

PRO-COSSACK EVENTS IN THE AZOV-BLACK SEA REGION IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 1930^S (HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS)

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The problem of cultural transformations in the Cossack regions of the USSR in the second half of the 1930s in the context of the launched at that time political campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks" is highlighted. Based on the materials from such important regions of the Azov-Black Sea region as Don and Kuban, the attempt to carry out a historical and cultural analysis of the process of implementing this political campaign and its results was made. The nature and degree of cultural changes in the Cossack villages in the second half of the 1930s were established, the degree of influence of the campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks" on the process of "decossackization" stimulated by the Soviet government, that is, the assimilation of the Cossacks into the mass of the USSR population, was revealed. Historical and cultural analysis allows us to speak about the duality of the campaign "for the secular Cossacks" and the results. On the one hand, it in no way meant resuscitating the estate status of the Cossack communities and was an attempt to design a new generation of "the collective-farming Cossacks" in order to use their military-economic potential in the interests of the state. At the same time, the campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks" led to the end of pressure and persecution of the traditional Cossack culture. Although the Party-Soviet structures still sharply opposed religious views, remnants of the patriarchy, manifestations of class arrogance, their attitude towards the bulk of the Cossack traditions became quite benevolent. Along with the Sovietization of the Cossack culture, the attention of the authorities and society to the Cossack traditions that did not contradict the policy of the Soviet government (in particular, to clothing and folklore) grew.

Key words: Azov-Black Sea region, campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks," cultural transformations, "decossackization," Soviet Cossacks, traditional culture.

[Н.В. Шишова, В.А. Бондарев Проказачьи мероприятия в Азово-Черноморском крае во второй половине 1930-х гг. (историко-культурологический анализ)]

Освещается проблема культурных трансформаций в казачьих регионах СССР во второй половине 1930-х гг. в условиях развернутой в данное время политической кампании «за советское казачество». Опираясь на материалы таких важных регионов Азово-Черноморья как Дон и Кубань, предпринята попытка осуществить историко-культурологический анализ процесса реализации указанной политической кампании и её результатов. Установлен характер и степень культурных изменений в казачьих станицах во второй половине 1930-х гг., выявлена степень влияния кампании «за советское казачество» на стимулируемый советской властью процесс «расказачивания», то есть ассимиляции казаков в массе населения СССР. Историко-культурологический анализ позволяет говорить о двойственности кампании «за светское казачество» и результатов. С одной стороны, она никоим образом не означала реанимации сословного статуса казачьих сообществ и представляла собой попытку конструирования новой генерации «колхозных казаков» с целью использования их военнo-хозяйственного потенциала в интересах государства. В то же время, кампания «за советское казачество» привела к прекращению давления и гонений на традиционную казачью культуру. Хотя партийно-советские структуры по-прежнему резко выступали против религиозных воззрений, пережитков патриархата, проявлений сословного высокомерия, их отношение к основной массе казачьих традиций стало вполне благожелательным. Наряду с советизацией казачьей культуры, росло внимание властей и общества к казачьим традициям, не противоречившим политике советской власти (в частности, к одежде, к фольклору).

Ключевые слова: Азово-Черноморье, кампания «за советское казачество», культурные трансформации, «расказачивание», советское казачество, традиционная культура.

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Throughout history of the Russian Cossacks the mid-1930s acts as one of the most important milestones. It was at this time when the representatives of the authorities in the USSR initiated a political campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks," the ideologic dominate of which was to recognize the Cossacks as full members of Soviet society with their own special culture and traditions. This campaign, due to the desire of the Party-Soviet leadership to use the significant potential of the Cossacks for the development of agriculture and strengthening the defensive ability of the USSR, put an end to the difficult and, often, hostile relations between the Cossacks and the Bolsheviks and marked the beginning of a new stage in the history of the Cossack communities of Russia.

