

# Orthodox dominant of preservation of national memory in the material and spiritual culture of the Ukrainian people

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## ABSTRACT

The article explores how collective memory shapes a unique cultural environment within the modern Ukrainian state. National identity is presented as a key condition for the survival of the Ukrainian people and the preservation of their cultural and historical heritage. One of the study's central themes is the Orthodox tradition, which has religious and cultural potential that extends beyond a purely religious framework. The historical development of Orthodox influence is evident in local educational practices, political life, and Ukrainians' self-determination across different periods. The article also examines the impact of Catholic dominance on the collective memory and self-consciousness of the local population during engagements with the Western world. It highlights the responses of Orthodox communities, particularly their efforts to safeguard spiritual traditions in reaction to Catholic expansion in the region. Key concepts such as "memory space," "cultural memory," and "reference points" are analyzed to explain the mechanisms through which traditional ways of life are preserved via texts, rituals, holidays, and other cultural practices. Particular emphasis is placed on the ethno-mental triangle of "paganism - Byzantine Christianity - religious syncretism in the form of Ukrainian Orthodoxy" and the triad "empire - Soviet period - independence," which is proposed as a framework for interpreting Ukraine's extended cultural and historical periods. The article also highlights the unique characteristics of restoring religious structures in the post-Soviet era and examines their connections to Eastern European religious and cultural traditions. In spiritual culture, sacred texts are emphasized, while in material culture, differences in architectural styles reflecting various cultural traditions are analyzed. These buildings showcase aesthetic preferences and the ideological and value orientations of their respective eras. Finally, the article emphasizes the cultural potential of national memory in shaping new ideological concepts. This is exemplified by the celebration of Kyiv's 1500th anniversary in 1982 and the contemporary Ukrainian state's use of Cossack heritage, which remains highly relevant in addressing modern challenges.

## KEYWORDS

*Orthodox tradition, national memory, memory space, cultural memory, identity, material culture, spiritual culture.*

## Introduction

National identity is one of the key foundations of a nation's cultural and social existence. It is shaped by many factors, including historical, social, and political influences, but its preservation is largely attributed to material and spiritual religious heritage. For many peoples, including Ukrainians, Orthodoxy is not only a faith tradition but also a significant factor in maintaining and reproducing folk traditions.

For centuries, the Orthodox Church has functioned as a spiritual and cultural center, uniting communities, preserving ancestors' heritage, and fostering moral principles. Its influence is evident across Ukrainian culture, from temple architecture and icon painting to literature and folklore. In the modern era of globalization, when authentic traditions face growing pressure from cultural homogenization, Orthodoxy remains a crucial factor in preserving national identity.

This article explores Orthodoxy's pivotal role in preserving national identity, particularly through its influence

on material and spiritual culture. It highlights the significance of church traditions, rituals, and artistic heritage in shaping the collective memory of the Ukrainian people within their historical lands.

The article's theoretical basis is the research of P. Nora, A. Assmann, C. Taylor, L. Nahorna, A. Kyrydon, T. Yakovenko, and Y. Tokarska, V. Pererva, O. Horbyk, L. Fylypovich, O. Musin, T. Yevsieieva, V. Kuksa, T. Kolomiiets, I. Kolesnyk, O. Tryhub, L. Tymoshenko, M. Dovbyshchenko and others.

## Research methods

The historical method enabled an examination of the origins of the Orthodox tradition's influence on Ukraine's socio-cultural environment across various historical periods. Comparative analysis examines the impact of other religious denominations, particularly Catholicism, on Ukraine's material and spiritual culture.

The dialectical method facilitated an exploration of the research subject in its developmental context, while the semantic method clarified ideas and concepts related to the Orthodox tradition's role in preserving national memory within material and spiritual culture.

Analysis, synthesis, and generalization methods were applied to identify the interrelations of Orthodoxy's religious determinants in education, folk traditions, art, and other domains.

