

IVAN L. RUDNYTSKY

A Study of Cossack History

THE COSSACKS. By *Philip Longworth*. New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970. vi, 409 pp. \$8.95.

As stated in the introduction, "This book represents an attempt, within the necessarily restricted confines of a single volume, to present a general conspectus of Cossack history from the fifteenth to twentieth centuries" (p. 8). Longworth's approach is predominantly narrative and to a large extent biographical. Several chapters are centered on representative Cossack figures, such as Ermak, Stenka Razin, and Pugachev. These chapters give evidence of the author's empathy and literary skills, and they make good reading.

A study of this kind must necessarily rely on previous research. Longworth has read widely in the field, and his book includes an impressive bibliography. What, however, distinguishes a work of historical synthesis from a mere "scissors-and-paste" compilation is the author's ability to formulate pertinent and original questions and to think in terms of problems. From this point of view *The Cossacks* perhaps ought to be considered a borderline case. The Cossack name is famous, but the nature of that peculiar historical phenomenon is commonly not well understood. Longworth's book has little new to offer the specialist, but it may be recommended to the general reader as an informative, stimulating, and generally reliable account of a fascinating aspect of the Slavic world. It is to be regretted that though the subject matter itself lacks nothing in drama and color, the author cannot resist the temptation to embellish the narrative with purple passages of his own making.

The book's major themes are the changing relations between the frontier communities and the Russian state, the taming of the former by the latter, and the gradual transformation of Cossack "hosts" from virtually independent little democratic republics and centers of popular revolt into obedient tools of tsarist autocracy. Chapters 8 and 9, which cover the time span from the Napoleonic Wars to World War I, are less narrative and more analytical than the rest of the book, and they should be singled out for their able discussion of social developments. Another problem, touched on in the introduction but not fully developed, is the illuminating parallel between the role of the frontiersman in Russian and American history. The chapter on the Cossack involvement in the Civil War is too sketchy. The Don and Kuban Cossacks were the main fighting force on the anti-Soviet side, but their striving for regional autonomy and federation was incompatible with the centralist program of "Russia one-

and-indivisible,” espoused by the leaders of the Volunteer Army. This issue of capital importance is blurred in Longworth’s account, and Denikin’s coup d’état of November 5, 1919, against the Kuban *Rada* (regional legislature) is not mentioned at all. There can be little doubt that the internal rift between White Russian centralists and Cossack autonomists contributed decisively to the outcome of the Civil War, and was therefore of world historical significance.

The least satisfactory sections are those on the Ukrainian Cossacks in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where one feels the author is treading on unfamiliar ground. Several slips are to be noticed. Thus Longworth states that Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky “minted coins bearing his own name” (p. 112). In fact, no money was ever issued by Khmelnytsky. The *Litopys Samovydtza* (*The Chronicle of an Eyewitness*) supposedly reflects the “bias of a Russian Orthodox monk” (p. 96). This important work of seventeenth-century Ukrainian historiography originated in the circles of high Cossack officers, and it shows no clerical bias; the anonymous “Eyewitness” has been identified, with a high degree of probability, as Roman Rakushka-Romanovsky (ca. 1622–1703), who during the 1660s was the treasurer-general of the Left Bank Ukraine. According to Longworth the Cossacks celebrated the victory at Korsun over the Poles in 1648 in the following manner: “Barrels of wine were torn open, singing and shouting rent the air as men pranced and tripped, to the accelerating thrum of balalaikas, over the stripped bodies of the Polish dead” (p. 104). Unfortunately the balalaika is not a Ukrainian folk instrument. The quoted passage is typical of the gratuitous embellishments indulged in by Longworth.

More damaging than occasional factual inaccuracies is the author’s inability to appreciate the historical originality of the Ukrainian Cossacks and how they differed from the Russian Cossacks. This error of judgment can be seen in the curious assertion that the state founded by Khmelnytsky was “hardly a Cossack one” (p. 122). What Longworth means is that this state does not conform to his preconceptions about the nature of Cossackdom, derived from the Russian Cossacks’ historical experience.

There existed a dualism among Ukrainian Cossacks, who were differentiated into the Zaporozhians and the so-called town Cossacks (*horodovi kozaky* or *horodovyky*). The former were the proper frontiersmen, who secured their livelihood by fishing and stockraising, while the latter resided in the already settled zone and were farmers. The Zaporozhians were sociologically similar to the Russian Don and Yaik (Ural) Hosts, and this is why Longworth’s account favors the Zaporozhian wing of Ukrainian Cossackdom. But it was precisely the *horodovyky* who represented the economically more advanced and politically more sophisticated element. This bias results in a lopsided understanding of seventeenth-century Ukrainian history. Longworth mentions that Khmel-

nytsky belonged to the petty nobility and that he had been schooled in Kiev ("like Taras Bulba's sons") and at a Jesuit college. But Khmelnytsky, in this respect, was not exceptional. It was the predominantly noble and more-or-less educated stratum of the *horodovyky* officers who, although raised in the climate of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, gave leadership to the great anti-Polish revolt of 1648. The presence of a literate elite differentiates the movement headed by Khmelnytsky in the Ukraine from those headed by Razin and Pugachev in Russia. Longworth's comprehension of the Khmelnytsky era would have benefited from a perusal of Waclaw Lipiński's *Z dziejów Ukrainy* (Kiev and Cracow, 1912). This work, dedicated to a study of the elitist elements of Ukrainian Cossackdom, is listed in the bibliography, but apparently has not been consulted.

