

## РЕЦЕНЗІЇ / REVIEWS

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## **THE COME BACK OF THE FORGOTTEN HEROES: A NEW INTERPRETATION OF LITERARY AND HISTORICAL NARRATIVES ABOUT THE WARS ON THE STEPPE BORDER OF UKRAINE IN THE 16TH – MID-17TH CENTURIES**

**(peer-review on the monograph: Vyrsky D. The War in the South: Chronicles  
of the Steppe Borderland of Ukraine (the 16th – Mid-17th Centuries). Kyiv:  
Institute of History of Ukraine, NAS of Ukraine, 2024. 292 p.)**

**ПОВЕРНЕННЯ ЗАБУТИХ ГЕРОЇВ: НОВЕ ПРОЧИТАННЯ  
ЛІТЕРАТУРНО-ІСТОРИЧНИХ НАРАТИВІВ ПРО ВІЙНИ  
НА СТЕПОВОМУ КОРДОНІ УКРАЇНИ XVI – СЕРЕДИНИ XVII СТ.  
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Dmytro Vyrsky is a renowned historian in the historical science as a thorough scholar of early modern historiography of Ukrainian history. He is the author of numerous monographs and scientific articles, the most prominent of which is the two-volume “The Polish-Lithuanian

Commonwealth Historiography of Ukraine (15th – mid-17th centuries)”. In 2024, the author published the book “The War in the South: Chronicles of the Steppe Borderland of Ukraine (the 16th – mid-17th centuries)”, some aspects of which have already been published earlier as the chapters of other monographs or scientific articles. At the same time, it should be noted that this book is a chief focus to scholars due to the fact that there were implemented several important tasks in the above-mentioned book, which were set by the author. First of all, D. Vyrsky had a fervant desire to draw the attention of modern scholars of the early modern history of Ukraine to literary and historical narratives written in the 16th and first half of the 17th centuries. Second of all, the scholar truly believes that modern historiography is still too focused on the “Cossack myth”, while ignoring the systematic activities of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and its border administration to protect the southern borders from the enemy attacks in the 16th and first half of the 17th centuries. Dmytro Vyrsky emphasized that the issue on the Ukrainian border was among the most important concerns of the state and neither government officials nor intellectuals spared any effort to resolve it.

There are 10 sections, nine of which present analyses of specific historical and literary monuments (created from 1527 to 1659) in the reviewed book.

In Section under the title “Still Fearless Horde: The Last Battle of Kniaz K. I. Ostrohsky” an analysis of the work on Justus-Ludwik Decjusz with the characteristic “long” title “Sendbrieff von der grossen schlacht und sigg So Kü. Ma. Von Poln volk In Litten am. XXVII. tag Januarii des. 1527. Jars mit den unglaubigen Tarnern gehabt hat” was carried out. D. Vyrsky managed to note that for the Ukrainian historiography the “Sent Letter...” was especially valuable because, on the one hand, it was a rare description of the “winter campaign” on the Ukrainian border, and on the other hand, it was the story of a purely “Great Lithuanian” military action and victory achieved without the “Polish” help, while briefly revealing the author’s biography.

Characterizing the historical work of Decius D. Vyrsky presented the prerequisites of the winter war, described the military forces of the Crimean Khanate, cited and clarified many geographical details, comparing the “Sent Letter...” with other historical sources of the time. According to him, the most likely number of participants in the Battle of Olshanytsia in January 1527 was: 7 thousand Lithuanians against more than 20 thousand Tatars. At the same time, there were only half “ready for the battle” among the Tatars. Finally, D. Vyrsky noted that Decius’s work about the battle with the Tatars at Olshanytsia in 1527 demonstrated a sufficient level of mastery by the historical writing of the Kingdom of Poland of the pan-European Renaissance practices of drawing up military reports. Decius’s style is striking regarding the details, in attention is not only to the act of battle, but also to the routine “technologies” of the war of that time. However, D. Vyrsky noted the efforts made by the author of “The Sent Letter...” to “fit in” the Ukrainian events into the contexts understandable to a European. It should be stated that Decius’s emphasis on the importance of this section of the Great Border of Christendom for organizing resistance to the Turkish-Tatar threat, and at that time this was considered the “super-task” of all European politics (p. 24).