### Results and Discussion

In the history of the Church, national life and religion are closely interconnected, with religion incorporating elements of the national character as well as material and spiritual culture. Archaeological and ethnographic research supports the view that "no society has yet been discovered without religion, and religion remains a universal and enduring aspect of human life" (*Vlasovskyi, 1990:9*).

The achievements of a people's material and spiritual culture form a distinctive socio-cultural landscape whose core elements are passed down through generations via religious tradition, language, and education. This transmission creates what A. Kyrydon describes as "a memory space - value-filled layer of cultural heritage that reflects the assimilation, memorization, and reproduction of experience in the system of images. The structure of memory space is not fixed. It is nearly imperceptible to human consciousness by its nature, yet its existence is undeniable. Thus, memory space remains hidden, emerging only when memory discourse is activated" (*Kyrydon, 2013:208*).

Y. Assmann proposes the concept of "cultural memory," which he describes as "inherent in every society and every era: a set of texts, images, and rituals that are continually utilized, through which the group stabilizes and perpetuates its self-image. This collective knowledge primarily concerns the past, on which the group bases its awareness of unity and originality."

The author also introduces the concept of "reference points" in cultural memory: defining past events whose memory is preserved through cultural forms such as texts, rituals, and monuments, as well as institutional forms of communication like recitation, holidays, and participation in public institutions. In everyday communication, traditional holidays, with their rituals and symbols, form "islands of the past," where a different temporality manifests itself (*Assmann, 2012*).

Religious and cultural systems are characterized by distinct approaches to temporality. For example, pagan consciousness was closely tied to cyclical economic cycles. In contrast, "the Christian sense of time is characterized by a linear orientation, centered on the earthly existence of Christ, marking the starting point for the past and opening a prospect into the 'otherworldly' future" (*Kolesnyk, 2002:28*).

The concentrated influence of the Orthodox tradition in Ukraine dates back to the 10th century when the Christianization of the ancient Kyivan Rus' lands occurred. This transition from pagan beliefs to Christianity established Kyiv as "the cradle of Christian culture in Eastern Europe" (*Dziurakha, 2010*).

The introduction of Byzantine Christianity enabled the ancient Rus' people to engage with the classical heritage, theological science, and Christian dogma. Church poetry, including canons, troparia, kontakia, and irmoi, is deeply influenced by Byzantine tradition. This development was attributed to the works of Orthodox poets such as John of

Damascus, Roman the Melodist, and Andrew of Crete (*Ohiienko, 2019*).

A Byzantine type of sacred architecture, Byzantine iconography, and corresponding church terminology (e.g., ambo, archbishop, penitence, schema, Theotokos, Easter) emerged, all of which are of purely Greek origin (*Тумошенко, 2020:106*).

The local population expanded its cultural horizons and transformed its attitudes toward life's meaning and humanity's place in the world. The new religious system addressed the identity crisis of the pagan world on multiple levels. Christianity, by unifying the spirituality of nature into a single life-giving force (Spirit), distinguished between the individual and gender, personality, and society within the context of the relationship between the Creator and creation. This shift allowed individuals to reclaim a sense of wholeness, fostering intrapersonal identity.

Ancient scribes, drawing on the Bible and the works of the Holy Fathers of the Church, successfully addressed the philosophical problem of understanding the world as unfolding history. This perspective allowed the world to be perceived as a unified whole founded on love – "collegiality." Within this framework, every living being is seen as having a unique mission, contributing to the world's harmony.

The solution to this problem made it possible to determine the civilizational affiliation of ancient Rus society: "The Christian world was one people before God, and the unanimity of Christian culture automatically 'turned every educated person into a citizen of the whole ecumene'" (*Yevsieieva, 2004:4*).

The Orthodox tradition became a determining factor in forming the national worldview, significantly influencing local education, culture, and social structure. During this period, the first educational centers appeared at monasteries and churches, which combined theological teachings with general education disciplines.

Ancient Rus' chronicles, notably *The Tale of Bygone Years*, played an essential role in preserving the national memory of Ukrainians. They describe the events of Kyivan Rus, contributing to the understanding of the past and the formation of a national identity. As one of the oldest written monuments, the annals preserved the language, traditions, and customs of the time, while also documenting legal and social norms. This enables the exploration of history, literature and the development of legislation (*Holotenko, 2024*).

