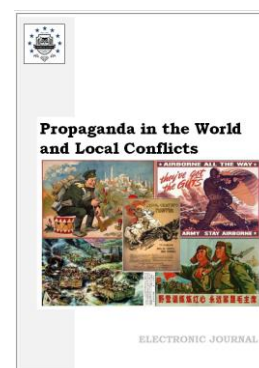


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## Articles

### “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” (1919): An Account of the History of Don Cossackdom for Readers from the Countries of the Entente. Part 1

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#### Abstract

This work analyzes “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host”, a book released by the Don government headed by Ataman A.P. Bogayevsky in 1919 for readers from the countries of the Entente (there were plans to release the book in English and French; the Russian edition of the book was intended for the Slav allies). It is shown that the book consistently advances the idea that the Cossacks were ideological allies of the British and the French and were committed to upholding the traditions of freedom and democracy. However, the book is inconsistent content-wise – for the most part, the factual material does not align with those ideas; it is mainly reduced to describing Cossackdom’s military victories (the exception is the section on the Civil War). This can be explained by the fact that as at 1919 there existed no summarizing works on the history of Cossackdom written from the standpoint of democratic and republican traditions, while it was also difficult to conduct meaningful research amid the Civil War in the country.

**Keywords:** Don Cossackdom, Almighty Don Host, Civil War, military propaganda, Entente, S.G. Svatikov.

#### 1. Introduction

In 1919, the Don government headed by Ataman A.P. Bogayevsky released a small but well-illustrated book entitled “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919). What makes it a unique addition to pre-Soviet Don historiography is that, while the genre of popular historical essays was fairly common among Cossack authors from as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this was the first time that an essay of this kind intended for foreign readers specifically had been produced. The situation in the country during the Civil War and the Intervention urged the Don government to create a positive image in the minds of the Western allies. It is well known that in that very year 1919 British Prime Minister D. Lloyd George showed his complete ignorance of Russian realities when he mentioned a “General Kharkov” as one of the leaders of the White Movement. This fact even made it into Russian culture, with V.V. Nabokov characterizing in “The University Poem” one of its female protagonists as a “well-educated” fool believing that Kharkov was a Russian general (Nabokov, 2001: 302). The Entente-oriented Bogayevsky government took advantage of the situation in the country to push its own propaganda,

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releasing a book intended to “enlighten our allies about the historic destiny and national significance of Don Cossackdom” ([Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: I](#)).

All of the previous popular essays on the history of Don Cossackdom created on commission from the government in the last decades of the existence of the Russian Empire were dominated by a conservative-patriotic view of the Cossack past. Specifically, Russian army General (and future Don Ataman) P.N. Krasnov concludes “The Pictures of the Past Quiet Don” with the following statement: “The glory of the Quite Don, a deep faith in the Lord and His Mercy, a boundless loyalty to the Sovereign, an ardent love for Mother Russia, and military prowess – this is what we ought to pursue as much as we can and dedicate our lives and everything we own to. So help us God!” ([Krasnov, 1909: 522](#)). A.N. Pivovarov, an adjutant to the Host Staff under another ataman, N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirskoy, hoped that his collection of essays “Don Cossacks” would help to fortify the reader’s faith in and loyalty to the Crown: “Learning about feats of selfless courage arouses a sense of deep sympathy and respect for the individuals who committed them, fosters and further fortifies one’s love for the Motherland and for the beloved Sovereign, and, lastly, makes it tempting to emulate these brilliant men of courage, these valiant performers of their duty” ([Pivovarov, 1892](#)). Understandably, monarchical declarations of this kind were of little value as a way to engage the sympathy of the British or French reader. In “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host”, Don history is considered through a totally different lens – with a focus on democracy.

It was stated as early as the little section “From the Publisher” prefacing the book that the easiest way for the “foreign reader” to get an idea of “the form of government in the ancient Cossack community” was by way of analogy to “the form of government in the most democratic cantons of Switzerland” ([Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: I-II](#)). This analogy was borrowed from the main text of the book. According to the publisher’s personal belief, the Cossacks’ democratism was not an accidental phenomenon but originated from the democratic forms of governance practiced in ancient Russia, which were eradicated by the Muscovite tsars ([Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: II](#)). On top of that, the “From the Publisher” section concluded with the following programmatic declaration about the historic significance of Russian Cossackdom, which is in diametric opposition to the beliefs of P.N. Krasnov and A.N. Pivovarov: “Cossackdom’s greatest historical accomplishment, and gift, is that it has preserved not only the memory of and not only the instinct for but also the clear consciousness of ancient Russian political freedom” ([Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: II](#)). As we can see, the purpose of the book is made clear right at the outset, with the idea being embedded into the mind of the Western reader right from the opening pages that the Cossacks are the principal bearers of democratic values in Russia.

