

The Image of the Cossacks in the 18th and 19th century German Literature

UDO GEHRMANN

The question of the appearance and the development of the Cossacks was reflected in the last centuries in the German literature and history. That was not an accidentally occurrence. The great geographical-political dimensions of the European-Asiatic relations were the result of that the Cossacks history occupied the important place of the German image about Russia and the East Europe at all.

The German image about the Cossacks changed by the influence of the history development, but there were some features of this image, which stood along the ages an invariable the same, as they were. To these features belonged the idea of the defenders of the Christian Europe as well the picture of the "Eastern threat", that was the reason of which the Cossacks replaced into the center of the German and European attention. Such a contradiction in the German image of the Cossacks must be overcome with the help of the following investigation.

The German historiography has a lot of various studies about the question of the development of the German image about Russia and the East Europe, that helps to reconstructing the German picture of the Cossacks' history at all. Side by side with the monographs and the articles of Peter Hoffmann, Eckhard Matthes, Günter Wiegand and Eduard Winter which wrote about the development of the German historiography about Russia¹, we must mention the studies of such scholars as Hans

1. See, for example, P. Hoffmann, "Zur deutschen Rußlandkunde und zum deutschen Rußlandbild des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts", *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 8 (1978), pp. 700-712; E. Matthes, *Das veränderte Rußland. Studien zum deutschen Rußlandverständnis im 18. Jahrhundert zwischen 1725 und 1762*, Frankfurt/Main 1981; G. Wiegand, *Zum deutschen Rußlandinteresse im 19. Jahrhundert*. E. M. Arndt und Varnhagen von Ense, Stuttgart 1967; E. Winter, *Halle als Ausgangspunkt der deutschen Rußlandkunde im 18. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 1953.

Hecker, Ekkehard Klug, Maria Lammich, Hans Lemberg and last not least Günther Stökl, which showed in these studies a lot of theoretical, historical and historiographical notions about Eastern Europe, as a subject of their investigations².

In connection with this we must recollect the works of researchment's group of German historians under the direction of Lew Kopelew about the problem of "West-East reflections"³. Naturally in these works are considered only common tendencies of Russia's and Eastern Europe changing German image, and the Cossacks image doesn't elucidate at all or only some sides of this problem.

The analysis and systematization of an existing historical literature about this subject is revealing the white spots in the German historical science in this domain. The few works about these questions existing in German literature belonged to the Ukrainian writers. Among them we must point out the dissertation of Theodor Mackiw, presented as a thesis at Frankfurt-on-Main University in 1950. The subject of his dissertation was the Ukrainian Cossacks in German Literature of the first part of 18th century⁴. Mackiw tried to show not only the roots of the German interest of Cossacks at all, but also analyzed the degree of the knowledge about Cossacks, which he got from the newspapers, magazines and reports of the trips. The work of Mackiw was naturally based on the researching results of other Ukrainian historians.

For example, in 1927 Dmitro Dorochenko published in German language the great historiographical investigation on the reflection of the Ukrainian history in the West European literature in the 18th and the first part of the 19th century⁵. In this book the most attention is paid to Ukrainian Cossacks. This investigation followed a more extensive monograph about German-Ukrainian relations and the reflection of them in German literature from 9th to 19th centuries. Among these publications in

2. See, for example, H. Hecker, "Die Tat" und ihr Osteuropabild. 1909–1939, Köln 1974; "Europäische Optionen - osteuropäische Reflexionen", in *Europa - Begriff und Idee. Historische Streiflichter*, ed. by Hans Hecker, Bonn 1991, p. 151-172; E. Klug, "Das 'asiatische' Rußland. Über die Entstehung eines europäischen Vorurteils", *Historische Zeitschrift*, 5 (1987); M. Lammich, *Das deutsche Osteuropabild zur Zeit der Reichsgründung*, Bopard am Rhein 1978; H. Lemberg, "Zur Entstehung des Osteuropabegriffs im 19. Jahrhundert", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 33, 1985, pp. 49-91; G. Stökl, *Osteuropa und die Deutschen. Geschichte und Gegenwart einer spannungsreichen Nachbarschaft*, 3th ed., Stuttgart 182.

3. See L. Kopelew (Ed.), *West-östliche Spiegelungen. Russen und Rußland aus deutscher Sicht; Deutsche und Deutschland aus russischer Sicht von den Anfängen bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, series A, vol. 1, *Russen und Rußland aus deutscher Sicht 9. - 17. Jahrhundert* (ed. by M. Keller), München, 1988; series A, vol. 2, *Russen und Rußland aus deutscher Sicht. 18. Jahrhundert: Aufklärung* (ed. by M. Keller), München 1987.