The most clearly and visibly implemented during the implementation of the campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks" activities and achieved results were expressed in the Azov-Black Sea region, since the largest Cossack communities were located here, i.e., in the Don and Kuban regions. Since 1924, the Don and Kuban Cossacks lived within the administrative borders of the vast North Caucasus region, since 1934 in the Azov-Black Sea region, and since 1937 within the Rostov region (the Don Cossacks) and the Krasnodar Territory (the Kuban Cossacks). Currently, in the Rostov region and the Krasnodar Territory, there are still significant Cossack communities that have an impact not only on the ethnocultural specifics of these regions, but also on political decisions and the activities of the local administration. This circumstance extremely updates the importance of the Azov-Black Sea region in the process of scientific analysis of both the position and life of the Cossacks in the Soviet era as a whole, and the government pro-Cossack measures deployed in the USSR in the mid-1930s, in particular. It is significant in this regard that in 1936 the Azov-Black Sea region was named "the land of the Soviet Cossacks" in the leading periodical of the USSR, the newspaper Pravda [8].

In the Soviet historical literature, the campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks" was covered very lapidarily; one of the few exceptions is the review monograph by G.L. Voskoboinikov and D.K. Prilepsky, where in general terms it was told about the deployment of the pro-Cossacks activities in the South of Russia since 1936, organizing military training in the villages in order to prepare a qualified replenishment for the cavalry, the formation of the Cossack cavalry divisions, the growth of the Cossack activity in the fulfillment of national economic tasks, etc. [4, pp. 118-133] During the post-Soviet decades, the lexical gap that arose in historiography was largely filled with scientists; in particular, the works of O.V. Rvacheva, M.A. Ryblova, A.P. Skorik and other researchers deserve to be mentioned [2, pp. 165-174; 9; 11, pp. 516-536; 12; 13]. These works examined in sufficient detail the socio-economic and socio-political processes in the villages of the Don and Kuban regions in the 1930s, the relationship between the Cossacks and the Party-Soviet structures, the reasons for the deployment of the campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks," numerous activities carried out within the framework of the given campaign, the reaction of the Cossacks to the initiatives of the authorities. Transformations of the mentality, culture and life of the Cossacks in the conditions of Soviet modernization were also analyzed.

However, within the framework of this issue, a number of under covered issues remain. In particular, despite the close attention of researchers to cultural, everyday and mental transformations in the Cossack villages in the Soviet period, these need further analysis due to their vastness, complexity and diversity. At the same time, the analysis of the noted transformations is an important and promising direction of scientific work, the results of which act as a condition for solving more extensive cognitive tasks. Taking into account the fact that culture is the basis of national and social identity, the study of cultural

shifts in the Cossack regions allows us to expand and clarify our ideas about factors, features, scale and degree of the so-called "decossackization," that is, about the loss by the Cossacks of their specific socio-cultural appearance and assimilation in Soviet society. In particular, the analysis of culture and mentality of the Cossack communities is a necessary condition for answering the question why "decossackization" in the USSR did not achieve success and in the late 1980^s was replaced by the revival of the Cossacks.

In this regard, within the framework of this publication, we made an attempt to carry out a historical and cultural analysis of the campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks," based on the materials of the Azov-Black Sea region, that is, the Don and Kuban Cossack communities. The research task is to establish the nature and degree of influence of the mentioned political campaign on the Cossack culture and, thus, on the process of "decossackization."

Considering the campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks" from the point of view of cultural transformations, it is necessary to note the duality inherent in this campaign, which had a direct impact on its social, cultural, mental results. On the one hand, the next turn of the Bolsheviks "facing the Cossacks" in the mid-1930^s (by analogy with the first such turn in the mid-1920^s, which turned out to be very short-lived and replaced at the end of the same decade by a new round of power repressions against the Cossacks) in no way meant the return of the Cossack communities to the pre-revolutionary status of the military-service class. As A.P. Skorik rightly points out, the campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks" "had a nature of the social framing of the Cossacks, and not its revival in some version, at least a little close to the previous one" [12, pp. 328-329].

The authorities stated very clearly and unequivocally that they intend to preserve the Cossacks for the sake of its useful qualities for the Soviet state, especially those that could be useful in strengthening the defensive ability of the Soviet Union. In this case, the statements of one of those high-ranking party functionaries who stood at the origins of the pro-Cossack course launched in the mid-1930^s, the first secretary of the Azov-Black Sea Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (the Bolsheviks) B.P. Sheboldaev, are typical. According to him, the government intended to take "from the Cossacks only good things," namely, "fighting spirit, courage, cultivation of character, love for a horse, the ability to own a shashka (a kind of sabre), love for military affairs, love for their homeland" [14].

