the sum, which the treasury still owed to the sum already seized by officers, it turns out that the cossacks received only 9.256 out of 131.687 rubles — even less than ten percent of the due sum.

Furthermore, the remaining 68.600 the treasury owed the Bug cossacks were of interest for Orlov as well. In 1802, Orlov and twelve other officers from Don who had previously served with the Bug cossacks forged a fake letter and were able to receive 63.600 rubles from the College of War.³⁶ Khmel'nitskii found out that Orlov had already received 63.600 and approached him in St. Petersburg. While it is not known what arguments Khmel'nitskii used and how persuasive they were, Khmel'nitskii managed to obtain 58.285 rubles from Orlov.³⁷ The rest — 5.315 together with 44.231 stolen earlier — remained in the hands of Orlov and his friends for the time being.

³³ RGVIA, fund 801, inventory 77/18, file 4, part 5, fol. 217; part 10, fol. 95.

³⁴ RGVIA, fund 801, inventory 77/18, file 4, part 10, fol. 13.

³⁵ Khioni, "Bugskie Kazaki i ikh Bor'ba," 104.

³⁶ RGVIA, fund 801, inventory 77/18, file 4, part 5, fol. 217; part 10, fol. 95.

³⁷ RGVIA, fund 801, inventory 77/18, file 4, part 10, fols 90-92.

At this point Khmel'nitskii sent his assistant Poruchik Saltykovskii back to Bug in order to receive another letter. Exploiting the fact that both Saltykovskii and the majority of cossacks were illiterate, he composed the letter himself, not forgetting to add that he is to receive one third of the due sum for all his troubles, yet neglecting to mention that he had already received part of the due money. Besides, Khmel'nitskii sent 20.000 rubles to his brother in order to conceal them. When cossacks signed another letter and sent it, Khmel'nitskii brought a court claim against Orlov in order to get the remaining money for 1787 – 1789. At the same moment, he extracted from the treasury an additional 17.890 for the service of Bug cossacks in the period of October 1791 – April 1792. Having enriched himself by 76.175 rubles, Khmel'nitskii stayed in St. Petersburg while his petition on the restoration of the unit was still under consideration. Wasting no time, the would-be ataman spent this money lavishly on presents and bribes in various departments and chancelleries. As a result, he gained access to a number of important officials including Viktor Kochubei, Minister of Interior.³⁸

In the meantime, Emperor Alexander I requested the opinion of New Russian governors on the issue of Bug cossacks. Reports by both civilian and military governors were submitted on October 27, 1802, and contained two opposing points of view. Mikhail Miklashevskii, the civilian governor, was against the restoration of the Bug Cossack Host. He calculated that Bug cossacks — with household economies in their current state — would be able

³⁸ Khioni, “Bugskie Kazaki i ikh Bor’ba,” 108-13.

to field only one five hundred strong regiment. As peasants, however, they would be obliged to pay 14.872 rubles in annual taxes.³⁹

Ivan Mikhel'son, the military governor, on the contrary, argued that the necessity of maintaining troops to patrol the border would outweigh the loss of revenue from taxes and Bug cossacks presence would help local police in the vast steppe province. Moreover, in Mikhel'son's vision, Bug cossacks would be perfectly able to field not one, but three regiments.⁴⁰

Minister of War Sergei Viazmitinov and Minister of Internal Affairs Viktor Kochubei considered these opinions and prepared a report on the restoration of the Bug Cossack Host, which was approved by Alexander on April 28, 1803. The decree of May 8, 1803, officially restored the Bug Cossack Host by ordering the transfer of 6.457 men and 5.673 women state peasants back into the cossack ranks.⁴¹

Anticipating this decision, Bug starshyna loyal to Khmel'nitskii petitioned to make their candidate an ataman. Yet, unexpectedly for them Ivan Krasnov – general from Don – was appointed to lead the Bug cossacks with Khmel'nitskii remaining one of many petty officers. Among the possible reasons for such a surprise appointment, there are hints in Khmel'nitskii's correspondence that Krasnov might have been a protégé of the dowager

³⁹ A copy of the report can be found at RGIA, fund 1286, inventory 1, file 219a, fols 1-10 or at OR RNB, fund 859, cardboard no. 2 (I.VI.14), fols 22-29. Noteworthy is the fact that at the same time Miklashevskii was a proponent – to the degree – of cossack autonomous rights in the Little Russia region.

⁴⁰ RGIA, fund 1286, inventory 1, file 219a, fols 1-10.

⁴¹ PSZ, vol. 27, no. 20754.

Empress herself.⁴² Other motivations are unclear – especially taking into account the previous assurances that in order to attract foreigners to serve in the unit, only local cossacks would be promoted to officer ranks. Apparently, arbitrary appointments like this further illustrate the insecure and vulnerable legal status of cossacks during the studied period.

With not many options left, Khmel'nitskii went all-out. He enlisted the support from Kochubei and other patrons, secured their recommendation letters addressed to Nikolaev governor Sergei Bekleshov, and returned to the Bug host. Upon his arrival to Bug in June 1803, he portrayed himself as savior, thanks to whom the host had got restored, while at the same time spreading the word about Orlov's previous exploits and the money which Don officers had previously stolen. Igniting anti-Don sentiments was a natural move against Krasnov, a Don general himself. Further rumors appeared — and it is difficult to say whether due to Khmel'nitskii or spontaneously — linking Krasnov and Orlov's schemes together and predicting hardship for Bug cossacks being exploited by ruthless Don officers.⁴³

On July 9, at a cossack gathering in *stanitsa* Novopetrovskaia, Khmel'nitskii announced that Krasnov had been appointed only temporarily, while Khmel'nitskii had been promised a permanent appointment, succeeding Krasnov. To bolster his support, Khmel'nitskii also promoted a number of Bug

⁴² RGVIA, fund 1, inventory 1, file 523, fols 25-27. If one is to believe court rumors of that time Orlov, being a commander of Life Guards at this point, approached Count Valerian Zubov, who in turn approached Prince Palatin, who in turn approached Maria Fedorovna in order to secure an appointment for Krasnov.

⁴³ Khioni, "Bugskie Kazaki i ikh Bor'ba," 114.

officers and began to distribute 3.610 rubles money from the host chancellery among cossacks.⁴⁴

Krasnov arrived at the Host only in 1803, where he encountered well-prepared protests not only from pro-Khmel'nitskii starshyna, but also from common cossacks refusing to carry out Krasnov's orders and acknowledging only Khmel'nitskii as rightful ataman. At the same time, cossacks loyal to Khmel'nitskii sent another delegation to St. Petersburg, which was instructed to portray in vivid colors all the troubles caused by Don officers and to petition for Krasnov's resignation. The delegation did not reach Petersburg because in Vitebsk they were informed that a direct petition to the Tsar would have no chance to succeed and that they should first approach the military governor in Kherson. The problem was that the resident military governor, Bekleshov, died in September 1803, and the new one, Andrei Rozenberg, had not yet arrived. Krasnov, in turn, approached the commander of Sibir Grenadier Regiment stationed nearby asking for help in dealing with the disobedient cossacks. It took the grenadiers ten days to restore order among the Bug cossacks. On October 11, 1803, Khmel'nitskii was arrested and delivered to St. Petersburg.⁴⁵

To improve his administrative authority Krasnov readjusted the internal organization of the Host, reshuffled local elders (*stanichnye atamany*), greatly reduced the cossacks' mobility outside their settlements by strictly limiting the number of their travel documents and reserving the right to issue these

⁴⁴ RGVIA, fund 801, inventory 77/18, file 4, part 5, fols 51, 198.

⁴⁵ Khioni, "Bugskie Kazaki i ikh Bor'ba," 119-20.

documents only to the Host Chancellery; previously it belonged to the authority of stanitsa-level officers. Krasnov's aides ruled by fear and widely used beatings, confiscations, and other forms of coercion in order to prevent any further disobedience.

Cossacks, feeling themselves unjustly oppressed, submitted numerous complaints to various offices. At the point where the number of complaints had reached such embarrassing proportions that they could no longer be ignored, governor de Richelieu paid a personal visit to the Bug Cossack Host. After his inspection he suspended Krasnov's tenure and reported this situation to Emperor Alexander on September 1, 1806.⁴⁶ Krasnov and his associates were added to the list of suspects in the judiciary case, which already included Orlov and Khmel'nitskii.

In retrospect it turned out that Krasnov and his aides — Major Iuzefovich, Prosecutor Pokhitonov, and Titular Councilor Luzenov — were no better than their predecessors. In three years, they embezzled more than 44.000 rubles assigned to Bug cossacks. This sum included not only payment for cossack military service, but also 18.000 rubles, which treasury had returned to cossacks as part of unfairly collected taxes in 1797 – 1803, when the cossacks were transferred into state peasants.⁴⁷ Besides embezzling of host money, the accused forced cossacks to work on their own land, practically as serfs, and to buy horses and ammunition directly from them at inflated prices. In this light, one may only wonder about the true motives

⁴⁶ RGVIA, fund 801, inventory 77/18, file 4, part 4, fol. 1.

⁴⁷ RGVIA, fund 801, inventory 77/18, file 4, part 8, fols 8-9.

behind Krasnov's letter to governor Rozenberg dated March 1, 1804 describing the poverty of Bug cossacks and requesting a 50,000 ruble loan to be given to the Host for twenty years. According to him, without such a loan the cossacks would be unable to field all three regiments required from them.⁴⁸ If such a loan were given, how much of it would have been stolen?

The investigation of the accused officers, however, was lengthy, and the final decision was reached only on March 12, 1813.⁴⁹ Krasnov was dismissed from service and had to return money, which he had previously received from cossacks, i.e., he was not accused of direct stealing of money, but only of accepting the proposed bribes, a much lesser crime. Khmel'nitskii was tried for insubordination, cashiered, deprived of both his noble status and military rank, and exiled. As for Orlov, he was found guilty, yet proof of his wrongdoings was considered inadequate to specify any punishment other than the partial recovery of the embezzled funds.

Such a prolonged ten year investigation can be interpreted in various ways: the cumbersome interaction between imperial institutions at the center and in the borderlands; the powerful patrons of the accused, who could delay the process; the unwillingness of imperial officials to intervene too much into the internal life of the cossack unit; the realization that corruption was the necessary cost to bear in order to maintain any high ranking officials as administrators in the remote and inhospitable borderlands.

⁴⁸ RGVIA, fund 846, inventory 16, file 341, fols 154-155.

⁴⁹ RGVIA, fund 801, inventory 77/18, file 4, part 8, fols 235-239.

After Krasnov's forced resignation in 1806, governor Richelieu appointed Colonel Nikolai Kantakuzin — his own protégé — as the ataman of Bug cossacks. Kantakuzin's activities were similar to those of the previous atamans': exploitation of cossacks on his own land, misappropriation of funds, and other acts of corruption. Due, however, to Richelieu's protection, Kantakuzin remained the ataman until 1817. Only the reorganization of the Bug cossacks into military colonists, and the Emperor's personal interest in this social experiment, prevented Kantakuzin from remaining in office any longer.⁵⁰

To obtain some idea of the scale of the sums embezzled by cossack officers, a comparison can be made with the remuneration paid to common cossacks in the unit. While officers could steal tens of thousands of rubles during their tenure, the payment of common cossacks during a campaign was only twelve rubles per year. When not campaigning, a cossack had to sustain himself on his own. While officers could own tens of thousands of *desiatina* of land with hundreds of serfs, the average cossack household of Bug cossacks in the 1775 had around thirty *desiatina* per adult male which was barely adequate to sustain a family. Nevertheless, by 1817, the average had fallen to fifteen *desiatina* due to population growth on the one hand and the practice of

⁵⁰ For Kantakuzin being protégé of Richelieu see Lozheshnyk, "Otamany Buz'koho Kozats'koho Viis'ka: Prosopohrafichnyi Portret," 57. This thesis stems in turn from Lanzheron's memoir, where Lanzheron describes Kantakuzin so: during the whole 1806-1812 campaign Kantakuzin was in Chisinau under the guise of preparing crusts (*sushki sukhareï*) for the army, leaving his cossacks and volunteers far from himself ... in 1788 Kantakuzin pretended to serve, yet during this war he did not even pretend. He equipped his volunteers very poorly, yet increased the size of his own herds. See A. F. Lanzheron, "Zapiski Grafa Lanzherona: Voina Rossii s Turtsiei 1806-1812 g.," *Russkaia Starina* 130, no. 4–6 (1907): 600.

officers transferring communal land into their private estates on the other. This average, however, is only an arithmetic mean arrived at by juxtaposing several large landowners with the majority of cossacks having six *desiatina* or even less. For a further comparison, fifteen *desiatina* was standard state peasant's allotment in Kherson province.⁵¹

Thanks to surviving evidence, the case of Bug atamans may be studied in detail. The question, however, remains whether it is representative enough and can be used as a general phenomenon common to all or most cossack units? All the possibilities certainly existed; yet, the situation of the Bug host could easily be duplicated with that of other irregulars both in New Russia or other borderlands of the empire. If even large traditional hosts were not immune to the abuses of their officers, then smaller and short-lived cossack units proved to be especially vulnerable.⁵²

The main factor, which influenced the scale of corruption, was the brief existence of units meaning they lacked the opportunity to form their own elites and, were obliged to accept temporary appointments of officers having no

⁵¹ Khioni, "Bugskie Kazaki i Ikh Bor'ba," 83-84.