Section 2 under the title “The Moldavian Underland: The War of Ivonia in 1574 (according to Sh. Starovolsky “On the Affairs of Sigismund I” 1616)” is dedicated to the heroic and cruel episode of the struggle of Moldova and the Ukrainian Cossacks led by Hetman Ivan Svirchovsky (Svirhovsky) against the Tatars and the Turks. Owing to contemporaries works on the events written by Leonard Gorecki and Jan Łasick, the above-mentioned episode is well known to historians. But there is also a later text by the historian-erudite Szymon

Starovolsky, which did not enter the historiographical canon. According to D. Vyrsky, the above-mentioned work was interesting as a “construction of the past” in the light of the already formed the Cossack and, more broadly, the border-Ukrainian narrative in the historiography of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The historian described in detail the biography of Sh. Starovolsky, analyzed his historical works, a significant part of which concerned the Ukrainian Cossacks (p. 27). Hence, D. Vyrsky retold the content of Starovolsky’s text from the work “On the Affairs of Sigismund I”, which concerned the events of 1574.

To our mind the scholar put an important historiographical emphasis in Section 3 under the title “The Black Velvet: Chronicle of Successful Tatar Attack of 1575 (B. Paprotskyi’s verse “A Pitiful History...”)). He notes that the issue on forming a narrative image of the Tatar attacks on Ukraine has not been raised so far practically in domestic historiography, since it belongs to the seemingly “obvious” topics. The source of this picturesque construct is usually presented as the “eternal” and a priori folk memory, which does not require any scientific research. Hence, it calls for analyzing the most vivid description of a successful Tatar attack in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth historical literature – the poetic chronicle “*Historia zalosna o prętkości y okrutności Tatarskiej a o srogim mordowaniu y popsowaniu Ziemie Ruskiej y Podolskiej. Ktore sie stało Księżyca Października Roku 1575*” (Krakow, 1575).

The historian cited facts from the biography of Bartosz Paprocki and noted that “The Pitiful Story” was a work about the Crimean invasion of Ukraine in 1575, which was still little known to the historians. According to D. Vyrsky, the Tatar attack was largely due to the times of kinglessness in Poland. The scholar stated some important accents of B. Paprocki, while retelling the content of the work, in particular, he noticed B. Paprocki’s attempt to fit the ancient-Renaissance cult of fortune into the context of Christian Providentialism. The author of “The Pitiful Story” presented the change of the latter as God’s punishment for the main sin for a Christian – pride. According to Paprocki, it was this unfavourable turn of fortune that caused the misfortune of the Ukrainian lands, which had previously enjoyed prosperity for a long time. D. Vyrsky also noted that B. Paprocki, writing about the wealth of Ukraine, mentioned cattle, horses, honey, and only then grain. Taking into consideration the above-mentioned order, the historian was given a proof that the agricultural products did not play the main role among the wealth of the Ukrainian lands in the 16th century, and therefore the statement of many scholars and writers about the “eternal grain-growing” nature of the economy of Ukraine is a myth formed later – in the era of Modernism (p. 64).

The author noted that Paprocki’s description of the events of 1575 was the most complete in the literature of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that recounts the stereotype of the “horrors” of the Tatar raid on Ukraine. He also tried to specify the number of the Tatars, who attacked the Ukrainian lands at that time and wrote that there were about 30 thousand soldiers (p. 81). The author also noted such an interesting feature in Paprocki’s work as the presentation of a “parade of culprits” – a list of the most prominent leaders and participants in the Tatar campaign, who plundered the Ukrainian lands and collected *yasyr* (p. 80). According to Paprocki the Tatars slaughtered the livestock and people, who could not be taken captive with them, D. Vyrskyi responded by remarking that the Zaporozhzhian Cossacks also resorted to such practices (p. 86).