There were plans to publish “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” in as many as three different languages – English, French, and Russian, with even the Russian edition intended for citizens of “the newly formed Slav states closely related to us” ([Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: I](#)). The “From the Publisher” section specifically notes that the events recounted in the book would be “covered from the viewpoint of the foreign reader” ([Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: I](#)). The Russian reader, arguably, might have been at a loss as to how to interpret this text, for, as stated above, it totally contradicted all previous (monarchical-conservative) popular essays on the history of Don Cossackdom. While the liberal tradition had, doubtless, fully taken form in Don historiography by the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it mainly was limited, including for censorship reasons, to isolated research and opinion pieces. As at 1919, there existed no popular essays and fundamental research studies covering the entire history of Don Cossackdom and done in that tradition.

Accordingly, it would be quite interesting to know how “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” was received by the Russian reader, i.e. someone used to a monarchical interpretation of Cossackdom, and the Western one, for whom that text was intended. However, the foreign reader seems not to have had the chance to, actually, read the book – all attempts to locate it in the holdings of the largest British and French libraries have met with failure. On the other hand, the distribution of the book in Russia was hindered by the triumph of the Reds. Most of its copies may have physically perished. According to prominent Don historian S.G. Svatikov, “in March 1920, train cars carrying the property of the Don State Printing Office and the Regional Printery were abandoned to their fate at the Krymskaya station of the Kuban-Black Sea Railway and sacked” ([Svatikov, 1924: III](#)).

Thus, “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” can be of interest as one of the last texts of pre-Soviet Don military propaganda conducted in a committed manner. On top of that, this book appears to have been the only known attempt within the frame of that propaganda to project a positive image of Cossackdom to foreign readers. The first part of the present work will analyze this highly interesting text with the aim of learning how the Bogayevsky government wished to position itself in the international arena in the turbulent year 1919 and how organic the initial attempts to destroy the traditional image of the Cossacks as loyal servants of the Sovereign were.

## 2. Materials and methods

The primary source employed in this work is “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” (Очерк политической истории..., 1919). Unfortunately, searching the State Archive of Rostov Oblast and the Ataman Chancery holding for documents relating to the preparation of this book has produced no results. Therefore, the present work will primarily focus on its ideological component, comparing it both with a set of earlier summarizing works on the history of Don Cossackdom (“Materials on the Geography and Statistics of Russia Gathered by General Staff Officers: The Land of the Don Host” (Krasnov, 1863), “A Statistical Description of the Province of the Don Cossack Host” (Nomikosov, 1884), and “The Pictures of the Past Quiet Don” (Krasnov, 1909)) and with the monograph “Russia and the Don” (Svatikov, 1924), which, essentially, further develops and substantiates most of the ideas voiced in “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host”.

Use was made of the historical-descriptive and historical-comparative methods, with a focus on identifying the key differences between the concepts discussed in “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” and the views common in early-20<sup>th</sup>-century Don historiography and also gaining insight into the key inconsistencies in the book.

## 3. Results

The very structure of “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” is of definite interest. Although this book was positioned as an essay on political history, two of its five chapters are devoted to some other narratives. The small fourth chapter, “The Don Economy” (eight pages) provides a brief account of the region’s geography and economy (Oчерк политической истории..., 1919: 108). The author explains the inclusion of this chapter into the book by the need to “show that the region has the physical (geographic) and economic conditions necessary for independent existence – thus, the Don needs a certain degree of self-reliance in order to put its natural riches to good use” (Oчерк политической истории..., 1919: 90). It is worth noting that prerevolutionary Don historiography is characterized by a close interrelationship between history, geography, and statistics. For instance, the major works of Cossack statisticians N.I. Krasnov and S.F. Nomikosov serve as historical-statistical descriptions of the Don region (Krasnov, 1863; Nomikosov, 1884). Accordingly, the inclusion of a geographic-economic chapter into “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host”, which may seem somewhat strange from a contemporary standpoint, was well in line with the distinctive Don historiographical tradition, within the frame of which history and geography have normally been considered in tandem. Interestingly, in the same year 1919, there came out, on the initiative of the Don authorities, the popular work “Essays on the Geography of the Almighty Don Host” by V.V. Bogachev, a manuscript later panned for mixing history and geography, with its author criticized for regularly drawing upon historical issues to the detriment of geographic ones (Bogachev, 1919: 517).

