

Construction of regional myths: a case study of the Greeks of the North Azov Sea region ¹

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the process of constructing the mythological image of the Russian Empire as a "saviour of Christians" who were resettled from the Crimean peninsula to the North Azov Sea region, which became the basis for the formation of a historical myth in the region. The paper uses the analysis of various sources: orders, letters, reports, rescripts, descriptive and statistical materials, messages, etc. to consider the main stages of creating and maintaining this image and its articulation at different levels. The author proves that the positioning of Russia's special mission to protect the Christian population of the peninsula began from the moment the Russian Empire decided to resettle Christians from the territory of the Crimean Khanate. The Russian Empire assumed a leading role in the protection of "co-religionists" justifying themselves by unbearable religious oppression and the difficult situation of the Greeks, Armenians, Georgians and all those who practiced Orthodox Christianity in a Muslim state. To strengthen its role and emphasize the importance of its "mission" the Russian Empire created and spread the image of the Crimean Khanate as a despotic state that oppressed the Christian population in every possible way and limited their religious and social rights almost to the point of destruction. Their extremely difficult situation forced the Crimean Christians to appeal to the Russian Empress to resettle them on the territory of the Orthodox Empire. This was the official version of the resettlement of the Christians used at all levels and became the basis for the construction of the myth.

The official image of the empire as the "savior" of the Christians was actively spread at first through the works of priests and representatives of the church. The special role of the leader of the Crimean Christians – Metropolitan Ignatius of Gotfey and Kafay was constructed. His actions are compared with the actions of the Old Testament Prophet Moses. In the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, this image was replicated by educators, doctors, and researchers of history. At this stage, the author observes the fixation of the official image of the Russian Empire as the "savior" of Christians. It was inconsistent with the memories of the Greeks and their descendants who survived the resettlement and strove to return to the Crimean Peninsula. At the same time, the "logical chain" of the regional myth about the founding of Mariupol by Metropolitan Ignatius and the first commemorative practices in his honor was built. All this laid the foundation for the final formation of the myth of the imperial city of Mariupol.

KEYWORDS

The North Azov Sea region, the Greeks, regional history, historical myth, Mariupol, mythological image

Introduction

The construction of the "imperial" past of regions and the use of this construct to shape the historical consciousness of its inhabitants and their belief in the decisive role of the Russian Empire in the fate of a particular region is a characteristic feature of the empire's policy in the occupied territories. The issue of analysing the ways in which existing narratives and historical myths were formed has become particularly significant after the Russian Federation's occupation of part of Ukraine. Russia's attempts to emphasise the

"Russian origins" of the occupied territories and its exclusive role in their formation and development require researchers to focus on the analysis of the processes of constructing and disseminating narratives in the public space, as well as in journalistic and academic literature. The Russian Empire, and now the Russian Federation, has been influencing the political consciousness and behaviour of both its citizens and residents of the border areas through myths for a long period of time. Myth is a universal tool that builds a general construct of the past, the value orientations of society, and lays the foundation

for future actions in accordance with the events of the past. The images constructed by myth do not raise doubts about their veracity, they are perceived as true.

From the theoretical point of view, the problems of myth construction and functioning are the object of cultural, historical and political science research. When analysing regional myths, cultural and political scientists focus on the nature, structure and main functions of myths, their impact on the emergence of ideas and guidelines in society, and the role they play in developing regional identity. The essential characteristics of the phenomenon of "regional myth" and its place in the formation of regional identity were studied by L. Nahorna (2008), O. Taranenko (2015), S. Rostetska (2019), K. Sidorova (2012), etc. According to S. Rostetska, the originality of regional myths is the result of appealing to its exclusivity from a historical, geographical or economic point of view, peculiarities of historical heritage, which together affect the formation of a unique mentality of the inhabitants of a certain territory. The author emphasises the importance of regional mythologies for the legitimization of power and positioning of the region for both internal and external space (Rostetska, 2019). L. Nahorna states that as a result of the activities of local elites supported by geopolitical claims of neighbouring countries, various myths have been built in the border areas for a long time to demonstrate their "identity", "otherness", and belonging to other territories (Nahorna, 2008: 77). Thus, myths become instruments of manipulation by politicians, and their "truth" affects the process of displacement of true knowledge and complicates the search for sources of mythologemes.

