

## FOR QUESTIONS SYSTEMATIZATION HISTORY OF THE COSSACKS

Erokhin I.Ur.

Croydon College, London, U.K.

History of the Cossacks is currently of great interest of researchers in Russia and Ukraine. Questions of history of the Cossacks are poorly structured in a global context. This article is an attempt to identify the key points to the genesis of the Cossack community.

**Key words:** Cossacks, ethnicity, class, history, Russia, culture, traditions.

Everyone knows about the Cossacks, independently on the interest to the history. Cossacks appear on the pages of textbooks each time when the major events of Russian State history are described. But what is known about them? Where do they originate from?

The term «Cossack» was first mentioned in the sources of the XIII century, in particular in «The Secret History of the Mongols» (1240) and according to different versions has Turkic, Mongol, Adighe – Abkhazian or Indo-European origin. The meaning of the term which later became an ethnonym is also defined variously: a free man, light-horseman, fugitive, lonely man and others [1].

The origin of the Cossacks and the time of its appearance on the historical arena is not fully cleared out up to the present time. Researchers have disputes even about the etymology (origination) of the word-term «Cossack».

There are a lot of numerous scientific theories as to the Cossacks origin (only major ones number 18). All the theories of the Cossacks origin can be divided into two major groups: the theories of runaway and migration, that is alien, and autochthonous, that is of local, native origination of the Cossacks. Each of these theories has its own evidence base, different persuading or not fully persuading scientific argumentation, advantages and disadvantages.

According to the autochthonous theories the ancestors of the Cossacks lived in Kabarda and were the ancestors of Caucasian Circassians (Cherkasy, Yasy), conglomeration of Circassians (Yasy), «black klobuks» (Pechenegs, Torks, Berendeys), brodniki (Yasy and the groups of Slavonic-Russian and nomadic peoples) and others [10].

According to the migration theories the ancestors of the Cossacks – freedom-loving Russian people, who ran away across the boundaries of Russian and Polish-Lithuanian states due to natural historical reasons (colonization theory) or influenced by social antagonisms (class war theory).

The first trustworthy information about the Cossacks who lived in the Red Yar, apart from scientifically disapproved evidences in the notes of the Byzantine emperor Konstantin VII Porphyrogenitus (the X century) are contained in the chronicles of the Donskoy monastery («Grebenskaya chronicle», 1471), «Word known...by archimandrite Antony», «Brief Moscow chronicle» – the notes about Don Cossacks' participation in the Kulikov battle are contained in the chronicles of 1444.

Having appeared on the southern expanses of so called «Wild Field», the first communities of free Cossacks were real democratic commune formations [2]. The basic principles of their inner organization were personal freedom of all the participants, social equality, mutual respect, possibility for every Cossack to express freely his point of view at the Kazachiy Krug, which was the upper power-administrative body of the Cossack commune, to choose and be chosen as the supreme official person, ataman, who was the leader among the equals.

The bright principles of liberty, equality and brotherhood in the early Cossack commune formations were universal notions, traditional and self-evident.

Another version tells that by the end of the XIV century two major groups who lived in the lower reaches of the rivers Don and Dnieper were formed. They were added by a great number of east-Slavonic resettlers from the neighbor Moscow and Lithuanian princedoms. These southern territories were mainly settled by energetic people, who lacked adventures. Later runaway peasants began coming there. There is a version telling that Turkic peoples also took part in forming Cossack detachments.

This was profitable for both Moscow and Warsaw as, firstly, those lands were extremely fertile and, respectively, they got food from them; secondly, they protected the boundaries from Crimean Tartars, who were backed up by almost the most potential state of those times – Osman Empire. The settlers of the lower reaches of Don formed Don Cossacks and the settlers of the Left bank of Don – Zaporozhian Cossacks.

Orthodox Moscow Russia got along very well with Cossacks, which was not the case with Catholic Rzeczpospolita. For sure, not only religious issues were important as both Don and Zaporozhian Cossacks were the ancestors of Kyivska Rus habitants and for sure remembered about this – western part of the world in the face of Poland was alien for them.

Finally, Zaporozhian Cossacks went along well with Moscow and helped it to conquer the whole eastern part of Poland along with Kiev and then gave the oath of allegiance to Moscow Tsar.

Textbooks, as a rule, suggest an idea of runaway free-loving peasants, who were tortured by landlord serfdoms and who in the XVI-XVII centuries ran away from Russia to the south, to Don,

where they settled and finally became military people.

This people forgot about the past conflicts with Tsars and in the XIX-XX centuries became their reliable support. There are variants in such «Cossack history». The essence is that instead of runaway free-loving peasants free robber murderers appear, who later got wives, households, settled and instead of robberies started guarding the sate boundaries.

However, there is another point of view on the origin of Cossacks, which is expressed particularly by the famous historians Tatischev, Plev and others.

