

ANCIENT HISTORY AND SUBVERSIVE ATTEMPTS TO AFFECT REGIONAL SYMBOLS BY INFORMATION WARFARE ACTORS

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Завдання цього наукового дослідження полягає у розширенні інформації про різні аспекти емблематики Донецької області у їх зв'язку з процесами інформаційного протистояння та в порівнянні з іншими регіонами країни; у ширшому розкритті процесів створення, затвердження та використання різних символів у контексті мотивації різних суб'єктів інформаційного протистояння; у встановленні конкретних наративів щодо історії області через ці символи. Зокрема, дослідження виокремлює символи, пов'язані з уявленнями про «давню історію» регіону, і визначає зумовленість їх використання різними акторами. Аналізуються розвиток офіційної геральдики та вексилології Донецької області, відображення історичної тематики у фірмових брендах та інших комерційних назвах, переосмислення офіційної символіки приватними особами у період з 1991 р. Методологічно робота базується на використанні історико-генетичного, історико-порівняльного, історико-системного методів. Їх комбінація дала змогу показати, що емблеми та символи Донецької області мали свій початок у позиції та походженні пострадянських політико-бізнесових еліт регіону; порівняти їх із позицією еліт інших областей України протягом того ж періоду; показати, як вплив позиції донецьких еліт зіграв на користь московського гібридного супротивника. Для цього були залучені матеріали ЗМІ, інтернет-блоги, архівні матеріали.

Результати здійсненого у межах статті дослідження свідчать про те, що адміністративно-бізнесові еліти Донецької області 1990–2000-х рр. були зацікавлені в регіональній символіці, яка б відділяла область від історії України загалом. Поради професійних українських істориків еліти свідомо ігнорували. Хоча вони не фігурували в офіційній геральдиці регіону, символи з давньої історії особливо зацікавили донецькі еліти, конкретно ті, що стосуються давніх скіфів і сарматів, набули широкого поширення в різних комерційних брендах, які контролювали представники керівництва області, їхні близькі знайомі, бізнес-партнери. Таке відокремлення емблематики та символіки регіону від єдиного українського «національного міфу» відрізнялося від досвіду Вінницької області в той самий хронологічний відрізок. З огляду на походження донецьких еліт, логічно, що вони шукали компромісу між власним радянським патріотизмом та роллю у новій, незалежній українській нації. Така політика регіональної влади

пізніше дасть змогу московським агентам впливу просувати власні наративи «давньої російської історії» в регіоні. Їхньою метою було посилення історичної плутанини у головах населення, недовіри до офіційних джерел (зокрема усталених академічних наративів з історії України), поширення ідеології «русского мира» серед переважно апатичного до неї населення області.

Дослідження є авторським та оригінальним, великою мірою базується на матеріалах особисто знайдених чи побачених автором (зокрема як жителем міста Донецька під час початку гібридного вторгнення Москви до регіону). З практичного погляду, результати наочно демонструють, як відсутність єдиної інформаційної та історичної політики в Україні 1990–2000-х рр. була використана регіональними елітами для відцентрових дій. Це не було б проблематичним, якщо б не полегшило діяльність антиукраїнських зовнішніх сил, націлених на відрив Донецької області від України. Тому матеріали дослідження мають певну цінність для підготовки чи підвищення кваліфікації держслужбовців. Перспективи подальших досліджень з теми лежать у пошуку інших образів з давньої історії, що використовуються в інформаційному протистоянні навколо історії України, особливо з московської сторони, з визначенням ключових тенденцій і причин створення пропаганди такої тематики. До того ж у статті використані архівні та візуальні матеріали, вперше введенні до наукового обігу, що можуть стати в нагоді дослідникам інформаційного протистояння.

Ключові слова: інформаційне протистояння, історія України, емблематика, спеціальні історичні дисципліни, давня історія, Вінницька область, Донецька область.