Historians L. Zashkilniak (2015), O. Udod (2021), Ya. Kalakura (2021), and N. Yakovenko (1998) analysed myths in Ukrainian historiography, the reasons for their origin and ways of their spread. Relying on the epistemological description of myth favoured by L. Zashkilnyak: "...as a result of cognitive activity of people shown beyond time or space and transformed into an integral element of thinking, culture and social activity of members of a certain community or communities", we agree with the researcher's thesis that one of the historian's tasks is to destroy myths that are outdated and do not correspond to the new epistemological situation (Zashkilniak, 2015: 19). According to L. Zashkilniak, one of the important factors that hinders the development of Ukrainian society is the continued functioning and artificial strengthening of historical myths and stereotypes that have been manipulatively imposed on the minds of Ukrainian citizens (Zashkilniak, 2015: 21). The roots of these myths go back to imperial times and continue to spread, especially through local history works. Ya. Kalakura emphasises that distortion of historical memory, mythologisation of heroes, false interpretation of the past and present by deliberately replacing or fabricating sources and facts, spreading myths, forming and imposing stereotypes of thinking, labelling other countries and peoples were an integral component of Russia's imperial policy and technologies aimed at manipulating historical consciousness (Kalakura, 2021: 22).

The problem of studying the construction and dispelling of national myths is relevant for many countries, especially those that were part of the USSR or shared a border with it. Researchers focused on various issues: from the influence of national myths on collective memory through the analysis of school textbooks (Ahonen, 2020), myths about the strength of the Russian Federation's influence on post-Soviet countries (Ortmann, 2018) to the

construction of the Russian national myth through the consideration of figures in history (Usitalo, 2013). In recent years, Ukrainian researchers have been actively engaged in studying existing myths and deconstructing them. It is worth noting that these works mainly concern important milestones in the history of Ukraine, while there are still many unidentified myths in regional history (Lastovskyi, 2021). Thus, one of the current priorities is to find the sources of imperial myths in regional history and analyse them, eradicate them from use, and stop their spread through local commemorative practices and media publications. Understanding the existing imperial-colonial discourse in local history literature and local memory policy will help to develop a plan of actions aimed to prevent the spread of colonial narratives, often unconsciously, among residents of different regions of Ukraine, especially the younger generation.

The aim of this study is to trace the formation of the image of the Russian Empire as the "saviour of Christians" who were evicted from the Crimean peninsula and relocated to the North Azov Sea region, as well as the process of mythologising the empire's actions at the regional level.

The Ukrainian North Azov Sea region is a region where the process of distorting history and mythologising heroes began two centuries ago, and the negative consequences of this policy of the Russian Empire can be traced both in historical memory and in the spread of mythologemes in the people's consciousness and urban space through monuments and other historic sights.

Research methods

The interdisciplinary nature of the topic enables the use of methods from different disciplines: historical regionalism and source studies. According to Ya. Vermenych, in the focus of historical regional studies is the genesis of specific loci and topoi that in a certain way influenced the processes of regionalisation and introduced the use of chorological and geocultural approaches to the study of regions as socio-cultural integrities (Vermenych, 2007: 15). Adherence to locality in research allows us to delve into a narrowed field of study, namely the process of forming the "image" of the Russian Empire as the "saviour" of Crimean Christians and the spread of this image in a particular territory, but at the same time avoid too detailed descriptions of the processes that also influenced its construction at the national level. Being based on the main concept of historical regionalism – a historical and geographical region – we distinguish between the North Azov Sea region as a separate territorial society.

The basis for distinguishing this region is the nature of the resettlement of Christians from Crimea to this area and quite a high level of preservation of the traditional culture of the population. Differences in the linguistic and legal organisation of this space: Christians used different dialects (four dialects of the Turkic group of the Altai language family and five dialects of the Greek group of the Indo-European language family) and had a semi-privileged position and separate internal governance of their own community, contributed to their rather high level of self-identification on ethnic grounds (they identified themselves as Greeks). Based on the fact that historical regionalism studies the existing specific regional traditions, including the worldview perceptions of the locals, I used the sources on the history of settlement and literature that reflect the stages of the construction of mytho-

logical images that influenced the formation of these perceptions of the local population of the region.

The methodological basis of the study includes the use of general historical (chronological and historical-comparative) and source study research methods. The use of bibliographic heuristics made it possible to study the state of the scientific development of the problem and identify the published sources. The presence of specific terminology, outdated words and phrases in the sources required the use of the hermeneutic method. Such source study research methods as analysis and synthesis were also applied.