The historical role of the Kyivan Rus' period is that "Orthodox culture has become a matrix, according to which, under the patronage of the Kyiv Church, the type of Ukrainian, Ukrainian statehood, and national consciousness has been formed and preserved over the centuries" (*Yevsieieva, 2004:4*).

In general, in the field of local education, the continuity of the Orthodox tradition can be traced from the time of the baptism of Kyivan Rus to the beginning of the industrial era when church education formed the basis of schooling. As V. Pererva notes, school life can be considered a "sub-branch" of church activity. The education of young people in the spirit of the Orthodox tradition was carried out in conditions where the Church played a leading role in educational activities. This was because most of the Ukrainian population lived in rural areas and belonged to the peasant class.

In the pre-revolutionary period, the Church and the state were closely connected, and the Church was assigned critical social functions, particularly informational

ones. For example, temples announced imperial manifestos and decrees, orders from the local administration, key legislative acts, and reports of epidemics or natural phenomena such as comets or eclipses. Additionally, the clergy urged the public "not to destroy the fetus in the womb, to protect nature, and to observe the rules of sanitary hygiene."

As Ukrainian lands merged with the imperial body, the dominance of educating young people in "secular patriotism" intensified. This form of patriotism emphasized loyalty to imperial power and a self-awareness tied to the grand imperial narrative (*Pererva, 2014*). Thus, a new public memory and associative framework were formed.

Memory serves as the primordial principle of identity, which is, in turn, shaped within specific spatial boundaries requiring separate commentary. As A. Kyrydon notes in the preface to M. Yakubovich's book *The Uniate Church in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, "any identity always claims to be 'placement,' and its parameters should correlate with spatial, semantic, value, and temporal forms" (*Voikovskiy, 2015:11*).

According to L. Nahorna, the "place" category is a key element in the triad of spatial concepts: space, territory, and place. It is often used for the "targeted identification" of territorial objects within a specific cultural landscape. This term has a special significance in local history, focusing not on the territory itself but on the historically established community (*Nahorna, 2014:55–74*).

The population of Ukrainian lands was historically influenced by both the East and the West, resulting in cultural hybridity. This hybridity is evident in everyday life and architecture, where Byzantine features harmoniously combine with European motifs. Ukrainian historians, notably M. Hrushevskiy, and M. Kostomarov, observed that this multi-vector development allowed Ukraine not only to preserve its culture but also to integrate Eastern elements, mainly through the Orthodox tradition (*Hrushevskiy, 1993; Kostomarov, 1923*).

However, Catholic priest and philosopher C. Taylor rightly emphasizes that "the Latin and Greek rites formed two different Christian civilizations, <...> which have related but different theological views and <...> different impulses for reform" (*Taylor, 2013*). This divergence formed a "contact zone with a very variegated spectrum of socio-cultural phenomena" (*Yakovenko, 2002*).

The clash of cultures in local spaces can be effectively demonstrated through architectural structures created under the influence of different traditions, marked by substantive and formal differences (*Horbyk, 2004:6–7*). Orthodox architecture emerged based on theological concepts reflecting Christian cosmogony. The structure of Orthodox temples is rooted in a strictly ordered sacred space closely connected to the theological principles of the Byzantine religious tradition. The semantic content of Orthodox churches embodies the key ideas of Eastern Christian spirituality, which can be perceived externally and internally within religious buildings (*Vaintrub, 1996:26–30*).

During the Baroque era, the Ukrainian Polish Catholic community abandoned local traditions and introduced Western European norms aligned with its religious and social ideals in an attempt to consolidate its position in annexed territories. This model was closely tied to broader processes in Catholicism, such as the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, and the crises in science and art, which were reflected in the architecture of Catholic churches.

