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**A History of the Cossack Assembly
And Its Arthurian Connection**

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**A History of the Cossack Assembly
And Its Arthurian Connection**

by

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Dedication

To Kate Zazulina for her constant love, support, and encouragement.

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Abstract

A History of the Cossack Assembly And Its Arthurian Connection

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The main intent of this thesis is to review the history and roots of the Cossack assembly, and to analyze its connection to western civilization. In terms of the roots of the Cossack assembly, this thesis will explore the Scytho-Sarmatian, the early Slavic, the Novgorodian, as well as the Turkic-Mongol influences that led to its creation. While the Zaporozhian Cossack assembly will be discussed, the primary focus of the history of the Cossack assembly section will deal with the Don Cossacks' assembly, since the practices and traditions inherent in this structure are representative of most Cossack groups. In addition to reviewing the Sarmatian Hypothesis, this thesis will also examine the connections and parallels between the Arthurian legends, the ancient Iranian governing practices, and the Cossack assembly. It is thus hoped that this multileveled analysis will generate a comprehensive portrait of the Cossack assembly and, through its ancient Iranian predecessor's connection to the Arthurian Round Table, prompt a reconsideration of analytical approaches to both the foundations of Cossack and western democracy.

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INTRODUCTION

The Cossacks are nothing if not some of history's finest warriors. Unfortunately, they are rarely considered to be anything outside of this militaristic sphere, especially in terms of western scholarship. In fact, the Cossacks, who are a distinct ethnic and cultural group within what is now Russia and Ukraine, are much more than the blood thirsty mounted warriors of legend. They have a unique cultural heritage that contains unique songs, literature, ethnic composition, linguistic history, an Orthodox religious tradition, as well as other notably elements. Perhaps the most interesting of these cultural characteristics is the historic democratic structure of their communities. Indeed, the Cossack assembly (known as the *Krug* or *Rada*) is truly a unique component of their cultural background; however, one must analyze it in three distinct areas, in order to truly understand and appreciate its history. First, noting that the Cossacks first appeared as an identifiable group roughly within the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is important to understand the ethnohistorical foundations of the Cossack assembly, beginning with its possible ancient Iranian roots. Second, it is important to have a grounded understanding of the history of the Cossack assembly from the late fifteenth century up through the present day. Third, taking their history into consideration, it may be beneficial to discuss how the ethnohistorical foundations of the Cossack assembly may have also played a role in the development of western civilization, especially in terms of the Arthurian tradition. The goal of this thesis is to present a reasonably thorough ethnohistorical account of the Cossack assembly by reviewing and analyzing the three previously mentioned areas.

In terms of the first component of the analysis, which will be reviewed in Section 1, the primary objective here will be to attempt to trace the roots of the Cossack assembly as far back as realistically possible. Utilizing linguistic, religious, and historical sources, as well as mythological references, the analysis will begin by reviewing the possible role that the ancient Iranian peoples may have played in laying the groundwork for the Cossack assembly. Following this, a discussion will be presented that reviews the role of the Slavs and of the Republic of Novgorod in the solidifying the democratic traditions of the Cossacks. Finally, the possible influence of the Turkic-Mongol Golden Horde will be reviewed as a possible contributor to the Cossack democratic tradition, especially in terms of its military democratic component. Moreover, the primary purpose of this section will be to address the ethnohistorical circumstances that contributed to the establishment of the Cossack assembly.

Regarding the second component of the analysis, which will be discussed in Section 2, it will be primary concerned with the history of the Cossack assembly itself. While the Zaporozhian Cossacks' assembly, the *Rada*, will be discussed, the primary focus of this section will be on the Don Cossacks' assembly, the *Krug*, largely because it contains the practices that would come to categorize most Cossack governing structures. From the sixteenth century through the present day, each major period of the assembly's history will be charted, with characteristic practices and relevant events being highlighted, in order to underscore the persistence of the Don Cossacks' democratic mentality. In sum, the primary purpose of this section is to demonstrate that the democratic mentality and governing apparatus of the Don Cossacks, which Section 1

shows to have been born from a complex ethnohistorical process, has both a fascinating history and has persisted, in spite of a number of historical trials, down to the present day.