The aims of the study include the expansion of information about various aspects of the emblematics of the Donetsk region in their connection with the processes of information warfare and in comparison with other regions of the country; wider disclosure of the processes of creation, approval and use of various symbols in the context of the motivation of various information warfare actors to establish specific narratives regarding the history of the region through these symbols. In particular, the study singles out the symbols associated with ideas about the «ancient history» of the region and determines why they were used by different actors. The analysis covers the development of official heraldry and vexillology of the Donetsk region, the reflection of historical themes in company brands and other commercial names, the reinterpretation of official symbols by private individuals since 1991. Methodologically, the research is primarily based upon historical-genetic, historical-comparative, historical-systematic methods. The combination of these methods made it possible to highlight that emblems and symbols in the Donetsk region had their origin in the views (and, accordingly, personal origins) of the post-Soviet political and business elites of the region; to compare them with the position of the elites of other regions of Ukraine during the same period of time; to show how systematically the influence of the position of the Donetsk elites played in favor of the Moscow-backed hybrid adversary. Media materials, Internet blogs, and archival materials were used to achieve these results.

The results of the study indicate that the administrative and business elites of the Donetsk region in the 1990s and 2000s were interested in regional symbols that would separate the region from the history of Ukraine as a whole. The elite deliberately ignored the advice of professional Ukrainian historians. Although they did not appear in the official heraldry of the region, symbols from ancient history were of particular interest to Donetsk elites, specifically those related to the ancient Scythians and Sarmatians, and became widespread in various commercial brands controlled by representatives of the regional leadership, their close acquaintances, and business partners. This separation of emblematics and symbols of

the region from unified Ukrainian «national mythos» differed from the experience of the Vinnytsia region elites in the same chronological period. Given the origin of the Donetsk elites, it is logical that in this way they sought a compromise between their own Soviet patriotism and their role in the new, independent Ukrainian nation. Such policies of the regional authorities will later allow Moscow-affiliated agents of influence to promote their own narratives of «ancient Russian history» in the region. Their goal was to increase historical confusion in the minds of the population, sow distrust in official sources (in particular, established academic narratives on the history of Ukraine), and facilitate the spread of the «Russian World» ideology amongst the mostly apathetic population of the region.

The research is fully original and belongs to the author; it is mostly based on the materials that have been personally found or seen by the author (including as a citizen in Donetsk during the early stages of Moscow's hybrid invasion to the region). From the practical point of view, the results fully demonstrate how the lack of a unified information and history policy in 1990–2000s Ukraine was abused by regional elites for decentralizing actions. This would not have been so problematic, if it did not also help the activities of anti-Ukrainian foreign forces, interested in separating the Donetsk region from Ukraine. Thus, the research's materials have a certain use for the education or the adult learning courses for the workers of bureaucracy. Prospects for further research on the topic lie in the search for other symbolical images from ancient history that are used in the information warfare surrounding the history of Ukraine, especially from the Moscow side, with the identification of key trends and reasons for the creation of propaganda on such a topic. Furthermore, the article contains archival and visual materials, first introduced to academic use, which may aid further researchers of information warfare.

Keywords: Vinnytsia oblast, ancient history, Donetsk oblast, emblematics, information warfare, history of Ukraine, auxiliary sciences of history.



An information warfare agent usually treats history as a unified jumble of facts and symbols that one can pullout to instantly give a political or military agenda a profound explanation, one «grounded in the ages past». Ancient history is, thus, of great interest to powers behind information policy activities, as its use provides legitimacy and sets an overall traditionalist tone over the entity's actions, if used correctly. In this form, it is especially of interest to subversive entities, which wish to demonstrate that their actions are somehow more «ordained by history itself» than those of the central government. But when the settlement of the region by its current population is (relatively) recent, another question arises: which part of ancient history must be used: that of the settler group's origins (thus likely too connected to the central government's symbols), or that unique to the region, but mostly disconnected to its current population? Questions like these would arise in historical cases of nation-building, both successful (Israel) and not so much (the Confederate States of America), and, while not fully identical, the actions of regional governments seeking a certain degree of autonomy, and an outside force trying to infiltrate and subvert the region, are similar enough in their approach to which historical facts and symbols to pick and choose from. With Ukraine facing hybrid and full-scale invasion from Moscow, and with cer-

tain local authorities and opportunist politicians choosing to collaborate with the invaders, including in the sphere of myth-making and tying regions through ideology, the topic of the use of history symbols as used in Donetsk region is of practical relevance and importance.

