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Who discovered the Donetsk coal basin and when it was discovered: Information war on the Donbas frontier

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ABSTRACT

In the article, the authors raise the topical issue of historical falsifications, considering them as an element of information warfare. Applying the historiographical method and interpreting the facts of the creation of historical misinformation as manipulation of public consciousness, they present a specific case of historical research on the discovery of the Donetsk coal basin. Therefore, a review of the scientific and encyclopedic literature of Russia, the USSR and Ukraine devoted to the coverage of this issue was made; archival historical documents that show the real picture of the discovery of coal in Donbas have been put into scientific circulation; the manipulative discourse of influence on the mass consciousness is tracked in order to create a mythological narrative about the "Russianness" of Donbass. It has been proven that the falsifications of Russia and the USSR regarding the history of the first discovery of coal in the Donbass have been going on for almost the entire period of the industrial development of the region and to this day, it is an example of an information war against Ukraine. The archival historical documents released by the authors unequivocally indicate that the official discoverers of coal deposits in Donbas were other historical figures than those described in Russian and Soviet scientific and encyclopedic literature, and they are of Ukrainian origin. The methods of spreading the mythological narrative and their actualization during the Russian-Ukrainian war are defined, which are typical for the manipulation of mass consciousness.

KEYWORDS

information war;
Donbas;
mythological narrative;
the history of the discovery of the Donetsk coal basin

Introduction

Information war or information propaganda in favor of its organizer was actively used and is used today in frontiers – that is, in territories on the border of two different societies, cultures, and civilizations. Obviously, it is an integral component of the so-called "hybrid" war, which turns even information into a weapon.

By distorting data, including historical data, by inventing and spreading disinformation, one can succeed in manipulating mass consciousness and the population's loyalty to the occupier.

One of the transitional zones, which has been the arena of armed confrontation between Russia and Ukraine for eight years now, is Donbas.

Therefore, it is not surprising that a whole network of interconnected planes and contexts of the information confrontation between Ukraine and Russia emerged about the past and present of this region.

We will consider the aggressor's efforts to establish his vision of events in Donbas in historical retrospect in this article.

Trying to change the historical truth and to form narratives of the Russianness of the region in the minds of the citizens of Ukraine, the manipulators focus on such questions. First of all, did this land ever belong to the jurisdiction of Ukrainian state entities? Secondly, who (which people) settled and developed the territory of Donbas? The third question is very relevant to this day – who and when opened the Donets coal basin

The acuteness of these issues of the information war is actually determined not by the lack of objective sources, but by the potentially powerful influence of those mythologists with which the aggressor seeks to replace the historical truth on the mass consciousness.

Wanting to create and root a sprawling mythological narrative about Donbas as a part of the same mythical

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"Russian world", engaged publicists, (pseudo)scientists create various discourses of historical primacy, priority of Russia in the mentioned issues.

In addition, in order to achieve the effect of public awareness of Russia's priority regarding Donbass in the perception of the masses, data even from the 18th century are distorted. In particular, information about "Russian mineralogists" is reproduced many times, social rituals, calendar holidays, sculptural images are created, which root the myth of "Russian Donbas".

Methods

The researchers used the historiographical (source) method: scientific data on objective sociocultural facts are given. An interdisciplinary approach is also actively used, with the help of which it is possible to interpret the facts of historical disinformation from the point of view of social philosophy and mass psychology as a manipulation of mass consciousness. The methods of historicism and comparative analysis are also reflected.

Ukrainian scientific opinion answers in the affirmative yo the question posed at the beginning of the article, which concerns the jurisdiction of Donbass, and it is based on authoritative sources that describe the Kalmius Palanka of the Zaporizhzhya Army (*Yavornytskyi, 1990; Pirko, 2003; Pirko, Lytvynovska, 2005; Mytsyk, 2007*).

The answer to the question about the subject who created the industrial and cultural infrastructure of Donbass is provided by the thorough works of a number of Ukrainian researchers, primarily V.O. Pirko and his scientific historical school (*Pirko, Lytvynovska, 2005; Alfiorov, 2008; 2012*).

The purpose of this work is to identify and analyze the elements of the information war in the issue of the first discovery of coal in Donbas.

Tasks are: 1) the coverage of this issue in the scientific and encyclopedic literature of Russia, the USSR, and Ukraine; 2) the introduction into scientific circulation of archival historical documents that show the real picture of the discovery of coal in Donbas; 3) tracing manipulative discourses of influence on mass consciousness with the aim of creating a mythological narrative about the Russianness of Donbass.

Results and Discussion

The Donetsk or Donets coal basin is the largest group of hard coal deposits in Europe, and its development had a significant impact on industrialization, the formation of economic potential, territorial social mobility not only of Ukraine, but also of the Russian Empire and the former USSR, and had an impact on important historical processes of the 20th and 21st centuries.