⁵² For corruption on Don see S. G. Svatikov, *Rossiiia i Don, 1549-1917: Izsledovanie po Istorii Gosudarstvennago i Administrativnago Prava i Politicheskikh Dvizhenii na Donu* (Belgrade: Izdanie Donskoi Istoricheskoi Komissii, 1924), 264–74; A. P. Pronshtein, *Zemlia Donskaia v XVIII Veke* (Rostov-na-Donu: Izdatel'stvo Rostovskogo Universiteta, 1961); Bruce Menning, "The Emergence of a Military-Administrative Elite in the Don Cossack Land, 1708-1836," in *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratization of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, eds. Walter Pintner and Don Rowney (London: Macmillan, 1993), 156–57; Boeck, *Imperial Boundaries Cossack Communities and Empire-Building in the Age of Peter the Great*, 187–207. For the Black Sea cossacks see V. A. Golobutskii, *Chernomorskoe Kazachestvo* (Kiev: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk Ukrainskoi SSR, 1956), 372–80. On Bug cossacks see Khioni, "Bugskie Kazaki i ikh Bor'ba"; Lozheshnyk, "Otamany Buz'koho Kozats'koho Viis'ka: Prosopografichniy Portret." The case of Nogai cossacks dealt with in the previous chapters also perfectly fits into the general picture.

previous connection to it. Thus, there were few restraints on these officers coming either from their superiors, who were often their patrons or from below by the traditional mechanisms of communal regulations.

This was especially true when local landowners were assigned as atamans: as in the cases of Kantakuzin and to some degree the first ataman of the Bug cossacks, Skarzhinskii. Indeed, local landowners often demonstrated keen interest in obtaining the rank of ataman. After all, cossack service being a form of military service was much more honorable and prestigious than civilian or administrative work in the Russian Empire. At the same time, it was much less demanding than serving in the Guards in far-away St. Petersburg that required a long absence from one's estate or dealing with the hardships of the regular army. Moreover, the control of imperial institutions over irregulars military units was notoriously loose. Cossacks could be used as cheap, or even free, labor on private estates while serfs could be used to work on cossack communal land. The chance to embezzle money and goods assigned to the host could be considered as an extra bonus. To be sure, Don officers assigned to command smaller units had no estates nearby, but being only temporary appointees, they were in a good position to embezzle funds practically without fear of any punishment.

The scale of corruption in cossack units can be ascribed also to the transitional nature of the period in question. During the heyday of cossackdom — say in seventeenth century — the common practice among cossacks was to elect their own leaders. If, however, elected leaders did not live up to cossacks' expectations they could be quickly and efficiently deposed by the

decision of assembly (*rada* or *krug*). This hallowed tradition of forcing the resignation of inefficient or corrupt leaders by executing them did not survive the early modern period; it was no longer in use in the early nineteenth century, when atamans became appointed officials of the state.

On the other hand, the empire was still looking for proper solution over cossacks problems. It has been argued that cossack elites were in no way modern public servants and it was tolerated, even expected, that they would use their station for enrichment.⁵³ There is some truth here. Yet three other factors should be taken into account in explaining the different standards applied to these abuses. First, if abuses of Don officers within the Don Host could, to a certain degree, be tolerated, the abuses of temporary appointed Don officer in other unit would be perceived through the us-them divide and would only promote rivalry if not hatred between separate cossack units.

Second, the scale of abuses mattered a great deal in the level of their acceptance. A certain degree of self-enrichment and embezzlement of public funds could be easily tolerated. However, abuses that created real hardship and even starvation among the lower orders of the community were grounds for resistance.⁵⁴ Unchecked abuses could result in a decline in the military effectiveness of cossack units, both in economic terms by depriving cossacks of the means to properly arm themselves and in terms of unit morale and willingness to fight. Therefore, as the imperial officials acknowledged the

⁵³ On the popular acceptance of certain degree of embezzlement see Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 118–19.

⁵⁴ On pre-modern economy in general and its idea of providing at least some sustenance for all community members see E. P Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Merlin Press, 1993).

growing importance of cossack units both for the Western theater and in the wild frontiers, it became an increasingly pressing need to solve the problem of corruption within the units one way or another.

Finally, the process of incorporating cossacks in the institutions of the central government undergoing reforms under Alexander I argued for greater restraint on arbitrary and, indeed, illegal actions by cossack officers. As the Russian administrative and legal traditions were moving from Colleges to Ministries and from vague charters of the 1780s to the digests of laws of the 1830s, the place of cossacks in the Russian society was gradually becoming more rationalized within the legal structure.

This process was given an additional impetus by the changing character of the New Russia. With the return of Transdanubian cossacks to the Russian Empire, less ad-hoc decisions were needed. If previously, cossack units were created or reformed just to attract more migrants, in the 1820s – 1830s the evolution of cossackdom became part of the all-imperial development of legislation. Here we have Speranskii's tradition, which culminated both in the Digest of Laws and in Complete Collection of Laws. As the all-imperial current was towards formalization of social groups boundaries, cossackdom, previously vaguely defined and extremely diverse in its forms, could finally become a distinct social category — with all the benefits and drawbacks such formalization could bring for cossacks themselves.

To summarize, the experience of Napoleonic wars led Russian officials to reassess the value of cossackdom for the empire: as light cavalry reserve

for the West, as frontier force for the East, and as relatively cheap irregulars in general. This reassessment, in turn, led to the recognition of problems, which plagued the internal life of cossack hosts — including the passing of frontier in such units as Don and corruption that was especially rampant in smaller cossack units. Consequently, Russian officers were actively searching for the best solution and proposed a range of options more or less viable both for specific cossack units and for cossackdom in general. This search coincided with the effort of Russian civilian administrators to properly clarify and formalize many pending legal issues with various social groups inhabiting the Russian Empire. In this vein, cossackdom was moving towards becoming a defined and distinct social group instead of being an umbrella-concept applicable to almost any irregular force.

4.2 ...and New Responses

After 1810, Alexander and his advisers experimented with a number of options for creating settled self-supporting military units in order to lessen the financial burden and to regularize the organization of the armed forces. Due to diversity of local conditions in various provinces of the empire, officials of different regions attempted to solve the problems in different ways. In the Pontic Steppe and its neighboring areas, it is possible to single out several trajectories, which developed as the result of both regional peculiarities and personal experiences of officials, working on the reorganization of local cossack units.

The most extreme and, in many respects, the most utopian way was the Arakcheev's pet project of military colonies. This approach involved the creation of a new social category: military colonists, who would assume the burdens of both farming and of the regular military service with little cost to the state.

As with the majority of reform projects, the motivation behind the establishment of colonies intended to benefit the material condition and welfare of the soldiers. In a manifesto proclaimed on the occasion of victory in the war and dated August 30, 1814, the Emperor promised well-deserved social security to soldiers.⁵⁵ Concerns for suffering caused by the recruitment of peasants into regular army and promises to ease it were voiced in other charters and decrees as well.⁵⁶ The aim of the military colonies was to reduce the burdens of those settled in them. The military colonists would become a separate military estate, economically self-sustainable while providing a reservoir of manpower with colonists' children serving as replacements for their parent as his term of service ended.

Immediate practical concerns, however, were not the only ones. Alexander sought to institute an enlightened policy reminiscent of his grandmother Catherine the Great's vision of the welfare state. Military colonists were supposed to receive access to state-sponsored healthcare and education. The forced education of the colonist peasantry was envisaged as a model for the transformation of the Russian society more generally. First,

⁵⁵ PSZ, vol. 32, no. 25671.

⁵⁶ PSZ, vol. 34, no. 26803; 34. 32, no. 26843; vol. 35, no. 27512.

colonies could be a step towards the creation of economically sound property-owning peasant households, a continuation to the Edict on Free Farmers (*Ukaz o vol'nykh khlebopashtsakh*) of sort. At the same time, military colonies could embody the moral transformation of the society dictated by Alexander's spiritual mysticism.⁵⁷ Should the colonies have functioned, they would have transformed Russian society not just in terms of another social category creation, but also by influence through their own social examples — be it colonists skills and entrepreneurship or their exercising of Christian moral virtues.

Besides the impact on the Russian society in general, military colonies were intended to solve a number of problems accumulated in course of the previous decades of difficulties within the cossack hosts. Officers serving in military colonies would not be local landowners, thus preventing a number of possible abuses. Further, the training imposed in the military colonies, in theory, would at the same time be the one imposed on the regular regiments. This meant that a soldier would be trained as a lifelong member of the martial estate; in contrast to a peasant recruit tempted to desert at the earliest possible moment. In this sense, the problem of the passing frontier could be

⁵⁷ For more on economic life of military colonies see Konstantin Mikhailovich Iachmenikhin, "Voennye Poseleniia v Rossii: Administrativno-Khoziaistvennaia Struktura," (Doctor of Sciences diss., Moskovskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet imeni M. V. Lomonosova, 1993). On the potential creation of property-owning social group see Richard Pipes, "The Russian Military Colonies, 1810-1831," *Journal of Modern History* 22, no. 3 (1950): 205–19. On spiritualist interpretation of the military colonies project see Andrei Zubov, "Razmyshleniia Nad Prichinami Revolutsii v Rossii: Tsarstvovanie Aleksandra Blagoslovennogo," *Novyi Mir*, no. 7–8 (2005). For contemporaries' notes on colonies potential to transform the society as a whole and to speed up the civilization process of Russia see: Robert Lyall, *An Account of the Organization, Administration and Present State of the Military Colonies in Russia*. (London: A. & R. Spottiswoode, 1824).

at least partially solved; even if not by reforming the cossack hosts, but by the creation of a parallel structure with partially overlapping functions.

The term military colonists (*voennye poseliane* or *voennye poselentsy*) was not original and had been used previously to denote various categories of military servitors: cossack-like irregulars, *odnodvortsy*, landmilitia, settled units, etc. Besides the practical experience of having settled military servitors in the Russian Empire, several treaties, most probably well known to Arakcheev, may well have set precedents. In his note “Thoughts on the state in general...” Paul proposed to focus primarily on the defensive position of four Russian armies ranged against the European powers – Sweden, Prussia, and the Habsburgs. All other regiments were assigned permanent garrison duties in regions, supplying them with both recruits and supplies. Paul also proposed to completely abolish conscription and to use soldiers' children as replacements that would mean in practice the establishment of a separate social category of hereditary military servitors.⁵⁸ A similar idea of abolishing conscription and creating self-sufficient military estates — both from perspective of financing and providing manpower — was also voiced by Prince Shcherbatov and General Zakhar Chernyshev in the late eighteenth century.⁵⁹

The structure of the settled military colonies, however, in Arakcheev's vision would change: instead of loosely organized communities of cossacks or

⁵⁸ Iachmenikhin, “Voennye Poseleniia v Rossii: Administrativno-Khoziaistvennaia Struktura,” 57. Paul's note “Rassuzhdeniia o Gosudarstve Voobshche” was submitted to Catherine in 1774 yet did not receive any favorable reaction.