Cossacks don't have their history. Why this happened? «Cossacks' speeches (particularly, famous anti Roman speeches of Stepan Razin and Emelian Pugachev) show their certain pretensions.» But if «pretensions» existed then the grounds for these pretensions – «rights» – also existed. However, the data about Cossacks of the XVI-XVII centuries was not fully recovered and most probably was partly destroyed.

«The question as to the Cossacks origination is far not revealed in the world literature. Grabianka, as well as Rigelman, originated Cossacks from Khazars; Yan Pototskiy regarded Cossacks as the ancestors of those Kosogs who were settled by the Great Prince Mstislav Vladimirovich in the XI century in Chernihiv. According to Tatischev, there was a city of Cherlaz in Egypt (from this word Cossacks were later called Circasseans by Russians). The citizens of this city later resettled to Caucasus and were called Kosogi». Tatischev in fact writes that Herodotus mentioned Circasseans and that «family of their princes, who came from Egypt, where the city of Chirkas or Cirkas...» [10].

This family that came was settled in Kuban region and was previously of Christian faith. And further: «...Circassians speak Slavonic language, rather wrongly, but it is sooner a mixture of Tartar and Egyptian languages, so they can't even understand a Tartar man correctly, but, it seems to me, they can understand Circassians from Malaya Russia. They originate from Kabardian Circassians on the 14-th place in the Kursk principedom, they joined to them various rabble being under the power of Tartars and settled the villages and robbed around. There were a lot of complains and many of them were resettled by the tartar governor to the Dnieper territories where they built the city of Cherkassy. Then, observing Polish raffish rule, they turned whole Malaya Russia into Cossacks, elected hetman or ataman, and they all were called Circassians. During the rule of the Tsar Ioan II they resettled to the Don with Vishnevetsky Prince and built the city of Cherkassy...»

This statement has many enigmas. However, the beginning of Cossacks is dated by the XIV century. In other words, Cossacks can be possibly found among those who fought in the Kulikovo field. Whose part they took? Apparently, they can be equally found on the both sides of fighters as Kulikov battle is a fight between two arising ethnicities – Great Russian, based on the Christian

faith and Lithuanian, which took in a lot of catholic truths.

Cossacks in the XIV century were a faith tolerant formation; they had Christians of various denominations, Muslims and pagans among them. The rift in the faith touched yet only Christians.

«The fact is also known that Don Cossacks in 1380 gifted to Prince Dmitry Donskoy an icon of Theotokos before the Kulikov battle. Those and other mentionings prove that already at those times was formed a community of people on Don, which could have been a germ of Don Cossacks» [10].

How could Cossacks be on the side of the Mongols? Here comes a long quotation by Eremenko: «Cossack is not a Russian word. It came to us from the steppe nomadic people, who from the immemorial times made attacks on the territories of east Slavs. The flows of steppe horse riders on their way to rich cities and farm villages often encountered the same flows of east Slavs horse riders, who guarded the southern boundaries of their lands. The fights were hot then...» [3]

In time, «steppe cossacks» made friendships with Slavonic equestrian knights who were like them, they even made families with them and also called them cossacks. In the times of Tartar-Mongol attack the boundary detachments of Cossacks-Slavs couldn't resist the conquerors... Khan Golden Horde in the course of many further years formed purposefully such flying horse detachments from captured Russian and Ukrainian young men and called them Cossacks.

As a rule, during their attacks on the east Slavs territories the Hordes let the Cossacks' detachments go ahead and they were first to be killed in the fights with their own brothers. It couldn't last long this way. The turning point in the mood of Cossacks-slaves happened in the course of the Kulikov battle. They refused to be advance guard right at the crucial moment in the attack on the Russian troops, moved to the side and after the defeat of Mamai the whole Kosh took the side of the winners. According to treatment with Dmitry Donskoy, Cossacks remained a military camp on Don and served as guarders of the southern boundaries of Slavonic Rus» [4].

From the point of view of foreignness of the Golden Horde such a view point of the author of the quotation as to Cossacks-slaves is quite natural. But, let's remember that the best Turkish troops were made of Slavs who were taken from their childhood to be brought up by Turks with the purpose of replenishment of the best part of their army. It seems that the Golden Horde had the same approach to forming the troops. In general, it's a great time to announce, that the word «horde» can be equally referred to Mongols, Cossacks and Russians. Authors of school and university history textbooks are in charge of the fact that this word was secured after Tartar-Mongols. The same was made with the words «prince, tsar» while the word «khan» was exclusively for Mongols and other nomadic people.

«Such a strong influence of the East is imposed ...in the free hordes of Don and Ural Cossacks!

Compare with malorussian, where the West and Poland prevailed» [5].

L.N.Gumilev originates Zaporozhian and slobodskiy Cossacks from baptized Polovtsy. The lower Cossacks according to Gumilev are the ancestors of brodniks, who in their turn are the ancestors of Christian Khazars. Brodniks became allies with Mongols when they appeared on the river Don [6].

So, according to one version people regarded Cossacks as the ancestors of Khazars, who lived in the southern Russia in ancient times, others originated Cossacks from Circassians. The third version says they originate from black klobuks and, finally, the fourth one associates appearance of Russian Cossacks with Tartars influence.