The purpose of the third and final component of this analysis, which will be highlighted in Section 3, is to review and interpret a possible connection between the governing structures of the ancient Iranian peoples, the Cossacks, and the Arthurian legends. In order to do this, this area of analysis will begin by examining the Sarmatian Hypothesis, noting the possible connections between the ancient Iranian peoples, notably the Alans and Iazyges, and various elements in medieval British culture, notably the Arthurian legends. Following this examination, the Arthurian Round Table will be compared with available information, which will be largely acquired from the *Nart Sagas*, on the ancient Iranian governing structure. The differences and similarities between the Arthurian Round Table and the Cossack assembly will then be explored, in order to underscore the possibility that both bodies may share a common ancestor. In sum, the general purpose of this section will be to highlight the historical connection between the Cossack assembly and the Arthurian Round Table, in order to posit that the foundations of the Cossack assembly and some key historical elements of western civilization are related. With this purpose in mind, the general objective of this specific section is to generate a previously unconsidered dynamic through which both western civilization and Cossack democracy can be comparatively understood.

The goal with all three components of this analysis is to promote serious scholarly interest in the Cossack assembly. There is a desperate need for further research on the history of the Cossack assembly, since there is a general absence of in depth analysis, especially in the

West, on the subject. Additionally, prior to this thesis, there were only a few attempts at pinpointing the roots of the assembly of the Cossacks. The information, which will be highlighted in this thesis, seems to indicate that the Cossack assembly did not simply materialize out of thin air, although some historians may believe something along these lines. Furthermore, through the previously stated three pronged analysis, this thesis seeks: to fill in some of the gaps in our understanding of the Cossack assembly's origin, to provide a comprehensive general history of the assembly, and to review the assembly's possible connection to parts of the historical basis for modern western civilization. It is hoped that this approach will generate further interest, research, and scholarly publications in the largely neglected area of Cossack self-governing structures.

SECTION 1: THE HISTORICAL FOUNDATION OF THE COSSACK ASSEMBLY

I. Section Introduction -

What are the roots of the Cossack democratic system? Were there precursor democratic bodies that existed prior to the Cossack assembly that contributed to its development? Or did the practice of the Cossack assembly simply spring out spontaneously as some historians contend. For instance, the notion of the spontaneous development of the Cossack assembly is noted by Russian historian I.I. Zolotarev, who states that although the democratic ideas of Novgorod had vanished by the late fifteenth century, the democratic “principle had reemerged on the banks of the Don by way of the [practices] of the Cossacks” a century later.¹ This idea of spontaneous reemergence of cultural practices, such as the Cossack assembly, is expounded upon by Adam Yuet Chau, who notes that various traditions (in this case – in terms of religious traditions) can “endure suppressions, lie dormant for a long time, go underground, minimalize, and reemerge in new forms in response to new historical conditions.”² Certainly this spontaneous reemergence is conceivable, especially noting the prevalence of village *Veche* (assemblies) across medieval *Rus*’ between the destruction of the Novgorod *Veche* in the late fifteenth century to the first reliable mention of the Cossack assemblies in the early sixteenth century. Further, the possibility exists that the democratic practices that would come to characterize the Cossack assembly were simply preserved during this interim period at the local *Veche* level, which is the widely held belief amongst many contemporary Cossack historians. However, nothing that Zolotarev does not

1 Ivan I. Zolotarev, *Donskie Kazaki I Gosudarstvennaja Služba* (Rostov-na-Donu: RostlzdaT, 2001), 23.

2 Adam Yuet. Chau, *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 6.

really take the Zaporozhian Cossacks' development into consideration, there is a great deal of compelling evidence that seems to point to a much different and far more complex path in the development of Cossack democracy in the Don region.³ Zolotarev, like many Russian historians, prefers to emphasize Russian related factors over the non-Russian elements, thus painting a skewed history of the Cossack assembly. Conjunctively, the question as to what chain of preceding practices may have led to the foundation of the Novgorod *Veche* must also be explored, since it is seldom discussed in terms of the development of the Cossack assembly. Moreover, the purpose of this analysis is to chart, as much as reasonably possible due to the absence of a complete historical record, a comprehensive ethnohistorical foundation of the Zaporozhian and Don Cossack assembly from its earliest possible Scytho-Sarmatian phase, to the early Slavic tribal democracies, to the Novgorod Republic, and to the military councils of the Golden Horde.