⁵⁹ M. M. Shcherbatov, *Neizdannnye Sochineniia* (Moscow: Sotsekgiz, 1935), 64-83.

odnodvortsy living in borderlands, the military bureaucracy would tightly control the life of these new military colonists. It is unknown, however, whether Arakcheev was the author of this idea, or a co-author, together with Alexander, or whether the idea of military colonies initially belonged to Alexander with Arakcheev being responsible just for the implementation.

Nevertheless, already in late 1815 – early 1816 active consultations on the highest level were held on the issue. Records of these consultations shed some light on Arakcheev's opinion not only of new colonies but also of cossacks. At some point during the discussion, Alexander proposed to take organization of cossack regiments as a base and to organize military colonies along the Western border, similarly to the existing cossack hosts. Arakcheev, however, was skeptical. In his view, there was no danger of predatory raids from the Europe — the justification for the existence of cossacks on the frontiers since the ancient times. Without persistent warfare, such colonists would quickly become de-facto peasants virtually eliminating military elements from their lives. Arakcheev's view prevailed, and in the end, he was entrusted with all the authority to create and manage military colonies.⁶⁰

Opponents to Arakcheev's approach in design for military colonies, say Barclay de Tolly, appealed to the examples of cossacks as well. Tolly's premise was that cossack-like units settled along the Western border, living without the stimulus of frontier warfare would quickly degenerate as a military force. Yet, Tolly's conclusions were the opposite of Arakcheev's. Tolly insisted that cossack-like settlements should continue to exist along the wild frontiers

⁶⁰ OR RNB, fund 859, cardboard 31, no. 17, fols. 53-55.

while settled regular units on the European border were simply unnecessary.⁶¹ Thus, both the proponents and the opponents of military colonies took cossackdom as an organizational model for their projects.

Developing his plan, Arakcheev proposed the creation of regimental districts: areas exempted from the general provincial administration and, for the time being, isolated from outsiders. The colonies were to be comprised of roughly equal numbers of regular soldiers and peasants; in theory, they would be economically self-sufficient. In peacetime, soldiers would share houses with peasants and would work in the fields or occupy themselves in other rural trades. During wars, peasants would continue to work, thus providing sustenance for the soldiers, and would maintain soldiers' dependants – an imperial version of social security. Both peasants and soldiers would be given the same training as regular army men — the only exception being at harvest time when there was a demand for extra manpower. Finally, children of military colonists would be recruited for other units, creating a virtual distinctive martial estate.⁶² From this perspective, the system not only aimed to reduce the army expenditures, but also to solve problems similar to those faced by cossack units during the passing of frontier, namely the necessity of substituting regular military training to replace the traditional fighting qualities bred by irregular and often savage frontier warfare.

⁶¹ RGVIA, fund 405, inventory 1, file 507, fols 1-68.

⁶² Hartley, *Russia, 1762-1825 Military Power, the State, and the People*, 190–208; Johh Keep, *Soldiers of the Tsar: Army and Society in Russia 1462-1874* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 275–306.

The envisioned existence of two colonists' categories – soldiers in service and peasants working to supply them – may remind of the system of cossack service, where a number of households supplied the person during campaigning. However, the burden of support had now shifted. If four households were usually expected to supply one cossack in the late eighteenth century, in military colonies one household had to supply one or even more soldiers. Such economic pressure imposed heavy burdens and harsh conditions of life on the colonists. On the other hand, being a project of enlightened bureaucrats, military colonies were to receive generous state financing in order to become viable for the long-term. In the end, historians debate whether military colonists struggled heavily under cruel and inhumane exploitation or lived even richer lives than the average peasant or cossack.⁶³

Four primary areas of military settlement were established, each occupied by ten or more regiments in Novgorod, Khar'kov, Kherson, and Ekaterinoslav provinces. It is important to note that only Novgorod settlements were under the direct supervision of Arakcheev. General Vitt commanded the southern cavalry settlements and his management did not always coincide with Arakcheev's plans. As for the total number of colonists and the scale of the experiment, estimates vary. Official War Ministry statistics give the number of soldiers and officers as 160.000 in 1825. Other numbers, both higher and lower, have been proposed as well.⁶⁴

⁶³ For the first perspective see Vladimir Aleksandrovich Anan'ev, "Voennye Poseleniia v Rossii (1810-1857)" (Candidate of Sciences diss., Leningradskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, Leningrad, 1989). For the second – Zubov, "Razmyshleniia Nad Prichinami Revoliutsii v Rossii: Tsarstvovanie Aleksandra Blagoslovennogo."

⁶⁴ Hartley, *Russia, 1762-1825 Military Power, the State, and the People*, 191.

Still, behind the noblest intentions and the disarming facade there were a number of problems with the implementation of the project. Among them were Arakcheev' style of administering, himself being strict disciplinarian with the strong impulse to impose uniformity. A second factor was an outgrowth of the general militarization of the Russian administration in this period. Finally, a third factor was the overzealous performance of local functionaries. All of which contributed to the resentment felt by both peasants and soldiers in their new colonist status. Peasants — the non-militarized estate — resisted the attempt of militarization. Soldiers resented work obligations as well. Administrative rule, having started from the need to educate, evolved into the full-fledged control over colonists' lives with even marriages being arranged by the decision of supervising officer; adding up to the impression that the military colonies were no different from serfdom in the end. Making matter worse, broader elements in Russian society resented the idea of military colonies. Conservative nobles feared the new colonists becoming a new pillar of the autocracy, replacing the prime position of the nobility as a loyal military estate. Liberals emphasized the cruel exploitation and severe punishments. Peasants feared the forced loss of their traditional communal lifestyle and the uncertain future — even if, according to imperial propaganda the colonist status was beneficial for them. The fact that many colonists themselves did not accept their new status, led both to passive resistance and to open revolts. An additional problem was that economic gains from colonists' labor did not outweigh costly initial investments required to set up and run the

colonies.⁶⁵ Finally, Arakcheev, as one of the main proponents of the colonies, fell into disfavor with the new Tsar, Nicolas, for his indecisiveness in crushing the Decembrist revolt.

Thus, in the end, the grand project of military colonies turned into another dystopian experiment. During the reign of Nicolas they were reorganized into supply bases for the regular regiments; while Alexander II abolished them just before the general emancipation. There was little future for a hereditary martial estate in an era of the nation-in-arms and a military reform that would introduce universal conscription.

In the same way as the officials' experience with cossackdom influenced the development of the military colonies project, the experiences obtained from colonists may well have had an effect on future legislation on cossacks. What is more important, while the plan to make military colonists into a closed military estate instilled with dynastic loyalty — a praetorian guard of sort — failed, the same idea was not discarded completely. It was later successfully applied to the cossacks, who, due to nineteenth century transformations evolved from the frontier brotherhoods, once proud of their

⁶⁵ On the perception of colonies by contemporaries see: Anan'ev, "Voennye Poseleniia v Rossii," 54-96; Hartley, *Russia, 1762-1825*, 207. For concise introduction to the nineteenth-twentieth century historiography on colonies see K. M. Iachmenikhin, "Voennye Poseleniia v Russkoi Dorevoliutsionnoi i Sovetskoi Istoriografii," *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta* Serii 8. Istorii, no. 3 (1985): 63-71; Iachmenikhin, "Voennye Poseleniia v Rossii," 12-48. Even authors considered as representatives of *ofitsial'no-okhranitel'nogo napravleniia* — say Modest Bogdanovich or Nikolai Shil'der were critical of colonies for a number of reasons: costly investments, questionable efficiency, cruel exploitation, alienation of colonists from other social groups of the empire, etc. For instance, see N. K. Shil'der, *Imperator Aleksandr Pervyi: Ego Zhizhn' i Tsarstvovanie*, vol. 4 (Saint Petersburg: Izdanie A. S. Suvorina, 1898), 28–40. The overcritical reaction of contemporaries led to the black legend of Arakcheev and military colonies as the most inhumane place in the world. A balanced evaluation of military colonies requires additional research.

independence, into one of the pillars that fell only with the end of autocracy itself.

Arakcheev, however, was not the only administrator of military colonies. Only the northern infantry districts were under his direct supervision. The settlement of troops in Khar'kov, Kherson, and Ekaterinoslav provinces was entrusted to General Ivan Vitt, Commander of the Settled Cavalry in the South.⁶⁶ Aracheev faced fierce opposition from Vitt in organizing cavalry districts along the same lines as the infantry districts of Novgorod area. As friction arose between Arakcheev and Vitt, Alexander supported Vitt and allowed him to submit his projects directly to the throne.⁶⁷

In general, Vitt agreed with Alexander and Arakcheev on the potential benefits of military colonies even stressing that, in his opinion, military colonies were the optimal mode of military organization – which, of course,

⁶⁶ Ivan Osipovich Vitt, Russian cavalry general and agent of political police, had bad reputation both in the eyes of contemporaries and historians. Bagration, for instance, called Vitt a 'liar' and a 'double-dealer.' Even Konstantin Pavlovich, brother of the Emperor, in his letter to Dibich, Head of the General Staff, gave rather unpleasant characteristic to the commander: 'General Vitt is a scoundrel, there was no such wretch before him in the world. Law, religion, honesty do not exist for him ... this is a man ... worthy of a hanging.' According to Vigel, Vitt was a master of disguise yet only at Austerlits, being a cavalry colonel, 'he was not able to pretend bravery and had to ... disappear.' For more on Vitt in the eyes of contemporaries see Anan'ev, "Voennye Poseleniia v Rossii (1810-1857)," 90–97. Furthermore, according to Lotman, "... Vitt, the person dirty in all senses, nursed far-reaching ambitious plans. Knowing about the secret society ... he considered whom it will be more profitable to sell – the Decembrist to the government or ... the government to the Decembrists. On his own initiative he spied after A. N. and N.N. Raevskii's, M. F. Orlov, V. L. Davydov and in the decisive moment sold them all.." See Iu. M. Lotman, A. S. *Pushkin. Biografiia Pisatel'ia. Roman "Evgenii Onegin."* *Kommentarii.* (Saint Petersburg: Iskusstvo, 1995), 90. Nevertheless, Alexander favored Vitt and appointed him as the commander of the southern settled cavalry. Still, it was not the only Vitt's only task. In 1819 Vitt received the special instruction to also observe Kiev, Volyn, Podolie, and Kherson provinces and to use his own agents for this. Another noteworthy fact regarding Vitt is that in 1812 he commanded irregulars called to serve in the Little Russia – Ukrainian Cossack Host that was raised similarly to other militias.

⁶⁷ RGVIA fund 405, inventory 1, file 509, fols 2-3.

could be interpreted as flattery.⁶⁸ Still, the main object of disagreement concerned a method of implementation.

Vitt recognized the particularity of the region under his command and proposed certain differences in detail to better adapt Arakcheev's project to the reality of the steppes. According to Arakcheev's plan, state peasants and regular soldiers were to be settled into villages emptied of their former inhabitants who would be resettled elsewhere — while the new settlers would be expected to build additional necessary infrastructures themselves. Vitt, however, proposed to use existing cossack households as the material base and cossacks themselves as a manpower — thus converting local cossacks into military colonists.

What could be the rationale for such a project? The use of the existing cossack settlements would ease the burden on the treasury; since there would be no need to build new settlements or to resettle the population. Not starting from the scratch and using cossack households — already adapted for the military service from economic perspective — would also allow colonies to become economically sound much quicker. For example, colonies under Arakcheev's supervision became self-sustainable only in the 1830s having been established in 1816. The southern colonies achieved stability in the first years of their existence. Having been established in 1817, already in

⁶⁸ Vitt's project is cited from Khioni, "Bugskie Kazaki i Ikh Bor'ba Protiv Feodal'no-Krepostnicheskogo Gneta," 89–90, 166-170. Khioni, in turn, cites RGVIA, fund 405, inventory 97, file 26, fols 608-612,

1820 they were economically self-sustainable.⁶⁹ Self-sustainability in this context meant not only providing equipment and the housing of troops, but also reducing need for further state investment into the colonies infrastructure. The transformation of cossacks can also be considered as an attempt to solve numerous accumulated problems within the cossack hosts including the lack of adequate training necessary to conduct warfare in the nineteenth century, the widespread evidence of corruption and abuses of the elites, impoverishment of rank-and-files.