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Historical science was and remains a subject of interest not only for scientists, but also for politicians. As the historian and writer Oleksandr Veltman, mentioned in the "Diary" of Taras Shevchenko, rightly noted, "Our history is full of white spots, historiography abounds with dark and even more darkened spots". Tendencies of deliberate "darkening" and distortion of historical facts took hypertrophied forms in the Soviet period. Historical science, like a number of others, was involved in the political creation of a narrative about a Russified "Soviet people" devoid of any other national identity.

In the middle of the 20th century, within the framework of Stalin's campaign against cosmopolitanism ("against placative kowtowing toward the West"), a separate work was conducted in search of Russian priorities in the history of science and technology, which assumed that each discovery had its own, Soviet, Russified author.

This led to numerous falsifications aimed at establishing the "national priorities: of the USSR, which were not even supposed to be scientifically verified.

Since miners and mining workers constituted a special "cohort" in the working class of the USSR and were always at the top of the propaganda work ("Stakhanovite movement", etc.), the question of the priority of opening coal in Donbas was of great political importance. And Donbas had to become "Russian" from the beginning in order to quickly replace this concept with "Soviet". Changing concepts and accustoming the masses to the "new language" is a well-known means of manipulating mass consciousness (*Kara-Murza, 2005*).

The most suitable figure of the "discoverer", who corresponded to the statist and socio-political doctrines of the Soviet era, and the purely Russian priority of scientific and geographical discoveries, was appointed chancellor Grigory Kapustin, who participated in the search for minerals on the rivers of Voronezh region and on the Don in the first quarter of the 18th century.

The commissioned "research" of the "history of the discovery" was entrusted to the authoritative professor of the Moscow Mining Institute named after Y. V. Stalin O. O. Zvorykin, who was given the opportunity to familiarize himself with the archives of the Collegium of Mining.

For the first time, Zvorykin's group was allowed to process the entire array of unique documents related to the search for hard coal in the first half of the 18th century. In 1949, the text "Research" (*Zvorykin, 1949*), was published, where, based on individual archival documents or certain parts of them, the leading role of oreologist G.G. Kapustin was "proved". In addition to the "Research" itself, Prof. O. Zvorykin included a complete set of documents found from the archive of the Collegium of Mining (about 400 pages) in the book, which, upon careful sequential examination, completely cancel the artificially "stretched" conclusions of the study itself, and testify that G. Kapustin was never on the territory of Ukraine Donbas, and the "stone" samples that he allegedly sent to the Collegium of Mining from the Don towns were not coal, because they did not burn during the tests.

We hope that by publishing these found documents, O. Zvorykin, realizing that he was creating a false "epic", tried to some extent to preserve his name, to remain a scientist, so that real scientists could draw objective conclusions. In those days, he could not refuse to write the "history of discovery".

However, as early as 1952, this work was republished in a mass edition thoroughly "cleaned up". All inconvenient information and documents had been removed from the book, and its volume had been reduced by almost half.

And then the propaganda flywheel spins. Up to the 21st century, mass "popular" publications were created, because the mythical narrative (invented lie) needs to be repeated many times from different sources – this is required by the theory of mass consciousness

manipulation (*Kara-Murza, 2005; Dodonov, 2017*). Examples are: O. Ivanov "Russian father of coal Donbass", 2010; Shubin A. V. "History of Novorossiya", 2015, historical novels (such as: Gubin L. "The Discoverer"), paintings (O. Plamenetskyi "Birth of Donbas" and others). Therefore, political belief is created and it must be reflected in rituals – monuments, films, names of streets, mines, holidays and... articles in encyclopedias inscribe into mind.

Let us stop at the last ones. The most authoritative (not only before the October Revolution of 1917) Russian encyclopedia of Brockhaus and Efron, based on the German encyclopedic edition of F. A. Brockhaus, involved the best scientists and specialists of the Russian Empire for a wider coverage of Russian events, at a certain time submitted an article by L. Weinberg "Donetsk Coal Basin" (*Brokgauz, Efron, 1893*). The historical reference in it is reduced to the following: "In the Donetsk coal basin, since the time of Peter I, huge deposits of coal and anthracite have been known, the proper development of which began only in the current century... Coal development began only in 1839, in which only 877,000 cubic meters were mined. The strong rise of the coal industry began only in the 1870s, with the construction of railways".

A certain exaggeration regarding the discovery of "huge deposits" already under Tsar Peter I (the discovery of the coal basin here as a system group of deposits took place only in 1829, research by E. Kovalevskyi (*Hayko, Biletskyy, 2013*) the wrong date of the beginning of coal mining (the beginning of open mining was 1723, the first mine was in 1796 (*Ibid*)) testify that at the beginning of the 20th century, the history of the discovery of Donbas remained terra incognita even for specialists.