Note that the fifth, and final, chapter, “The Don’s Political Aspirations” (even smaller in volume – seven pages), has no direct analogues in earlier Don historiography, but it is well in line with the book’s propagandist purpose (Oчерк политической истории..., 1919: 109). It openly describes and substantiates the wishes of the Bogayevsky administration with regard to the future form of government in Russia. Naturally, none of the previous popular essays on Don history and historical-statistical descriptions of the Don region, most of which were created on commission from the government, was in a position to voice such wishes. Besides, Don ataman administrations (as of 1848, the post of Ataman was exclusively held by Regular Army generals who were not Cossacks by descent) had never publicly stressed the need to undertake nationwide reforms. At the level of Don public opinion, the first cases of discontent being vented at the political agenda in the Russian Empire were recorded no later than the 1860s, when I.K. Babst and K.P. Pobedonostsev spoke of the effect on the local public of “childish

daydreams and fairytales about the independence of particular tribes in the Russian state, linguistic and institutional autonomy, the federative principle, and so on and so forth” (Volvenko, 2015: 22). The demise of the Russian Empire and the creation of an electoral Host government were making it possible now to describe “the Don’s political aspirations” in an officially published popular essay on the region’s political history, as opposed to local opinion pieces, logically concluding it with a description of the desired political future for the Cossacks. The problem is that this move exposed the book’s propagandist orientation, making it clear that it was intended not just to familiarize the reader with the history of the Cossacks but spread in Western society certain views of the future of Russia, for which it would provide a historical rationale.

It is through this lens that one must view the structure of the historical chapters in this book. These chapters appear to be characterized by an obvious disproportion – whereas the history of the Don region in the period from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries is described in 35 pages (Chapter 1 – “The Ancient Don Volnitsa”; on a side note, the volnitsa was the Cossacks’ self-governing community), the period from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is covered in just 21 pages (Chapter 2 – “The Don as Part of the Russian Empire”), while the text devotes 29 pages to the period 1917–1919 (Chapter 3 – “The Revival of the Don”) (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 107-108). As evidenced even by its structure, the past serves in this text as the background and an explanation of the much more comprehensively described present, with the emphasis laid on the early history of Cossackdom to the detriment of the imperial period. This kind of logic behind the narrative is perfectly illustrated in the author’s small introductory section entitled ‘The Distinctive Position of the Cossacks among Other Population Groups in Russia’. It attempts to prove that, despite the fact that Cossackdom is ethnographically, and even physically, heterogeneous, the Cossacks are distinguished from all other population groups in Russia by “a love of freedom, but not the kind of love of freedom felt by a rebellious slave who identifies freedom with unbridled displays of base instincts and anarchy but the kind felt by a warrior and citizen” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 3-4). This “love of freedom”, on one hand, “finds an explanation in the origins and history of Cossackdom”. On the other hand, it is alleged to have given rise in the present to the Cossacks’ antagonism toward Bolshevism, of which much is said as early as the introductory section: “The Cossack Hosts were affected by Bolshevism only briefly, with a particularly short period of subjugation witnessed in the Don. It is particularly worth noting that a portion of the Don Host has rejected Bolshevism staunchly. It can be stated with confidence that the strife of the Don Cossacks against Bolshevism has been going on since the moment the Council of People’s Commissars let the hand of an international con artist reach out toward the patriarchal, freedom-loving Don” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 4). Thus, the book interprets Cossackdom’s past flat-out propagandistically – not as an intrinsically valuable phenomenon but as an explanation of its democratic traditions and contemporary struggle against the Bolsheviks.