Still, in proposing to convert cossacks into colonists, Vitt maintained certain reservations. For instance, referring to Bug cossacks, he emphasized their foreign origins. For Vitt, these Moldavians and Bulgarians – as he called Bug cossacks – were extremely individualistic people – to the degree that even two brothers could never get along living in one house.⁷⁰ For comparison, in Arakcheev's plan, up to four extended families inhabiting one household were expected to peacefully coexist. Arakcheev's model on the one hand draws from the traditional patterns of extended peasant families living under one roof, while on the other, increases the numbers of families by

⁶⁹ For comparison of economies of southern and northern military colonies see Iachmenikhin, "Voennye Poseleniia v Rossii: Administrativno-Khoziaistvennaia Struktura.," 309–85. Besides there were some experiments with military colonies in 1810, yet they lacked continuity to judge the time required of them to become economically stable.

⁷⁰ Emphasis on the foreign origins of Bug cossacks is a recurring trope in the perception of officials shaped, presumably, by earlier petitions. Still, taking into account Potemkins transfer of local peasants to Bug cossacks, one may assume that the percentage of Eastern Slavic peoples in the unit was far from negligible.

at least putting together a family of peasants and a family of soldiers.⁷¹ So, Vitt continued, it would be extremely difficult to find a uniform pattern whereby both former volunteers with their individualistic character – in Vitt's view – and local Ukrainians, quite accustomed to living as extended family, could inhabit in the same colonies or even in the same houses.

Khioni interprets this episode as Vitt's attempt to warn his superiors of the danger of future cossack disturbances and, in a certain sense, to limit his responsibility for causing them. For Khioni, the main causes for cossack unrest upon their transition into colonies would be the economic ones.⁷² Due to previously granted privileges, Bug cossacks could be considered among the wealthiest farmers in the region, able to supply not only their own communities, but also the market. Conversion into military colonists, with imposed drills and overarching military regulations would certainly destroy traditional household economies – not to mention another obligation of colonists, that is the virtually permanent quartering of regular cavalry soldiers, whose horses were expensive to maintain as well. It might be added, that such a conversion would be the final abolition of benefits previously promised to volunteers – later Bug cossacks.

⁷¹ A nice illustration to this point is provided in Hartley, *Russia, 1762-1825 Military Power, the State, and the People*, 196. In Chuguev area in 1822, Pavlenko household comprised the head of household, his wife and two children, his brother with his wife and their two children, the widow of a neighbor and her four children, and another family – which meant the hut was shared by four families comprising twenty one people. The whole household owned only one horse and one plow. Another family in the same colony – Bondarevs – comprised eighteen people in 1826, and included a neighbor's family lodged with them and also another *soldatka*.

⁷² Khioni, "Bugskie Kazaki i ikh Bor'ba," 171-176.

Vitt's project expressed criticism of Arakcheev's views on land use as well. In Arakcheev's vision, all the colony's land was to be distributed evenly between households. In cossack lands such a division would deliver a serious blow against elites and the economically sound middle households. On the other hand, the poorest of cossacks, lacking sufficient number of plowing animals, ploughs, and other agricultural necessitates would not be able to farm their individual lot efficiently. Heavy ploughs were in use in the region, which meant that colonists without oxes would most certainly have to use their warhorses in agriculture. Horses exhaustion, in turn, would diminish the military efficiency of the unit. These factors made sponsoring the poorest households, from the treasury quite expensive, and on this basis it was decided that the poorest cossacks were to work in construction and infrastructure.

Vitt drew attention to other points of Arakcheev's project that were impossible to implement in the steppe. For instance, it was barely possible to maintain three horses per household in the south due to the regionally high price of oats. The same was true for wood and construction materials — if Arakcheev planned to settle four families in one house, constructing such large buildings was impractical in the south with its scarce forests and high prices for wood.

In sum, Vitt's project is a viable illustration of how local conditions influenced imperial policies. Vitt's approach was not only to adapt Arakcheev's grand project to the peculiarities of the climate and character of local population, – it was also a potential way to solve problems accumulated in the

cossack hosts, especially smaller ones. To summarize, if in Novgorod Arakcheev could conduct his experiment in social engineering as he wished, in the frontier region there still were plenty of possibilities to escape imperial notice not only by crossing the border, but by simply hiding in the underpopulated areas, thus Vitt had to be extremely careful not to destroy pre-existing household economies.

Historically, only Bug and Chuguev cossacks, as well as, some cossacks from Little Russia, were transformed into military colonists. As for the regular army, around one sixth of regular troops were settled by the end of Alexander's rule counting approximately 160.000 soldiers.⁷³ Projects, however, existed to transform not only many more regulars — almost all army — but also parts of the Black Sea Cossack Host.⁷⁴ Among the reasons for such projects having been discarded in the end, one can mention the cossacks' response to such forceful transfers — even if these transfers were made with benevolent intentions in mind and for cossacks own good. Bug cossacks rebelled immediately in 1817 as many of them preferred traditional — even if mythical — freedoms over the military regulation of every aspect of everyday life. Petitioning and complaints, desertion and flights, various forms of everyday resistance — all took place as well. Finally, the empire resorted to

⁷³ The thesis that one third (or more) of the army was settled stems from the improper calculations, that include whole population of colonies — women and children included. For more on approximates of military colonies population and difficulties to determine them see Iachmenikhin, "Voennye Poseleniia v Rossii: Administrativno-Khoziaistvennaia Struktura," 90–91.

⁷⁴ RGIA, fund 1409, inventory 1, file 34, fol. 88; RGVIA, fund 405, inventory 2, file 1995, fols 1-14; fund 846, inventory 16, file 17628, fols 10-12.

coercion: the revolts were suppressed, while the cossacks were forced to reconfirm their oath of fealty.

Such a coercive approach was effective – especially if sparingly used and applied to smaller hosts. Yet, in larger traditional cossack communities, like Don or Black Sea, it was hardly possible. First, cossacks there were dozens of times more numerous and clung fiercely to their traditional lifestyle. Second, the empire itself wanted a loyal military community able to supply military force and not a barren land. Vitt recognized this and on the question of Don cossacks he was for gradual reform in order to limit abuses and bolster efficiency, while avoiding unrest.⁷⁵ Even so, if imperial administration had to tread slowly and carefully when reforming large cossack communities like Don, more rapid and more coercive ways were also an option – especially when dealing with smaller hosts.

If the grand proposals for reform by Arakcheev and Vitt represent one extreme in transforming cossacks by creating a new social category, another plan was advanced by Prince Illarion Vasil'chikov, Head of the State Council (*Gosudarstvennyi Sovet*).⁷⁶ Vasil'chikov was so skeptical towards the reform of cossack service that he can be considered a proponent either of limited reform or an opponent of reform altogether. The rationale behind such a position was that the empire would reap the benefits from the lasting conflict between various cossack factions – even if cossacks would retain only some

⁷⁵ RGVIA, fund 405, inventory 6, file 392.

⁷⁶ Illarion Vasil'evich Vasil'chikov was a cavalry general, trusted aide of Nicolas I and, in 1838-1847, the head of both the Committee of Ministers and the State Council.

useful functions in the empire.⁷⁷ Given the potential for conflict between cossack commoners and cossack elites, the central government had the option of employing the classic tactic of divide and conquer to achieve its ends. One approach to carry this out was to ally with the elites and to suppress dissent among the commoners. Another way was to take up the mantle of protector of the rank-and-file cossacks against abuses by their commanders. Both of these options could not only improve cossack military qualities, but would also bolster imperial legitimacy over the cossacks, even if in completely different ways. Finally, imperial officials could delay their intervention, exploiting existing conflicts within the cossack hosts. Even if this third option would weaken cossack units in general and decrease their usefulness for empire, it nevertheless would prevent cossacks from forming a unified opposition to imperial policies. Playing on conflicts between commoners and elites was a typical style of borderlands management. Having been successfully employed by the Russian Empire towards the Little Russian and Zaporozhian cossacks in the mid-eighteenth century, it was actively used by other contemporary governments, which faced the problem of integration of frontier martial societies as well.

Aleksei Ermolov, Commander of the Caucasus Corps, also submitted projects for limited reform. While he acknowledged that issues harmful to cossacks survived in the administration of the hosts, he still advanced a limited reform reflecting his interest in Black Sea cossacks — who continued to live and to fight on the open frontier. After the Treaties of Bucharest in 1812

⁷⁷ Svatikov, *Rossija i Don*, 279.

and Adrianople in 1829 the Ottomans finally withdrew their protectorate over Caucasian tribes, thus the Russian Empire could advance further into the Caucasus. Some local tribes were eager to accept the Russian protectorate, still pacification of others lasted all the way until the 1860s. Consequently, while the Don and the New Russia became practically internal provinces and Bessarabia was a more or less stable borderland, the Caucasus remained an open frontier. In a situation of continuous warfare, Black Sea cossacks were strengthened primarily by state-directed colonization and dozens of thousands of people transferred by government — both between social categories and between regions. In the situation of persistent warfare, projects of new Statute for Black Sea cossacks by General Aleksei Ermolov, were much more moderate than, for instance, Aleksandr Chernyshev's Don Statute, and were focused only on streamlining the administration of the cossacks and relieving the overloaded cossack courts, which were practically paralyzed by numerous unresolved cases. More comprehensive reorganizations of Black Sea cossacks, following Ermolov, ought to be postponed.⁷⁸

The more balanced approach, falling into neither extreme of social engineering or complete inaction, was the one proposed by Aleksandr Chernyshev. Chernyshev, being a light cavalry officer himself and having had first-hand experience with cossack regiments, proposed to preserve and to strengthen existing cossack units through a series of Statutes: legal

⁷⁸ RGIA, fund 1150, inventory 1, file 1, fols 4-15.

documents, which covered all areas of cossack life.⁷⁹ Cossack legislature was finally brought into accordance with the all-imperial one; thus, cossackdom was practically formalized as a separate social category within the empire. Tightened control of cossack life by imperial officials was to prevent abuses of cossack elites and the impoverishment of rank-and-files. As one observer noted, in reality Chernyshev transformed the Don Cossack Host into a military colony no different from Arakcheev's ones.⁸⁰ Tactically speaking, however, Chernyshev and his associates disguised the similarity by unveiling it as "codification of customary law," paying at least lip service to cossack traditions, and masterfully exploiting conflicts between different factions within the cossack society. In this way they sought to insulate themselves against cossack revolts and the outrage of liberal public opinion alienated by the alleged cruelty and failure of Arakcheev's colonies.

The range of reform projects proposed by imperial officials once again illustrates the complexity of the problems that defied one simple solution. Even Arakcheev, Alexander's close advisor, called both by (envious) contemporaries and researchers as "vice-emperor"⁸¹ or "grand vizier"⁸² did not have a monopoly on the ways to manage settled units. The monarchy was flexible enough to test various approaches at the same time: Chernyshev's

⁷⁹ For comparison: at the same time as Chernyshev's committee was working on the two-hundred pages comprehensive statute for Don cossacks covering all spheres of life, Ermolov's statute on several pages included only a set of recommendations regarding the work of Host Chancellery and host courts.

⁸⁰ Words of N. Krasnov cited from Menning, "A.I. Chernyshev: A Russian Lycurgus," 214.

⁸¹ Svatikov, *Rossia i Don*, 283.

⁸² Michael Jenkins, *Arakcheev: Grand Vizier of the Russian Empire* (New York: Dial Press, 1969).

codification attempts for Don, Vitt's conversion of Bug and Little Russian cossacks into military colonists, Arakcheev's attempt to create the same colonies from the scratch and so on. Diverse experiments in different regions of the empire perfectly highlight the nature of imperial rule and its constant struggle to adapt to local circumstances of various borderlands.

Despite the multiplicity of reform proposals, none of which succeeded in being fully adopted or long maintained in the face of opposition, tsarist officials continued to wrestle with the problem raised by changes in the frontier and the nature of warfare in nineteenth century. Hampered in attempts to emulate the European concept of mass armies by the existence of serfdom, and bound by their own conservative inclinations, officials sought to impose a uniform structure on cossack units by bringing them into line with regular forces.