4. See Th. Mackiw, *Das ukrainische Kosakentum im Lichte der deutschen Literatur der ersten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt/M. 1950.

5. See D. Doroschenko, *Die Ukraine und ihre Geschichte im Lichte der westeuropäischen Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts und der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Abhandlungen des Ukrainischen Wissenschaftlichen Instituts, Berlin 1927, vol. 1.

1930 in Germany, appeared some interesting special investigations about these questions, To these special pieces of research related at the first Boris Krupnitzky's dissertation *Johann Christian von Engel and the Ukrainian history* presented a thesis at Berlin University in 1931 and also his work *Hetman Mazepa in the light of German literature of his time*, which was published in 1932⁷. As in these works the German image of Cossacks is analysed only from Ukrainian art, the main desert of them are the first systematizations of German literature by one special topic- Cossacks history.

However, all that shows that the quantity and quality of historiographical investigations does not answer the demands of analysis the rich German literature about Cossacks history at all. The reason of that may be: from one side all these works about the Cossacks history, for example, special piece of research of Boris Krupnitzky *The Ukrainian history from the very beginning to the 1917th year* don't put the intention of solely investigation of Cossacks' problem⁸, and at the other side, we could remark only books about Cossacks, which were written not by historians, but by publicists⁹.

The aim of this investigation consists in survey of German special literature about Cossacks history. It is out of the question to review the sources and all the publications, but only those of them which are especially concentrated on peculiar monographs and articles, which characterize the historical epoches and show the tendencies of German historiography in its development at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century.

In Germany at the beginning of the 18th century the emphasis was on problems of Russian literary legacy. Naturally, the quantity of corresponding publications are rising in this period of time. Side by side with the literature about trips also appeared the memoirs, the diaries and the observations of Germans, which were living an working in Russia during a long period of time. Thanks to that, the German image of Cossacks was substantially enlarged. In connection with this we must indicate the investigations and memoirs by such Germans as Friedrich Christian Weber and Johann Wendel Bardili, which proposed for the German reader not only different variations

6. See D. Doroschenko, *Die Ukraine und das Reich. 9 Jahrhunderte deutsch-ukrainischer Beziehungen im Spiegel der deutschen Wissenschaft und Literatur*, Leipzig, 1941.

7. See B. Krupnitzky, *Johann Christian von Engel und die Geschichte der Ukraine*, Berlin, 1931. See also his work: *Hetman Mazepa v osvitcheniu nimeckoi literaturi iogo chasu*. *Analecta Ordinis S. Basilii Magni*, Zhovka 1932, vol. IV.

8. See B. Krupnitzky, *Geschichte der Ukraine von den Anfängen bis zum Jahr 1917*, Wiesbaden, 1963.

9. See, for example, Ph. Longworth, *Die Kosaken : Legende und Geschichte*, Wiesbaden, 1971; K. J. Gröper, *Die Geschichte der Kosaken. Wilder Osten 1500–1700*, München, 1976; D. Wende, *Im wilden Feld: aus der Geschichte der Kosaken*. Berlin, 1988.

10. See generally Th. Mackiw, *Das ukrainische Kosakentum...* pp. 122-138.

of the Cossacks appearance, but also showed the difference between “Hetman”, Zaporozhian and Don Cossacks.

Thanks to that, appeared an opportunity to correct some wrong notions about this subject. For instance a wrong notion about such a famous representative of Cossacks as Yermak, which was known at the beginning of the 18th century as ganster and a thief ¹¹. The major contribution in correcting the wrong notions about Cossacks was brought by the German scientists from the Petersburg’s Academy with their trips along Ural and Siberia. There were such famous scientists as Peter Simon Pallas, August Wilhelm Hupel, Gerhard Friedrich Müller and Daniel Gottlieb Messerschmidt ¹². In these essays the German readers could acquaint themselves with the history and the mode of Cossack’s life upon Wolga, on Yaik, on Ural and the other regions of Siberia. Particular historiographical meaning for Cossacks history have the works of the Baltic educator and representative of Enlightenment Hupel and the German historian Müller ¹³.

In the 18th century in their trips the former student of Halle D. Anton Büsching and a Prussian-Russian officer Christoph Hermann Manstein had an opportunity to meet the Cossacks directly ¹⁴. In spite of that, these works bear more likeness to a compilation. By process of writing about the appearance of the Cossacks history Büsching repeated the point of view of Müller and Manstein was also based on the works of Weber ¹⁵. It’s interesting to state that Büsching understood the historical role of Cossacks, at the first, only from the point of view of the Christian’s struggle against the “unbelievers”, the Turks and Tartars. This conception about Cossacks image influenced the further development of the German picture of Cossacks at all.