In general, the author of the book called B. Paprocki’s “The Pitiful History” a vivid example of the existence of a poetic chronicle in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth historiography. To his mind, the above-mentioned work was especially interesting for the Ukrainian historians for its illustrations of the contemporary military technologies, highlighting the role of the

Cossacks in Podillia in the 1570s (the Podilia Cossacks are usually too much in the shadow if to compare with their Zaporizhzhian colleagues in modern historical literature). Eventually, there could be seen a rich genealogical and toponymic material in the text (p. 89).

D. Vyrsky began Section 4 “The Proud Kniaz: The Story of a Border Guard (“Epicedion on the Death of Kniaz M. Vyshnevetskyi in 1585, etc.)” by stating the unsatisfactory state of the source-study of such a well-known poetic monument as “Epicedion...”, which was published by A. Storozhenko back in 1904. The text of the “Epicedion” described the events from 1555 till 1584 (from the first battle of M. Vyshnevetsky to his death). Hence, D. Vyrsky presented the biography of M. Vyshnevetsky based on this work. At the end of the section, the historian made a rather noticeable excursion into the history of his native city of Kremenchuk, since the “Epicedion” mentioned the “departure of Kremenchuk” (pp. 107–112).

Section 5 is entitled “The War and “International” PR: An Anonymous Report on the Tatar Raid of 1589 (“The Defeat of the Tatars and the Turks...”, Paris, 1590)”. The author noted that the Tatar attack on Ukraine in 1589 gave impetus to the so-called “The Cossack Reform” of 1590 – 1591 and the establishment of the phenomenon of registered Cossacks. At the same time, he emphasized that this next Tatar expedition made it into the “Western European press”. The growing popularity of the relational genre in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the end of the 16th century contributed to greater awareness of the “Ukrainian” issues in the West of Christian Europe. It became not only fashionable, but also respectable to write about Ukraine. Hence, D. Vyrsky named newspapers and relations published in Gdansk, Nuremberg, Prague, Paris, Rome, Lyon, which dealt with the events of 1589 in the Ukrainian lands. He noted decently that these events could attract attention also because the Chancellor and great crown Hetman Yan Zamoyski played a prominent role in them (pp. 113–114).

The historian analyzed an anonymous work published in Paris in 1590 with a rather long title, which was abbreviated as “The Defeat of the Tatars and the Turks...”. The scholar outlined the background of the Tatar attack in 1589, pointed out the inspiration of this campaign by the Turkish and Moscow governments, while describing the circumstances of this historical source appearance. The analysis of the study allowed the historian to clarify some of the circumstances of the battle near the village of Orynyn (pp. 128–129). According to D. Vyrsky, the anonymous Parisian report on the Tatar attack on Ukraine in 1589 is the most complete and detailed account of this event. The above-mentioned study vividly illustrates the growth of the power of the Ukrainian Cossacks, and calls into question the traditional assessments of the actions of the great crown Hetman Yan Zamoyski in the 1589 campaign as a failure or ineffective. The Tatars did not manage to take out a significant number of the prisoners and booty. Moreover, it happened due to the Cossacks by large. There also appeared a new promising leader in Zaporizhzhia – Krzysztof Kosiński in the light of the events of 1589. Furthermore, according to D. Vyrsky, the circumstances in Ukraine in the late 1580s and the late 1640s were comparable in history because both times the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth government abandoned its plans to fight Turkey, which led to the “Cossack War” and the uprisings of Kosiński and Khmelnytsky (p. 137).

It should be mentioned that Section 6 under the title “Freedom and Slavery: The Life of a Ukrainian as an Adventure Novel (Ya. Kymikovsky’s Odyssey in M. Pashkovsky’s “The Turkish Stories and Cossack Battles with the Tatars” from 1615), is especially fascinating for the reader. First of all, the author emphasized that the possibilities of presenting the early period of the history of the Cossack Zaporizhzhia are limited by a rather modest “source base”.