The most fully constructed pro-Russian Soviet version of the history of Donbass is revealed by the "Mountain Encyclopedia", where L. Smirnov's article "Donetsk coal basin" states:

> "The first mention of finds of hard coal in the region belongs to the end of 16th – beginning 17th century. Systematically studies start from the beginning of 18th century in 1721, the young G. G. Kapustin, sent by mining master V. Lodygin, who led the team of ore prospectors of the Collegium of Mining, in the Don district for the exploration of ores and stones. coal, discovered coal near the tributary of Seversky Donts, Kundryuchya River. In 1723, according to the decree of Peter I, who said that "this mineral will be very useful if not for us, then for our descendants", in the district of Bakhmut (now the city of Artyomovsk) coal mining began under the leadership of manager N. Vepreisky and captain S. Chirkov. Coal was used on local salt roofs and in forges. Small numbers the population of D. was interested in coal only from the point of view of home heating needs due to the lack of forests. The discovery of new ore and coal mines (1724) determined the further study of terr. of D. In the 70s P. S. Pallas and S. G. Hmelyn conducted the first geol. studies of the Donetsk ridge. In the 80-90s mining official N. Avramov opened many beds of coal, incl. in the district of Lysychye Balka (now the city of Lysychansk). Coal development in D. in prod. scale begins essentially with the island of Luhansk coal in the district of Lysychye Balka on the basis of iron ore and stone-healing mines (1795-1807). Since then, coal mining in D has been carried out systematically" (*Smirnov, 1986*).

As we can see, the falsifying component of the information here is not so obvious, in contrast to the obvious misinformation of the Stalin era, which attributed to G. Kapustin the discovery of coal deposits in Bakhmut and/or Lysychansk. An allegedly more balanced interpretation is presented here – the discovery of deposits in the Don region. From the point of view of manipulation of consciousness, including among scientists, this is appropriate, because scientists need to be given the illusion of diversity, the possibility of choosing information (*Kara-Murza*, 2005). However, the manipulative discourse is simply hidden more – as we can see, in the article in "Mining Encyclopedia", the tsar, the names of Russian administrators and the military are clearly named, and only as a vague background there is a mention of a "small population" that used coal long before it was "discovered" by the Russians.

So, the expedition of G. Kapustin to the Don is documented, but it is also confirmed by documents that the samples he sent were not coal [1], and the next expedition to these places by the mining master G. Nixon (which included G. Kapustin) *also did not find coal*. This excludes questioning the figure of Kapustin as the pioneer of coal in Donbas.

Let us pay attention once again to the effort of the author of the article to show the activities of the Russian state in the "discovery" of Donetsk coal: here is the decree of Peter I regarding the search for coal (real, in contrast to the pathetic phrase invented by the "descendants" that "this mineral will be very useful if not for us, then for our descendants"), and mention that Kapustin was sent to search by mining master Lodygin (this has documentary confirmation), but nothing is said about the fact that these efforts did not yield results. The real pioneers of coal are M. Vepreyskyi and S. Chirkov (*Podov, 2009; Hayko, Biletskyy, 2013*) mentioned as those who only conducted developments in the Bakhmut area (they are given in the article, but do not fit into the given "history of discovery" and are presented as secondary figures).

In the article by M. V. Golitsyn "Donetsk coal basin (Donbass)", "The Great Russian Encyclopedia" in volume 35 gives the following historical reference:

> "References about coal finds in the region belong to end of 16th – beginning of 17th century, the first deposits were discovered in 1721 near the Kundryuchya River (a tributary of the Seversky Donts), in 1723 development began in the area of Bakhmut (in 1924-2016 – Artemovsk) for the needs of local salt factories and forges. In the 1780s and 1790s plural coal deposits, including in the area of Lysychya Balka (now the city of Lysychansk), were discovered. Development of coal in industry started in 1795-1807, mining was carried out underground". (*Golitsyn, 2007*).

The published version basically repeats the material of the "Mountain Encyclopedia", but no longer mentions surnames. This encyclopedic article allegedly does not associate itself with the ideological figure of G. Kapustin, but fully preserves the version of his discovery of coal in the Donbass on the Kundryucha River. This is explained by the axiom of social influence – misinformation must be spread and repeated from various sources (*Kara-Murza, 2005*).

Let us consider the historical events of coal mining in Donbas in Ukrainian encyclopedias. Thus, the "Encyclopedia of Ukrainian Studies" in the general part (Volume 1), the "Fuel and energy sources" section provides information about the Donetsk coal basin, but only from a natural (geological) point of view, without

[1] An extract from the protocol of the Berg Collegium and a fairy tale by the "forge master" Mark Reer about the results of a sample of coal mined by G.G. Kapustin, *The Central State Archive of Ancient Acts, Berg Collegium Fund*, File 629, List 29.

historical reference. In the section “Industry”, there is a description of the coal industry of Ukraine, but historically the description begins with the 1870s, when this industry acquires dynamic development (*Entsyklopediya ukrayinoznavstva, 1949*). In the dictionary part (volume 2) there is a separate article by V. Kubiyovych “Donetsk Basin”, where it is specifically noted:

> “Then, in the second half of the 17th, century, fortified troops were established points on the border of tour. possessions – Tor (later Slavyanske) and Bakhmut (later Artemivske); settlers were also attracted by the exploitation of salt. In the first part of the 18th century Serbs were settled on both sides of the Dinets, two regiments were organized from them, and the entire region was named Slavic Serbia. But the Serbs did not turn out to be good colonists, some of them left their new homes, and the government began to force Ukrainians into these territories again. At that time, the current D. b. was included in the possessions of Zaporizhzhia (north-western part), the Don army (south-east) and Slobid Ukraine (north). After the destruction of Sichs and the spread of The Russian ampire along Chorne and Ozivske cities, the greater (western) part of D. b. became a part of the Katerynoslav Governorship, later the Katerynoslav Province (Bakhmutskyi and Slavyanoserbskyi or Luhansk oblasts), smaller (eastern) part of the Don Military Region (part of Taganriz and Donetsk oblasts); this administrative-territorial division remained until 1917. The face of the country was not changed by the fact that already in the second half. 18th century a small exploitation of hard coal began and what with the late 18th century built by the state metal plants that produced cast iron from local depleted ores, and anthracite was used as fuel: Luhansky factory 1795, Petrovsky b. Yenakievo 1859-64, Lysichanskyi 1866-70 (see also Steppe Ukraine). 1870-1917 Heavy industry of D. b. began to develop in the 1870s, since the construction of railways connecting D. b. with the depth of the Russian Empire and with the sea, in particular with the construction of the Catherine railway, which in 1884 connected D. b. with the iron ore Kryvyi Rih district. In connection with this, there was a demand for Donetsk coal for the railways themselves, and on the other hand, powerful metallurgy developed on the basis of Kryvyi Rih ores” (*Kubiyovych, 1957*).

As it can be seen, manipulative discourse is completely absent here. Obviously, the author was either not familiar with the documents published by O. Zvorykin, or deliberately did not spread the myth. It is also clear that the “Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopedia” had to contain such a mythical narrative.

In the volume of “Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic”, the article “Coal industry of the Ukrainian SSR” it is stated that “coal deposits in Donbas were discovered at the beginning of the 18th century”. And in the article by Yu. Butsyk and V. Shpakova “Donetsk Coal Basin” in the third volume of the Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopedia, the basic Soviet pro-Russian version is repeated::

> “The first deposit of coal of the Donetsk coal basin was discovered in 1721 by G. G. Kapustin on the Kundryuchy River. In the same period, artisanal coal mining began near Bakhmut (now Artemivsk)” (*Butsyk, Shpakova, 1979*).

The last sentence even strengthens the misinformation, because in the early versions of the myth it was noted that the local population used coal before it was “discovered” by the Russians.

Despite the numerous publications of Ukrainian researchers (in particular, the authors of this article), which showed the great importance of the priority of the discovery of coal in the Donbas by M. Vepreysky and S. Chirkov, subjected the Soviet version to scientific verification and proved its falsification, documented the main stages of the discovery and first development of coal deposits – encyclopedic editions of independent Ukraine, unfortunately, did not focus on these achievements.

Thus, the “Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine” states in the article “Donetsk Coal Basin” by A. Ya. Radzivil that: “The study and development of Donbass began in the 18th century. Royal Court of the Russian Empire for the first time received information about significant deposits of coal from the Cossacks. Developments were of a local nature, as extraction was carried out by an artisanal method. The first mine was laid in 1795 in Lysychansk (now the city of Luhansk region), in the 2nd part of in the 1860s, the first geological maps of the basin were created”. The important information mentioned here and the publicity that reached the royal court from the Cossacks cannot actually be a justification for the priority of opening coal deposits. The statement that the first geological maps appeared in the 1860s is also inaccurate (for example, there is a schematic map of 1829).

Even more unfortunate is the absence of the article “Donetsk coal basin" in the "Small Mining Encyclopedia”. In addition to the main part in three volumes, an additional volume with geographical names was planned, where an article about Donbas was being prepared. However, this volume was not published (a miracle, in fact, was the completion of the publication of the main part of the SME in 2013-2014 in Donetsk). Only a brief statement entered the “Mining Encyclopedic Dictionary”: “Donbas has been exploited since 1796” (*Biletskyy, (ed.), 2004*), which concerns only the issue of the construction of the first mine.

As we know, any academic science is usually based on the principles of historicism. Therefore, the Ukrainian creators of these encyclopedic publications had to present objective information not only in scientific publications, but also to reproduce it in the popular mass media. But the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which began in 2014, prevented this process. Wide popularization of the true history did not take place during the independence of Ukraine, the myth of the Russianness of Donbass was preserved, as well as numerous quasi-religious rituals, including holidays, monumental images, etc.

The scientific reproduction of the chronology of the discovery of coal deposits was first reflected in the encyclopedic publication “Great Ukrainian Encyclopedia” (*Biletskyy, Hayko, 2022a*). Here, in a concise overview, only the facts confirmed by the archival documents of the Collegium of Mining are presented. Since the full description of the events remains poorly known, we will present its most important stages according to the analysis and systematization of documentary evidence given (*Hayko, Biletskyy, 2022b*).