In the second part of the 18th century the German literature about Russia became an independent branch of the historical sciences. In connection with this, August Ludwig Schlözer, which like Müller had spent a lot of time in working in Petersburg’s Academy, paid a great attention to the history of Cossacks. Göttingen’s

11. See G.F. Weise an G.A. Freylinghausen und A.G. Francke, Katharinenburg 28.V./8.VI. 1733, Beilage, in: E. Winter, *Halle als Ausgangspunkt...*, p. 473.

12. See, for example, P. S. Pallas, *Merkwürdigkeiten der Morduanen Kasaken, Kalmyken, Kirgiesen, Baschkieren etc. Nebst anderen dahingehenden Nachrichten und Kupfern*, Frankfurt und Leipzig 1773; D.G. Messerschmidt, *Forschungsreisen durch Sibirien, 1720–1727*, ed. by E. Winter and N.N. Figurovskii, vv. 5, Berlin 1962-1977.

13. See G. F. Müller, *Von dem Ursprunge der Cosacken, Sammlung russischer Geschichte*, St. Petersburg, 1760, vol. IV, pp. 365-410. The same, *Nachrichten von den Saporogen Cosacken*, *ibid.* pp. 411-472; A. W. Hupel, *Von den Kosaken. Nebst anderen kurzen Aufsätzen*, Der nordischen Miscellaneen 24stes und 25stes Stück, Riga 1790, pp. 17-294.

14. See D. A. Büsching, *Neue Erdbeschreibung*, vol. 2, Schaffhausen, 1768; Ch. H. Manstein, *Historische, politische und militärische Nachrichten von Rußland, welche hier ausführlich beschrieben worden sind*. Leipzig, 1771.

15. See Th. Mackiw, *Das ukrainische Kosakentum...*, pp. 139-145.

professor Schlözer assimilated the history of Cossacks as an independent branch in his system of 24 Slavonic histories¹⁶. The historical-comparative method of Schlözer inspired in one of his scholars, the Hungarian-German Johann Christian von Engel, the zeal to study the history of Cossacks¹⁷. In spite of some prejudices in the first work of 1790, he grounded six years later in his *The history of Ukraine and the Cossacks*, the meaning and the use of the Cossacks history. It was Engel who grounded that the Cossacks history is an important part of the history of Slavonic peoples; he played also an important part in the investigations of the history of Poland, Sweden and Hungary. Engel saw the geographical and historical meaning of the Cossacks lands as the «frontier between cultured Europe and a wild Asia». Besides that, at his opinion, the Cossacks history also had one political meaning at that time. He bore in mind “Zaporozhian notion of the democracy”, which he devoted another investigation¹⁸.

At the end of the 18th and from the beginning of the 19th century Cossacks acquired great meaning in connection of Napoleon's and liberation wars. Unlike Russian historical science, the German historians paid special interest to Cossacks in this period. The great role of Cossacks in the partisan struggle in 1812 was emphasized in the Russian literature, but the part of the Cossacks in the military actions of the 1813th to the 1815th years was not investigated at all. The Cossacks were at the front of Russian army, they were the first, whom were meeting the German population. Their exotical appearance and behaviour created sensation in the population, as recollected the memories of the witnesses. That is why Cossacks questions played a part in Prussian-German literature also.

Because of that, in 1799, the year when Cossacks at the Russian side struggled against France, and at the first time they were in Germany, was published the work of Johann Paul Pöhlmann about Cossacks history. At the great part this work was written on the basis of Engel's materials¹⁹. At this time or a little later was published a small interesting booklet “Cossacks, as they were in year 1799th and went along Germany.”²⁰

16. See A. L. Schlözer, *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte oder 31 Theil der allgemeinen Weltgeschichte*, Halle, 1776, p. 71.

17. See J. C. von Engel, *Commentatio de republica militari seu comparatio Lacedaemoniorum Cretenisium et Cosaccorum*, Göttingen, 1790; The same, *Geschichte der Ukraine und der Cosaken, Fortsetzung der Allgemeinen Welthistorie der Neueren Zeit*, Halle 1796, vol. 48.

18. See also B. Krupnitzky, *Johann Christian Engel...*, Berlin, 1931; R.A. Mark, “Johann Christian von Engel (1770-1814) als Historiograph der Ukraine”, *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung, Länder und Völker im östlichen Mitteleuropa*, no.7, 1987, pp. 191-202.