At this point the concomitant problem arises whether the struggle of Ukrainian Cossacks against Poland (and, we may add, their subsequent resistance to the encroachments of Russian autocracy) did possess a "national" character. Longworth thinks that "a nationality was predicated retrospectively to seventeenth-century Ukrainian Cossacks, though there is no evidence to suppose they themselves were conscious of it" (p. 355). The evidence, whose existence Longworth rashly denies, is available in great abundance, and it is to be found in contemporary state papers, international treaties, official and private correspondence, chronicles and memoirs, literary works, and even folk songs. There is no doubt that seventeenth-century Ukrainians were perfectly aware of their distinctness from the Turko-Tatars, Poles, and Muscovites. This awareness was, of course, expressed in forms and terms appropriate for the age; for example, it was frequently found in a religious frame of reference, or as a defense of the corporate "rights and liberties" of the representative social class. Here is another capital difference between Russian and Ukrainian Cossacks. No wonder Longworth's insight fails him at exactly this point, as he is looking at Ukrainian history through Russian spectacles.

The opposition of the Don and Yaik Cossacks to the tsardom of Moscow, a state of the same nationality and religion, could not assume a national coloring. The situation of the Ukrainian Cossacks was different, insofar as they were facing in Poland-Lithuania a state they felt to be essentially alien. The Polish-Cossack conflict was primarily social, but it would be preposterous to deny that it developed also a national dimension. The Polonization of the native aristocracy had deprived the Ukrainian (Ruthenian, in the terminology of the time) people in the commonwealth of their traditional leaders and spokesmen. This role devolved on the Cossack order. Thus we see the Cossacks providing military assistance for the restoration of the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church in 1620, extending their protection to Orthodox schools, and entering into political alliances with the remaining Orthodox nobility, the burghers, and the

clergy. The peasant masses, in their elemental resistance to serfdom, spontaneously gravitated toward the Cossacks. Thus was effected a broad coalition of various social classes around the Cossack organizational nucleus. Under such circumstances the term "war of national liberation" may well be applied legitimately to the great uprising of 1648.

The Ukrainian body politic, which emerged from the mid-seventeenth-century upheaval, could not possibly have been a frontiersmen democracy of the type of the original Zaporozhian community, but only a society of estates. This, however, does not justify denying a Cossack character to that state, as Longworth does. The very concept of Cossackdom underwent an expansion and transformation. In the course of the revolution there occurred a massive influx into Cossack ranks of the most prosperous and energetic elements of the peasantry, on the one hand, and of the most militant elements of the Ruthenian nobility, on the other. A new administrative order, based on the Cossack regimental organization, superseded the former Polish administration. The polarity of the Zaporozhians and the town Cossacks became accentuated in the post-revolutionary era. The Zaporozhian Sich stronghold continued its traditional function as an outpost against the Tatars and a place of refuge for the common people. But the center of gravity of Ukrainian Cossackdom had now moved definitely to the settled hinterland. (It is noteworthy that the residence of the hetmans and the seat of government was moved from Chyhyryn, near the steppe border, to Baturyn and Hlukhiv in the Chernihiv area.) But since the Hetmanshchyna, the Ukrainian Cossack state of the second half of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, does not fit into Longworth's scheme, he dismisses it in a few scanty passages.

Since the Hetmanshchyna possessed an estate structure, and the class of Cossack officers, or "elders," evolved into a new landed gentry, the question may be raised whether the common people of the Ukraine had benefited at all from the Khmelnytsky movement. A seventeenth-century revolution could not have produced a democratic social system, incorporating the principle of legal equality for all citizens, which did not exist anywhere in Europe at that time. But despite class tensions and growing inequality, the position of the common people in the Cossack Ukraine compared favorably with the conditions of those in the neighboring countries, Poland and Muscovy. The rank-and-file Cossacks, who were a class of free warrior-farmers, made up a large proportion of the rural population. The towns enjoyed municipal self-government according to the so-called Magdeburg Law. The position of the peasantry gradually deteriorated, but they still remained personally free, although deprived of political rights and subjected to various economic burdens. The Zaporozhian territory and the open steppe lands in the south provided a safety valve. But social relations in the Ukraine were distorted by the ever-increasing pressure of im-

perial Russia, especially after Mazepa's fall. The reintroduction of serfdom coincided with the final dismantling of the autonomous Ukrainian institutions, in the 1780s.