It is for this reason that from the mid-1930^s "a new stage of active manifestation of the military culture of the Cossacks begins" [9, p. 155]. There was a well-known decree of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR on April 20, 1936 "On lifting restrictions on service in the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army from the Cossacks" and the order of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR of April 23, 1936 on the creation of the Cossack cavalry divisions and corps, after which a number of such military formations are created, including the 12th Kuban and 13th Don Cossack cavalry divisions. The traditional Cossack methods of military training of younger generations are actively promoted and introduced, for which amateur associations are created everywhere, i.e., circles and clubs of "Voroshilov cavalymen." The Cossack youth became members of these associations, who studied horseback riding, dzhigitovka (off horse riding skills), possession of cold weapons, horse care, etc. Circles and clubs of "Voroshilov cavalymen" became very popular and widespread in the Don and Kuban regions. According to available data, in the spring of 1936, up to 600 such circles operated in the Azov-Black Sea region [12, p. 348].

But the "Soviet Cossacks" should not have returned to the state of the archaic and therefore intolerant in the Soviet Union closed, military-service class. The new generation of the "Soviet Cossacks" was thought by representatives of the authorities as a kind of ethnographic community as part of the collective-farming peasantry. Moreover, "designing of the "Cossack" identity for the population of the South of Russia was undertaken for the practical purposes of extending the Cossack skills to all residents of the region" [9, p. 151]. In other words, a kind of "cossackization" (from decossackization) of all residents of the Don and Kuban regions in general, regardless of whether they belonged to the Cossacks

or not, was thought. Perhaps, S.M. Budyonny went farthest in such plans, proposing "to consider the entire population of the Azov-Black Sea and North Caucasus territories, including the former Stavropol Territory, with the exception of, of course, mountain nationalities, to be the Cossacks"; the former commander of the First cavalry considered it expedient to allow "the entire population of these regions" to wear the Cossack uniform, because this, in his opinion, corresponded to the sentiments of the population, especially young people [3, pp. 728-729]. The commitment of the authorities to the ideas of "cossackization" is also evidenced by the facts of the vestment of large Party-Soviet officials in the Cossack uniform. One of such cases, dating back to May 1936, is described by A.P. Skorik. At this time, in Rostov-on-Don, a Cossack delegation from the North Don region of the Azov-Black Sea region arrived to the regional leaders B.P. Sheboldaev, V.F. Larin, M.M. Malinov with the news that the chiefs were elected honorary Cossacks of several local collective farms. The visitors immediately handed the newly made Cossacks the Cossack uniform, in which the regional leaders dressed up and posed in front of a photographer [12, pp. 378-379].

Accordingly, the campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks" was not an attempt to restore the Cossack cultural traditions. There was a selection of traditions and a revision of such, taking into account the fundamental principles of the Communist Party's policy towards the Cossacks, which pursues the goal of decossackization. The pro-Cossack turn of the mid-1930s did not mean a rejection of the socialist modernization of the Cossack regions and the unification of the Cossack culture in a socialist system [11, p. 517]. This, in particular, is evidenced by the Cossack folklore of the Soviet period, which bizarrely combines the traditional form with innovative content. Thus, in the pre-Soviet period, the leading theme of the Cossack songs was war, military affairs, military service. As T.S. Rudichenko noted, "in the Don song tradition in active form there was mainly an army repertoire of the turn of the 19th-early 20th centuries, consisting in the main part of songs of literary origin" [10, p. 129]. The study of the Cossack songs of the 1930s. confirms the fact that their content is based on "images of the Soviet collective-farming Cossacks and its unprecedented prosperity" in the conditions of Soviet power and the collective-farming system [9, p. 150]. One of the most characteristic examples is the famous "Thought of Stalin" (poems by A. Isakov), which was performed in the villages in different variations and glorified collective-farming prosperity. So, in the collection "Day of Our Live" published in Rostov-on-Don, which included letters, notes, testimonies of the residents of the Don region about one day of their small homeland, May 15, 1940, there are slightly changed two initial verses of this "Thought," which, according to the author of the note, was sung by the Cossacks of the village of Elizavetskaya, Azov region, Rostov region: "The Cossacks gathered on a collective farm in the yard. The big thought was thought early at dawn: How would we, now, guys, invite Stalin. And how would we show all the wealth to him, to our father ... " [7, p. 188].