The first step in the industrial mastering of the rich, but dangerous (due to the attacks of the Crimean Tatars) steppe lands of Eastern Ukraine was the evaporation of salt from the water of the Torsky and Bakhmut lakes, known since the times of the Hetmanship. After the Tatars once again destroyed the Torsk salt fields at the end of the 17th century, and the destruction of Bakhmut during the subjugation of K. Bulavin’s rebellion, salt production began to revive only in 1710-1715 on the basis of lease relationships (the management of the saltworks at that time was in the hands of the Moscow state).

Bakhmut became a fortified settlement of salt workers. One of the main problems of the salt industries was the shortage of wood and the high price of imported firewood.

To a large extent, this was facilitated by the order of Peter I dated November 19, 1703 and subsequent orders, which forbade cutting down the forest not only for firewood, but also for the production of charcoal, under the threat of the death penalty. In addition, the Collegium of Mining of December 10, 1719 encouraged the search for minerals, particularly "burning stones" (coal), promising generous rewards and the possibility of establishing private mining enterprises. Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that the discovery of Donetsk coal was connected with the salt industry and the search for alternative fuel to wood.

In 1721, manager of the Bakhmut salt mines, landrat (assistant to the governor), nobleman Mykyta Vepreyskyi and commandant of the Bakhmut fortress, captain of the Izyum regiment (formed from the Slobid Cossacks) Semen Chirkov, with his guards and guides, set out on the slopes to take coal samples. It was discovered in two places – in the Skelevato tract, which is 25 versts from Bakhmut, and on the Bilenka River 50 versts from it. Coal samples in the required quantity were selected and sent to St. Petersburg to the Collegium of Mining (received on January 20, 1722). Their test showed the desired high results. The required number of workers from the Belgorod province was sent to develop coal. The first coal mining was organized by Vepreysky and Chirkov and began in 1723.

The given facts are recorded in archival documents [2], have passed multiple checks, were used by many researchers (in particular, authoritative historians of the Russian Empire) and were generally known, at least in the first quarter of the 20th century. They testify to the names of persons who are officially appointed to the role of pioneers of Donetsk coal, but they leave very important questions that need to be answered. The main one is: in what amazing way did Vepreyskyi and Chirkov manage to find coal? They did not personally know each other on minerals, it is not known about any mineralogist in their search party. Their expedition lasted only a few days, but on the first attempt they surprisingly came across the exits of two promising coal deposits.

These circumstances become even more amazing if we remember that at the described time in the territory of the Russian Empire, only a few experts imagined how to look for this still little-known useful mineral and even what it looks like. Moreover, special expeditions launched on the initiative of Peter I to search for hard coal were not successful for a long time. Close to the coal deposits, the ore operator G. Kapustin, who took samples near Tula, Voronezh and on the Don (not far from the place where the Siversky Donets flows into the Don), approached the ore works, but the testing of these minerals at the Collegium of Mining did not confirm the presence of fuel in them properties. We will cite (in the language and style of the original) a fragment from the protocol of the Collegium of Mining (from July 4, 1723) about the results of tests by the blacksmith master Mark Reer of coal samples mined by G. Kapustin:

> *"And against the written artillery protocol, the foreign blacksmith master Marko Reer said: which earthen coal was given to him to try, which was taken in the Voronezh province and in the Don towns, found by the informer thanks to Grigory Kapustin, and he, Reer, tried that coal, and after the test it turned out that there was no effect of that coal, only that coal crackles in the fire and only turns red, but there is no heat from it, and when you take it out of the fire, it will be black, just like the first one...[3]…".*

Unsuccessful tests of fossil samples found by G. Kapustin changed the attitude of the tsarist government officials towards him. The Collegium of Mining decided not to award Kapustin a reward, since there was nothing useful in the samples he brought. Soon, the oreologist was arrested in general on charges of hiding a letter about the abuse of county officials, and although Kapustin was later released, he was no longer entrusted with the leadership of the search in the new expedition in 1724 (the Englishman George Nixon led it); managing the money of the expedition was entrusted to another person – non-commissioned officer A. Maslov.

The accusations of commissioned research in the middle of the 20th century that foreigners deliberately discredited the success of a Russian oreologist during the analysis of samples seem to be quite opportunistic, since the same foreigners (in the person of the coal master G. Nixon) submitted a completely different verdict on samples of Bakhmut coal sent to the Collegium of Mining by M. Vepreyskyi and S. Chirkov:

> *"On May 5, 1724, they showed me coal in the Collegium, which I tried, and it is fine, and the ash from it is blue. And in England, we call the best coal at the coal plants, and if there are so many coals in this country, then it gives a great pleasure and is suitable for all needs, because they do not appear to have a lot of unnecessary things, as I have the same coal in England as I saw here and I liked this coal"[4].*

The urgency of the need for people who knew how to search for coal is evident in Peter I's letter to Vice-Admiral Gordon (dated January 21, 1723):

> *"To Vice-Admiral Gordon (handwritten). We really need you to send two people from England or Scotland who know how to find hard coal (Steinkohl) by signs on top of the earth and who are skilled in their craft, on which provide your work"[5].*

The given facts testify to the significant difficulties of finding coal and make it completely impossible for the accidental discovery of two deposits at once during one short trip of the initial (leading) people, as it allegedly happened with Vepreyskyi and Chirkov.