Results and Discussion

The 70s of the 18th century were very difficult in the history of the Crimean Khanate and its inhabitants: the Tatars, the Greeks, the Armenians, etc. During this period the Crimean Khanate became independent of the Ottoman Empire, was occupied by the Russian Empire later and stopped its existence forever. At that time, Russia pursued a policy of "liberation" and stood for the liberation of the Crimean Tatars, the Crimean Christians from the "Ottoman yoke". Later, Empress Catherine II acted in another role and began to protect the Christians from Crimean Tatars by moving them from the Crimean Khanate to the territory of the Russian Empire. At present, the Russian Federation continues its "tradition" of "protection" and is now pretending that they protect the population of the Donetsk region, where the Christians displaced from Crimea in the 18th century live now.

The documents (rescripts and decrees of Catherine II, order and letters of Petr Rumyantsev, Grigoriy Potemkin, Aleksandr Prozorovskiy) give an opportunity to study how the preparation of the resettlement took place, the arguments used to convince the population and the birth of the image of the "savior of Christians". In March 1778, the empress's rescript and decree indicated the need to make all possible efforts to persuade Christians to move to the Russian Empire. These sources emphasize that it was extremely important to agree with the metropolitan about the resettlement and promise various benefits to him¹. As an explanation and argument for the Khan, Catherine II indicated that the resettlement was being organized to prevent possible harm that Christians might suffer from the Tatars, as well as the Turks if they arrived in Crimea². The sources testify that the authorities close to the empress perfectly understood that the Khan would be against the resettlement of Christians, since they were the ones who paid taxes that brought a lot of profit³. In

order to convince the Khan not to resist, the authorities wrote letters to each other advising to ensure the Khan that he would receive financial compensation and should not contradict the decision of his patroness, Empress Catherine II⁴. Ignoring the prepared arguments, the Khan was not informed for a long time.

The documents prove that Christians were not interested in the resettlement, so it was decided to apply psychological pressure on the population. Starting from April 1778, through its representatives, the Russian Empire spread disinformation that the Tatars would kill all Christians on a favorable occasion. Due to the fact that in the near future the troops of the empire would leave the territory of the Crimean Khanate, nothing would prevent the Tatars from doing it. Thus, the entire Christian population would die, since it would be difficult for Russia to protect them⁵. In the event of a war with the Ottoman Empire, Christians would also be forced to leave their homes to save their lives, so it was the best time to take advantage of the opportunity to resettle and receive many privileges from the Russian state. In addition, rumors spread that the Khan had handed over all his Christian citizens to Russia⁶ and that if they resisted resettlement, they would be brutally punished by both the representatives of the Khan and the Empress⁷.

In addition to external informational pressure, Metropolitan Ignatius (as the head of all Christians) worked with the population directly and through wealthy people in Crimea. As a result, the manipulation of public consciousness influenced the decision to leave Crimea. 3 months after the announcement of the resettlement, Metropolitan Ignatius handed over a document that outlined the conditions under which Christians would be ready to leave the Crimean Khanate⁸. Most of the demands were

grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.61.

¹ Rescript of Catherine II to P.A. Rumyantsev for preparing the resettlement of Christians to Russia. 1778, March 9. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.56-57*; Decree by Catherine II to G.A. Potemkin for the preparation of resettlement of Christians and their reception in Novorossiysk and Azov provinces. 1778, March 9. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.57-58.*

² Rescript of Catherine the Great to P.A.Rumyantsev for preparations for the resettlement of Christians in Russia. 1778, March 9. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.57.*

³ Extract from a report by A.A. Prozorovsky to P.A. Rumyantsev on the untimely resolution of the issue of Christian resettlement. 1778, March 11. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo*

grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.61.
⁴ Letter from G.A. Potemkin to A.A. A. Prozorovskiy on the interaction with Shahin-Giray-khan on the issue of resettlement of Christians. 1778, March 10. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.60-61*; Letter from P.A. Rumyantsev to A.D. Konstantinov on the need for propaganda among Christians on their resettlement to Russia. 1778, March 23. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.62.*

⁵ Report from A.D. Konstantinov to P.A. Rumyantsev confirming and clarifying their conditions for Christians to resettle in Russia. 1778, April 16. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.67.*

⁶ Message from Crimean officers to Shahin Giray-khan informing him of the imminent resettlement of Christians in Russia and asking him to prevent this. 1778, July 17. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.79.*

⁷ Report from the Crimean government to the Khan on the ongoing preparation of Christians for resettlement under pressure from the Russian military and a request from individual Christian priests to prevent this. 1778, July 20. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.83.*

⁸ Resolution of the Crimean Christians on their resettlement from Crimea to the province of Azov. 1778, July 16. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.71-73.*

voiced by the metropolitan at the beginning of April 1778, that is, before informing his congregation about this possibility and consulting with them⁹. At the same time, part of the Christian population appealed to the Tatar representatives with a request not to allow Russia to relocate them from Crimea¹⁰. For example, according to the report of the kapiji-basha Ahmet-aga to Khan Shagin Geray, the Greeks and Armenians who lived in Kozlov did not want to move, were satisfied with the power of the Khan and “even being cut with sabers, we would not think of going anywhere”¹¹. Therefore, they requested to stop the resettlement and prevent it from being removed from the Crimean Khanate.