In contrast, Orthodox architecture in Ukraine developed independently, avoiding the contradictions inherent in Catholic orders. Ukrainian culture during the Baroque period drew upon the richness of its Orthodox heritage, folk art, and the legacy of previous eras to create a unique cultural identity. The Orthodox community of this time became the custodian of a distinctive traditional culture, focusing on the cultural restoration of the Church and national self-determination (*Horbyk, 2004:6–7*).

Consequently, Orthodox architecture reflected differences in value orientations, cultural and mental approaches, and fidelity to the Slavic interpretation of the Byzantine tradition. It demonstrated a commitment to historical heritage and ethnic specificity, giving the temples a unique character.

The Union of Brest in 1596 was a key factor in the spiritual and political division of the region into East and West. As Y. Tokarska emphasizes, it "consolidated the difference in the historical fate of the Left Bank, Right Bank, and Galicia in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18th centuries" (*Tokarska, 2022:37*).

This event marked a turning point in Ukraine's religious and political life. It strengthened the gentry's influence and caused a territorial split between the Eastern and Western regions (*Kryzhanivskiy; Plokhii, 1994:271*). This division further exacerbated pre-existing regional differences in identities, mentalities, and historical memory.

According to M. Dovbyshchenko, "In the families of Catholic converts of the first generation, there was still an awareness of their Rus origin, and the Catholic Church was defined as the 'Catholic Church of the Polish and Rus people.' However, by the second or third generation, the process of Polonization was nearly complete. As a result, differing approaches to understanding the relationship between the concepts of 'national' and 'religious' factors in the lives of the Russian people led to the formation of two vectors of socio-religious, cultural, and national development of Ukrainian societies – Orthodox and Uniate" (*Dovbyshchenko, 2008:490*).

Over time, Latin traditions increasingly influenced Uniate rituals, which affected the appearance of temples. Side altars, pulpits, confessionals, and organs, unusual for the Eastern tradition, became more common. Iconostases gradually diminished or disappeared, replaced by altars featuring icons or sculptures of the apostles. An interesting feature was the viceroy altars created under the viceroy icons of the iconostasis. Despite this, Latinization did not entirely eradicate Eastern traditions but synthesized them with Western ones, creating a new style incorporating features of Baroque, Rococo, and Classicism (*Yakubovskiy, 2024*).

In response to Catholic expansion, church fraternities arose in the region, primarily to protect Orthodox spiritual traditions. During the crisis of the Orthodox Church that preceded the Union of Brest, the active efforts of fraternities significantly contributed to the development of education in Ukrainian lands, the preservation of national culture, and the spread of publishing (*Holovashchenko, 1997:5–6*).

L. Fylypovych explains the sources of this complexity, linking them to "the historical division of the ethnic group across the borders of several states: the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Moscow, Hungarian, Romanian territories (including Wallachia), Polish, and Austro-Hungarian, etc." (*Fylypovych, 2006:7*). As a result, local social consciousness and collective memory are characterized by "chronological gaps" (*Kolesnyk, 2002*), emphasizing the need to streamline the development of national identity.

Long cultural and historical periods of Ukrainian history and the evolution of folk memory can be traced through generalizing concepts, such as the ethno-mental triangle "paganism – Byzantine Christianity – religious syncretism in the form of Ukrainian Orthodoxy" and the triad "empire – Soviet period – independence."

The ethno-mental triangle reveals the depth of folk history, demonstrating how religious and cultural symbolism transitioned from one period to another. For example, pagan symbols are incorporated into the architecture of churches, and pagan holidays are integrated into the church calendar.

The triad "empire – Soviet period – independence" reflects the selective use of cultural achievements from past eras. For instance, the Soviet government recognized the talents of writers from the Tsarist era while attempting to attribute to them ideological beliefs aligned with the Soviet system.

As demonstrated, collective memory holds significant cultural and ideological potential. To continue the discussion, it is worth mentioning the Soviet authorities' use of Ancient Rus religious and cultural resources during the celebration of the 1500th anniversary of Kyiv in 1982. This event contributed to creating a unique "memory space," the characteristics of which were outlined at the beginning of this article.