19. See J. P. Pöhlmann, *Die Kosaken oder Historische Darstellung ihrer Sitten, Gebräuche, Kleidung, Waffen und Art Krieg zu führen*, second ed., Wien and Prag 1812.

20. See *Die Kosaken, wie solche im Jahre 1799 waren und durch Deutschland zogen*, o.J., o.O.

On the eve of the Russian Patriotic War was published a book about Cossacks history “beginning from their origination till the modern period of time”, Berlin, 1811. The author was a Prussian officer Carl von Plotho. In the center of his attention were the Ukrainian Cossacks, because of his opinion that from these Cossacks were originated all others Cossacks from Don, Ural etc. It’s interesting to note that Plotho repeated and propagandized the German image about Cossacks, that they “stood up for middle Europe against middleasian barbarians”²¹. Like Carl von Clausewitz and other military writers, Plotho paid great attention to the Cossacks once more in his later work “The War in Germany and in France in the 1813–1814th years”, which was published six years later²².

Numerous studies about the Cossacks were published at those military years, which reflected a great interest for this subject from the population. For instance, in 1812 were published the works of the future professor in Tübingen Johann Benedikt Scherer about the history of Zaporozhian Ukrainian Cossacks in German translation. For the first time this translation was published in 1799 by Karl Hammerdorfer in Leipzig²³. In years 1813 and 1814 appeared the work by unknown author “The Cossacks, the description of this military peoples, their traditions etc.”, the study by J. Träger “The Historical Description of the Cossacks” and a popular-science article about Cossacks by Franz von Gretzmüller, which was published in Homyer’s magazine “The history, geography, state and military art archives” in 1814 in Vienna²⁴. At this period appeared much more memoirs, trip-reports, military recollections, diaries and letters by different representatives of the German population. These materials contained valuable information about the Cossacks, and their visit in Germany²⁵.

The characteristic traits of German image of the Cossacks at that time were the following : at the first – by the common notion of the German historians and writers,

21. See C. von Plotho, *Die Kosacken oder Geschichte derselben von ihrem Ursprunge bis auf die Gegenwart*. Berlin, 1911, pp. 5-6.

22. See, for example, C. von Clausewitz, *Der russische Feldzug von 1812*, ed. by H. Greiner, Wiesbaden, 1953. C. von Plotho, *Der Krieg in Deutschland und Frankreich in den Jahren 1813 und 1814*, 3 vol., Berlin 1817.

23. See K. Hammerdörfer, *Geschichte der Ukrainischen und Saporogischen Kosaken nebst einigen Nachrichten von der Verfassung und Sitten derselben. Nach J. B. Scherers aus russischen Handschriften übersetzten Annales...*, Leipzig 1789.

24. See *Die Kosaken, eine Schilderung dieses kriegerischen Volkes, Sitten, Lebensweise etc.*, Dresden, 1813; F. v. Gretzmüller, *Die ukrainischen Kosaken von ihrer Unterwerfung an Rußland (1651)*. Homayers Archiv für Geographie, Historie, Staats- und Kriegskunst Vienna, 1814, n° 9-10, 16-17, 20-21; J. Träger, *Versuch eines Beitrages zur Länder- und Völkerkunde oder historische Beschreibung der Kosaken*, Ingolstadt, 1813.

25. See, for example, F. Rochlitz, *Tage der Gefahr, ein Tagebuch der Leipziger Schlacht*, Leipzig 1988 ; F. v. Schubert, *Unter dem Doppeladler. Erinnerungen eines deutschen und russischen Offiziersdienst, 1787–1814*, Ed. by E. Amburger, Stuttgart, 1962.

the Cossacks native lands were not on the southern boundary, but on the northern boundary and because of that, the Cossacks were the defenders of the Christian Europe against “wild” and “unfaithful” Turks and Tartars²⁶. At the second – differently from the French, the Germans had a positive attitude to the exotic Cossacks, because they were coming in Germany as liberators²⁷. Thirdly – but in spite of all, the Germans stated the great differences in culture, religion, music, language, traditions etc. But the result of the confrontation of these two cultures was the enrichment of German art and literature with the Cossacks folk-lore. All of this connected with the Russian language spreading in Germany of that time²⁸. All of this was the reason why the interest to the Cossacks history rose in Germany.

At the beginning of the first part of 19th century the reports about the trips of the German scientists were valuable sources of this study. Among them was the famous German scientist Alexander von Humboldt, which traveled along the Ural and Siberia with G. Ehrenberg and G. Rose²⁹. The great changes of the Cossacks position in the social life of Russia, the Cossacks more and more fell under tsar’s influence, reflected in this and many other reports. At that time the role of Russia, as “The Gendarme of the Europe” exerted deep influence on the German image of Cossacks.