II. The Sarmatians, Scythians, and their Mythology –

Without being extremely unreasonable, it seems that the farthest back one can trace the roots of the Cossack assembly would be to the time of the ancient Iranian peoples. Those peoples are generally referred to by historians as the Sarmatians (also sometimes called Sauromatians), who inhabited what is now Southern Russia, the Caucasus, and Ukraine from 600 BCE to about 450 AD, and the Scythians, who, apart from also living in the previously mentioned regions,

³ The development of Don and Zaporozhian Cossack democratic traditions will be in focus of this analysis, since they were the first two Cossack groups to form, and the first two that were recorded as having nomadic democratic structures. Further, while other Cossack groups developed later, such as the Kuban and Orenburg Cossacks, their self-governing structures were acquired from these initial groups. Hence, in order to best trace the origin of Cossack democracy, one must explore primarily on what led to its initial acquisition by the Don and Zaporozhian Cossacks.

existed from about 700 BCE to 300 BCE. However, in terms of available historical records, these classifications should be viewed as blanket terms at best, since they were often applied quite liberally to the various groups native to the previously mentioned regions by Greek and Roman historians. Further, it is often believed that some of these historians may have even mislabeled or misidentified these groups. This point is best highlighted through the historical account by Greek historian Hippocrates, who noted in the fourth century BCE that: “In Europe there is a Scythian race, called Sauromatae, which inhabits the confines of the *Palus Maeotis*, and is different from all other races.”⁴ For our purposes, it should be noted that it is commonly accepted that “‘*Sauromatae*’ is a variant spelling of ‘*Sarmatae*,’” although this isn’t necessarily what the Sarmatians called themselves.⁵ On a side note, it should be stated that the *Palus Maetis* is the Latin name for the Sea of Azov. Despite the fact that they were likely similar in terms of culture, language, and traditions, the Sarmatians were not themselves Scythians, who appeared earlier. Further, while they were culturally distinct, as is often noted by archeologists,⁶ these similarities likely prompted misidentifications due to the fact that “as the Sarmatian tribes moved into ‘Scythia,’ in South Russia, there was a tendency to confuse them with Scythians.”⁷ This problem of mislabeling the Sarmatians and Scythians was quite pronounced with historians beginning in the third century BCE:

4 Hippocrates and Conrad Fischer, *The Corpus* (New York: Kaplan Pub., 2008), 135.

5 Richard Brzezinski and Mariusz Mielczarek, *The Sarmatians, 600 B.C.-A.D. 450* (Oxford: Osprey Military, 2002), 5.

6 The archeological record of both Scythians and Sarmatians underscores a cultural difference between these two peoples.

7 Craig M. White, *The Great German Nation: Origins and Destiny* (AuthorHouse, 2007), 87.

To the ancient Greeks the Scythians, Sarmatians, Germans, and the Goths were the remote northern races of antiquity. Geographically near to one another, they were often grouped together under the term “Scythians,” which by the third century B.C.E. no longer had an ethnic or national connotation and had come to designate the peoples of the remote north.⁸

It should be noted here that the Goths and the Germans were not ancient Iranian peoples, and thus their possible inclusion in various historical records does substantially muddy the modern historian’s ability to make reasonable deductions about both these peoples’ way of life and their governing structure.

The historical use of the term Sarmatian itself is also problematic, since there were a number of inter-related Sarmatian subgroups that shared a similar cultural and linguistic tradition, yet were distinct. These subgroups included the nomadic Alans, Roxolani, Iazyges, Arosi, as well as others. In addition, these nomads pressured each-other “in search of new pastures” in the regions that are now Ukraine, Southern Russia, Crimea, and the Caucasus.⁹ Perhaps as a result of their proximity, most historical accounts tend to bundle these groups together, so it is quite difficult to examine the individual cultural attributes (including the intricacies of their governing apparatuses) of each group, and there is generally no discernible way to accurately differentiate between them with one hundred percent certainty. Furthermore, since it is difficult to yield reliable historical results from the available records, it might be

⁸ David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 43.

⁹ Kathryn Hinds, *Scythians and Sarmatians* (New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2010), 50.

beneficial to explore the surviving remnants of the ancient Iranian mythology, in order to make reasonable deductions regarding their self-governing structures.