On the eve of Kyiv's 1500th-anniversary celebrations, several significant landmarks were inaugurated in the city: The Kyivan Rus cinema, the Golden Gate pavilion-museum, the monument to the founders of Kyiv in Navodnitsky Park, and the Museum of the History of Kyiv, located in the Klovsky Palace.

An exposition of Kyiv literature from private collections was organized in the Exhibition Hall of the Union of Artists. It featured about four hundred books devoted to the city's history. Additionally, a special annotated catalog, Literature for the 1500th Anniversary of Kyiv, was prepared for the occasion.

During the same period, several important popular science publications were released, including the first volume of the three-volume History of Kyiv, the book Kyiv from the series History of Cities and Villages of the Ukrainian SSR, and the first encyclopedic reference book about Kyiv.

The celebration was accompanied by numerous souvenirs, such as commemorative medals, signs, badges, postcards, and handicrafts. The envelopes of the first day caused a particular stir, with deltiologists gathering en masse at the General Post Office to receive unique stamp cancellations – a symbolic event for collectors (*Nasyrova, 2021*).

Under the conditions of the state atheism policy, the significance of the religious component in cultural and historical achievements – the resources of Ukrainians' collective memory – was realized.

Through architectural structures, books, and solemn events, the memory of the past was brought to life, emphasizing its relevance for the present. These activities connected ordinary citizens with antiquity, helping them comprehend the depth of local history from a modern perspective and appreciate the progress of cultural and technological development.

Researcher O. Musin aptly observes that it is impossible to "restore socio-political relations or architectural images of the past in completely different cultural and historical conditions" because "such nostalgia contrasts with the constant development of society, cultural landscape, and architectural thought. <...> The perception of these images

and relationships, distant from the times of their existence, inevitably leads to reinterpretation, which significantly affects the reproduction and perception of monuments in a new context." As a result, the social understanding of history transforms, and relics of the past are replaced by a "myth constructed by modernity" (*Musin, 2018:131–132*).

As O. Tryhub writes, "Images of the past are remembered in the consciousness of the nation only in a concentrated and simplified form, acquiring decoration in monuments, memorial plaques, names of streets and cities, and in oral folk art" (Tryhub, 2008:28). Such a definition correlates with the previously mentioned approximation of antiquity to the daily life of ordinary citizens and serves as one of the crucial tools for creating a collective memory of the people.

It is essential to highlight the peculiarities of restoring temples in the post-Soviet space of Eastern Europe, as they possess a distinct socio-political and aesthetic specificity. Their study, even more than an analysis of the reconstruction of civil structures, reveals a wide range of public expectations associated with restoring the urban environment and symbolic buildings. Structures such as religious shrines or places of historical memory were often deliberately destroyed for ideological reasons or fell victim to the devastation caused by hostilities.

The post-Soviet concept of a "historical monument" and the approach to historical memory resonate not only with the European concept of lieux de mémoire (places of memory) but also with the "image" or "icon of history." These images frequently convey an idealized vision of the past, which, if not outright venerated, inspires significant reverence. A. Musin describes this approach as a form of "historolatry" – a worship of ideas about the past deeply rooted in collective and cultural memory (*Musin, 2018; Bartetzky, 2010; Nora, 1989; Halbwachs, 1950, 1952, 1980, 1992*). This concept aligns with the Eastern Christian tradition's emphasis on historicity.

The modern narrative of Ukraine in the context of national memory often idealizes the Cossack era as the one that most aligns with the state's external and internal challenges. In the scientific community, there is consensus that the second half of the 17th and 18th centuries represented the golden period of Ukrainian culture. During this time, under the influence of Western European Baroque, a unique style known as Cossack Baroque spread across central Ukraine. Its splendor and grandeur peaked during the age of Ivan Mazepa, a patron and founder of many majestic temples.

Despite the gradual loss of autonomy, including the church's autocephaly structure, this period remained closely tied to the imperial course toward unification in Ukraine during the 17th and 18th centuries. Nonetheless, it continued to foster a distinctive culture.