The Germans could feel this influence by reading of the works of Moritz Wagner, which were published 1850, as the reports about the trip “The Caucasus and the land of the Cossacks”. In this work a very sad impression was made by the recollection of the old Don Cossacks about old times of the Cossacks freedom and about the profitable campaigns in 1813 to 1815th years. Besides that this report contained much interesting materials for ethnography and history, and also an interesting information about Black Seas’ and Ters’ Cossacks. According to Wagners’ opinion the Cossacks history, including the Cossacks of East regions of the Russia, divided into

26. See L. Hüssel, *Leipzigs Geschichte seit dem Einmarsch der Verbündeten im April 1813 bis zur großen Völkerschlacht im Oktober 1813*, Leipzig o.J., p. 32. See also H. Lemberg, *op.cit.*, pp. 52-55.

27. See, for example, Raymond Th. Mc Nally, *Das Rußlandbild in der Publizistik Frankreichs zwischen 1814 und 1843*, Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte, vol. 6, Berlin, 1958, pp. 89,96.

28. See E. Hexelschneider, *Die russische Volksdichtung in Deutschland bis 1848/49*, Diss. Leipzig 1963; H. Isenbeck, *Rußland in der politischen Lyrik des vormärzlichen Deutschlands*, Diss. Münster/Westf. 1929; E. Reissner, *Deutschland und die russische Literatur 1800-1848*, Berlin, 1970; M.-R. Uhrig, *Das Slawenbild Friedrich und Heinrich Rückerts*. Diss. Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1973; Schweinfurt, 1974; G. Ziegengeist, *Traditionen deutsch-slawischer Geistesfreundschaft. Deutsch-Slawische Literaturbeziehungen in der Zeit der Befreiungskriege*, Habil. der HUB, Berlin, 1967.

29. See A. von Humboldt, G. Ehrenberg, G. Rose, *Reise nach dem Ural, dem Altai und dem Kaspiischen Meere*, 2 vol., Berlin, 1837,1842; See also J.v. Klaproth, *Reise in den Kaukasus und nach Georgien in den Jahren 1807 und 1808*, 2 vol. Halle und Berlin 1812, 1814; Fr. v. Haxthausen, *Studien über die inneren Zustände, das Volksleben und insbesondere die ländlichen Einrichtungen Rußlands*, vol. 3, chapter “Die Kosaken”, Berlin, 1852.

three stages: 1. from the very beginning of the Cossacks till the time of Tsar Peter I; 2. from the beginning of the 18th century till the beginning of the 19th century; 3. from the 1820th years till the middle of the 19th century³⁰.

In spite of Wagners' sympathy to the Cossacks, he couldn't digress from the German historical conception at that time and he saw the great difference between barbarians from one side and the German culture from another side. Here we can also remark the changes into the German image of the Cossacks. From one side Wagner showed the contrary between Christian civilization of the West and the traditional "destroying peoples" of the East, and from the other side he knew well and also showed the great changes of the Cossacks, their role into colonization of Russian Empire. Wagner connected both aspects into one thesis "in the next important war Cossacks will struggle with the Tartars (which were their everlasting enemy) against enemies of Russia"³¹.

The new social position of the Cossacks in Russia, at the first part of the 19th century brought deep changes into the German historical literature. These deep changes could be noted not only in the historiography but also in the geographical sense. For instance, in German images, till the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, the Cossacks lands were at the North and only after on the East of Europe. Because of that the Cossacks were the main reason of the appearance of the East European history at that time in Germany³². As the Cossacks were the military tool of the colonial aspirations of Russia, in Germany they stood, as wrote Wagner, like a symbol of the "Eastern threat". At this point of view the Cossacks turned out to be the main subject of the military writers in Germany in the end of 19th century³³.

30. See M. Wagner, *Der Kaukasus und das Land der Kosaken in den Jahren 1843 bis 1846*, 2 vol., Leipzig 1850, vol. 1, pp. 81-85.

31. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 101.

32. See H. Lemberg, *Zur Entstehung des Osteuropabegriffs im 19. Jahrhundert*, pp. 59-80.

33. See, for example, F.v. Stein, *Die russischen Kosakenheere*, Gotha 1884; F. v. Tettau, *Die Kosaken-Heere, Militär-Statistische Beschreibung*, Berlin 1892; Th. v. Trotha, *Die Kaukasische Kosaken-Brigade im Balkan-Feldzug 1877-78*, Berlin, 1894.