Analysis of previous publications connects two large topics: one related to the development of symbols in Donetsk region, and the other related to the use of those symbols for information warfare reasons. The heraldry and vexillology of Donetsk region was created after the restoration of independence and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and it became the subject of interest of Ukrainian scholars from the time of its creation (which, in itself, was contested by professional heraldry analysts). Researchers of heraldry and vexillology primarily focused on whether the Donetsk region's heraldry was made in accordance to the rules of tincture and other heraldic traditions, leading to disputes between scholars and the authorities, discussed in the mass media¹. The Ukrainian Heraldic Society played a significant role in the aforementioned discussion of the symbols of the region, one should particularly the publications of a Lviv-based historian A. Hrechylo. He analyzed the progress of official heraldry in independent Ukraine, and described the coats of arms of cities and villages of Ukraine known as of 2020. The researcher was a member of the commission for approving the symbols of the Donetsk region, but his proposals for their improvement were not accepted, despite their sound scholarly background, due to specific decisions by the regional authorities².

Other Ukrainian authors from various regions that analyzed historical elements used to create regional symbols for Donetsk region include the researchers Ye. Maksimenko (she focused on the formation and background of the particular designs of heraldry in the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk regions)³, A. Yashchuk (who demonstrated how «alternative projects» in emblematics eventually find their embodiment, even «without passing the competition» via personal connections with the authorities, which is useful to bear in mind in the analysis of Donetsk heraldry specifically)⁴,

¹ Донетчанам подсунили «неграмотный» герб? (2003) *ОстроВ*. Retrieved from <https://www.ostro.org/general/politics/articles/76/> (data zvernennia: 14.07.2024)

² Гречило, А. (2004). *Герби та прапори міст і сіл України*. Ч. I (А–Л). Львів: Друкарські куншти; Гречило, А. (2004). Сучасні символи областей України. *Українське геральдичне товариство*. Retrieved from <http://uht.org.ua/ua/part/terytot/oblasti/#don> (data zvernennia: 14.07.2022); Гречило, А. (2008). *Сучасні символи областей України*. Київ–Львів: Укр. геральд. т-во, НАН України, Львів. від-ня Ін-ту укр. археографії та джерелознавства ім. М. С. Грушевського НАН України; Гречило, А. (2020). *Герби та прапори міст і сіл України*. Ч. II (М–Я). Львів: Львів. від-ня Ін-ту укр. археографії та джерелознавства ім. М. С. Грушевського НАН України.

³ Максименко, Є. (2014). *Міська геральдика Донбасу XVIII – початку XXI ст.* (автореф. дис. ... канд. іст. наук – 07.00.06). Донецьк; Максименко, Є. (2013). Сучасна міська геральдика Луганщини. *Схід*, 6, 225–228. DOI: 10.21847/1728-9343.2013.6(126).21030.

⁴ Яшук, А. (2021). «Архангел Михаїл» та «Богдан Хмельницький»: проекти герба м. Києва 1942 та 1944 рр. у творчій спадщині Антона Середи. *Архіви України*. 1(326): січень–березень, 184–195. DOI: 10.47315/archives2021.326.184.

Yu. Kulish (looked for the genesis of the formation of regional symbolism in folk lore and local culture)¹, and M. Slobodianiuk (studied the emblems of regional military units, particularly those symbolizing the battlefields against the Moscow-backed hybrid adversary in the east of Ukraine)².