4.3 To Preserve and to Perpetuate: Statutes of the 1830s – 1840s

On September 21, 1818, Andrian Denisov, Ataman of the Don cossacks approached the Emperor asking for the establishment of a special commission to codify the laws of the Don cossacks. He rehearsed the familiar arguments of earlier reformers in outlining the problems shared by other cossack units as well: abuses by local nobility, who settled personal serfs on the communal land; lack of proper legislation, as the existing amalgam of customary and imperial law was too cumbersome to use; impoverishment of cossacks, which only grew in the aftermath of the recent war victory. Alexander approved Denisov's request on May 29, 1819, and the committee

for codification of cossack law was established. It was responsible for gathering all the laws related to the Don Host – that had been published in various forms, at various times, under various circumstances – and to then draft a new Statute (*Polozhenie*) on administration of the host to the Tsar.⁸³ The new Statute was to be ready in a year; yet, such a momentous task required much more time and resources from imperial administrators. Denisov's request and Alexander's permission to do so can be considered as turning points in the history of not only Don cossacks but also other irregular units of the empire.

While Denisov was the formal head of the Committee, two officials from St. Petersburg were made assistants to help the ataman and his aides to properly bring local law in accordance with the imperial one. These were General Aleksandr Chernyshev — by this time Emperor's adjutant — and Senator Vasillii Bolgarskii, representative of the Ministry of Justice.⁸⁴

There is no indication of Chernyshev's prior agreements with Alexander, yet evidently Chernyshev arrived to Novocherkassk, the Don capital, with a firm commitment from the throne to support an undertaking, which would far exceed Denisov's codification expectations. The comprehensive reforms to be imposed by St. Petersburg, faced the resistance of a number of groups representing various categories of the Don population.

⁸³ PSZ, vol. 26, no. 27819; Andrian Denisov, "Zapiski Donskogo Atamana Denisova," *Ruskaia Starina* 12, no. 3 (1875): 457–80.

⁸⁴ Bolgarskii was in 1804-1808 the governor of Viatka, while in 1823 became a member of Senate. As inspecting Senator, he conflicted with many Don elites over their liquor monopoly – whether it can be considered as fight with abuses or an attempt to benefit from abuses himself. Overall, he was a protégé of Chernyshev, while Ermolov considered him the greatest of robbers.

Members of the former Don starshyna, who by this time had been successfully incorporated into the all-imperial *dvorianstvo*, might well have feared retribution coming from the imperial center for all their previous abuses and requisition of communal land. Besides, there also were traditionally minded elites – perfectly represented by Ataman Denisov himself – who were not hostile to the idea of reform, yet would prefer to limit the influence of outsiders not versed in local customs. Lower level administrators and functionaries might well have feared getting caught into the professionally fatal crossfire between local elites and representatives of the Tsar. Common cossacks were rather unpredictable as well, known for their moody behavior and clinging to centuries-honed traditions. Finally, one should not discount the peasant population of the region — originally foreign, yet at this point counting around 160.000 persons.⁸⁵ These were serfs of local notables settled on the previously communal — yet by this time privatized by various means — land.

Thus, due to various, often opposed, interests of various local groups, the introduction of the will of the imperial center via the imposition of comprehensive reform, instead of modest codification attempts, was quite an risky undertaking. To successfully cope with this challenge, Chernyshev and Bolgarskii made land reform a principal issue from the very beginning of the Committee deliberations. This was a tactic for securing the favor of common cossacks, who had in the past experienced how vast communal lands could easily become nobles' acquisitions. Chernyshev even invited rank-and-files to

⁸⁵ Menning, "A.I. Chernyshev: A Russian Lycurgus," 205–206. Peasants estimate follows Svatikov, *Rossija i Don*, 275.

voice their grievances against officers who had unjustly appropriated plots of *stanitsa* land originally intended for common use.⁸⁶

The committee of 1819 can also be seen as a turning point in imperial policies toward the cossacks. If previously, the empire either sided with cossack elites, or masterfully exploited and further ignited existing conflicts; this was a point in which the empire finally took up the mantle of the protector of the commoners against the abuses by local elites. Such an alliance of common cossacks and imperial administration could not only win popular support for Chernyshev's reform, but also meant completely new types of imperial legitimacy in the cossack-populated borderlands. Nevertheless, those of local nobility, who opposed Chernyshev's program, became isolated from both their imperial patrons and from local commoners. The irony here lies in the fact that Don nobles themselves owed their existence to previous imperial support and various decrees recognizing their elevated status over their previously egalitarian brethren.

To cement and further cultivate popular favor, Chernyshev pressed the Committee to adopt new regulations on cash subsidies for cossacks in active service. Due to Chernyshev being in close contact with the Emperor and the Ministry of War, the proposal was quickly approved and implemented. Instead of receiving a forage allowance for a second horse, each cossack in active service would now receive a payment of ninety rubles.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ RGVA, fund 331, inventory 1, file 15, fols 88-90.

⁸⁷ N. F. Dubrovin, *Sbornik Istoricheskikh Materialov, Izvlechennykh iz Arkhiva Sobstvennoi Ego Imperatorskogo Velichestva Kantseliarii*, vol. 9 (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia Vtorago Otdeleniia Sobstvennoi E.I.V. Kantseliarii, 1897), 57-61, 77-80.

In autumn 1821, the Committee, having collected the necessary historical, statistical, and legal data from the Don region, moved to St. Petersburg. After another year and a half of semi-regular sessions, Chernyshev forwarded a complete draft to the State Council — the institution responsible for the review of proposed legislation. At this point, Ilarion Vasil'chikov, for unclear reasons, emerged as a defender of large Don landholders — those who feared the upcoming reform most of all. Although Vasil'chikov was not in a position to block the enactment of the new statute, he could delay its submission to the Emperor by submitting a lengthy commentary on the specific, minute points in the draft, in order to prolong the discussion and to call into question the rationale behind separate aspects of the proposed legislation. Vasil'chikov was able to drag out the discussions on the forthcoming statute well into late 1825; only by autumn did all members of the State Council receive the final draft of the proposed legislation formulated, nevertheless, in accordance with Chernyshev's vision.⁸⁸

Contrary to the urgency initially attached to the call for reform, more than fifteen years passed until the official enactment of the Statute. In the meantime, the untimely death of Alexander, the Decembrists revolt, wars with Persia in 1826 – 1828, with the Ottomans in 1828 – 1829, the Polish Uprising of 1830, all distracted the attention of the officials and drained the empire's resources. Another reason for the delay was the need to find a reasonable solution to the land problem, which was becoming ever more pressing due to

⁸⁸ For the reconstruction of this episode see Menning, "A.I. Chernyshev: A Russian Lycurgus," 210-212. Vasilch'ikov's position could stem either from his previously held views described above or from something else.

abuses by local nobles and rapid population growth. Finally, great efforts by Chernyshev's subordinates were required to survey the Don and compile data on landholding patterns which would be introduced by the Tsar's enactment of the reform – a task that required dozens of surveyors well in the 1830s.⁸⁹

Despite all these difficulties, the Statute was ready in Spring 1835 for submission to Nicolas. The Emperor in general was satisfied with the work done and signed the Statute on May 26, 1835 — with only minor corrections made by him. As for corrections, made by the Emperor himself, they were primarily minor, yet dealt with both the essence of the statute and its form. As for form – i.e. specific wordings – in one of the statute drafts the Don administration was called government (*pravitel'stvo*). On this Emperor commented that the word was misused: the government is the emperor himself (*pravitel'stvo est' ia*), thus local administrations were to be renamed (*nazyvat' dolzhno Voiskovym Pravleniev*). Similarly, in the paragraph on the ammunition of guards regiments Nicolas eliminated the phrase “*obmundirovanie i vooruzhenie zavisiat ot Vysochaishego usmotreniia*” – as per Nicolas, everything in Russia depended on Emperor's will, thus such wordings had no sense.

⁸⁹ Speaking of other causes for delays, one may mention practically anecdotal story that nevertheless illustrate the opposition of Don elites to the comprehensive reform. In August 1826, as the new Tsar was coronated, Ataman Aleksei Ilovaiskii submitted a petition to the Emperor, where he questioned the rationale behind the reform project and was critical of Chernyshev's initiatives. Unfortunately for Ilovaiskii, Tsar had no time to study the petition and immediately passed it to Chernyshev, who just happened to be close. In a few months, in June 1827 Ilovaiskii was forced to retire from atamanship. Dmitrii Kuteinikov, a supporter of Chernyshev, became the next ataman. On Kuteinikov taking the office see N. I. Krasnov, “Dmitrii Efimovich Kuteinikov, Ataman Voiska Donskago, 1827-1866,” *Russkaia Starina* 13, no. 5 (1875): 41–43; Svatikov, *Rossiiia i Don*, 298.

As for more substantial notes, Nicolas had some remarks on the recruitment and accounting of officers. Besides, he revoked the projected prohibition on the use of ovens between May and September – initially it was envisioned as a fire-safety measure, yet Tsar decided that it would be too uncomfortable (*stesnitel'no*) for cossacks. Finally, the draft project mentioned the punishment for regiments that would not uphold the standards of service (*pokazhut sebja predosuditel'no*). Nicolas was sure that there would be no such regiments on Don thus there was no need to include this sentence in the Statute.⁹⁰

The official inauguration of the Statute took place on 1 January, 1836, with two Senators, Bolgarskii and Kniazhnin, presiding over the festivities in Novocherkask dedicated to the announcement of the new legislation.⁹¹ The Statute consisted of one hundred and ninety pages made up of thirty chapters – not including separate regimental instructions – and organized and regulated on a comprehensive basis the most important aspects of cossack administration, economy, and military service. The Statute covered practically all aspects of cossack service for the empire: it confirmed mandatory military service of Don cossacks; introduced new regimental staff tables; brought clarity into the system of recruitment. According to Statute, each cossack had to be ready for service and to maintain his own weapons, equipment, and horses. While the same was traditionally true for cossacks — equipping and

⁹⁰ RGIA, fund 1150, inventory 2, file 1a, fol. 47v; file 1i, fols 31-416.

⁹¹ PSZ, 2nd series, vol. 10, no. 8163. See Svatikov, *Rossiiia i Don*, 311-313 for the description of senators' visit to Don and their reception as of angels by common cossacks.

supplying themselves — by the early nineteenth century this was no longer the only option. The distribution of firearms among cossacks was regulated and there were separate requirements for cossacks serving in guard units, etc.

The Statute also outlined the number of units that Don cossacks were to provide: fifty four army regiments, two guards regiments, one artillery battery, a separate squad serving at arsenals and a hundred military artisans (*masterovye kazaki*). To man such a force, cossacks were required to serve in three cycles, i.e., only one third of eligible cossacks were enrolled in active service at any one time, being rotated after two or three years. The Statute increased the number of non-commissioned officers in cossack units to improve control and command thus increasing the military efficiency of cossacks. The Statute conserved and formalized a number of already existing practices regarding: the rotation of men between units, rules for conducting local censuses, recording and accounting of host manpower, and preparation of young cossacks to service.

The Statute of 1835 legally confirmed the principles of personal military service; the use of hired substitutes was strictly forbidden. This was to prevent the numerous abuses stemming from richer cossacks hiring the poorer ones. Such a practice had long been considered a serious problem in the eyes of imperial officials, since such substitutes were often considered to be of extremely low quality, not proficient with weapons and sometimes barely fit for service in general. At the same time, the Statute permitted and further clarified the status of the so-called Cossack Merchant Society (*Torgovoe*

Obshchestvo Kazakov), which was composed of five hundred especially rich cossacks, whose merchant activities were deemed more beneficial, both to the host and the empire, than their military service. These cossacks were allowed to pay a tax instead of serving personally. Of those also exempt from military service, the Statute listed only clergy and Kalmyk herdsman who were engaged in an economically important profession in the society obliged to provide light cavalry troops. Besides, the prohibition against hired substitutes could not always be enforced in practice and local officials were sometimes forced to tacitly accept them.