The Khan found himself in a difficult position because he did not believe that the Empress had decided to resettle the Christians without informing him through the representatives of her decision. That is why he issued a decree to find people who spread the rumors about the resettlement of Christians¹². To clarify the situation, the Khan wrote letters to Aleksandr Suvorov with a request to destroy the rumors¹³. Only a few days later, he received a letter. It said that the Christians, who were afraid to be killed by the Tatars, had appealed to the Empress with a request for the resettlement. Being obliged to protect Christians, Catherine II allowed them to resettle. Instead, the Empress expected the Khan not to interfere with the resettlement, but help implement the decision of his patroness¹⁴. Khan and his entourage were in despair, more than once they wrote letters to Catherine II with a request not to resort to the relocation and assured that they would

not cause any harm to Christians¹⁵. But all their attempts were in vain. Later, the thesis that the resettlement was organized as a result of an exclusively voluntary request of Christians to the empress to save them from the Tatar yoke and disaster, was recorded in the foundational document of Christians – “A charter granted to Christians of the Greek law who left the Crimea for settlement in the Azov province” dated May 21, 1779. The document became the basis for creating and spreading the image of the Russian Empire as the “savior of Christians”¹⁶.

This statement was gradually expanded through the works by the representatives of the church published in secular and religious publications. So, in 1844, the article by Kherson and Tauric Archbishop Gavriil “Resettlement of the Greeks from Crimea to the Azov province and the foundation of the Gothia and Kaffa diocese” was published. In it, the author stated that being advised by Metropolitan Ignaty, the Greeks applied to the Empress and asked to become the subjects of the Russian Empire. In Crimea, they used to live under the Tatar yoke and Muslim oppression, that was the reason why they strived to move to single-religion Russia. The decision was taken extremely quickly and pleased the Greeks with the generosity of the Empress¹⁷.

At the same time, Archbishop Gavriil laid the foundation for the creation of an apologetic image of Metropolitan Ignatius. In terms of its consequences and significance, the author compared the resettlement of the Greeks from the borders of the Crimean Khanate to the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. Gavriil ignored all the facts that could point to the poor preparation for the process of the resettlement, the reluctance of the Greeks to leave their homes in Crimea, the uncertainty about the places for relocation, the search for suitable accommodation on the lands of the former Samara palanka that lasted more than a year. The only mention that can hint at the strained relationship of the metropolitan with his congregation is the information that his house burned down along with all his property. In spite of the fact that a new one was built for him, he could not live peacefully in it “being disturbed by frequent grief from his countrymen”¹⁸. Thus, the spread of the image of Russia as the “savior of

⁹ Report from the Crimean government to the Khan on the ongoing preparation of Christians for resettlement under the pressure of the Russian military and the request of individual Christian priests to prevent this. 1778, April 4. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya* / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.63.

¹⁰ Message from Crimean officers to Shahin Giray-khan informing him of the imminent resettlement of Christians in Russia and asking him to prevent this. 1778, July 17. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya* / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.79.

¹¹ Report from the Kozlov chief Kapiji Bashi Ahmet-agi Khan on the imminent resettlement of Christians in Russia and the reluctance of many of them to move. 1778, July 18. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya* / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.80.

¹² Decree by Shahin-Giray Khan ordering the extradition of persons spreading rumours about the imminent resettlement of Christians. 1778, July 18. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya* / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.81.

¹³ The first letter of Shahin-Giray Khan to A.V. Suvorov requesting him not to withdraw the Christians from the Crimea. 1778, July 19. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya* / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.81-82; The Khan's second letter to A.V. Suvorov, asking him to reply to his first letter about the resettlement of Christians. 1778, July 20. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya* / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.82-82.

¹⁴ A.V. Suvorov's letter to the Khan about the Empress' decision to resettle the Christians in Russia. 1778, July 22. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya* / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.87.