The negative attitude of the ideologists of the Communist Party to those cultural traditions that prevented the "construction of socialism," primarily to religion and religious ideas, was fully preserved. Such traditions "were subject, if not to dark oblivion and displacement by new forms of culture, then to a significant transformation" [2, p. 166]. Therefore, even in the conditions of the campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks," the onslaught on the church and religion in the Cossack regions (as well as throughout the country) did not weaken at all, the closure of churches, persecution of believers, the authorities' unkind attitude towards the baptism of children, etc.

The Soviet state still paid close attention to the fight against illiteracy and the massive formation in the villages of foci of new, Soviet culture, such as schools, libraries, village reading rooms, rural clubs, Halls of Culture, etc. In particular, according to statistical materials, 1,739 clubs and 598 village reading rooms, as well as 1,112 libraries, had been created in collective farms of the Krasnodar Territory by 1939 [5, p. 525, 534]. A wide network

of cultural and educational institutions brought up new Cossacks, who from childhood absorbed not only (and, often, not so much) the Cossack traditions, but also Soviet Art Nouveau.

In the 1930^s significant contingents of the Cossack youth, actively supporting Soviet initiatives, had already formed in the villages. For the most part, young people were far from thinking about a return to traditional class and isolation, since "they were much less influenced by previous cultural patterns" and "they were more susceptible to new modernizing forms of culture" [9, pp. 154-155].

The Cossack girls strongly opposed the traditional patriarchy and were entirely on the side of Soviet innovations focused on increasing the role of women in the economy, public life, even in the military sphere. Thus, the Cossack Young Communists took part in the campaign to feminize the professions of rural machine operators in 1937; in the Don region, the young Cossack Maria Kramskova became the initiator of the movement for the girls to master the professions of a tractor driver and a combine driver [4, p. 129]. The Cossacks also sought to the clubs of the "Voroshilov cavalrymen" in order to learn how to own weapons (The Cossack youth of both sexes had been training horse riding since childhood). According to reports, in the Cossack regions in some cases there were attempts to create female circles of "Voroshilov cavalrymen" [11, p. 527]. An interesting source testifying both to the Bolsheviks' desire to increase the role of women in the villages and to the Cossacks girls' support for this desire is the film "Stanitsa Dalnaya" shot in 1939 (here we fully agree with the opinion of L.N. Mazur and O.V. Gorbachev that art cinema "is a unique source that allows us to reconstruct different sides of everyday life..., the values declared by the state and society..." [6, p. 6]). According to the plot of the film, military maneuvers are announced in one of the districts of the Kuban region, in which the Cossack-collective farmers from territorial-militia cavalry formations are involved. Having learned about the training camp for men, women and girls declare that they are not worse, they can also "jump and cut" and therefore "cavalry girls and Voroshilov Sharpshooters will definitely go to maneuvers." And when men and some cavalry girls go to maneuvers, the Cossack girls and women who stay in the village carry out firefighting service, conduct training as part of a chemical defense circle, etc.

The Soviet Cossacks should have been distinguished from their pre-revolutionary counterparts by an incomparably higher level of education, the lack of class isolation, and increased social mobility. In December 1937, M.A. Sholokhov, nominated as a candidate for deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, justifiably told his voters that the Cossacks "no longer think about raising sons who can only work in the field," but "want to see their children engineers, commanders of the Red Army, agronomists, doctors, teachers" [15, p. 65]. It is important to emphasize that the social mobility most characteristic of the Cossack youth corresponded to the logic of "decossackization," since it inevitably led to the erosion of the Cossack communities and, therefore, to a reduction in the range of the culture of the Cossacks. The campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks" did not change the situation in this area in any way, since it did not provide the reconstruction of the Cossacks as a closed military-service class.

On the other hand, the turn "facing the Cossacks" in the mid-1930^s made it impossible to force the pace of "decossackization." Even being declared "Soviet" and "collective-farming" and possessing a not very intelligible status of ethnographic community among the population of a collectivized village, the Cossacks, nevertheless, turned into a social fact and, therefore, received the right to exist. The Cossack culture, even subjected to selection and Sovietization, was still recognized as worthy of attention and respect. Researchers rightly argue that since the second half of the 1930^s "there have been no persecution or prohibitions on the existence of traditional forms of the Cossack culture" [11, p. 528] (excluding those intolerant (from the Bolsheviks' point of view) forms about which we

have already written above, in particular, religiosity). Accordingly, culture continued to generate samples of the Cossack life order, behaviour, mentality.