The *Nart Sagas*, which represent a category of ancient mythology passed down amongst the Ossetians (decedents of the ancient Sarmatian tribe - the Alans) as well as other various peoples, may provide a helpful conduit for this analysis. Within the *Nart Sagas*, as John Colarusso notes, there is an undeniable “ancient Iranian core” in the various tales.¹⁰ Even the word Nart itself is widely accepted to have come from an ancient Iranian language, where it probably meant man, “man of heroic mould, the hero, titan or giant,”¹¹ although the precise origin and meaning of the word remains “obscure.”¹² It is likely, considering this implied heroism behind the word Nart, that there was an importance placed on warfare in Scytho-Sarmatian societies, which, as will be stated, may support the idea that their governing structure was a nomadic democracy. Still, it is important to note that the *Nart Sagas* themselves constitute a window, albeit an imperfect one, into the culture and the beliefs of the ancient Sarmatians and Scythians, and possibly highlight the way they governed their communities. It is this window that may allow us to uncover key similarities between the Cossack assembly and the practices of the ancient Iranian peoples.

Within the *Nart Sagas*, there are a number of references to a governing body, which, apart from arriving at decisions through consensus of male community members, could be a

10 John Colarusso, *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus: Myths and Legends from the Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz, and Ubykhs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 6.

11 H. W. Bailey, "Analecta Indoscythica," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1953, 6.

12 Denis Sinor, *Studies in Finno-Ugric Linguistics: In Honor of Alo Raun* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1997), 107.

representation (or at least a partial representation) of a governing council used by ancient Iranian peoples. This body is referred to as the Nart Council (Circassian: *Nart Hase*), which is generally considered by scholars to have been the ancient body assigned “to deliberate a course of action in the face of external threat, or to debate contentious problems” in the community.¹³ Although this author is by no means acknowledging any truth to the *Nart Sagas*, the Nart Council exists prominently in most of the variations of the *Nart Sagas* (including the Circassian and Ossetian variants) possibly indicating that similar practices were the norm for the ancient Iranian peoples.

Interestingly, many of the practices of the Nart Council resemble those that characterize the Cossack assembly. Notably, the Nart Council was shown in some instances to act as an arbitrator for the community, as is clear in the following example:

They consulted together, but when no one openly confessed his desire to have it, they decided that the problem be presented to the Nart council to determine who should be the owner of the fur. So they skinned the black fox, and all three Narts returned home with the skin ... The men went before the Nart council and told their stories. The council gave the fur to one of them, but to whom was the fox fur given?¹⁴

This function as communal arbitrator seems quite similar to the activities of the Don Cossack *Krug* (assembly), which also “arbitrated disputes between Cossacks,” notably in the sixteenth

¹³ Amjad Jaimoukha, "The Hearth Tree Circassian Cultural Miscellany," *Jaimoukha.synthasite.com*, 2009, 276, accessed November 2011, jaimoukha.synthasite.com/resources/Circassian_Journal.doc.

¹⁴ John Colarusso, *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus: Myths and Legends from the Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz, and Ubykhs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 90-1.

and seventeenth centuries.¹⁵ Another notable attribute of the Nart Council was its apparent role as a judicial body of the community. In an example that seems notably similar to the punishment bestowed upon the Norse God Loki in the Norse Myths as well as the punishment enacted upon the Greek God Prometheus by Zeus in Greek Mythology, the Nart Council punished the giant for his crimes against Lady Isp.¹⁶

[Nagurashko] brought [the giant] to the Nart council and set him before them... The Narts were angered and said, “We should not show mercy on him who showed no mercy to Lady Isp, who behaved disgracefully, who committed one hundred sins.” So they resolved to fashion a chain...to fetter him in it, and to beset him with one hundred torments to endure. During the day they set the sun upon his face so that it would bake his visage and dry out his mouth. At night he would have moisture so as not to die, but again during the day he would suffer thirst and have only dried *kasha* and barley to eat, which they would put before him. They lifted him up on the mountain brow and nailed him there so that other evildoers would see him as a warning.¹⁷

However, unlike the other mythological variants of this type story, the *Nart Sagas* version is the only one in which the punishment seems to have been decided and implemented by consensus,

15 Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 27.

16 Loki, for his various misdeeds, was bound and forced to endure venom being poured on him till the end of time. Prometheus was forced to endure being eaten by birds during the day, brought back to perfect health at night, only for the process to occur again ever subsequent day (Peretti 45).