¹⁵ Letter from Shahin-Giray Khan to Catherine II with a request not to remove Christians from the Crimea. 1778, July 28. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya* / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.112; Translation of a petition from the Crimean Tatars to the Empress not to relocate Christians by force and yasys. 1778, July 28. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya* / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.113; Thirteen Crimean chiefs petitioned the Empress to confirm the independence of the khanate, to allow it to have a resident at the tsar's court, not to remove Christians by force and not to interfere in the further settlement of the peninsula by settlers from other countries. 1778, July 28. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya* / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.114.

¹⁶ Charter to the Christians of Greek law, who left the Crimea for the province of Azov to settle. *Ot Kryma do Mariupolskogo grecheskogo okruga (1652- 1783). Dokumenty po istorii grekov Priazovya* / compiler Kaloerov, Stefan. Donetsk, 2008. P.349-352.

¹⁷ Gavriil. Resettlement of Greeks from Crimea to the Azov Province and the founding of the Diocese of Gothia and Cafia. *Zapiski Odesskogo obshchestva istorii i drevnostey*. 1844. Vol. 1. P.198.

¹⁸ Ibid. P.202-203.

Christians" was initiated and the foundations for the image of Metropolitan Ignatius as the "Moses of the Mariupol Greeks" were laid.

The publication of Archbishop Gavriil's article in the first volume of "Notes of the Odessa Society of History and Antiquities" was of great importance. Sometime later, "Notes..." became one of the main magazines where historical works were published by amateurs and researchers of the South of the former Russian Empire. Therefore, Gavriil's article and his thesis about the initiative of Christians regarding resettlement and the role of Russia became a kind of benchmark. Other researchers took it as a basis, often reprinting entire sentences and not indicating their true authorship. For example, in 1845, the "Journal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs" published an article by doctor Gavriilo Kaleri (Kalera)¹⁹, who lived in Mariupol. Despite the declared title "Topographical and medical-statistical data on the Mariupol district", the author included in the article information about the appeal of the Greeks to the empress with a request for resettlement from Crimea. The text of this informational reference is very similar to the text of Gavriil, even the errors in the dates were preserved. But he did not make any reference to the work of Archbishop Gavriil. An important difference in Kaleri's work is the restrained description of the role of the metropolitan. It can be assumed that being a resident of Mariupol he was well aware that the townspeople, and especially the older generation, did not approve of Ignatius.

The publication of a book by Apollon Skalkovskiy, a researcher of the history of the southern lands, contributed to the spread of the statement about the initiative of Christians to move to save themselves from death. According to his information, the appeal of the Greeks was supported by the Empress, but the Khan did not oppose the resettlement (the documents show the opposite). Citing statistical information, the author notes that in 1783, after the resettlement, there were still about 10,000 Greeks of both sexes in Crimea, who mostly lived in cities²⁰. Skalkovskiy did not say a word concerning how they managed to have survived before the Russian Empire annexed Crimea and why they did not agree to resettle. He also wrote that many Christians returned to Crimea after 1783, which is not true. Russia did not allow the Greeks to leave their new places of residence and forcibly returned those who fled²¹. The work of the researcher Apollon Skalkovskiy differs from others due to the lack of detailed descriptions of the sufferings of Christians and little attention to the person of the metropolitan. Thus, this is the most balanced work, which at the same time supports and consolidates in the scientific space the image of the Russian Empire, which saved Christians.

The image of the Russian Empire as the "savior of Christians" was finally cemented thanks to the work of Archpriest Serafimov. At the beginning of his work, he compared the suffering of Christians in Crimea with the

suffering of Jews in Ancient Egypt. The author emphasized that Christians suffered from Muslim fanaticism for six centuries and were finally saved by the mighty hand of Catherine II²². To reinforce the description of the suffering of Christians at the hands of Muslims, he cited the story about 3,000 tongues of Christians that were cut out in one day. As a result of the extremely difficult situation, some Christians stopped using their native language. In addition, the Crimean Tatars forced them to pay exorbitant taxes, thus forcing them to convert to Islam. And in conclusion, to confirm his words, Serafimov cited a story from the work of archpriest Grigoriy Chernyavskiy, who served in one of the Mariupol churches (the work itself has not been found by researchers yet). As a result of the steadfastness of the faith of Christians, the Khan ordered to cut off the tongues of 70 priests and teachers of the Greek religion, string them on a rope and send them to the Sultan²³. "Under such dire circumstances, what did poor Christians have to do, but resort to the protection and patronage of powerful, monotheistic Russia?" - asked Serafimov.