So, it is even evidenced by the distinctive structure of “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” that this text is constructed as a flat-out propagandist work – compared, say, with “Essays on the Geography of the Almighty Don Host”, whose author, V.V. Bogachev, asseverated that he had always kept to “scholarly inquiry templates” and that his research plan was well in line with that of scholarly books describing other governorates in the Russian Empire (Bogachev, 1919: 517). Overall, prerevolutionary Don historiography is characterized by propaganda being mixed with science – Don authors tend to mix elements of propaganda into scholarly works, with numerous new facts even introduced at times. The only such author to admit to writing popular essays for patriotic purposes was A.N. Pivovarov, who acknowledged this in 1892 (Peretyatko, 2020: 11-12). The logic behind the production of scholarly-propagandist research, which has been traditional in Don historiography, is clearly explained by N.I. Krasnov via the following statement: “We do not invent or make things up but write based on real documents and, where possible, try to cite top Russian historians; yet we do pick the periods that are of relevance to our time and to our current concerns – so as to suggest a possible future based on what happened in the past” (Krasnov, 1881: 66). Thus, the texts of Don authors who pursued strictly patriotic goals (e.g., A.N. Pivovarov and P.N. Krasnov), likewise, employed a move utilized in earlier scholarly-propagandist works – whereby patriotic ideas deemed important by the author of such a work could be put across not directly, i.e. via the author’s personal statements, but via particular facts discussed in that work or the dialogue of its protagonists. Even in the final part of “The Pictures of the Past Quiet Don”, where P.N. Krasnov openly voices his views of Cossackdom, some of the ideas of

importance to him are put across as “great precepts” of the forefathers M.I. Platov and Ya.P. Baklanov, which he himself just humbly followed (in actual fact, there is no evidence in support of the existence of some of those “precepts”, which seem to have been made up by him personally) (Krasnov, 1909: 521-522). “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” stands out in this context from the Don historiographical tradition and is a lot easier to analyze, as it is not masqueraded as something scientifically objective, nor does its anonymous author have historical figures utter made-up statements – but directly and openly expresses his position.

To gain insight into this position, we will explore its key tenets by way of comprehensive analysis of “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” through the lens of early-20<sup>th</sup>-century Don historiography. The first part of this work will focus on the first three chapters, which cover the history of the Don Host from the time of its establishment to 1919.

#### *The Ancient Don Volnitsa*

Although this chapter is the largest, most of its content is not original and is not of much interest in the context of the present study. For the most part, it describes facts from the history of Cossackdom that were known pretty well by the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, like the conquest of Siberia by Yermak and the part played by the Don Cossacks during the Time of Troubles. The very chronological timeframe for the early history of the Don established by the author (from the emergence of Cossackdom to the suppression of the Bulavin rebellion (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 107) occupied a common place in Don historiography by the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Back in 1864, N.I. Krasnov wrote that Don history was divided into two distinct periods (“sections”): “The first section is the primal existence of a community governed by a local government – just under the auspices of the Russian government. The second section is the existence of a community wholly subordinate to Russia and its laws – with the Cossacks still enjoying some rights and benefits, which they are expected to willingly relinquish sooner or later” (Krasnov, 1864: 2). Note that, while N.I. Krasnov placed the Bulavin rebellion in the second “section”, ending the first one with the year 1700, he offers the caveat that this border is nominal and can be pushed to 1738, i.e. when the Host Assembly, arguably, ceased operation (Krasnov, 1864: 2).

Compared with earlier popular works, what is different about “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” is not so much the way facts from the early history of Cossackdom are described but the way such facts are assessed in it – it was not legal for many of the statements contained in the book to be published in the Russian Empire back then. This book says nothing about the primal, primitive existence of early Cossackdom. On the contrary, it states that at that time the form of government in the Don Host was the “genuine republic”, regarded “as the ideal polity by Rousseau” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 30). The work separately characterizes the status of this republic as a “semi-sovereign state” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 30). By contrast, the Russian Empire is described as a highly primitive state, one that does not match contemporary democratic ideals: “What Russia’s Petersburg rulers have wanted for it is not true unity, but uniformity. Their ideal of the polity can be said to have found reflection in the infamous Arakcheev “military settlements”; Russia is like an army barrack” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 38-39).