Thus, an analysis of related literature shows that the peculiarities of heraldry and vexillology of the Donetsk region have already been described, in accordance to the specifics of those auxiliary sciences of history (specifically, in the works of A. Hrechylo, and other professional heraldry scholars). This work's particular task regarding the broader issue would be, instead, to consider the process of creation, approval and use of various symbols in the context of the motivation of various information warfare agents to conduct a specific message, in regards to the history of the region, through those symbols. In particular, we will focus on the symbols connected to ideas about the region's «ancient history», and why those were used by various actors. The research to analysis should related to the development of official heraldry and vexillology of the Donetsk region, reflection of historical themes in brand names, reinterpretations of official symbols by private individuals) in the post-1991 period. The latter group should include individuals acting in the interest of the hybrid adversary.

Therefore, the aim of the research is to analyze which symbols, related to the history of the lands that currently encompass the Donetsk region, particularly «ancient history», were used by local authorities, interconnected business elites, and Moscow's hybrid forces, and for what reason.

The research's source base is varied and representative. Firstmost, it includes specific images of coats of arms, flags, emblems of commercial brands, symbols used in propaganda events. The majority of those emblems and symbols were described in the course of work of an international research project on the self-representation of Ukrainian cities «CityFace». The analysis of motivations behind various symbols also requited the use of mass media materials, offline and online newspapers, as well as blogs in social networks. Furthermore, in the interests of historical-comparative methodology, the documents of Vinnytsia regional administration and regional council, personally found by the researcher in Vinnytsia regional state archives, were used to compare Donetsk and Vinnytsia regions' approaches to information policy and ideology at the same period of time.

Results of the research. The fall of the Soviet Union left Donetsk region with a «not so new» leadership. Representatives of the old party «nomenclature» and the

¹ Куліш, Ю. О. (2015). Поняття символу: символи в українській культурі. *Вісник Харківського національного педагогічного університету імені Г. С. Сковороди. «Філософія»*, 2(45), 101–105. DOI: zenodo.32455.

² Слободянюк, М. (2020). Символіка місць боїв на Сході України – новий різновид нарукавної емблематики Збройних Сил України. *Знак*, 82, 10–11; Слободянюк, М. (2020). Індивідуальні нарукавні емблеми бійців АТО-ООС – новий вид символіки Збройних Сил України. *Знак*, 80, 9–11.

mining unions' elite stayed in power during the 1990s. By early 2000s, their ranks were further replenished by the representatives of the newly-formed capitalist business elite. The culmination of this process of forming a stable and seemingly unshakable local and regional government was the formation of the «Party of Regions». Like no other party, the «Regionals» were interested in building their power in the new Ukraine without *Ukrainian* ideology, instead focusing on the remnants of the Soviet cult of Victory and the retransmission of old myths in the new political arena (using the fear of the «Banderites» for political struggle of the 21st century). In the course of the search for self-definition, description of their own role in the new political space of Ukraine, these figures began to appeal to the Stalinist term of «strong economists», which was actively spread by political technologists in the Russian-speaking media space: not only in the east of Ukraine, but also in Belarus and the Moscow region¹. At the heart of the concept (in its original, positive meaning) is an appeal to voter introspection, an incentive to neglect the ideological (the desire to elect a non-corrupt, patriotic politician) for the sake of the pragmatic (finding a politician who will be «competent in economic matters»). The contrast between «the language and the sausage», «the idealists and the businessmen» formed the basis of the system of values that the Donetsk leadership offered to society *instead* of an ideology based on Ukrainian national identity and Ukrainian-specific nation-building. One could say that this was exactly how the Party of Regions bosses saw the «new» Ukrainian ideology: absolutely «toothless» in terms of historicism, focused only on issues of economic stability and promised further enrichment, and, at the same time, not opposed to the Soviet heritage, due to historical connections of the party leaders to old Communist bureaucracy.