It is important to emphasize that later in his work, the archpriest described that the Russian Empire was very eager to seize Crimea and was interested in relocating Christians in order to deprive the Crimean Khanate of the main taxpayers. From this, we can conclude that Serafimov understood the main reasons for the resettlement, but he deliberately reinforced the description of the suffering of Christians and the role of Russia as a "liberator". Sometimes Serafimov rewrote entire sentences from Gavriil's work, while not referring to his article²⁴. This especially concerned the description of the role of the metropolitan, thus cementing his image as the "Moses of the Crimean Greeks".

The published work of the Mariupol Greek and educator Feokist Khartakhay "Ignatius, Metropolitan of Goth and Kafsky" became the final chord in consolidating the created image of the hero and "Moses of the Greeks" in literature²⁵. While retelling all the suffering of the Greeks in the Crimea from the Muslims, the colossal role of the metropolitan in the resettlement and liberation of Christians under the patronage of Empress Catherine II, Khartakhay aimed to influence the formation of the historical memory of his community and contemporaries. This memory was built on the Muslim-Christian antagonism and the prominent role of the Russian Empire, which achieved its mission thanks to the "Moses of the Mariupol Greeks" and his dedication to the salvation of his congregation. An important difference between Feokist Khartakhay's work and the works of other authors is that it was written not only for an external reader but also for members of his Mariupol Greek community. Taking into account the fact that Khartakhay was the initiator of the establishment of male and female gymnasiums in Mariupol, it can be assumed that students became familiar with his works and this publication in particular. The portrait of the metropolitan from descendants of his nephew, was also printed in it for the first time²⁶. Later, it was

¹⁹ Kaleri G. Topographical and medical-statistical data on the Mariupol district. *Zhurnal Ministerstva vnutrennikh del*. 1845. № 11. P.34-69.

²⁰ Skalkovskiy Ap. *Experience of a statistical description of the Novorossiysk region*. Ch. 1. Odessa. 1850. P.277.

²¹ Detailed information (lists, orders) regarding the Greeks who left their new place of residence without a permit and returned to Crimea, as well as official appeals of the population to obtain a permit for resettlement are contained in the files of the Mariupol Greek Court.

²² Serafimov S. Crimean Christians (Greeks) on the northern shores of the Sea of Azov. *Khersonskie eparkhialnye vedomosti*. 1862. Ch. 3. P.145-146.

²³ Ibid. P.149.

²⁴ Ibid. P.157; 159.

²⁵ Khartakhay F. Ignatius, Metropolitan of Goth and Kafsky. *Collected works*. Donetsk. 2004. P.169-175.

²⁶ Ibid. P.169.

this portrait of Ignatius that was reprinted and used for commemoration.

Feokist Khartakhay knew well that the metropolitan's contemporaries were dissatisfied with the resettlement and blamed him for their troubles, so they did not show him respect even after his death: they passed by the burial ground of the metropolitan with indifference. In his opinion, by the time he wrote the paper (1861) Mariupol Greeks had already reconsidered the actions and contribution of their "Moses". F. Khartakhay stressed the need for a monument to Ignatius and emphasized that the community itself strived to do it (in fact the first monument to the metropolitan appeared only at the beginning of the 21st century). Therefore, thanks to the efforts of Khartakhay, the formation of the image of the metropolitan as the leader of the Greek community was completed and was used in the construction of the historical memory of the Greeks. The appearance of this work contributed to the implementation of the first commemorative practices to crown the memory of the metropolitan among the Greek population.

In the second half of the 19th – at the beginning of the 20th century significant changes took place in the life of the Greek community – the liquidation of the Mariupol Greek Court in 1869 (a self-governing body of the Greeks that performed administrative, judicial, and police functions), increased Russification through education, rapid industrial development of the region and rapid population growth (since 1859 the representatives of all ethnic groups were allowed to settle in the city). As a result, new accents appeared in the evaluations of Ignatius, in public opinion the metropolitan was positioned as the founder of Mariupol outside the context of his ethnicity. At the same time, the role of the Russian Empire did not undergo rethinking.

At the end of the 19th century the city government, in cooperation with educational institutions, introduced several commemorative practices. In 1886, 100 years since the death of Metropolitan Ignatius, the city council decided to hold a memorial service near his tomb in the Church of St. Catherine and celebrate the anniversary according to the approved program of celebrations. In the same year, a scholarship of his name was founded in the spiritual school for the upbringing of an orphan or a child from the poorest Greek family. Since 1886, it has been ordered to hold an annual memorial service on the death day of Metropolitan Ignatius²⁷. In 1898, a scholarship named after Metropolitan Ignatius was established in the boys' gymnasium for students who studied well. His portrait as a prominent man of Mariupol hung in the assembly hall of the gymnasium.