The Statute also centralized procedures for equipping cossacks for service; ammunition was to be made in the host workshops or purchased by the host as a whole. Further steps were outlined to standardize artillery and small arms calibers. As a precautionary note, rifles were stored in state-owned warehouses and were handed out to cossacks only for the time of active service.

While numerous clauses of the Statute regulated cossack military obligations, due attention was also paid to local administration and functioning of the courts. Following the bureaucratic standards of that time, even minor procedural details were prescribed and regulated. The territory of Don was reorganized into eight districts: seven *okrugi* and separate *kochev'e* for local Kalmyks. Paying lip-service to the cossack traditions, the new obligation of ataman was to supervise proper implementation of entitlements and benefits granted to the host. The ataman was both the head of cossack military and civilian administrations, while the once-powerful cossack assembly – *krug* –

was barely mentioned and was retained only for ceremonial purposes. The power of the ataman became — both practically and formally — similar to the power of governors. Civilian administration in general became quite similar to the administration of neighboring provinces with the term “province” replaced by “host.”

The Don Statute went hand in hand with other legislative acts clarifying and further formalizing the status of cossacks in the Russian Empire: the reform of Ministry of War in 1835 subordinated cossacks only to the Department of the Military Colonies (*Departament Poselennykh Voisk*). If previously, cossack hosts were under the double supervision of both civilian and military authorities, since 1835 they reported only to the Ministry of War. A bit earlier, in 1832, the Code of Law was published, which listed cossacks as a special category of rural population (*sel'skie obyvateli*) bringing, finally, at least some official recognition of cossack status — even if it could be unpleasant for cossacks themselves. In 1837 cossacks of Little Russia were subordinated to the Ministry of State Property (*Ministerstvo Gosudarstennykh Immushchestv*), finally denying them cossack status — that had been contested since the mid eighteenth century — and finally converting this large ambiguous group into state peasants.⁹²

The Statute of 1835 was the first imperial legislation to embrace all areas of cossack life, replacing scores of decrees, charters, and instructions.

⁹² On cossacks place in imperial administration in this period see Robert McNeal, *Tsar and Cossack, 1855-1914* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 7, 94. On the Hetmanate case see Zenon Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy: Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate, 1760s-1830s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

Thus, the preparation of the Statute involved cooperation between various ministries and offices on an unprecedented scale. Naturally, the Ministry of War got the upper hand, yet even the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment (Education) and the Holy Synod gained their points as well.⁹³

For the time being, the Statute of 1835 dealt only with the Don Cossack Host, but statutes for other irregular units were already in the working stage. Until their completion, however, certain paragraphs of the Don Statute were applied to other hosts. For instance, in March 1835, the Commander of the Caucasus Corps, Grigorii Rozen, contacted Ministry of War asking for current regulations regarding drunkenness and immoral behavior of cossack officers.⁹⁴ The response cited paragraphs of Don Statute. Although the Statute had not been approved by the Emperor yet, it still was referred to as a source of law; besides, in this case, clauses of the Don Statute project were being applied to the Black Sea cossacks.

As the author of the Statute, General Chernyshev, remained at the top of military hierarchy during the reign of Nicolas, he was in a position to reform other cossack units in accordance with his own vision – speaking of this, it was quite an achievement to be able to please two emperors of quite different characters. Thanks to Chernyshev, already in 1823, the commission to create

⁹³ RGIA, fund 1150, inventory 2, file 1a, fols 25-33. While the primary work on the Statute was done by the ministries of War and Justice, other ministries were consulted on specific issues in their competence. For instance, both the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and the Holy Synod were consulted regarding the education of Don cossacks. Noteworthy, however, that even by January 1835, the project ignored some aspects of all-imperial legislation. Minister of Popular Enlightenment complained that even the most recent drafts of the Don statute ignored *Ustav* on Gymnasiums issued in 1828 and, for instance, allowed individuals without university degree to teach in gymnasium situated in the land of host.

⁹⁴ RGVIA, fund 405, inventory 6, file 133.

a new Statute for Orenburg cossacks was established, while in 1835 the Committee for revising the Black Sea Host Statute began its work.⁹⁵ These Statutes were completed and published as laws in 1840 and 1842 respectively. Later statutes, based on the Don, were introduced to the Danube Host in 1844, the Astrakhan' Host in 1845, Caucasus Line Host in 1845, Sibir Line cossacks in 1846.⁹⁶ As for newly-established units, they were organized according to this pre-existing template; the Don Statute influenced the organization Tobol'sk, Irkutsk, Enisey cossack regiments, as well as of the Transbaikal Cossack Host.

There is some question as to whether the spread of the Don Statutes can be interpreted as unification. The striking similarities in the text of these documents have led some researchers to agree that these statutes led to uniformity in cossack military service and to the creation of a separate cossack estate. The series of Statutes based on Chernyshev's legislation for the Don cossacks can be treated as empire's response both to new challenges in warfare and the numerous accumulated problems in the administration of cossack units. Thanks to these statutes, almost all hosts of the empire gained unified status and unified legislation with only minor differences; stemming from current host size and purpose and less from its previous traditions. Bruce Menning calls Chernyshev the "Russian Lycurgus" for all his legislative activities and bringing order into the Russian military

⁹⁵ To be more precise, the work on the new Statute for Orenburg Cossacks started in 1818 on the initiative of local administration. Initial draft, however, was discarded and the final statute version was based on the Don Host Statute.

⁹⁶ PSZ, 2nd series, vol. 15, no. 14041; PSZ, 2nd series, vol. 17, no. 15809.

estate.⁹⁷ Indeed, to sort out centuries of edicts, charters, and instructions; as to bring them into accordance with the imperial law in use, yet present them as codifications of cossack customary law should not be underestimated in its difficulty. This is not to mention, the actual spread of the laws over practically all cossacks of the empire in all their diversity – from such perspective the achievements of the 1830s can be viably viewed as great.

Following this reasoning, one can admit that despite the reign of Nicolas I often portrayed as the period of stagnation and reaction, this period was also a culmination of monarchy's enlightenment program with order having been brought into the most ambivalent spheres of borderland management and to its disorderly frontiers. The said militarization of administration that happened during the Nicolas' rule thus can be treated as a form of rationalization in a society where the rule of law was traditionally weak if existent at all.

On the other hand, the limitations of the Statute and legislation accompanying it should be acknowledged as well. First of all, a number of distinctions among the cossacks did remain. Not all cossack units received statutes based on the Don. Bashkir and some other *inorodtsy* irregulars were too small, thus Don regulations were inapplicable to them. Peculiarities of Siberian cossacks stemmed from the fact that they were basically settled regular troops. There were too few Azov cossacks; besides they served primarily in the navy and not in the army, so regulations of cossack service carefully prescribed by Chernyshev and his supporters were barely applicable

⁹⁷ Bruce Menning, "A.I. Chernyshev: A Russian Lycurgus," 219.

to them as well. Other cossack units such as the Ural were heavily involved in campaigning in the mid-nineteenth century so it was impractical to undertake their reorganizations at that point of time.

As for those units that got new statutes, the Don Statute was not mechanically copied for them. Imperial officials spent decades surveying the land of hosts as to take into account — at least nominally — their economic conditions and traditions. From such a perspective, the number of statutes, adopted in 1830s-1840s, suggests that although important steps were taken toward unification, officials displayed a degree of flexibility in balancing the unifying elements with the need to adapt to local peculiarities.⁹⁸

Attention to these peculiarities is important since there is a vast difference between the enactment of the legal document and its implementation and practical use. As the previous chapters demonstrated, a number of cossack hosts had already been organized on Don Host model before the Statute with its legislative unification even came into existence. This is, however, only the formal side of the story, since in practice the lives of cossack hosts were barely regulated at the turn of the centuries. The same argument can be applied to the post-1835 period: by that point the cossacks were already controlled by imperial officials in many spheres; their atamans were appointed; internal life of the hosts was step by step approaching standards of imperial law ever since the mid eighteenth century. Therefore, if one takes into account the time required to actually implement the statutes of

⁹⁸ For instance, the requirement to maintain horses characteristic for many cossack hosts would be impractical (if possible) in Kamchatka.

the 1830-1840s and obstacles to it ranging from slow pace of printing enough copies to the inertia of thinking of local officials, one may argue then in the end, not much changed in the lives of common cossacks with the adoption of these statutes. The degree to which statutes practically influenced the life of cossack settlements deserves further attention and investigation of its own.

Furthermore, the timeframe of these statutes practical application was quite limited. On the one hand, numerous corrections, clarifications, explanations and modifications followed from ministry officials almost immediately after the adoption of each statute. On the other, the decision to bid on closed martial communities could be only temporary. As Russia moved towards universal military conscription, in 1874, Milutin's new reform statute was imposed upon the Don host and then on all the rest. Thus, the Don Statute was practically used for less than forty years, while other hosts statutes were used for even less.

Finally, each cossack unit received its own statute: each cossack community symbolically retained its individual character, special designation and direct link with the monarch rather than being homogenized in a single cossack estate. Visibility of monarchy's respect to traditions was maintained and cossack hosts were regulated by separate deals – just as in times before.⁹⁹ From this point, if the reforms of imperial legislation were an

⁹⁹ For more on this bond between the cossacks and the throne see: McNeal, *Tsar and Cossack*, 1-5; Philip Longworth, "Transformations in Cossackdom 1650-1850," in *War and Society in East Central Europe.*, ed. Gunther Rothenberg and Béla Király (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1979), 404-405.

important move towards making cossacks an efficient military force, they were not the only tools used by the empire.

Other steps were undertaken towards instilling cossacks with dynastic loyalty as well. The practice of solemnly bestowing military banners to cossack units or recruiting cossacks into the guard was in use since earlier times and continued throughout the nineteenth century. In 1827 the title of Ataman of all Cossack Hosts was added to the collection of titles of the Romanov dynasty and bestowed upon the heir to the throne. At first glance, one may say that this was simply a tactic to flatter the cossacks about their special status in the Russian Empire. Still, it can also be treated as a concept of monarchy itself being shaped by its frontiers. In her work, “Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective”, Karen Barkey notes:

In many ambiguous ways, empires experience in some transitional populations the simultaneous potential for both legitimation and opposition. That is, dissent can sometimes help further legitimate the imperial order; opposition that wants to be incorporated into empire can bring legitimacy to empire.¹⁰⁰

This notion is also applicable to cossack communities. If Potemkin’s adoption of a similar title can be seen either as subjective fascination with all things cossack or a move to destabilize Polish Commonwealth, adoption of ataman title by Tsesarevich was a perfect public demonstration of how successfully the Romanov dynasty had won over the legendary fractious cossacks.

¹⁰⁰ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 157–58.

Furthermore, apologists for the dynasty strove to create a myth of the special loyalty of the cossack. The history of Don cossacks written by Vladimir Bronevskii was published in 1834, suspiciously close to the publication of the upcoming Don Statute. Even more, Bronevskii was among the first to imagine cossacks as an honorable martial estate of the empire — perfectly in accordance with empire's needs of that time and in the midst of Chernyshev's legislative activities.¹⁰¹

Consequently – or maybe even contrary to – imperial attempts to domesticate cossacks, many cossacks considered themselves privileged, compared to the majority of population, due, among other things, to their imagined pact with the Tsar, whom they served as faithful warriors and were thus to be justly rewarded. This was, however, not just a matter of the cossacks imagination, but a reciprocal link: the personal bodyguard of Alexander II during the days when he was hunted by revolutionaries was composed of mounted cossacks, while Nicolas II was wearing the uniform of the Kuban' cossacks at the moment of his abdication. In the end, the bond between the monarchy and cossackdom assumed great importance in the imperial structure, even if the imperial version of the cossack myth was conceived only in the mid 1830s.

¹⁰¹ Vladimir Bronevskii, *Istoriia Donskago Voiska* (Saint Petersburg, 1834). Bronevskii was a noble from Smolensk; in 1805-1833 he served in the Navy and actively participated in the Russo-Turkish wars. As a historian, he is also known for his memoir on the Second Archipelago Expedition and for his notes on Tavrida region. As for certain culmination of Bronevskii's thesis in the imperial historiography see K. K. Abaza, *Kazaki: Dontsy, Ural'tsy, Kubantsy, Tertsy: Ocherki iz Istorii i Starodavniago Kazatskago Byta v Obshchedostupnom Izlozhenii, dlia Chteniia v Voiskakh, Sem'e i Shkole* (Saint Petersburg: Izd. V. Berezovskii, 1899).