Analyzing the statements of the Donetsk region politicians recorded by the local press, along with interviews given to the newspapers, it can be surmised that they experienced a form of cognitive dissonance, when people who were brought up with unquestioning belief in the Communist Party, and many of them already used to servitude around the ideologues of communism, to flattery before the Soviet leadership, now had the power in their own hands, unconnected to pretend «adherence to the ideals of Communism», and now had to lead an independent country, now with full awareness of the crimes of the old totalitarian regime. Accordingly, the politicians' «way out» of this situation was to evade any «problematic» ideological issues like, the very matter of Ukrainian self-identity and the realization of many crimes of the old regime against not just the few members of intelligentsia, but indeed large swathes of the population. Such an attitude in regards to ideology obviously affected local symbolism, and, thus, local emblems (heraldry, flags, emblems). Ukrainian officials and local authorities also witnessed foreign examples of standing by Soviet symbols: Vla-

¹ Белей, Л. (2020). Феномен господарництва. *Uchoose – Обираєш ТИ!* 15 жовтня 2020. Retrieved from <http://uchoose.info/fenomen-gospodarnytstva/> (data zvernennia: 14.07.2024)

dimir Putin's use of the Soviet anthem, Alyaksandr Lukashenka's return to Soviet Belaruian flag and coat of arms, only partially modified, the uneven decisions on whether to «de-communize» the names of the regions themselves or not. Thus, the authorities were not focused on portraying national Ukrainian symbols, so much as on a version of Ukraine that's comfortable for former Soviet «Communists», and that resulted in specific choices regarding emblems¹.

In 1999 Donetsk regional administration announced a competition for projects of regional symbols, which was initiated by the «Zolotoy Skif» (*translation from Russian: «Golden Scythian»*) charity foundation, the purpose of which was to popularize the Donetsk region with a new coat of arms and a regional flag. The head of the «expert commission» that judged the contestants, the charity foundation, and the regional administration at that time was one and the same person – Viktor Yanukovich, who'd later become the Prime Minister and at one time President of Ukraine, only to abandon the country in times of crisis. As Yanukovich's «expert commission» finished their judging, and the session of the regional council approved the winning design, trouble has started: a variation of the coat of arms that was specifically criticized by heraldry researchers was the one that ended up approved by the authorities. The heraldry researchers noted that a more heraldry-adequate version has already been presented to President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, and the coat of arms approved by the commission was incorrect: it was based on the French shield, which was different from the rest of the regions; it contained a personal motto (!), something characteristic of personal rather than regional coats of arms; the main figure of the heraldry, an azure Mertsalov palm tree, was supposed to be sable, symbolizing the original statue made of black metal; finally, the coat of arms was adorned with green branches, symbolizing youth and insecurity. The updated design, refined according to the requirements of heraldists, was personally presented to Viktor Yanukovich at the summing up of the results of the commission's work, and the design won a national award². Despite a personal appeal to Viktor Yanukovich himself, in the end, in a letter from the «Zolotoy Skif» foundation, the heraldry scholars were accused by the elites of suffering from a «bruised ego» with a «request to the regional administration» (*controlled by the same leadership as the foundation!*) to keep the previous design, as made by the local advertising firm «Cardinal» (*connected to the business partners of the same leadership!*)³. Said design is still used by the Donetsk military-civilian administration.

¹ Никоноров, О. (2015). Історія розвитку сепаратизму в Донецькій області. *Депо Донбас*. Retrieved from <https://dn.depo.ua/ukr/donetsk/istoriya-rozvitku-separatizmu-v-donetskiy-oblasti-28102015090000> (data zvernennia: 14.07.2024).

² Донетчанам подсунили «неграмотный» герб? (2003).

³ Золотой Скиф. (2003). Мнение БФ Золотой Скиф о дискуссии поднятой СМИ о гербе Донецкой области. *Геральдика.ру*. Retrieved from <https://geraldika.ru/article/3267> (data zvernennia: 14.07.2024).

The special shield, different from the rest of the regions, and the words of the chemist Dmitry Mendeleev written in Russian on the «motto» were left as is.