The publication of the collection "Mariupol and its surroundings" in 1892 was an important step in consolidating in the public consciousness the logical chain "Tatar yoke – the liberation of the Greeks by Russia – the foundation of Mariupol by Metropolitan Ignatius". It included the texts of excursions that were prepared and conducted on the initiative of the director of the gymnasium Grigoriy Timoshevskiy to familiarize students with their native city Mariupol and its history. The preface stated that the purpose of the publication was to acquaint local residents with the history of the region and facilitate the study of history for future researchers. The authors of the tours emphasized that the texts did not pretend to be complete

²⁷ Timoshevskiy, Grigoriy. Spiritual and civic self-government. *Mariupol i ego okrestnosti*. Mariupol. 1892. P. 103.

due to the small number of works on the history of the city in the libraries and the disorganisation of the local archives. Later this edition became the main source for writing works on the history of the city, and the key points are axiomatic even nowadays.

In his texts, the excursion director Timoshevskiy repeated all the theses of the previous researchers, starting from the difficult life of the Christians in the Crimean Khanate, their request to the Russian Empire and the consent to save them as a result of brotherly love and personal benefit. At the same time, while keeping the general canvas of the story about the resettlement, Timoshevskiy also gave information that not all Greeks positively accepted the idea of the resettlement, some of them did not want to lose their homes and farms, the others intermarried with the Tatars and did not feel the suppression²⁸. During the preparation and the resettlement, there were acts of defiance among Christians who refused to relocate. Of great value is the information about the attempts of the Greeks to return to Crimea even at the beginning of the 19th century and the involvement of the military to calm and return them²⁹. According to the above-mentioned retelling, the Metropolitan's relations with his congregation were very acute at the end of his life. Ignatius tried to continue to rule his congregation as he did in Crimean Khanate, but the power in the city already belonged to the Mariupol Greek court. After another misunderstanding, the Greeks destroyed the Metropolitan's garden. Ignatius cursed everybody who took part in it. The Greeks considered the troubles that happened to them, such as drought, cholera, and other diseases, the result of this curse³⁰. In spite of all the information given, it is clear that Timoshevskiy treated the metropolitan with respect and commitment.

Grigoriy Timoshevskiy noted that the land where the Greeks were settled belonged once to the Russians before it was occupied by the Tatars (this is not true). After that he added that before the resettlement of the Greeks these lands (Kalmiuska palanka) were populated by Cossacks from Zaporizhzhia, beginning with the 15th or 16th centuries³¹. A fortress and 61 khutirs were founded on the territory of the palanka³². After the liquidation of the Zaporizhzhia Sich, the Cossack fortress became the center of the new city Pavlovsk, which in 1780 was inhabited by the Greeks. According to the author, old Greeks remembered what the remnants of the fortress looked like (the remains of the fortress were finally destroyed in 1845 by the decision of the head of the Mariupol Greek court

²⁸ Timoshevskiy, Grigoriy. Resettlement of Orthodox Christians from Crimea to the Mariupol district of Azov, now Ekaterinoslav, province. *Mariupol i ego okrestnosti*. Mariupol. 1892. P. 22.

²⁹ This information was received by Timoshevskiy from the case of the Mariupol Greek court, which before the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Russia in Ukraine was kept in the Mariupol regional museum. During the blockade of Mariupol in March 2022, the museum burned down.

³⁰ Timoshevskiy, Grigoriy. Spiritual and civic self-government. *Mariupol i ego okrestnosti*. Mariupol. 1892. P.101.

³¹ Timoshevskiy, Grigoriy. Resettlement of Orthodox Christians from Crimea to the Mariupol district of Azov, now Ekaterinoslav, province. *Mariupol i ego okrestnosti*. Mariupol. 1892. P.32.

³² Timoshevskiy, Grigoriy. The foundation of the city of Mariupol and some details of its history. *Mariupol i ego okrestnosti*. Mariupol. 1892. P.68.

Ivan Chebanenko because of the preparation of the city for the arrival of Prince Konstantin Nikolaevich³³.