We will not dwell here upon how valid this view of Don history is. It is not completely false – the Don Host was earlier termed “an independent bellicose republic” by V.D. Sukhorukov, the man who laid the foundation for Don historiography (Sukhorukov, 2001: 36). What is flat-out propagandist in “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” in this case is the author’s assessments – the alleged “bellicose republic” of earlier Cossackdom, obviously, had little to do with the ideals of then-yet-to-be-born philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment, while “Russia’s Petersburg rulers” professed totally different state ideals, and much of that was far from the “Russia is like an army barrack” narrative (suffice it to recall the Great Reforms of Alexander II). Well, there is another thing about this book that is even worse from the standpoint of the impact of a propagandist narrative. The book’s assessments of early Don history do not match at all the factual material in the text tracing back to earlier works on the history of Don Cossackdom. Specifically, of the Russian tsars who reigned prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the book speaks negatively only of Boris Godunov (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 20). Mikhail Fedorovich, for instance, is said to have “pursued a cautious policy and governed wisely” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 31). A high valuation is also placed on Peter I’s capture of Azov (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 35). Consequently, what remains unclear is what was wrong with the gradually growing subjugation of the Don to those wise rulers. On top of that, a large portion of the chapter

“The Ancient Don Volnitsa” is devoted to the Cossacks’ military activities, which are described from a perfectly traditional Russian patriotic perspective, while the “genuine republic” of the early Don Host is discussed rather succinctly – in a mere one and a half pages (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 29-30). In other words, even the way the narrative is constructed, which is done in the vein of earlier monarchical texts, keeps conflicting with the author’s republican-democratic declarations.

Perhaps, this is best illustrated by the description in “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” of the uprising of Stepan Razin. Structurally, this description is close to the interpretation of this event in “A Statistical Description of the Province of the Don Cossack Host” by S.F. Nomikosov. It takes this prominent Don statistician just a couple of sentences to describe the uprising of S. Razin, the ataman of “the utterly destitute”. He speaks of it in a rather negative light and diminishes the role of the Don Cossacks in it as much as he can. He then dwells upon the Cossacks’ first official swearing of fealty to the Sovereign subsequent to the uprising (Nomikosov, 1884: 19). In “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host”, the Razin rebellion is, likewise, described briefly – it terms it “a brigand adventure” and “a rebellion of the utterly destitute” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 33). However, afterwards it all of a sudden states that “the image of brigand Razin in the public consciousness has changed”, with his movement being a “precursor to a great public protest against autocratic power” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 33). Next, the book provides a detailed description of the way the Cossacks swore fealty to the Sovereign. Note that it is stated that the Donians did it reluctantly – they wanted to serve Russia without swearing fealty to its Sovereign: “The thought of being subordinate and submissive must have made most of the freedom-loving Cossacks uneasy” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 34). The problem is that the book describes as the effects of the Cossacks’ swearing fealty to the Sovereign their numerous victories and their improved relationship with the central government – i.e., it turns out that the government was right when it imposed the swearing of fealty on the “freedom-loving Cossacks” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 34). So, the uprising of Stepan Razin was a bloody revolt of “the utterly destitute” – yet it entered public memory as a “great public protest against autocratic power”, and the Cossacks’ swearing of fealty to the Sovereign was incompatible with the Donians’ traditional love of freedom – yet a series of glorious victories ensued as a result.

Logical inconsistencies of this kind, which discredit the very idea of a democratic Cossackdom opposed to Russian despotism, are encountered in the first chapter of “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” on a regular basis. In point of fact, exclusive of the author’s declarative statements, the democratism of the Cossacks of the period between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and the despotism of the Russian government are covered in the text fairly negligibly, but it provides detailed descriptions of the Donians’ patriotic exploits in defense of Russia and Christianity, something that would have been impossible without help from the Russian tsars and something that formerly made up the basis of conservative-monarchical propaganda in the Cossack environment.

#### *The Don as Part of the Russian Empire*

This chapter reveals the book’s inconsistent tone to an even greater degree. Given the above-stated declarations by the author about an “army barrack-like Russia” being the ideal to the “Petersburg rulers”, this chapter was to become the key part of the book and prove the despotism of the imperial government and the democratism of Cossackdom via specific examples. This kind of logic behind the construction of a narrative is brilliantly illustrated in “Russia and the Don” by S.G. Svatikov – most of this book (38 out of the 53 chapters) is devoted to this specific period (Svatikov, 1924: 590-592). However, “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” not just says little about the imperial period of the existence of Don Cossackdom – nothing at all is written in it about the narratives that are central to the author’s declarations.