Epilogue

The emergence of different cossack hosts in the Pontic Steppe region, during the last quarter of the eighteenth through first quarter of the nineteenth centuries, became possible due to the imbrication of governmental interest in colonization and the locals' efforts to preserve traditional rights and customs in light of the situation. Yet, the majority of the various irregular formations raised in the region, after the dissolution of Zaporozhian cossacks, were short-lived – some were even barely existent. Indeed, only the Azov and Danube cossacks managed to maintain a relatively strong identity, which they would hold up until the era of the Great Reforms. With the reforms came their partial disbanding and partial resettlement to reinforce the Black Sea cossacks at the Caucasian frontier. In result of this resettlement almost all branches of the former Zaporozhians were reunited in the end.

The fate of various cossack units that existed in New Russia at the turn of the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries further illustrates the challenges imperial rule faced in managing its vast territories and the flexibility required from the officials appointed to administer these southern borderlands. As the result of various factors – such as vast distances from the center; a scarce and scattered population; lack of coordination between various imperial offices; and shortage of trained officials – contradictory policies emerged, which in turn resulted in precarious loyalties of the local population. All of these factors added up to a situation of serious and prolonged difficulty in establishing firm imperial rule over the steppe.

The frontier, however, offered other opportunities for expanding and consolidating the empire. The exploitation of frontier traditions and symbols could bolster imperial claims over annexed territories; justifying further expansion, by sowing discontent in neighboring states or attracting cross border migration. To be sure, the porous frontier provided similar opportunities for rival state systems, also engaged in attempts to control population flows in their direction.

The question remains, however, as to the changing nature of cossackdom during this transitional period with its varying contexts, i.e. what was cossackdom in the end and what did it mean at the turn of the centuries? Traditional definitions of cossackdom have been treated as a function of the binary opposition between categories like “estate” or “ethnicity/nation.” On the one hand, to discard these categories completely would force the historian to ignore both the rich primary sources and the extensive historiography on cossackdom that actively appealed to these categories. On the other hand, it is also not possible to ignore the critical tradition of the followers of Michel Foucault, who argue that categories, like these, are languages of mythologisation that represent only power relations, without being particularly useful in understanding the historical reality behind them.¹ Consequently, in order to advance towards a flexible definition of cossackdom three aspects might be considered: cossackdom as an actual experience of living people; cossackdom as a legal category; and cossackdom as mythologized image.

¹ Michel Foucault, *Nuzhno Zashchishchat' Obshchestvo: Kurs Lektsii, Prochitannykh v Kollezh de Frans v 1975-1976 Uchebnom Godu,* trans. E. A. Samarskaia (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 2005).

If one was to focus on the actual lives of the cossacks in this period, the first thing to note is the striking diversity of lifestyles of those connected with local cossackdom. Take for example, some of the former Zaporozhians who preferred to continue military service. Their story would be as proud warriors whose community got separated by imperial borders and who ended up in the armed forces of Romanovs, Ottomans, and Habsburgs. Meanwhile, others – both elites and commoners – settled down becoming landlords or peasants and focused more on the economies of their households; abandoning the venerable traditions of a martial community. Still others chose to join a floating population roaming throughout the steppe in search of a better living, becoming either hired workers or bandits. It is not feasible to identify an ‘average’ cossack in this period. Cossacks would tell different stories in the Caucasus where their main task was to fight the Circassians and on the Danube where they were engaged primarily in fishing for a livelihood. Similarly, the stories of those who performed their service as irregular troops only formally, yet in practice engaged in commercial activities as merchants, would differ radically from those told by officers in the Life Guards who were in personal contact with the Emperor and his family.

The history of the cossacks in the Pontic Steppe, however, should not only be limited to the former Zaporozhian cossacks. There were also Nekrasovtsy, who shared many of the customs and experiences of the Zaporozhians: moving between empires, yet preserving a distinctive way of life. There also were Tatars, Kalmyks, or Nogais who served as irregular units of the Russian Empire and were occasionally designated as cossacks by

official decree. In addition, there were foreigners coming from the Ottoman lands – Moldavians, Bulgarians, Greeks, etc. – who served as volunteers in the Russian army and at times were considered part of cossackdom as well. Another category of irregulars in the region were the cossacks of Hetmanate, who moved to New Russia in order to join already existing units; or who were officially resettled in Kuban' as part of the on-going process of state supported colonization. Finally, representatives of the Polish – and not only Polish – gentry could be found in cossack units in the Pontic Steppe as well. Given all the noted diversity, what were the common elements that justify the continued use of the term cossack? For one, shifting loyalties, high mobility, frequent resort to violence, and a resistance to authority were common characteristics of many cossack formations.

This character was in part the result of the fracturing of previously unified communities that went along with the Russian governments' administration of these conquered lands. Consequently, various cossacks groups were forced to live under different imperial systems, serving various sovereigns. This was true not only for former Zaporozhians, but also for Tatars, Nogais, Nekrasovtsy, etc.² Consequently, Russian and Ottoman governments held interest in consolidating and integrating their parts of the divided communities either, as in the Russian case, by repeatedly promulgated amnesties for the betrayers and lost sons, or by promised respect of the traditional lifestyle, as for the Ottoman side. In order to attract

² For such mobile categories Natalie Rothman coined the term “transimperial subjects,” which seems to be quite applicable to cossacks as well. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

more migrants, both sides granted land, tax exemptions, and various other benefits. In the end, the cossacks – as well as other communities divided by imperial borders – could benefit from this inter-imperial competition by choosing the side that offered better terms at any given moment. If this trans-imperial process were expanded to its limits, the entire region from the Adriatic to the Caspian could be envisaged as inhabited and influenced by a fluid movement and interaction of various branches of Pontic Steppe cossacks.

This radical conceptualization of space fits a more general pattern – especially if including foreigners treated as cossacks – applicable to an interpretation of the histories of frontier societies within Central European and Mediterranean empires. There is a general consensus that military and bandit communities of the borderlands – whether uskoks, klephts, hajduks – were typologically close to the cossacks and merit a closer comparative analysis. An intriguing aspect of this comparison would be a study of former hajduks who served in Russian cossack units during the Russo-Turkish wars and the reverse movement of former cossacks who joined the hajduk movement after their desertion, or the dissolution of their hosts, and then whatever choice connected to the dissolution.

The diversity of cossackdom emphasized in this dissertation raises the problem of whether the very word cossack contains any useful analytical meaning for scholars today. Such a question has already been raised by Sergei Markedonov, who took a general view of the history of cossackdom from early modern times to the twentieth century and called for the

elaboration of more precise terminology and typology since he considered the word cossack too vague and too politically loaded.³ It is difficult to disagree with Markedonov, as he includes the free cossacks of the sixteenth century, cossacks as servants of the empire in the nineteenth century, exploitation of cossack myth during the World War II with both the Nazis and Soviets fielding cossack units, etc. When the term is used in such different temporal and spatial contexts and encompasses so many different communities it is, naturally, drained of any substantive content.

Still, as this dissertation has further demonstrated, cossackdom was extremely diverse and bore ambiguous meanings even when applied to groups operating within the geographical limits of the Pontic Steppe during the short span of the late eighteenth – early nineteenth centuries. Further, the demonstrated diversity of cossackdom runs counter to much contemporary scholarship and popular histories, which over represent the Don Cossacks and, to a certain degree, Zaporozhian cossacks, while virtually ignoring many other claimants to the title. From such a perspective, the case of the post-Zaporozhian Pontic Steppe is illustrative of the complexities of social life and the phenomenon of social categories in constant flux. This phenomenon can be further extrapolated both over other borderlands and the Russian Empire as a state.

Another argument of this thesis is that despite – or even because – of the term cossack having been sporadically applied, it still must be

³ Sergei Markedonov, “Kazachestvo: Edinstvo Ili Mnogoobrazie?,” *Ab Imperio* 2 (2004): 521–28.

emphasized that it survived in local and official usage – even across imperial borders. Thus, it fulfilled important, while sometimes, contradictory functions in the conditions in which it flourished, as myths so often do. Among those myths were: the illusion of freedom; promotion of the martial values of a society determined to defend its borders; spiritual values. At the same time, it could be used to denote a status rewarded to compensate for the lack of material gain or as an administrative device to regulate potentially unruly and roaming populations.

Similarly, cossackdom, imagined as a coherent social or legal category in the Russian Empire should be carefully reconsidered. Well until the mid 1830s, the legal framework used for defining cossack status was vague – leaving much possibility, varied understandings, and competing interpretations. In practice, such vagueness could lead to the same unit being at the same time considered cossack in some documents and non-cossack in others – another illustration concerning the complexities of borderland management as there was no encompassing legislation to regulate the life of cossack communities. Yet, as one example, this did not stop College of War officials from using cossackdom as an umbrella term that covered almost any irregular. On the other hand, there also were the regularized cossacks, who further complicated this already complicated picture.

Additionally, cossackdom was widely used to denote temporary units – be they foreign volunteers or locally raised militias. The status of the people who served in these units was far from secure; usually being regulated by separate decrees that might have little in common with the promises made at

the stage of recruitment. These forced transfers of populations to and from cossackdom illustrate not only the fluidity of cossack category, but also the (in)stability of other estates' statuses.

This all also brings up the question: did the situation change in the 1830s with all the work done by Chernyshev, Speranskii, and other imperial legislators and did the cossacks become an estate of empire in the end? The answer here would depend upon what one means under estate. In the Russian legislation the term *soslovie* was used rather interchangeably with, for instance, *sostoianie*, *chin*, *zvanie*; besides, *soslovie* sometimes could also be used synonymously with *uchrezhdenie* – a quite different term. Furthermore, given that these terms included numerous categories within themselves, it is not surprising that the applicability of the estate paradigm to the history of the Russian Empire has been a topic of many hot debates.⁴

For instance, Elise Wirtschafter, focusing on people of various ranks (*raznochintsy*), brought attention to the fluid and mutable boundaries between various social categories.⁵ While Michael Confino, to the contrary, drew attention to the competing categories of estate and social group and whether they were mutually exclusive. As for Confino, estates are not helpful for the description of the numerous and diverse social groups in the Russian Empire; yet, even so, they should not be completely abandoned as analytical

⁴ The start of the *soslovie* debate is associated with a seminal article by Gregory Freeze, "The *Soslovie* (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 1 (1986): 11–36.

⁵ Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Structures of Society: Imperial Russia's People of Various Ranks* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994).

categories.⁶ Pushing against Confino's thesis, David Ransel proposed the rejection of estates as structuralist categories and their replacement with the functionalist concept of corporations; given that estates-based historical writing artificially separates social reality, presents society in the form of isolatable units, which obscure the relational influences between social groups.⁷ Robert Johnson, on the other hand, considered estates as useful approximations – even if they were heterogeneous in themselves.⁸ Playing on this perspective, Alison Smith's focuses on burghers and concludes that *sosloviia* meant both everything and nothing to contemporaries who constructed social reality themselves, while the state was only adapting to it.⁹ Nevertheless, even if taking into account recent revisionist trends, the estate did carry specific meaning not only as the external decrees of administration or as legal rights and duties, but also in the terms of self-perception and self-regulation.

In this vein, what were the essential features of cossacks as a social category in the post-1835 Russian Empire? In the nineteenth century the cossack hosts finally became a tool of imperial rule: a form of both spatial and social organization similar to a peasant community or, say, Jewish kagal. Still, even after the unifying reforms of the 1830s, cossackdom was far from being homogenous in at least two senses.

⁶ Michael Confino, "The 'Soslovie' (Estate) Paradigm: Reflections on Some Open Questions," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 49, no. 4 (2008): 681–99.

⁷ David Ransel, "Implicit Questions in Michael Confino's Essay: Corporate State and Vertical Relationships," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 51, no. 2/3 (2010): 195–210.

⁸ Robert Johnson, "Paradigms, Categories, or Fuzzy Algorithms? Making Sense of Soslovie and Class in Russia," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 51, no. 2/3 (2010): 461–66.