The brightest example is the aforementioned manifestation of the military culture of the Cossacks, in which the representatives of the authorities were most interested. In the given case, not only the interests of the Party-Soviet leadership and the Cossacks coincided, but also conditions were created for the preservation of cultural traditions and mental dominants of the Cossack communities. One cannot but agree with the statement that for the Cossacks, provided since the mid-1930s "opportunity to develop paramilitary games, military training, and training in combat skills has become almost the only way to preserve its cultural identity, largely determined by military culture" [9, p. 157]. Obviously, military affairs were one of the cornerstones of the existence of the Cossacks and the dominant of its culture. In particular, the analysis of the Don Cossack folklore suggests that "the largest number of semantic meanings in songs, fairy tales, proverbs, is associated with the concepts of *Russia, Don, service, honour* (italics of the author of the quote – N.Sh., V.B.). They cover the main guidelines of the Cossack worldview" [1, p. 10]. Actively involved in military training and military service, the Cossacks, including in the Don and Kuban regions, again felt like a caste of soldiers with their own special culture and worldview, which they were in the pre-Soviet times.

The attentive attitude of the authorities to the Cossack culture in the conditions of a long-term political course "for the Soviet Cossacks," with all the selectivity of this attitude, nevertheless determined, if not the cultural renaissance, then at least the preservation of certain traditions. Even being Sovietized and distinguished by a combination of elements of modernity and archaic, the Cossack culture reminded the Cossacks of their special status and special place in Soviet society. Thus, the campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks" laid the foundation for the popularization of Cossack singing and the creation of the Cossack district and regional choirs. Back in the summer of 1935, at the initiative of M.A. Sholokhov, a choir of the Cossack-collective farmers was created in the Veshensky district of the Azov-Black Sea region, and in February 1936 the leadership of the North Don region decided to create a district choir [12, pp. 490, 491]. The activities of the Cossack folklore groups, which combined Soviet songs with traditional ones in their performances, not only awakened the interest of listeners in the original Cossack culture. The functioning of the Cossack choirs of the Azov-Black Sea region, as well as other folklore groups in the Cossack regions, contributed to the popularization of the culture of the Cossack communities and, thereby, strengthened this culture. The preservation of culture naturally led to the inhibition of "decossackization," the preservation of the continuity of generations in the villages, and the strengthening of the Cossack communities.

We state that the campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks" launched in the mid-1930s was due to the desire of the Party-Soviet leadership to use the significant potential of the Cossacks in order to develop agriculture and strengthen the defensive ability of the USSR. Representatives of the authorities in no way intended to restore the pre-Soviet status of the Cossacks as a closed military-service class, because this fundamentally contradicted the course of the Communist Party on decossackization. However, the turn "facing the Cossacks" put an end to the difficult and, often, hostile relations between the Cossacks and the Bolsheviks, created the conditions for strengthening the Cossack communities, their successful integration into Soviet society, for preservation and progressive development of their culture. Since the mid-1930s, the Cossack traditions and the Cossack culture have been recognized as having the right to exist, deserving attention and popularization, and ceased to be persecuted and banned. The military traditions of the Cossacks were actively promoted, the Cossack folklore was preserved and developed (albeit simultaneously with the saturation of traditional folklore forms with Soviet content), the interested attention of Soviet society to the history of the Cossacks and the reality of the collective-farming Cossack villages increased, as, in particular, was evidenced by feature films shot at that time. All this strengthened the Cossack communities,

since even those young Cossacks who, having matured in the villages and subsequently left them for military service or life and work in the city, remembered their roots and traditions and transmitted this memory to their children. Of course, the campaign "for the Soviet Cossacks" could not stop the process of "decossackization," because in the conditions of increased social mobility observed in the USSR, the Cossack communities naturally disappeared in Soviet society. Nevertheless, this campaign contributed to the preservation and strengthening of the Cossack culture and, as a result, the inhibition of the Cossack assimilation. Moreover, the inertia of the pro-Cossack measures carried out in the mid-second half of the 1930^s turned out to be very serious and was felt, at least until the mid-1950^s. Only in the 1960^s did the process of dissolving the Cossack communities in the mass of the rural and urban population of the Soviet Union went galloping. However, the increase in crisis phenomena in the USSR in the 1980^s and the Cossack revival that started at that time did not allow the assimilation process to end and saved the Cossacks from leaving for historical oblivion.

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