17 John Colarusso, *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus: Myths and Legends from the Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz, and Ubykhs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 105.

rather than by the decrees of the all-powerful Zeus or Odin. The differentiation in this story from the Greek or Norse variants seems to point to the idea that rather than one leader (such as a king, chief, etc.) doling out punishments, the ancient Iranian peoples may have adjudicated various matters by consensus. Thus, it seems reasonable to infer that at least some of the councils of the ancient Iranian peoples may have served as a judicial body as well, which will be discussed in more detail in Section 2, was also one of the roles of the Cossack assembly.

It should also be mentioned that the Nart Council was probably not a well-ordered modern parliamentary assembly. In reality it was seemingly much like the Cossack assembly, with multiple instances pointing to it having been a very boisterous council complimented by food and drink. The wild nature of their debates is seemingly captured in the following passage from *The Ballad of Sawseruguo*, which is a tale within the *Nart Sagas*.

I shall tell you what I have heard
When I went to the Nart council.
I encountered a great battle there.¹⁸

Based on various passages like the one above, it would seem that, as in the Cossack assemblies, the ancient Iranian assembly may have had very lively debates, which were perhaps partially fueled by alcohol. If it was anything like the Cossack assembly, it is possible that “half or at the very least a third of the members [were] either tipsy or hungover” during the council sessions.¹⁹

18 John Colarusso, *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus: Myths and Legends from the Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz, and Ubykhs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 118.

19 Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 27.

Coupled with this social aspect, both the Cossack assembly and those of the ancient Scytho-Sarmatian peoples were probably best described as nomadic steppe democracies, which, by definition, may have contained a militaristic component as well. This militaristic component of the Nart Council will be flushed out in more detail in Section 3, however, it should be noted here that it might have influenced similar practices amongst their inheritors. Thus, the development of the Cossack assembly doesn't end with its roots in ancient Iranian democratic councils; rather there is more to its development, especially in terms of the influence of the early Slavs.

III. Sarmatian Influences, Early Slavic Tribes, and the Novgorod Republic -

While it is difficult to develop a solid picture of the exact methods of governance used by the ancient Iranian peoples, notably the Sarmatians, it is more practical to conceptualize the governing practices of the early Slavs, notably due to a larger body of surviving evidence. Emphasizing an ethnohistorical link between these two peoples, although there is still much debate on this issue, experts have “turned up evidence of the seminal influence of the Sarmatians on Slav language, art, and religion.”²⁰ In terms of both language and religion, the most visible evidence of this influence is present in many Slavic religious words, such as *bog* (God) and *rai* (paradise), which some linguists say are “Sarmato-Iranian by derivation.”²¹ These connections are further pronounced in terms of the pre-Christian Slavic mythology, which contains a number of interesting parallels with ancient Iranian mythology.

20 Richard Brzezinski and Mariusz Mielczarek, *The Sarmatians, 600 B.C.-A.D. 450* (Oxford: Osprey Military, 2002), 39.

21 Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland : In Two Volumes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 37.

One such connection, which is often seen in the company of the fertility goddess *Mokosh*, is visible in “the bird-dog *Simorg*,” and is a mythological creature of ancient Iranian origin.²² According to H.T. Norris, *Simorg* was, “in the mythology of the Sarmatians,” a winged monster that protected the tree that produced the seed for every plant.²³ In ancient Slavic mythology, *Simorg* is referred to as *Simargl*, and, having very similar attributes to its ancient Iranian counterpart, was even depicted in “a group of idols” erected on a hill near the palace of Prince Vladimir of Kiev.²⁴ In addition to *Simargl*, we also have *Khors*, a sun deity of the ancient Slavs whose name is likely of Iranian origin, especially when one notes that the name *Khors* itself is probably “based on *Khursld* [*Khurshld*], the Iranian name for the personified sun (*khur* = sun).”²⁵ In conjunction, as noted by A. P. Vlasto, these previously mentioned deities (in addition to others) “belong in their attributes, and partly in their names, to Iranian religious conceptions which gained wide currency in South Russia [no] later than the Sarmatian domination of the steppes (c. 200 B.C.- A.D. 200).”²⁶ While there are a number of other examples that underscore the relationship between the early Slavs and the ancient Iranian peoples in terms of religion, it should be clear that there was a cultural relationship between these two peoples. This point is emphasized when one notes that early Slavic art was likely influenced through “contact in the

22 Mike Dixon-Kennedy, *Encyclopedia of Russian & Slavic Myth and Legend* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 194.