Content-wise, a large portion of the chapter “Don as Part of the Russian Empire” is again devoted to Cossackdom’s military exploits, which are interpreted in a traditional, monarchical-patriotic, vein. Specifically, in relation to the Cossacks’ exploits committed between 1812 and 1814, the book even mentions the Imperial Commendation from Alexander I (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 48). There is no criticism of imperial policies in relation to the Don. Of all the sovereigns from the period between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the text speaks negatively only of Paul I, which is done purely in the context of military history – the Cossack campaign to India masterminded by him was rated as a “pipe dream” that could have been born only in a “sick mind” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 45). The civil history of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Cossackdom is not

covered at all, not even as briefly as the early “genuine republic” of the Don Cossacks – subsequent to describing the Donians’ military exploits, the author immediately proceeds to discuss “major events in the civil life of the Cossacks in the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919: 51).

Incidentally, this fact does the best job of proving the compilatory nature of “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” content-wise. The thing is that as at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it is the civil history of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Don Host that had been relatively researched the least. All the existing texts on the subject, although not numerous anymore, interpreted the Don’s diminishing autonomy in that century as a positive phenomenon. Specifically, it is worth drawing upon the following description by N.I. Krasnov, who was quite liberal and never hesitated to criticize the imperial government, of the reforms that ensued following the suppression of the Pugachev rebellion: “The installation of a proper system of administration and governance eliminated the powers of the Host Assembly; verbal justice, some of which may have been unfair, was replaced with a sword of justice acting in accordance with the law; both public and private ownership rights could now be ensured” (*Krasnov, 1863: 59*). Thus, N.I. Krasnov and most of the Don prerevolutionary authors viewed the elimination of the Don’s autonomy and disbanding of the Host Assembly as civilization’s triumph over barbarism and a success for the better developed Russian Empire in the cause of installing a proper system of governance in the Don.

However, this way of looking at the events of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was incompatible with the book’s focus on the idea of the superiority of Cossack democratic institutions over Russia’s despotic ones. The first prominent text in historiography to speak of the erroneousness of the reduction of Don autonomy by the imperial government in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, actually, was the monograph “Russia and the Don” by S.G. Svatikov. Note, however, that S.G. Svatikov had admitted that a case for the idea of the early Cossack Hosts being full-blooded democratic republics was first made by him – if a bit earlier, in 1919, in some book entitled “The Political-Legal Environment in the Don in the Period between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries’, which is yet to be located by contemporary researchers (*Svatikov, 1924: V*). This raises the question of whether perhaps “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” is actually that very lost work by S.G. Svatikov, in which he first made a case for his new view of the history of Cossackdom, a work possibly published amid the pandemonium of the Civil War under a different title (these narratives will be discussed in greater detail in the second part of the present work). In any case, we can see that, being unable to find any descriptions of the civil system in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Don Host that would fit with his concept, the author of “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” simply omitted this subject, despite its significance. This is direct proof that, in discussing the Don’s history prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the author exclusively retold third-party texts, which resulted in a mismatch between descriptions and concepts in the book.

What stands out somewhat in “The Don as Part of the Russian Empire” is the chapter’s final part, which covers the events that took place after 1905. It contains very few specific facts, which is no wonder, considering that as at 1919 the events that took place after the Russo-Japanese War remained insufficiently conceptualized in Don historiography. At the same time, it contains a number of original assessments by the author that clearly are something that the Western reader would have liked to hear. Specifically, the Cossacks are said to have “shed their blood” in World War I not only for the “greatness and political might of Russia” but also for “our allies – the French and the English” (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919: 59); they are also said to have elected to the State Duma “representatives of pronouncedly democratic public currents fighting for the freedom and rights of the people” (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919: 58). Finally, it is noted separately that it was wrong to have regarded the Cossacks at the time of the First Russian Revolution as “enemies of the public movement whose actions encroached upon the rights of the people” for their part in suppressing the public unrest (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919: 58). According to “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host”, the Cossacks “did what all upright citizens should – they fought against anarchy, confronting a debauch of the populace’s dark instincts, something that does not build but destroys the state” (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919: 58). Arguably, it is in this part of the text, where the author’s declarations are not proved or disproved by specific facts, that the narrative of the book’s historical chapters is the least inconsistent.