There can be only one explanation for this contradiction: the expedition of the Bakhmut Salt Board did not explore anything in the Donetsk steppe, but probably ***knew*** the location of the deposits and went to take samples to already ***known places***.

This version can be confirmed by the answer to another important question: why did the two first people of the county – the manager of the salt industry and the commander of the military garrison – go out together to search for coal? If we assume a real long-term

[2] See. A letter from the Bakhmut Salt Board to the Kamor Collegium about digging coal at a found deposit and about boiling salt on newly refined salt waters, The Central State Archive of Ancient Acts, Berg Collegium Fund, File 629, Page 187–188; а також Information from the Berg Collegium on the organization of exploration of coal and ores in southern Russia, The Central State Archive of Ancient Acts, Berg Collegium Fund, File 629, Page 71–74.

[3] An extract from the protocol of the Berg Collegium and a fairy tale by the "forge master" Mark Reer about the results of a sample of coal mined by G.G. Kapustin, The Central State Archive of Ancient Acts, Berg Collegium Fund, File 629, List 29.

[4] A note by the "coal master" G. Nixon on the quality of coal sent from the Bakhmut salt board, The Central State Archive of Ancient Acts, Berg Collegium Fund, File 629, List 191.

[5] Letter from Peter I to Vice Admiral Thomas Gordon about the release of coal masters from abroad, The Central State Archive of Ancient Acts, Peter's office, Part. 1, Book 39, List 525.

exhausting search, then obviously secondary, but more trained people from the salt works would have been sent for them.

In our case, it is the superiors who go “in search”, which indicates the pre-planned success of the “discovery”. It can be assumed that such great attention to the taking of coal samples directly by the county leaders was due to the expectation of a generous reward promised by the Collegium of Mining privilege of Peter I (from 1719) to the pioneers of mineral deposits. Therefore, Vepreyskyi and Chirkov did everything necessary (according to the requirements of the Collegium of Mining) to “take” the priority of the discovery and become the founders of the first coal industry.

But who was the real (informal) pioneer of the Donetsk coal deposits? Who invented and mastered the difficult technology of finding and using them and how was it done? Unfortunately, we will disappoint the hopes of fans of conspiracy theories, who are probably waiting for the name of some particular incognito to be revealed.

The main actor of these events was the population of the Donetsk basin (at that time - the lands of Zaporozhian Sich). It was the inhabitants of local settlements (Cossack winterers, individual villages of Old Believers) who started using coal, which sometimes came to the surface in tracts. Of course, interest in it arose here not from scientific books and not from visiting “educated people”, but through practical encounters. The reason for them could be the partial external similarity of hard coal with a wooden, well-known blacksmith, or the happy case of a bonfire near the exit of a coal deposit (this has happened more than once in the history of mining).

One way or another, it was the autochthonous people who paid attention to coal – they found out its energy properties and mastered the technology of burning it in a village furnace (which also had its own significant features). The lack of wood and the relative ease of digging coal in barracks close to settlements intensified its use by the local population.

Sooner or later, information about the properties of “burning stones” had to reach the Bakhmut saltworks: people came here for salt and understood the great need for fuel in the salt mines. It is unlikely that it will be possible to accurately find out the name of the person who knew the places from which the residents dug coal and informed M. Vepreyskyi and S. Chirkov about them.

The further development of the discovered deposits was a notable event. Thanks to preserved archival documents, we have the opportunity to learn about it firsthand. In a letter to the Collegium of State Income dated January 23, 1724, M. Vepreyskyi and S. Chirkov wrote:

> *“A decree from that Collegium ordered to send as many working people as necessary from Belogorotsk province to Bakhmut to the salt board for testing the newly refined coals and salt waters, but it was from that province that one hundred and ninety-four workers were sent, and they were sent in different periods, small numbers of them, without help, and without records, and after summer time – it was in August and September. And those coals were dug by hard workers who occupied mountains: fifteen fathoms in length and ten fathoms in height. And that earthen coal is now used in the Bakhmut salt factories, in government forges, for patching salt-cooked pans and for other handicrafts. Exactly that coal went deep into the mountain, and how much of it is in the depth is unknown, because above that coal there is a big mountain – ten fathoms or more in height, and between that coal and other materials are sought. And it is not possible to dig that coal with such small number of people in the near future”*[6].