Thus, the coat of arms of the Donetsk region was left «silent» about distinctly Ukrainian history in the region: the Ruthenian silver-seekers of old, the Kalmius Palanka of Ukrainian Cossacks, the victories of Ukrainian People's Republic in 1918. Even though one could argue that references to Cossack settlements of old, such as Oleksandrivka could be useful for information policy of the region, in order to depict an early history of the city of Donetsk (which representatives of various city administrations are typically concerned with), the Donetsk City Council dates the foundation of the city from the founding of the John Hughes metallurgical plant, although Hughes's town of Yuzivka was built on the basis of the incorporation of older settlements. A monument was erected in honor of the 19th century Welsh entrepreneur, brand names referencing him still remain, while the Ukrainian Cossacks were «not so lucky»: despite the suggestions of local historians, the authorities were not interested in the heritage of the Zaporozhian Host in the Donetsk region. It is worth noting that while the political and economic elite of the region chose to ignore the legacy of the Ukrainians Cossacks in the region, they were not averse to mentioning, even highlighting the ancient, «pre-Ukrainian» part of the region's history. In addition to the above-mentioned «Golden Scythian» foundation (and the multi-annual festival of the same name, with the famous award in the form of a Scythian statue), the ancient Iranian peoples of the Pontic-Caspian Steppe became of great interest to both the political elites and the connected business interests. It is worth noting that in 2001, according to the decision of the concern's shareholders, the «Donetsk beer plant» brewery was renamed «Sarmat», referencing the ancient Sarmatians, who controlled the region after the Scythians. It is the most notably, but not the only reference to the names of Scythians and Sarmatians, which have been commercialized, and intended to be promoted as specifically regional brands¹. However, these ancient peoples were not exactly Donetsk-specific parts of history: Scythia, at even the modest estimates, covered nearly the entirety of modern Ukrainian territory, and Sarmatia expanded even further beyond its borders. Yet, the authorities from Donetsk focused specifically on the promotion of these symbols from ancient history, of rough steppe nomads, rather than other parts of the region's history. Comparing the activities of the Donetsk region authorities to those of other regions at the time is especially of note. The Vinnytsia region archives reveal to us that in the same year, 2001, the authorities and business interests in Vinnytsia regions were concerned with the implementation of the Presi-

¹ CityFace. (2021). Отримані дані. *CityFace*. Retrieved from <https://cityface.org.ua/data?SightsSearch%5BsRegions%5D%5B0%5D=2&SightsSearch%5BsTypes%5D=&SightsSearch%5BsPeriods%5D=&SightsSearch%5BsAmounts%5D=&SightsSearch%255D=&SightsSearch%255BsDateSinceEnd%255D=&page=2&per-page=15> (data zvernennia: 14.07.2022).

dent of Ukraine's plans on the implementation of the Program of integration of Ukraine into the European Union. Particularly of interest is the ideological component. Vinnytsia regional administration reported encouraging the local newspapers, information agencies, schools, universities to cover topics such as «Ukraine in the history of Europe», «Ukraine on its way to Europe», «Ukrainians famous in Europe» to facilitate the ascension into the EU¹. Meanwhile, Donetsk region focused on the Scythians – the rule of which covered Vinnytsia, as well, but its authorities and decision-makers would not try to compromise Ukrainian nation-building for the sake of dressing up in the symbols of antiquity. Once again, it also wasn't the factor of specific regional history being promoted – not only the Iranian tribes lived beyond the current Donetsk region, but there were plenty of ancient and early medieval tribes that Vinnytsia authorities could have promoted – like the Khazars, the Ulich, or the Bolokhivtsi, – and yet, they did not.

The motivation of the regional and business authorities, all in the circle of relatives and acquaintances of then-governor Viktor Yanukovich, to downplay national Ukrainian symbolism in favor of ancient Iranian peoples, 19th century Russian chemists, and Welsh industrialists, is obvious: they were uneasy, even discomforted by the idea of focusing on Ukrainian-specific (unrelated to Moscow, or any other current or historic power) historical content of the region. Not being loyal to the idea of independent Ukraine themselves, instead accustomed to the role of «good little brothers», they opposed the use of Ukrainian symbols and unified Ukrainian historical mythos. Notably, some of the symbols they introduced, like the regional flag, would become associated with the new Ukrainian nation-building in popular variations: versions of the flag with the words «the sun of Ukraine rising in the Donbas» were popularized after Moscow's 2014 hybrid invasion into the region². It is of interest that the hybrid invaders, while amplifying the «Russianness» of regional symbolism for their propaganda (using a flag that modern «folk history» mythos attributed to the short-lived «Donets-Kryvyi Rih Soviet Republic» with an added legless variation of the traditional Muscovite double-headed eagle), also turned to ancient history for information warfare. As personally witnessed by the author of the article, during 2014's Victory Day in Europe celebrations in Donetsk, Moscow hybrid adversary agents would spread stickers and small calendars adorned with the «St. George ribbon» imagery and the words «We remember glorious victories... Over Germany in 1945. Over Khazaria 1 045 years ago, Over China more than 7 500 years ago» (Image 1). A variant of said art, depicting a Soviet monument, a Cossack-stylized Sviatoslav of Ruthenia, and a Slavic-looking