#### *The Revival of the Don*

The work is not so much inconsistent in its description of contemporary events (the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War) as it is with regard to objective reality. It tends to handle facts in a

totally biased manner, with an obvious focus on presenting the Cossacks to the French and, especially, the English in as favorable a light as possible, including at the expense of the rest of the Russian people. For instance, the Provisional Government is characterized in the book as one “mainly formed of individuals totally unprepared for running the government and not endowed with a gift of statecraft” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 61). Even worse, the Petrograd Council of Workmen’s and Soldiers’ Deputies is presented as a collection of individuals who “are un-Russian, do not love Russia, and do not know her” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 62). This tandem is said to have lost a war about to be won through the efforts of the Western allies: “Thanks to the allies, the Russian army was brilliantly armed at the time; its artillery outnumbered that of the enemy, and it had much ammunition and endless reserves. The army’s morale was high – one last offensive was coming up aimed at overpowering the enemy and securing a victory for the countries of the Entente a year and a half earlier than it would actually happen and ensuring a worthy role for Russia in the victorious conclusion of the war” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 62). The text lays particular blame for the army’s collapse on “the ambitious mountebank Kerensky”, who is said to have personally demoralized the units at meetings (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 62).

So, all of Russia had descended into chaos and anarchy, while, according to this book, things were completely different with the Cossacks: “The Donians were building a temple of freedom when in Russia they were paying a boisterous homage to freedom at a saloon” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 63). In the Don they were doing a deliberate and competent job of “reviving the self-government of our forefathers”, and on the frontline the Cossacks were the only ones who did not seek to desert (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 63). In July 1917, the Cossacks even saved Russia from a Bolshevik coup (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 64). They were headed by the democratically elected A.M. Kaledin, a “truly exemplary citizen” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 63).

What was left to do was to explain the reasons behind the establishment of Soviet power in the Don in early 1918 and Ataman A.M. Kaledin’s shooting of himself to death. Here, we encounter another inconsistency in the book. While just a few pages earlier it states that the Cossacks remained impervious to the anarchy that had engulfed Russia, it all of a sudden then turns out that some of the Cossacks returning to the Don had actually been affected by “the poison of depravity” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 67). Tellingly, back in December 1917, “there were many units that remained more or less disciplined”, but it is not clear why the number of guerilla fighters really answerable to the Host administration was so small that “it was becoming impossible to engage in meaningful armed combat with the Bolsheviks” (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 68).

We will not dwell here upon the description in the book of the events of the Civil War that followed. Enough has been said to give one an idea of the way this text tends to interpret facts. Let us limit ourselves to one important and telling narrative – the one dealing with the Cossacks’ attitude toward the Central States and the Entente. The Krasnov government established subsequent to the liberation of the Don from the Bolsheviks is known to have had a pro-German orientation, which was not something for the British or French reader to cheer about. Below is an outline of this book says on this.

“The Don, which received technical aid from the Germans to be able to sustain its existence, nurture the nascent forces of the new Russia (Volunteer Army), and fight the Bolsheviks, remained loyal to its allies in the world war. The Donians’ behavior can be confidently characterized as staying *loyal to the allies*. If it had not been for this wise policy, the struggle against Bolshevism either would have withered away altogether or would have been still in its early stage, as a consequence of which the Council of People’s Commissars would have been in a much stronger position than it is now and would have enabled Germany to refuse to sign a peace treaty, something it wished to do in reliance on assistance from Soviet Russia. And, had the Council of People’s Commissars not been in a hopeless position itself, it would have done Germany a favor in its struggle against the Entente”, says the text (Ocherk politicheskoi istorii..., 1919: 76). In other words, under this inconsistent narrative, the Don Host appeared to be receiving help from the Germans in the interests of their opponents, the English and the French, because this help was used for fighting the Bolsheviks, who, in turn, allegedly were loyal allies of the Germans. Apparently, the question of why the Germans would want to help the Don Host to fight their own allies is not raised in the book. At the same time, the Cossacks are said to have played a decisive



role in the signing of the Armistice of Compiègne – it appears that, if it had not been for their success in the struggle against the Bolsheviks, the latter would have fought alongside Germany, making World War I last longer!

“An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” openly praises “the wise and ingenious policy of Don Ataman Krasnov”, who supplied German weapons to the Volunteer Army, which was too sensitive to engage in a direct relationship with the Germans (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919: 73). Yet it is stated in another place that the Don Host was surrounded exclusively by “either the Bolshevik enemy or states servile to the Central Powers” (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919: 76). Comparing P.N. Krasnov’s policy with those of other pro-German governments, the book’s author tries to prove that this policy was characterized by relative freedom and required “much courage” (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919: 76). P.N. Krasnov’s leaving his post of Ataman was attributed not to his pro-German position but “some tensions between Don and Volunteer Army commanders” (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919: 76).