So, it follows from the letter that in 1723, mining was started on one of the coal beds and during August-September, about 200 workers were employed. An important circumstance was that hard coal was used both for salting and in forges, which testifies to its good quality and mastered technology of use.

The question of the location of the first industries remains debatable. If the Skelevate tract is clearly defined (about 26 km southeast of Bakhmut, near the Skeleva River, a tributary of the Lugan), then several places claim the tract on the Bilenky River, which is 50 versts from Bakhmut[7], (there are several rivers with that name in Donbas).

The authors consider the most convincing version of Yu. M. Kanygin and Yu. T. Batyushin, which equates this place with the settlement of Horodyshche (Perevalsky District of Luhansk Oblast). In this case, the distance and direction, the Bilenka River (a tributary of the Belaya River in its headwaters), and the location of the so-called Kukuevskaya Mountain, from which local residents нав been mining coal since ancient times, coincide with Vepreysky’s route. V. I. Podov’s version, which substantiates Yashchikovo village in the same Perevalsky district, has a somewhat smaller coincidence of circumstances, but it also has the right to exist. Researchers of the middle of the 20th century also hypothesized about the deposits of Lysychansk and the Verkhnia Bilenka River, but most of the signs do not match here.

In May 1724, an authoritative expedition of the Collegium of Mining went in search of coal deposits, consisting of coal masters George Nixon (head), John Marshall, Thomas Krauvin, Thomas Clark, Vilim Person, non-commissioned officer Andrii Maslov, vice-chancellor Grigory Kapustin, translator Yakov Gramatin, two assistants and two soldiers. Its specified route provided for the study of coal deposits in the Pereslav province of the Ryazan Governorate, in the Olenicachi Mountains of the Voronezh Governorate, in the Don, and also ordered:

> *«And how those places will be examined, the Bakhmut province to the Skelevato tract should be reached, which was announced by the Collegium of State Income as a memorial, and that place should be writteb by him [G. Nixon] in the register»*[8].

Searches for coal on the Don have not yielded results. Nixon wrote:

> *«Now I have no samples to send, because the top of the mountain that Grigory showed was drilled with drills, but they did not find anything, but they drilled seven fathoms in that mountain».*

The expedition arrived in Bakhmut [9] only in December 1724 and, accompanied by the manager of the salt

[6] A letter from the Bakhmut Salt Board to the Kamor Collegium about digging coal at a found deposit and about boiling salt on newly refined salt waters, The Central State Archive of Ancient Acts, Berg Collegium Fund, File 629, List 187-188.

[7] Register of coal and ores sent from the Bakhmut salt board to the Kamor Collegium, The Central State Archive of Ancient Acts, Berg Collegium Fund, File 629, List 188-189.

[8] Extract from the journal of the Berg Collegium on the change in the route of the expedition of G. Nixon, The Central State Archive of Ancient Acts, Berg Collegium Fund, File 629, List 193.

[9] Presumably, after unsuccessful coal exploration results near Biloghirya on the Don, G. Kapustin was removed from the expedition and was not in Bakhmut. At least not one of his

mines, followed the route of 1721 (Vepreysky and Chirkov). The conclusions of the head of the expedition were preserved in his letter:

> *"Bakhmut, January 7, 1725. It is written to the Collegium of Mining by coal master Nixon: I arrived on a ship last year in 724, and from there a nobleman [10] and a sergeant [11], took me 60 versts, where I drilled the coal, which lies 45 inches thick and goes under the mountain, but there is no coal there for the direct distribution. And I drilled another 39 pounds in that place on the side of the river and also found coal there, under which lies a strong stone... And I hope that it is possible to start a good coal factory here and a lot of coal can be mined every day, if there was time for that... And from here I went to Shelevet, 25 versts from Bakhmut to the Sherkovsky coal mines, but all the coal there, as much as it was possible to do for the sake of water, was taken away, and I thought that the coal was going under water... And the mountain has a decent foundation at the top, and if if the coal goes on that foundation, then we can hope for a long time and the coal here is very good.."*[12].

G. Nixon's official report to the Collegium of Mining (from May 25, 1725) confirms the presence of deposits near the Bilenka River (in Nixon's words "by the Belkyne River") and in the Skelevato tract (in Nixon's – "by Shelevetovo, where Captain Chirikov worked"), a good prospect for their development is noted. This report essentially confirms the priority of the official opening of coal in the Donetsk Basin by M. Vepreyskyi and S. Chirkov. However, the issue of "priority" had its further history. G. Nixon, contrary to the obvious facts, considered himself the pioneer of Donetsk coal. Russian and Ukrainian historians of the 19th and early 20th centuries mentioned mostly the surnames of Vepreyskyi and Chirkov. In the middle of the 20th century, for the reasons analyzed at the beginning of the article, Nixon's expedition was "renamed" to Kapustin's expedition, who was appointed as the sole "discoverer" of Donbas (Vepreyskyi and Chirkov were not suitable for this role not only for reasons of social status, but also because of their local initiative, "horizontal ties", Ukrainian origin destroyed the doctrine of the statist vertical, called into question the Russian discovery of coal in the Donbas).