23 H. T. Norris, *Islam in the Balkans: Religion and Society between Europe and the Arab World* (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 16.

24 Alison Hilton, *Russian Folk Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 137.

25 Brian Cooper, "Lexical Reflections Inspired by Slavonic - Bogū: Some Thoughts on the Slavonic Pantheon," *Slavonica*, November 2, 2006, 138, accessed February 09, 2012, <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/maney/sla/2006/00000012/00000002/art00003>.

26 A. P. Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom; an Introduction to the Medieval History of the Slavs* (Cambridge [Eng.: University Press, 1970), 254.

course of historical development with the Scythian-Sarmatian art,²⁷ and is visible even today in Slavic folk art “in the schematic depictions of animals in *vybiika* (wood-block printed cloth), embroidery, and painted Easter eggs (*pysanky*).”²⁸ Moreover, in terms of both early Slavic religion and art, it is quite probable that it was influenced (at least to a degree) by their counterpart ancient Iranian traditions.

These cultural similarities likely developed for multiple reasons, probably largely due to the proximity of the early Slavs to the Sarmatians in what is now Southern Russia and Ukraine. There are two general lines of thought when it comes to the relationship between the Sarmatians and the early Slavs. The first notable view is aptly noted by Karl Ploetz, who states that:

The Slavs were known to the late Roman geographers under the name *Vendce* (hence *Wends*) as inhabiting the region beyond Vistula, which bore the general name of Sarmatia, from the nomadic Sarmatians who inhabited [it], interspersed with the Slavs, from whom they differed in language and decent.²⁹

Moreover, while the previously aired concern of misidentification of Sarmatians is a possible issue here, it is still interesting that he notes that both peoples existed side by side for a period of time, thus indicating that cultural transference may have occurred through the interactions between these two groups. There is another view, however, that postulates that the Slavs, rather

27 Justine M. Cordwell, *The Visual Arts: Plastic and Graphic* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 783.

28 Halyna Petrenko, *Ukraine, a Concise Encyclopedia* (South Bound Brook, NJ: Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the U.S.A., 1987), 119.

29 Carl Ploetz and William H. Tillinghast, *Ploetz' Manual of Universal History from the Dawn of Civilization to the Outbreak of the Great War of 1914*, (Boston, New York [etc.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915), 168.

than being a distinct people at the time of the Sarmatians, may have actually descended from them. As noted by Brzezinski and Mielczarek,

For centuries it was believed that the Sarmatians were the ancestors of the Slavs: they lived on much the same lands; and as one people disappear in the 5th century AD, the other appears. Throughout the Middle Ages and until the 18th century the Slav world often appeared on maps as ‘European Sarmatia.’³⁰

The question then becomes, which of these two perspectives is correct? The answer to this question seems to hinge upon when the first Slavs came into being, which is a very complex inquiry. This complexity is due to the fact that the first reliable mention of the Slavs occurred in the fifth century, but in all probability the Slavs existed for some time before this, as is noted by Michael MacDonald.³¹ Regardless of the precise date of the first appearance of the Slavs, it seems possible that, in addition to other elements such as the Goths, there may have been an ethnogenetic merging of proto-Slavs and Sarmatians, which produced what became known as the early Slavs; hence, it is only logical that the traits present in early Slavic culture resemble those found in the Scythian-Sarmatian traditions.³² Further, regardless of exactly how the cultural transference occurred, the above discussion underscores the notion that, since the early Slavic peoples did receive cultural elements from the Sarmatians, they may have inherited their form of self-governance from the ancient Iranian peoples as well.

30 Richard Brzezinski and Mariusz Mielczarek, *The Sarmatians, 600 B.C.-A.D. 450* (Oxford: Osprey Military, 2002), 39.

31 Michael H. MacDonald, *Europe: A Tantalizing Romance: Past and Present Europe for Students and the Serious Traveler* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996), 174.