This brevity contrasts with the text’s detailed descriptions of the activity of the British missions in Southern Russia. Overall, the British intervention is covered in the book in the following four chapters: “England’s Help”, “The Mission of General Poole: The Disappointment with the Allies”, “The Mission of General Briggs: The First Help”, and “The Assembly’s Gratitude to England” (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919: 80-81, 88). Gratitude to the British government and British officers is expressed in these sections regularly (e.g., “A major factor in the further successful development of the events was help from our allies” (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919: 80); “The direct (material) and indirect importance of this help is very high – it occupies a significant place among the reasons behind the successes achieved by the Don Army last spring” (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919: 81)). This was well in line with the policy of Ataman A.P. Bogayevsky. The book provides a detailed account of a special ordinance by the Host Assembly. This directive, which is of importance in the context of the present work’s subject matter, is described in the text as follows: “The ordinance defines the meaning of the struggle against Bolshevism and the significance of the help coming from the allied democracies. According to this directive, “English weapons in the hands of the Don Cossacks will help to advance the common historical ideals of democracy and freedom”. The English democracy will know that the Don’s struggle against Soviet power is waged not in the name of reaction and restoration but in the name of attaining a genuine democracy, living up to the precepts of the ancient Don volnitsa, and advancing the historical “ideals of democracy and freedom” common for the British and the Cossacks (*Ocherk politicheskoi istorii...*, 1919: 88).

The Bogayevsky government wished to position itself in the international arena as committed to European democracy and oriented toward the British Empire. However, it tried to make it look like that was not something that had come about situationally by 1919, subsequent to the demise of the conservative pro-German Krasnov government, but was something inherent to the Cossacks historically, having to do with “the common ideals of democracy and freedom shared by the British and the Cossacks”. Consequently, all the incoherencies and clearly inconclusive interpretations in “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” were associated with the desire to prove the historical democratism of the Cossacks, thwarted by the despotism of the Russian Empire. Basically, it was all about building a propagandist image that would place the Don government (and all other Cossack governments during the Civil War) in a special position relative to the Western allies – above all, the Cossacks were to be presented as ideological allies of the democratic Entente.

Nonetheless, the image of Cossackdom created in “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” came out quite underwhelming. Technically, the concepts of the “genuine republic” of the early Don Host and historical Cossack democracy did have some potential, both propagandist and scholarly. However, as at 1919 there simply existed no substantial research on Don history conducted in correspondence with these concepts, so the author mainly retold in the work’s historical part the texts of his predecessors in his own words, supplementing that information with his own assessments, which tend to be inconsistent with what happened.

#### 4. Conclusion

The government headed by A.P. Bogayevsky wished to position itself in the mind of the European reader as an ideological, rather than situational, ally of the Entente. “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host”, intended for this reader specifically, paints the

Cossacks as committed republicans and bearers of the same “ideals of democracy and freedom” as the British. The entire history of the Don Host, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to 1919, is interpreted in this particular way. On top of that, it is alleged that it was with the aim of upholding their ideals that ever since 1917 the Cossacks had consistently fought against the Bolsheviks, trying to both defend their lofty democratic traditions from the unruly mob and protect their ideological allies, the democratic English and French, from the Bolsheviks allied with the monarchal Germans.

It was, thus, perfectly natural for a text written from that kind of standpoint to be strictly propagandist and to badly distort (or, at best, simplify) real facts to suit the political trend of the day.

Besides, in 1919, when “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” was created, there simply existed no summarizing research works on the history of Cossackdom written from the standpoint of democratic and republican traditions. By contrast, the tradition of popular historical essays on the history of Cossackdom, pervaded by a conservative-monarchical spirit, had been around for several decades by then. Having said that, it looks like the author of “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” had not conducted any research of his own amid the Civil War and simply retold existing texts and supplemented that information with his own assessments. As a consequence, his narrative turned out to be highly incoherent and inconclusive. While these are popular monarchical essays and there are detailed descriptions of the Don Cossacks’ military exploits committed for the glory of Russian monarchs, the author’s assessments are not always well-aligned with that content, as they tend to deal with a narrative that factually is represented in the text quite poorly – the one about the democratic ideals of Don Cossackdom. Nevertheless, later on, the major ideas proposed in “An Essay on the Political History of the Almighty Don Host” would be picked up and finely elaborated by S.G. Svatikov. This will be discussed in the second part of the present work.

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