Contrary to expedient manipulative schemes and biased ideological doctrines, the truth of life always prevails. Residents of Donbass can be proud of their ancestors, who independently discovered, initiated the development and use of "sunstone" from the depths of the Ukrainian land, indicating the places where rich coal deposits come out to the official "first discoverers".

However, it should also be remembered that a falsified story does not pass without a trace either. Like any social institution, it has social inertia. Another factor of its survival is the usefulness of using the mythological narrative about the Russian priority of opening the Donbass as an element of the system of the powerful myth about the "Russian world" (*Dodonov, 2017*).

The war unleashed by Russia in 2014 would hardly have been possible if the narratives of imperial propaganda (which also actively used the figure of the Russian oreologist G. Kapustin in Donbas) had remained in the past. A certain step in this direction is the scientifically verified article of the Great Ukrainian Encyclopedia named "Donetsk Coal Basin"

Conclusions

1. 1. The issue of the discovery of the Donetsk coal basin in the scientific and encyclopedic literature of Russia, the USSR and Ukraine is highlighted. It is shown that the history of the first discovery of coal in Donbas, which was falsified by Russia and the USSR, and the narratives of imperial propaganda, which actively used the figure of the Russian oreologist G. Kapustin in Donbas, are an example of the information war against Ukraine, its science, culture, and economic achievements, which has been going on for almost throughout the period of industrial development of the region, to this day.

2. Archival historical documents that show the real picture of the discovery of coal in Donbas have been introduced into scientific circulation. They unequivocally testify that the official discoverers of coal deposits in the Donbass were the manager of the Bakhmut salt mines, land administrator, nobleman Nikita Vepreyskyi and commandant of the Bakhmut fortress, captain of the Izyum regiment of Slobid Cossacks, Semen Chirkov. The first geological map of the Donets coal basin and its very name was given by the mining engineer Yevgraf Kovalevskyi, who comes from a family of Ukrainian Cossack elders.

3. By preparing the mythological narrative, we can see the methods of its distribution and consolidation, typical for the manipulation of mass consciousness: the substitution of history, multiple replications, the distribution of disinformation by various sources, the silencing of historical truth, the censorship of information, the creation of a great amount of academic disinformation "knowledge", as well as the creation of "new language" by means of a double replacement of concepts, because the "Russianness" of the pioneers was useful in Soviet times for the formation of the "Soviet people" led by the Russian. Now this "Russianness" (latent "Sovietness") is again useful for the aggressor who seeks schismogenesis of the Ukrainian nation and the reproduction of the Russian empire.

letters, memos, or messages from Bakhmut exists (quarrels between Nixon and Kapustin are recorded by letters only from earlier sections of the research). In addition, Nixon, hinting at Kapustin, notes in his letter from Bakhmut: "And he, who was supposed to show the coal, is not to be found here".

[10] Nixon means M. Vepreiskyi.

[11] Presumably, it is about a tract near the Bilenka River and the modern village of Horodyshche (ancient name – Bilenke). The Skelevate tract, where Vepreyskyi and Chirkovy had been searching for coal since 1723.

[12] G. Nixon's report to the Berg Collegium on the exploration of coal in Bakhmut, *The Central State Archive of Ancient Acts*, Berg Collegium Fund, File 629, List 445-446.

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Хто і коли відкрив Донецький вугільний басейн: інформаційна війна на Донбаському фронтирі

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У статті автори порушують актуальне питання історичних фальсифікацій, розглядаючи їх як елемент інформаційної війни. Застосовуючи історіографічний метод та інтерпретуючи факти створення історичної дезінформації як маніпуляцію суспільною свідомістю, вони презентують конкретний кейс історичних досліджень про відкриття Донецького вугільного басейну. Відтак зроблено огляд наукової та енциклопедичної літератури Росії, СРСР та України, присвяченої висвітленню цього питання; уведено в науковий обіг архівні історичні документи, які показують реальну картину відкриття вугілля на Донбасі; відстежується маніпулятивний дискурс впливу на масову свідомість з метою створення міфологічного наративу про «російськість» Донбасу. Доведено, що фальсифікації Росії та СРСР щодо історії першовідкриття вугілля на Донбасі тривають практично протягом усього часу промислового освоєння регіону і до сьогодні, є прикладом інформаційної війни проти України. Оприлюднені авторами архівні історичні документи однозначно вказують, що офіційними першовідкривачами вугільних родовищ на Донбасі були інші історичні персони, аніж ті, про яких пише російська та радянська наукова та енциклопедична література, і вони мають українське походження. Визначено типові для маніпуляції масовою свідомістю способи поширення міфологічного наративу та їх актуалізацію під час російсько-української війни.

Ключові слова: інформаційна війна, Донбас, міфологічний наратив, історія відкриття Донецького вугільного басейну.

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