Historical critic has enough quantity of facts which allow correct evaluation of all these suppositions and determine the right view point on the Cossacks origin.

Researchers consider that equate of Cossacks with Khazars apparently was due to assonance of the names as well as due to the fact that both Khazars and South-Russian Cossacks resided in the southern Russia.

The word «cossack» as well as some other words such as «koshevoy, vataga, ataman» and others, used by Cossacks, have Tartar origin and residing of different nationalities although in one same place but in different historical epochs can't yet be a proof of their origination from one same tribe. Historical data about Khazars is quite vague, fragmentary and uncertain. Still, however, Khazars were not Slavs.

Thus, considering only these above mentioned factors the supposition of tribal kinships of Cossacks with Khasars disappears by itself.

Even less persuading is the theory of oneness of Cossacks and Circassians. Nowhere one can't find any mutual points that could be a basis for even a faint guess as to Cossacks originating from Circassians – not in language, except for resemblance of the words «Circassian and Cherkas», not in the inner lifestyle, not in regular law, not in religious beliefs and stories, not in folk poetry. Thus, such supposition is nothing more than a fruit of ungrounded, random conclusion. The same is about the supposition of Cossacks origination from black klobuks.

The most probable is the hypothesis as to Cossacks origin under the direct influence of Tartar tribe on the life of Russian people. Still, this hypothesis should be also used with a great care and on obligatory condition of differentiating the facts which characterize an independent development of Russian people from the facts which suppose alien influences on Russian life.

Considering modern scientifically grounded essence characteristics of the Cossacks, it was a complex self-developing ethno-social notion, which by the beginning of the XX century took in all the major elements of social-ethnic and social-class structure of society and as a result was at the same

time both sub-ethnicity of Great Russian ethnicity and special military-guard class. [7]

The process of Cossacks formation was long and complicated. Various ethnicities were combined in its course. It's possible, that in the primary basis of early Cossack groups various ethnic elements were present. In ethnic aspect «old» Cossacks were later «overlapped» by Russian elements. The first mention about Don Cossacks is dated by 1549.

The origin of the ethnonym «cossack» was not fully discovered. The versions of its etymology are grounded either on the ethnic content (cossack is derivative from the name of the ancestors of Kasogs or Torks and Berendeys, Cherkas or Brodniks) or on the social content (the word cossack is of Turk origin, by it a free, independent man or a military guard on the border was called). In different periods of Cossacks existence they had Russians, Ukrainians, representatives of some steppe nomadic people, the people of the North Caucasus, Siberia, Middle Asia, and Far East. By the beginning of the XX century east-Slavonic ethnic basis was fully prevailing. Thus, Cossacks seem to be a sub-ethnicity of Great-Russian ethnicity. [6]

Cossacks lived on Don, Northern Caucasus, Ural, Far East, in Siberia. These or those Cossack communities were parts of definite Cossack Host.

In the XV century (other data dates it much earlier) the communities of free Don, Dnieper, Volga and Grebensky Cossacks appear. In the first half of the XVI century Zaporizhzhya Sich was formed, on the second half of the same century – the communities of free Terek and Yaik Cossacks and at the end of the century – the communities of Siberian Cossacks. In the early periods of Cossack existence their main household activities were fishing, hunting, and apiculture, later it was cattle breeding and from the second half of the XVII century – farming.

A major role belonged to spoils of war, later to government wages. By the means of military-economic colonization Cossacks quickly colonized vast territories of the Wild Field, then Russia and Ukraine boundary territories. In the XVI-XVII centuries Cossacks lead by Ermak Timofeevich, V.D. Poiarkov, V.V. Atlasov, S.I.Dejnev, E.P. Khabrov and other explorers took part in the Siberia and Far East colonization. [8]

It's perfect, that considering all the distinctions, almost every of above mentioned theories and hypothesis underlines the peculiarity of Cossacks, its deep difference from Russian population. Thus, originality, uniqueness of Cossacks in any case enables telling about them as about some ethnically specific notion: let it be independent ethnicity, ethnic group of Russians or a special ethnic-estate group of population.

The language of Cossacks is Russian language. Amidst Cossacks a row of dialects can be distinguished: Don, Kuban, Ural, Orenburg dialect and others. Cossacks used Russian writing. By the 1917 4 million 434 thousand Cossacks of both genders were counted. [3]

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**Ерохин И.Ю.**

Кройдон Колледж, Лондон, Великобритания

## **К ВОПРОСАМ СИСТЕМАТИЗАЦИИ ИСТОРИИ КАЗАЧЕСТВА**

### **Резюме**

История казачества в настоящее время привлекает внимание исследователей в России и на Украине. Вопросы истории казачества достаточно плохо структурированы в глобальном плане. Данная статья – есть попытка определить общие ключевые моменты формирования казачьего этноса.

**Ключевые слова:** казаки, этнос, сословие, история, Россия, культура, традиции.