In order to free the territories of the former Kalmiuska palanka for the Greek population, it was decided to relocate the local population, mostly Ukrainians, and buy all their buildings and the church, except for mills³⁴. On the freed lands, the Greeks founded the city of Mariupol and 23 villages (22 populated by the Greeks and 1 – by the Georgians). So, while giving the historical information, Grigoriy Timoshevskiy wrote about the Cossack history of the region but clearly noted that Mariupol was founded by the Greeks headed by Metropolitan Ignatius. Later, the statement about the establishment of Mariupol by Ignatius and the Greeks, which were rescued by the Russian Empire would be replicated in different editions.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the foundations of the regional myth began in the late 18th century and were further developed in the nineteenth century. Church leaders contributed to the spread of the thesis laid down in 18th-century documents about the unbearable life of the Greeks in the Crimean Khanate, which forced them to seek salvation from Empress Catherine II as the defender of Christianity. Thanks to their published works, the basis of the regional myth about the role of the Russian Empire in the North Azov Sea region was created. Later, the image of Russia as a "saviour of Christians" was spread through numerous articles by researchers, educators and doctors in scientific publications and governmental journals, etc.

In the first half of the 19th century, the mythologeme of Metropolitan Ignatius' prominent role was added to the existing myth. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the thesis that he founded the city of Mariupol was added to the image of the metropolitan as the "Moses of the Mariupol Greeks". Thus, the idea that the city was founded thanks to the efforts of the Russian Empire became an integral part of the public and academic space. This thesis was further developed in Soviet times and continued to spread after Ukraine gained independence.

The North Azov Sea region was perceived as inhabited exclusively by the efforts of the Russian state, which, therefore, has the right to it. Sometime later, these statements were used by the Russian Federation to spread its own historical narrative and claims on Ukrainian lands. The Cossack past, unlike the Greek one, was not actively spread in the public space either in Soviet times or nowadays. At first glance, the thesis about the foundation of the city by Metropolitan Ignatius (3 monuments in the city were erected) does not seem harmful, but in fact, it influences the understanding of history and is in favor of Russian propaganda. Spreading the image of Russia as a "savior", instead of Russia, which eliminated the freedom of Ukrainian Cossacks in these territories, continues to promote the existence of the imperial myth and narrative of the history of Mariupol.

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³³ Timoshevskiy, Grigoriy. Particularly remarkable events in Mariupol. *Mariupol i ego okrestnosti*. Mariupol. 1892. P.92.

³⁴ Timoshevskiy, Grigoriy. Resettlement of Orthodox Christians from Crimea to the Mariupol district of Azov, now Ekaterinoslav, province. *Mariupol i ego okrestnosti*. Mariupol. 1892. P.35.

Конструювання регіональних міфів: кейс-стаді греків Північного Надазов'я

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В статті досліджено процес конструювання міфологічного образу Російської імперії як «рятівниці християн» переселених з Кримського півострова до Приазов'я, що став основою для формування історичного міфу в регіоні. Базуючись на аналізі різноманітних джерел: наказів, листів, донесень, рескриптів, описово-статистичних матеріалів, повідомлень тощо, виділено основні етапи створення та підтримки даного образу та його артикуляція на різних рівнях. Доведено, що, починаючи з моменту прийняття рішення Російською імперією про переселення християн з території Кримського ханства, розпочалося позиціонування особливої місії Росії у справі захисту християнського населення півострова. Аргументуючи свою ініціативу нестерпним релігійним тиском та важким станом греків, вірмен, грузин та всіх, хто сповідував християнство у мусульманській державі, Російська імперія брала на себе провідну роль із захисту «одновірців». Саме через надзвичайно важке становище християни звернулися до Російської імперії з проханням переселити їх на територію православної держави. Це була офіційна версія переселення християн, яка використовувалася на всіх рівнях та стала основою для конструювання міфу.

Образ імперії як «рятівниці християн» спочатку активно поширювався через праці священників та представників церкви. Водночас конструювалася особлива роль лідера переселення християн – митрополита Готфрейського та Кафайського Ігнатія. В літературі його вчинки ототожнювалися з вчинками Старозавітного Пророка Мойсея. У другій половині XIX – на початку XX століття цей образ тиражувався зусиллями освітян та дослідників історії. На цьому етапі можна спостерігати закріплення образу Російської імперії як «рятівниці християн», який дисонував з живими спогадами греків та їх нащадків, які пережили переселення та знали і пам'ятали своє життя в Криму, в який прагнули повернутися. Водночас відбувається вибудова «логічного ланцюжка» регіонального міфу про заснування Маріуполя митрополитом Ігнатієм та перші комеморативні практики на його честь. Все це заклало основу для остаточного формування міфу про імперське місто Маріуполь.

Ключові слова: Північне Надазов'я, греки, регіональна історія, історичний міф, Маріуполь, міфологічний образ.

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