Hence, the pictures of the Cossack past described so far are easily exposed to the accusations of the excessive fragmentation. Therefore, each “new” source from which one can draw knowledge on the above-mentioned issues arouses enthusiasm and meticulous attention of a fairly wide range of scholars. The story of an ordinary Cossack from the poetic work of the first half of the 17th century by Martyn Paszkowski “*Dzieje tureckie, y utarczki Kozackie z Tatary...*” is considered to be such narratives that are “not integrated” into modern Ukrainian studies (Krakow, 1615). D. Vytskyi cited M. Pashkovsky biography traditionally, who was particularly fond of the Cossacks and introduced the Ukrainian plots into his works.

The most original part of this work by Paszkowski was the story of the turbulent life of the poor nobleman Jakub Kimikowski, who served the Polish and Lithuanian kniaz, was captured by the Nogais, fled to the Cossacks, and took part in campaigns against the Tatars, who captured him. Later on, he was resold about 20 times, after which he ended up as a slave on the Turkish galley. Together with other galley slaves, he raised an uprising, due to which the rebels captured the galley and managed to sail to Italy. J. Kimikowski returned to his homeland after ten years of hardships, as he travelled via Rome and Venice. D. Vytskyi was primarily interested in Kimikowski’s descriptions of the Cossack “nomads” as of 1590 – 1591, which he used to confirm his theory that there was not a single centre for the Zaporizhzhian Cossacks – the Sich – until the second half of the 17th century. It was mentioned in the notes (pp. 151–152) by the historian, in particular, he presented his vision of the development of Zaporizhzhia by the Cossacks and the emergence of various projects to create some fortified center as a centre for this Lowland Cossacks Army in the 16th and first half of the 17th centuries. He proves that there were only temporary fortifications (“sichs”) in Zaporizhzhia and none of them was the generally recognized centre (capital) of the Zaporizhzhian Cossacks, until the development of the Chortomlyk Sich in the second half of the 17th century. It should be noted that D. Vytskyi advocated his theory in a debate with I. Storozhenko, who tried to prove the existence of only three Zaporizhzhian Sichs – Bazavluk, Chortomlyk and Pidpilnenska.

Section 7 “The Triumph of Noble-Cossack Solidarity: The Battle of Bila Tserkva 1626 (based on the “True Relation” by J. Dobrosetsyky)” D. Vytskyi began with a historiographical remark: the plots of the “Ukrainian Wars”, i.e. the struggle of the Ukrainians (the Cossacks), the Poles and the Lithuanians against the Tatar and the Turkish attacks, dominated classical historiography, in which the Cossack-nobility conflict occupied a rather modest place. The themes devoted to the wars of the Cossacks with the nobility became key and central in historiography only in the era of Romanticism fragmentary. Hence, the author retold the work of J. Dobrosetsyky about the successful battle of Bila Tserkva for the Polish and Cossack troops in 1626. The above-mentioned poetic chronicle (relation), according to the scholar was inferior in its literary and analytical level to other works of that time. D. Vytskyi refuted the claim about the large number of the Tatars, who took part in the attack on Ukraine in 1626, while revealing and analyzing the content of the work. In his opinion, there were not 40, but 16 thousand of them. There took part in the battle near Bila Tserkva approximately 10 thousand Tatars (p. 174). “The True Report” by Ya. Dobrotsetsky was important for the historian as there was information about the Cossacks-registered as an organic part of the “Ukrainian army”. As a result, the above-mentioned work considered that Bohdan Khmelnytsky also participated in this battle, being under the command of Hetman Mykhailo Doroshenko, and also there was the proof that the future Crimean Khan Islam-Girey also took part in this campaign (p. 185).



