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The Freemasons made a huge contribution to building the Ukrainian nation

The Freemasons appeared in Ukraine during the times of Bohdan Khmelnytskyi. Scholars affirm that Colonel Yuriy Nemyrych, who was the commander of the artillery under Khmelnytskyi, joined a Masonic lodge in Cambridge while studying in England. By the way, many Protestants served in Khmelnytskyi's army. Nemyrych himself was a Calvinist. The wife of the next Hetman Ivan Vyhovskiy belonged to the same faith. Nemyrych was Vygovskiy's closest companion-in-arms and later earned the post of general scribe (foreign minister).

Ivan Kotlyarevskiy

Freemasonry found fertile ground in Ukraine as it was traditionally widespread in countries whose histories were associated with the struggle against the Catholic Church. The Freemasons see themselves as the spiritual successors of the Order of the Knights Templar, which was destroyed as a result of collusion between the French king and the Pope. Books by the German mystic Jacob Boehme were widely popular during the Hetmanshchyna times (Free Cossack Republic). In those very same years in the principality of Muscovy reading books by Boehme, which were part of the initiation course for Freemasons, was punishable by burning at the stake.

Purely Masonic love

In Russian Masonic tradition it is believed that Tsar Peter I was initiated a member of the Freemasons. There is a version according to which the tsar belonged to the same Masonic lodge as Ukrainian Hetman Ivan Mazepa. The lodge was called "Hannibal to Victory" and was based in St. Petersburg. For this reason the betrayal of Hetman Mazepa was not simply the betrayal of the emperor. While a vassal fleeing to a new suzerain was quite common at the time, the hetman's switch to the side of Charles XII was considered a breach of the principles of fraternity. Be that as it may, there are no documents confirming this Masonic legend. The Masonic Lodge in St. Petersburg was first mentioned in 1732.

In Ukraine Masonic lodges began to emerge in Podillya, the northern region of Ukraine, in the first half of the 18th century. The most active Freemasons at the time were of Polish origin as they had lost their statehood. The 18th and beginning of the 19th

centuries – the times of Oginsky, Czartoryski, Potocki, Branicky and Ponjatowski – was the era of the great Polish masons.

The National Sofiyivka Park in Uman became the monument to those times. This masterpiece of landscape art is not only testimony to the passionate love of General Stanislaw Potocki of a Greek girl named Sophia, who was the wife of the Commander of Kherson commandant Count Josef Witte. Sofiyivka Park is also a monument to Sophia, the Goddess of Wisdom, whom the Freemasons worshiped. Tourists rarely notice that the territory of the park accommodated sites for Masonic meetings with all the attributes: caves for meditation, places for hacking a symbolic stone truncated by the Column of Hiram named after a biblical character that was considered the founder of the order. "The Island of Love" is adapted for ritual feasts, "agapes", which, in fact, means "love".

Hryhoriy Kvitka-Osnovianenko

What does Ukraine mean?

At the end of the 18th century lodges opened in Ukraine, in particular, in Poltava and Kharkiv. Among the thinkers donning Masonic aprons were the creator of the literary Ukrainian language Ivan Kotlyarevskiy, the founder of the Kharkiv State University Vasyl Karazin and the writers Hryhoriy Kvitka-Osnovianenko and Petro Hulak-Artemovskiy. The correspondence of famous Ukrainian philosopher Hryhoriy Skovoroda depicts the atmosphere of the times. One of the philosopher's letters alludes to the "Martinists", one of the branches of Masonry that tried to recruit him. But after having familiarized himself with their ideas he failed to find in them a rational principle.

According to one popular hypothesis, the word "Ukraine" was conceived by the Masons and was actively promoted by them. Aspiring to an ideal world the Masons often resorted to half-forgotten historic names and allegories. At the time, historians wracked their brains over a chronicle of 1187 in which it was written: "Prince Hleb passed away and after him all of Oukraina mourned". The Masons chose the obscure word "Oukraina" as the name of an ideal country on the lands of Malorossiya (Little Russia).