The Cossacks, closely tied to the Ukrainian people and the protection of Orthodox traditions in the region, personified the highest level of nation-building efforts. They mobilized all the people's resources—spiritual, material, moral, social, cultural, and political. As Vyacheslav Lypynsky emphasized, the Cossacks became a fundamental force that united the people around a shared national identity (*Kuksa; Kolomiets, 2010*).

Thus, the culture of the Cossacks, which dominated Ukraine from the 16th to the 18th centuries, significantly influenced the formation of Ukrainian identity. It became firmly embedded in the national culture and an integral part of the heritage of the modern Ukrainian people, to some

extent pushing the ancient Rus period of Ukrainian history to the periphery of social consciousness.

### Conclusion

These materials enable several conceptual generalizations to explain the mechanisms by which collective folk memory contributes to creating a unique cultural environment within the modern Ukrainian state. National identity is a vital condition for the survival of the Ukrainian people and the preservation of their cultural and historical heritage.

One of the study's central themes is the Orthodox tradition, which possesses religious and cultural potential that extends beyond its purely religious framework. Orthodox influence is evident in educational processes, political life, and Ukrainians' self-determination across various historical periods.

The study examines the concepts of "memory space," "cultural memory," and "reference points," which illuminate the preservation of traditional ways of life through texts, rituals, and holidays. Furthermore, it uses the ethno-mental triangle "paganism – Byzantine Christianity – religious syncretism in the form of Ukrainian Orthodoxy" and the triad "empire – Soviet period – independence" to propose an alignment of Ukraine's continuous cultural and historical periods.

In spiritual culture, sacred texts are highlighted as pivotal, while differences in architectural structures in material culture are analyzed within various cultural traditions. National memory's significant cultural potential for shaping new ideological concepts is illustrated through examples such as the celebration of Kyiv's 1500th anniversary in 1982 and the modern Ukrainian state's use of Cossack heritage to address contemporary challenges.

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## Православна домінанта збереження національної пам'яті у матеріальній і духовній культурі українського народу

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Стаття розкриває механізм створення народною пам'яттю унікального культурного середовища в межах сучасної української держави. Національна ідентичність визначається як ключова умова для виживання народу та збереження його культурно-історичної спадщини. Одним із центральних мотивів дослідження є православна традиція, чий релігійно-культурний потенціал виходить за межі виключно релігійної системи. Історичний розвиток православної домінанти простежується в місцевих освітніх практиках, політичному житті та самовизначенні українців у різні періоди. У статті також висвітлено вплив католицизму на колективну пам'ять та самосвідомість місцевого населення в часи активних взаємодій із Західним світом. Досліджено реакцію православних громад, зокрема їхню діяльність, спрямовану на захист своєї духовної традиції у відповідь на католицьку експансію. Стаття розглядає поняття «простір пам'яті», «культурна пам'ять» та «точки фіксації», що пояснюють механізми збереження традиційного способу життя через тексти, ритуали, свята тощо. Особливу увагу приділено концепту етноментального трикутника «язичництво – візантійське християнство – релігійний синкретизм у формі українського православ'я» та тріаді «імперія – радянський період – незалежність», які запропоновано використовувати для узгодження тривалих культурно-історичних періодів української історії. Висвітлені ключові особливості храмового зодчества на території східної та центральної України та визначена їх кореляція зі східноєвропейської релігійно-культурною традицією. У сфері духовної культури підкреслено особливе значення священних текстів, тоді як у сфері матеріальної культури аналізуються відмінності архітектурних споруд, створених у різних культурних традиціях. Такі споруди відображають не лише естетичні уподобання, але й ідейні та ціннісні орієнтири епохи. Акцентовано увагу на культурному потенціалі національної пам'яті для формування нових ідеологічних концептів. Це проілюстровано на прикладі святкування 1500-ліття Києва в 1982 році, а також на сучасному використанні українською державою козацької спадщини, яка є найбільш актуальною у відповіді на виклики сьогодення.

**Ключові слова:** православна традиція, національна пам'ять, простір пам'яті, культурна пам'ять, ідентичність, матеріальна культура, духовна культура.

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