⁹ Alison Smith, *For the Common Good and Their Own Well-Being: Social Estates in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

First, cossackdom included nobility, clergy, merchants, and rank-and-file cossacks in itself. Consequently, all these subcategories within cossackdom were intersected: cossack elites had much in common with other nobles; cossack clergy with clergy of other regions and so on. From such a perspective, cossackdom, as a category, can be treated a bit separately from the imperial social structure, while perfectly mirroring the outside society. In this sense, one may conclude that cossack-nobles, cossack-clergy, and cossack-merchants were separate estates on their own or that – as it went in many cases – cossacks could be representatives of two estates at the same time.

Second, even in the 1830s, there was no such thing as an encompassing legislation for cossacks in general. Specific cossack hosts were regulated by separate charters, decrees, and statutes. Presumably, this was the effect of a tactical appeal to tradition, flattering cossacks with their special connection to the monarch, and, thus, elevation of cossack status over the masses of common peasantry. Further, when compared to other estates of the empire, this feature attains greater importance. Peasant communities were not regulated separately in each district, as well as noble assemblies – even with some recognition of local peculiarities – had common legal underlying. From such a perspective, one may argue that each host was an estate of its own. In the end, unified all-imperial cossackdom as a singular estate did not emerge at all – peculiarities of separate units heavily influenced their life even after reforms brought a certain degree of unification to cossack administration and military service.

Consequently, keeping in mind the heterogeneous nature of cossack hosts and the existence of semi-estates within cossackdom itself, the term estate may not be the best term to characterize the situation. On the other hand, paying a certain tribute to the historiographical tradition and having no widely acknowledged alternatives, I would not discard the concept of the cossack estate when speaking of late imperial Russia either. After all, the same way as *soslovie*, cossackdom (*kazachestvo*) can be just a useful approximation – even if used sparingly and acknowledging its limitations.

Furthermore, the story of cossack legal inclusion into imperial society culminated just two decades before the Great Reforms that weakened the estate structure of the empire; with these reforms *soslovie* lost its original meaning and was subsumed under new and often contradictory terms.¹⁰ Furthermore, the same reforms also questioned the rationale behind the prolonged existence of military caste in the era of universal military conscription.¹¹

Nevertheless, the persistence of separate and loyal military estates till the very fall of the monarchy itself offers another argument for the thesis that, in the case of the Russian Empire a heterogeneous legal system – a system

¹⁰ A fitting metaphor was used by Alfred Rieber, who called Russian imperial society, “the sedimentary society” where relics of different eras coexisted, acquired new layers, and complexly interacted. Alfred Rieber, “The Sedimentary Society,” *Russian History* 16, no. 2/4 (1989): 353–76.

¹¹ Another debatable question is whether cossackdom can be considered as anachronism in the late nineteenth century. For instance, Gunther Rothenberg and Robert McNeal saw no future in military caste on the eve of the twentieth century. On the other hand, looking at a larger perspective, one should not simplify military developments as teleology towards universal conscription. In discarding such a teleology, one may notice that after the mass armies of the mid-twentieth century many countries shifted to professional armies, while the role of private military companies and subcontractors has grown immensely in the hybrid conflicts of today – a parallel with military entrepreneurs of the Early Modern period?

that does not move towards general citizenship and civil society, with various social groups being governed by separate legislations – was completely viable for the integration of borderlands into the imperial society – even if it did not correspond to the standards of Western Europe.¹²

Consequently, this study of the Russian imperial policies towards the incorporation of cossackdom may be considered as a step towards a proper symmetric comparative study of the encounter between borderland military communities and other states all over Eurasia. Furthermore, studies taking into account Russian cossacks, reforms of the Habsburg Military Frontier, and later Ottoman experiments with *hamidiye* – irregular servitors of the Eastern Anatolia – may shed further light on the transfers of knowledge between imperial militaries: one being modeled after another, their interconnections and mutual influences.

Still, the integration of these martial communities into imperial society was not only a challenge for the empires. Smaller states are also viable examples for comparison. For instance, state builders in Serbia and Greece had to somehow integrate local hajduks and klephts – militant borderlanders accustomed to violence and banditry – i.e., they faced challenges not unlike those faced by imperial administrators. The lives of hajduks and klephts changed drastically in the first third of the nineteenth century, with Serbia gaining autonomy and Greece and independence from Ottoman rule. At a certain point, both hajduks and klephts were instrumental in state-building

¹² For more on heterogeneous legal system see the overview of Mikhail Dolbilov's conference presentation by Alexander Semyonov in Alexei Miller, ed., *Rossiiskaia Imperiia v Sravnitel'noi Perspektive* (Moscow: Novoe Izdatel'stvo, 2004).

projects — actively participating in the Serbian Uprisings of 1804 – 1817 or the Greek War of Independence 1821 – 1829. Yet, the moment autonomy or independence were achieved, they became a burden for local elites in attempts to either cement their own power or to build an army according to western standards instead of the existing loosely controlled bands of irregulars. In such a context, the first President of the Greek Republic, Ioannis Kapodistrias — former Foreign Minister of the Russian Empire — resorted to policies quite similar those applied in Russia's move to integrate Little Russia in the eighteenth century; or to what Prince Vasil'chikov was proposing, with regards to the cossack problem, in the early nineteenth century. Kapodistrias exploited existing conflicts between various klepht factions to prevent their unified opposition.¹³ While the reaction to the hajduks problem by Milosh Obrenovich, Serbian Prince from 1817 – 1860, was more repressive, it again aimed at scattering of any possible opposition to the new ruler.¹⁴ In such a context, the divide-and-conquer method applied by Russian officials towards the cossacks was quite common to the times.

Finally, in speaking of cossackdom as image or as myth, two points require further consideration. First, the strength of the cossack image, as an image of freedom, is striking. Meanwhile, the reality of their situation by the mid nineteenth century was one of numerous obligations; making it difficult to argue that cossacks lived any better than average peasants. Standards of

¹³ John Koliopoulos, *Brigands with a Cause: Brigandage and Irredentism in Modern Greece, 1821-1912* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 67-104.

¹⁴ Aleksandar Petrovic, "The Role of Banditry in the Creation of National States in the Central Balkans During the 19th Century: A Case Study: Serbia" (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2003).

living were even worse around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries due to numerous unrestricted abuses by elites. At this point, cossacks of the smaller hosts could practically be considered as the serfs of their officers, in almost everything, but the name. Still, peasants from Little Russia maintained utopian perceptions of cossackdom even during the Crimean War.

Second, the spatial dimension of the image issue requires reassessment. Even if some Zaporozhian cossacks remained in the Pontic Steppe – neither being resettled in the Caucasus, nor having migrated somewhere else – the institutional continuity of Sich was broken and the Zaporozhian traditions had to be later reinvented in different circumstances. The format of the dissertation prevents me from deeply engaging with counterfactual methods, still, what would happen if the Sich was not dissolved in 1775?¹⁵ From such a perspective, several factors may be taken into account.

First, if we speak of Hetmanate and Zaporozhian Sich as Early Modern entities, there were a number of grievances between them: quite often they served different sovereigns in the era of Ruin; quite often Zaporozhians raided Little Russian settlements; quite often regiments from Hetmanate participated in the retributive pacifications of Zaporizhia. Besides, both entities thought first of their own economic interest over whatever commonalities in language or religion may be shared – almost till the end of Zaporizhia there was a customs

¹⁵ For another example of counter-factual reasoning with regards to the dissolution of Sich see: Mykhailo Haukhman, “Zvidky Kozaky? Iakbytolohiia Odnoho Mitu,” <http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/avtorska-kolonka/1809-mykhailo-haukhman>, February 25, 2016.

system between the lands of Sich and the lands of Little Russia. Finally, the usual divide between warriors and peasants existed in this region as well: many Zaporozhian cossacks frowned upon buckwheat-sowers (*hrechkosii*) from Little Russia.¹⁶

Second, much of our knowledge of Zaporozhian cossacks today stems from texts produced by the Little Russian intellectuals of the early nineteenth century. On the one hand, these texts quite often follow the argument of manifest on the dissolution of the Sich, which portray Zaporozhians as unproductive robbers and drunkards. However, it must be noted, that this portrayal may very well extend from the above mentioned rivalries. On the other hand, in contemporary research, these works are now being deconstructed as unreliable; having too little in common with the actual reality of the Zaporozhians. After all, as actual Zaporozhia was no more, intellectuals of the former Hetmanate could imagine it practically anyway they wished.¹⁷

Consequently, if, for instance, the Sich had been reformed largely along the lines of the Don Host, instead of being dissolved, the Ukrainian national project that we know today would have looked very differently. If Zaporozhian cossacks had stayed in the region and preserved their martial ethos, it is quite probable that at some point they would have generated their own intellectual tradition. Members of this tradition would have worked on the

¹⁶ Such a divide between warriors and peasants is not unique, happening in other martial communities as well. Don cossacks were skeptical towards Russian peasants, Croatian grenzers saw themselves as higher than the neighboring serfs, etc.

¹⁷ For the Zaporozhian cossack image during the early nineteenth century see Denys Shatalov, *Uivlennia pro Kozatstvo: Ukrains'ke Kozatsvo u Suspil'ni Druhoi Polovyny XVIII - Pershoi Polovyny XIX St.* (Dnipro: Dominanta Print, 2017), 159–72.

codification of the local dialects, written the histories of the true cossacks from Sich-centric perspective, and promoted their own political agenda.

In such a case, many options were open for Zaporozhians – becoming part of the Ukrainian national project was only one of them.¹⁸ Indeed, one option could have involved collaboration between Zaporozhian, Little Russian, and Galician intellectuals as an initiative to advance an all-Ukrainian project. In this effort, however, Zaporozhians could strive for primacy, attempting to portray only themselves as true Ukrainians while downplaying other localities.¹⁹ Besides, Zaporozhians could have advanced a national project of their own – be it a completely independent one or as part of the four-partite All-Russian people: Cossacks joining the Great Russians, Little Russians, and White Russians.²⁰ Finally, there was also an option of honor-bound martial estate with little regard to the national question – after all, monarchies could be quite successful instilling dynastic loyalty into martial communities.²¹

¹⁸ In such a scenario a fitting parallel is observed by John-Paul Himka, “The Construction of Nationality in Galician Rus’: Icarian Flights in Almost All Directions,” in *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, ed. Ronald Suny and Michael Kennedy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 109–64.

¹⁹ Geographical factors favor this option: contrary to Don cossacks who were separated from the Russian hinterland by a vast steppe, Zaporozhians lived in close proximity to Kyiv and at crucial points participated in affairs of the region. The classic example of such participation would be Petro Konashevych-Sahaidachyi and his role in the restoration of Orthodox hierarchy in the region. Consequently, Zaporozhian cossacks could become active in Little Russia in later periods as well – and in this imagined scenario not only as common robbers, but also as political activists or *narodnyky* of their own.

²⁰ Interestingly, Ivan Pavlovskii, nineteenth century geographer, considered Cossacks as the fourth constituting nation. See Ivan Pavlovskii, *Geografiia Rossiiskoi Imperii. Chast' I.* (Derpt: Tipografiia Shiunmanna, 1843), 93–94.

²¹ On national indifference see Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 93–119. Speaking of examples from real history, it is striking how masterfully Habsburgs managed to secure grenzers' dynastic loyalty in 1848 and used them to suppress various national movements.

One may argue, in the end, that the comparative ease with which the Pontic Steppe got later conceived as Southern Ukraine was largely the side effect of imperial policies, the result of the dissolution of the pre-existing Zaporozhian cossacks by the empire and the resettlement of former Zaporozhians elsewhere. The reimagination of the region from Early Modern *Vol'nosti Viis'ka Zaporiz'koho Nyzovoho* into part of contemporary Ukraine was actually made easier – if not even made possible – through the imperial *Novorossia*. Consequently, following such reasoning, the dissolution of the Sich can be seen as a favor for Ukrainian nation-builders and not a tragedy for the Ukrainian people at all. Still, challenges to the Ukrainian national project and its spatial dimensions is a problem to be taken up in other research – and a story for another day.

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