Earlier on, the Masons invented the name America. The Templars and later the early Masons called a mythical country in the East as Merica, considered to be the home of wisdom and truth. The land discovered by Columbus was named A-Merica, meaning a land opposite to Merica. The legend is that the New World was allegedly named America after the Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci is exactly the opposite – Vespucci was nicknamed after the new continent.

A century later the Masons began creating their own Ukraine with the priority being spiritual education and only later its geographic name. So, it is not without reason that

the poet Taras Shevchenko called his thoughts "go to Ukraine" in his famous poem Dumy (Thoughts). Shevchenko, Panteleymon Kulish and Mykola Kostomarov were suspected of involvement in the Masonic movement, of which the St. Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood they belonged to was a visible part. Shevchenko prophesied the emergence of Ukraine's own leader like George Washington, who will introduce a "new and righteous law". There is no need to remind that the first U.S. president was a prominent Freemason.

Legend has it that Hulak-Artemovskiy wrote before his death a draft of an ideal constitution of Ukraine and bequeathed that the manuscript be buried with him in his coffin. He did not believe that Little Russia (Ukraine) would ever be ready to adopt the Masonic ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity.

Petro Hulak-Artemovskiy

People of peace

Ukrainian Freemasonry existed in the underground. In 1822, Tsar Alexander I, who several years earlier had joined a Masonic lodge in Warsaw, suddenly decided to ban freemasonry. Soon after came the Decembrist uprising in 1825 in St. Petersburg, the insurrection of the Chernihiv Regiment in 1826 in Vasylkiv near Kyiv and the Polish mutiny in 1830-1831. They were all organized by the Freemasons. Seeing as all of the Decembrists were Freemasons attending Masonic lodges became dangerous.

Meanwhile, Freemasonry was thriving in Western Ukraine. Priests attended meetings in international lodges together with lawyers, writers and representatives of other classes. It was the Masonic influence that shaped the revolutionary movement in the 1870's. Writer Ivan Franko began his career in politics in the Masonic lodge. His poem "Kamenyari" became a true anthem for the movement of the Freemasons in Ukraine.

At the start of the 20th century Masonic lodges were activated in Russia. They played an active role in the events of 1905. Indeed, the Cadet Party and the Octobrists were largely made up of Masons. Being a Mason was in vogue to the point where the Provisional Government headed by Prince Lvov, which came into power in Russia in February 1917, was totally made up of Masons.

The Freemasons also formed the foundation of the leadership in the Ukrainian Central Rada. Baron Theodore Steinheil, Professor Mykhailo Hrushevskiy and journalist Symon Petliura were brethren of the Kyiv St. Vladimir's Lodge headquartered on the corner of Khreshchatyk and Prorizna streets.

Modern Ukrainian Freemasonry

The turbulent years of Ukraine's first independence passed under the banner of Freemasonry. Member of the Masonic Order Skoropadskiy unseated his fellow member Hrushevskiy in April 1918 and eight months later Petliura overthrew Skoropadskiy. In the end, independence was lost and Freemasonry was banned by the Soviet authorities. Squabbles continued in emigration far away from Ukraine. In a letter written by a humble station clerk named Sydor Mokrotun and published by a newspaper in the early 1920s in France, the author wrote to Simon Petliura: "You, the hangman of Ukraine, leave the Lodge!"

Today, the Medal of Honor – a necklace of the Grand Master Simon Petliura, is stored in the Kyiv Lodge "Three Columns". It was transferred to Ukraine by brothers of the Paris lodge "Vox Ukrainae", the keeper of Ukrainian Masonic rituals and traditions.

In 1993, Masonic lodges underwent a revival with the founding of "Try Kolonny" in Kyiv, "Phoenix of Ukraine" in Kharkiv, "Kamenyar" and "Svitlo" in Lviv, "Zolota Akatsiya" in Odesa and "Imkhotep" in Ivano-Frankivsk. Today, Ukrainian Freemasonry is united in the Grand Lodge of Ukraine. There is no information available about the involvement of Ukrainian politicians in this movement.

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