The second question pertains to the different policies pursued by the St. Petersburg government toward Russian and Ukrainian Cossacks respectively. The Don and Ural Hosts could be tamed and assimilated into the mainstream of the empire. But the distinct national traits of Ukrainian Cossackdom made it a continued potential threat to the unity of the Russian state; therefore, both the Hetmanate and Zaporozhe had to be destroyed. This occurred in the reign of Catherine II. But it is a fallacy to assume, as Longworth does, that "by then, Cossackdom itself had long since ceased to exist in the Ukraine" (p. 156). As Longworth himself notes, the remnants of the irrepressible Zaporozhians found a new home in northern Caucasia, and became the Kuban Cossacks. In the territory of the former Hetmanshchyna, which corresponds to the provinces of Chernihiv and Poltava, the descendants of the rank-and-file Cossacks were recognized by the Russian law as a separate estate; these "Little Russian Cossacks" retained a legal identity until 1917. The former Cossack officers in the same area received the rights of the Russian nobility. Certain circles among them continued to hope for a restoration of the old autonomous order, and tentative moves in that direction were undertaken repeatedly—for instance at the time of Napoleon's invasion, and then again in connection with the Polish uprising of 1830–31.

Of the greatest importance were the psychological and ideological after-effects of the Cossack era in the Ukraine, and their influence cannot be set too high. The vision of a free and glorious past acted on the people's minds like a powerful leaven. The dualism of Ukrainian Cossackdom, noted above, was extended into the nineteenth century, and the Cossack myth operated on two different levels. The Ukrainian cultural revival started among the Left Bank nobility, the heirs of the *horodovyky* and the Hetmanate's leading class. Virtually all Ukrainian scholars and writers before Shevchenko belonged to that stratum, and their labors of love were devoted to historic and folkloristic researches into, and poetic amplifications of, the Cossack past. On another social level the Cossack tradition was alive among the masses of the enslaved peasantry, but here the point of reference was the Zaporozhian Sich rather than the Hetmanshchyna, and the memories of former revolts against the oppressors and exploiters of the common man. The vitality of this tradition can be seen in the "Kievan Cossackdom" of 1855, when during the Crimean War the peasants in over five hundred villages of the Kiev province organized spontaneously in the Cossack fashion, and refused obedience to their masters and tsarist officials. Both strands of the Cossack heritage were reunited in Shevchenko, whose hatred of social injustice and passionate concern for the freedom and dignity of the com-

mon man were due to his peasant background, but who owed his intellectual equipment, and particularly his concept of history, to the influence of the enlightened members of the Left Bank nobility, through their writings and his own personal contacts with them. Shevchenko's message of national and social liberation, anchored in the Cossack tradition, became the ideological cornerstone of the modern Ukraine.

In the concluding paragraph of his book Longworth observes that Cossackdom as an institution and social class has vanished, but that the Cossack heritage has been absorbed into the general texture of "Russian" life: "Men still point to Razin's mountain where his treasure is said to be concealed, and there is a statue in Kiev to Khmel'nitski. . . . The Cossacks are no longer a vital force—but their legend has become the heritage of every Russian" (p. 341). This may sound plausible enough, but here again Longworth misses the essential difference between the Russian and Ukrainian historical processes. The basic national tradition of Russia is that of an autocratic state, which at all times strove consistently to subordinate to its unlimited domination all social groups and individuals. The anarchic *vol'nitsa* of the Razins and Pugachevs was only a marginal phenomenon in Russian history. In the Ukrainian tradition, on the other hand, Cossackdom belongs in the mainstream of the country's history, and it implies not only—as in the Russian case—notions of elemental revolt and romantic adventure but also a vision of national independence and a free and just ordering of society.

There still remains a formal issue to be dealt with. Longworth transliterates Ukrainian proper names not according to their native spelling and pronunciation, but as they appear in Russian. Thus he writes Sech instead of Sich, Sagaidachny instead of Sahaidachny, and so forth. This is a dubious procedure, but it may be defended on grounds of convenience, since the author has taken these names mostly from Russian-language sources. Utterly indefensible, however, is the transliteration of the Ukrainian titles of publications, in the references and bibliography, in a distorted Russianized form. There we find gems such as *Zapiski Naukovogo Tovaristva . . .*, *Getman Ivan Mazepa . . .*, *Dzherelo dlya Sotsialno-yekonomichnogo Doslidzhennya . . .*, *Pratsy Komissii . . .*, and more of the same kind. Longworth is not the only one to have sinned on this count, but such slovenliness should not be tolerated in works that make claims to scholarship.