¹ Державний архів Вінницької області, ф. Р-6147, оп. 3, спр. 546, арк. 139–140.

² Мелекесцев, К. І. (2021). Емблематика пострадянської Донеччини: офіціоз «господарників», переробки «з народу», альтернативи апологетів «руського мира». *Наукові записки Вінницького державного педагогічного університету імені Михайла Коцюбинського. Серія: Історія: збірник наукових праць*, 36, 58–66.

warrior fighting a dragon (symbolizing ancient China) was reportedly seen in 2015's Moscow on advertisement billboards¹.



Image 1. Propaganda art in 2014's Donetsk and in 2015's Moscow

These propaganda pieces are even less related to either Ukrainian or Donetsk-specific history, but the particular use of ancient history is intriguing. As said pieces are connected to Moscow's 2014 hybrid adversary forces, it is likely that the message wasn't meticulously crafted by a committee, but rather «outsourced» to technically nongovernmental-affiliated actors, such as the businesses of Konstantin Malofeev, which had contacts with the both faces of hybrid aggression in 2014's Donetsk: the Russian Federation citizens Aleksandr Borodai and Igor Girkin. Therefore, some obscure «folk history» mythology about an ancient war against China made it into the picture. Although most people won't recognize this «war» as something familiar, but they will at least get an idea of such an event, perhaps «hidden by the historians, so that people wouldn't know the truth». It is a peculiar attempt, which fits into the patterns of information warfare agents: introduction of concepts previously unknown to the audience through association with ones that they have already heard of before (in this case, the Victory in Europe Day).

The research shows that the 1990–2000s Donetsk region government-business elites spent money and influence of adorning the region with symbolism that would differ from the region's history in the scope of the history of Ukraine as a whole: a metal palm tree made for the Russian Empire's entry in the International industrial exhibition in Paris; words of the 19th century Russian chemist Dmitry Mendeleev; John Hughes as a mythologized creator of the future city of Donetsk. Corrections from professional Ukrainian historians were deliberately ignored by the elites. While not featured in the official heraldry of the region, the ancient history symbols relating to ancient Scythians and Sarmatians became widespread in various commercial brands,

¹ Россия отпразднует 7 523 годовщину победы над Китаем. (2015). *ZpTown*. Retrieved from <https://zptown.zp.ua/archives/173808> (data zvernennia: 14.07.2024).

including the «Zolotoy Skif» foundation, which was headed by representatives of regional leadership and their close acquaintances and business partners. Medieval and Early Modern periods of the region's history, particularly the development of Ukrainian Cossack settlements, did not receive such attention from the regional elites, despite being instrumental to the genesis of the region's current population and of a great number of its towns and cities. This separation of the region's emblematics and symbolism from unified Ukrainian «national mythos» was mostly done for the sake of the elites' themselves, reconciling their old Soviet loyalties with their new roles in an independent, capitalist country, whose national movements were fear-mongered against in the Soviet times. However, reasoning notwithstanding, such policies would later allow Moscow's agents of influence to promote their own narratives of «ancient Russian history» in the region, particularly a mythical «war against ancient China». The reasons for those are seeding of confusion, distrust in official sources (including the established academic knowledge on the history of Ukraine), the spreading of the «Russian World» ideology amongst people largely apathetic to it.

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