In Section 8 under the title “Magnate Sport: A Description of Kniaz S.-K. Koretsky’s Excursion to Dyke Pole (Wild Field) in the Autumn of 1644 (“The Chase” of 1645),” D. Vyrsky notes that this is an anonymous work, regarding whose authorship there are no worthy hypotheses. In his opinion, the theme of “The Chase” immediately refers to M. Hrushevsky’s words about Cossack hunting as a “border Ukrainian sport” of local magnates. But there are very few texts that describe such magnate campaigns. Thus, the introduction into scientific circulation of a historical narrative, where the magnate’s expedition to the Wild Fields is a single and coherent plot, is of a considerable interest. In addition, the peculiar uniqueness of this work is that the absence of a combat clash forced the author to pay more attention to the everyday life of a private army. The anonymous author describes the organization of the army, geographical areas, characterizes the “secondary” heroes, etc. All this makes the work an excellent source for the history of ideas and military art, as well as historical geography (primarily of the Steppe Buzhie) and the genealogy of noble families.

Section 9 under the title “The Culprit of Khmelnychchyna: Through the Pages of “Rhymes” on the Death of A. Koniecpolski (1659)” is dedicated to poems about the life of Alexander Koniecpolski (1620 – 1659), the son of the great crown Hetman Stanislav Koniecpolski. As the starosta of Korsun and Chyhyryn, he, according to D. Vyrsky, was Bohdan Khmelnytsky’s superior. However, with this remark, the historian limited his explanation of why A. Koniecpolski should be considered the culprit of the Cossack uprising of 1648. Having outlined the content of “Skorbotnaia postava” (1659), the historian notes that this work, despite its panegyric and biased format, is saturated with facts and meanings. It provides many keys to understanding the history of Ukraine on the eve and at the beginning of the Cossack Revolution.

In Section 10 under the title “Polish-Polish Tatar Studies: Scribes and Eyewitnesses (16th – mid-17th centuries)” D. Vyrsky noted the popularity of the topic of the East and Oriental studies in early modern Europe. He emphasized that the young Jagiellonian dynasty in the Crown of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was able to worthily fit into the pan-European narrative of the struggle against the Islamic East precisely through literary and historical works about the struggle on the “Tatar front”. In this section, D. Vyrsky described the content and authorship of works from Callimachus to Samuel Otvinovsky briefly. The historiographer focused on the texts of Stanisław Sarnytski “Hetman’s Books from the Stories of Knights of All Ages Collected...” (1577) and John Peyton Jr. “A Report on the Polish State and Provinces United with the Crown” (1598) (pp. 223–228, 240–241).

The main text of the reviewed book ends with an afterword, in which we note D. Vyrsky’s emphasis on the source appeal of the works he analyzed (mainly reports). On their basis, important discoveries were made: the calculation of the yasr of 1527 and 1575 by Decius and Paprotsky (without dividing into people and livestock – which undermines the popular colossal numbers of slaves from Ukraine in the 16th century); the use of night attacks by the Cossacks; a description of the elections of the hetman of the “Ukrainian army” in 1575 (it was still believed that the election of the hetman was a purely Cossack “invention”); a description of the “front” of Zaporizhzhia and the year-round “Zaporozhian nomadism” at the end of the 16th century, etc. (p. 245).

Overall, in this book, D. Vyrsky demonstrates his broad erudition, his ability to work with literary and historical works of the 16th – 17th centuries as historical and historiographical sources, verifying the historical information presented in them with the help of other contemporary sources, clarifying the biographies of many historical figures, discovering

new names, and detailing the historical geography of early modern Ukraine. We should also positively note the style of the researcher, which skillfully combines scientific analysis with a vivid descriptive narrative. At the same time, the book contains certain technical inaccuracies. For example, the historian constantly calls Khmilnytsky starosta and famous knight Yakub Strus the starosta of Khmelnytsky (pp. 125–126). In one of the notes, the author, speaking about the events of the 16th century, notes that the feast of St. Pokrova fell on October 14 (p. 63), but in fact on October 1. However, such trifles do not reduce the overall positive impression of D. Vyrsky's book, which can be recommended not only to historians or literary critics, but also to those who prefer the fiction genre and are fond of adventure novels.

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