32 Thomas F. X. Noble, *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms* (London: Psychology Press, 2006), 223.

The governing structure of the Slavs is generally referred to as the *Veche*, however, has also been referred to as a *sbor*, and *skhod*. Needless to say, all of these words refer to the communal or village assemblies used by the various Slavic peoples, arguably up to the present day. In terms of the *Veche*, the most commonly used of the terms, it is believed to have first evolved from the form of governance of the early Slavic tribes prior to the ninth century. Unfortunately, despite having more available materials on the subject than on the ancient Iranian councils, there is little available evidence in terms of how the early Slavic governing apparatus (which was also referred to as a *Veche*) was organized, as is noted by Vladimir Butromeev:

We do not have any statute or charter, which truly discusses the organization or the power of the *Veche*. The general essence of this institution has been recovered from fragmentary evidence...[The] evidence generally only speaks about the assembly (*Veche*) in terms of key historical turning points, and does not give a clear picture as to the normal activities of the *Veche*.³³

Expanding upon Butromeev, since there are no strong historical records that discuss the typical operations of the early Slavic *Veche*, we are forced to examine the sparse evidence available. For instance, Procopius, a prominent sixth century Byzantine scholar, noted that (while describing their raids in the sixth century) the early Slavs “are not ruled by one man, but they have lived from of old under a democracy.”³⁴ Procopius also noted that the Slavs “discussed their wants in

33 Vladimir P. Butromeev, *Enciklopedija Rossijskoj Monarchii* (Ekaterinburg: U-Faktorija, 2002), 50.

34 Procopius, as quoted in Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, Ca. 500-700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 44.

popular assemblies or *folknotes*.”³⁵ This account is compounded by the accounts of Emperor Maurice, a sixth century Byzantine Emperor, who noted that “the Slavs like liberty,” and that “they cannot bear unlimited rulers, and are not easily brought to submission.”³⁶ This fact is further highlighted by Emperor Leo, a fifth century Byzantine Emperor, who stated that the Slavs “are a free people, strongly opposed to any subjection.”³⁷ These fragmentary accounts, while providing nothing in terms of the exact processes that went on in the early form of Slavic democracy, should be seen as evidence to the early presence of Slavic democracy, although it is far from conclusive.

However, it should also be noted that the early Slavic democracy, possibly like their ancient Iranian precursors, is often seen through the prism of nomadic military democracy, rather than a democracy in the purest sense. In this regard, according to Fredrich Engels:

[A] military democracy is a specific organizational structure of gentile society that emerged when war and organization for warfare became ‘regular functions of a people’s life,’ and the plundering of neighbors ‘a constant branch of the economy’. The main organs of this system were the military leader... council, and popular assembly.³⁸

35 Procopius, as quoted in M. M. Kovalevskii, *Russian Political Institutions; the Growth and Development of These Institutions from the Beginnings of Russian History to the Present Time*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1902), 6.

36 Emperor Maurice, as quoted in Daniel Bell Leary, *Education and Autocracy in Russia from the Bolsheviki* (Buffalo, NY: University of Buffalo, College of Arts and Sciences, 1919), 14.

37 Emperor Leo, as quoted in Henry Smith Williams, *The Historians' History of the World; a Comprehensive Narrative of the Rise and Development of Nations as Recorded by over Two Thousand of the Great Writers of All Ages* (New York: History Association, 1907), 88.

38 Fredrich Engels, as quoted in Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ilia Iliev, and Slobodan Naumović, *Studying Peoples in the People's Democracies II: Socialist Era Anthropology in South-East Europe* (Berlin: LIT Verlag Münster, 2008), 322.

More specifically, this was a democracy where generally only the military personnel were permitted to participate. This structure likely included a chieftain, who relied heavily on the support of the other military personnel (including the soldiers), which would be afforded or denied to him in some sort of assembly or council. Taking Engels' definition into consideration, the likelihood that this form of governance was utilized by the early Slavs is reinforced by the fact that they were quite often at war with Germanic and Celtic tribes, fought amongst themselves, and were periodically fighting with Roman and Greek "empire-builders."³⁹ John of Ephesus, who was both a religious leader and a historian, highlighted this constant state of warfare in 581 AD, noting that the Slavs were "an accursed people" and that they "overran the whole of the country of Greece, and the Thessalonians, and all Thrace, and captured the cities, and took numerous forts, and devastated and burnt, and reduced the people to slavery."⁴⁰ Additionally, the early Slavs' propensity to fight amongst themselves is highlighted in Emperor Maurice's *Strategikon*, a sixth century work in which he describes the groups of military significance surrounding the Byzantine Empire. Here, apart from pointing out a number of other organizational problems with the early Slavs' military apparatus, he notes that:

When a difference of opinion prevails among them, either they come to no agreement at all or when some of them do come to an agreement, the others

39 Edward J. Dodson, *The Discovery of First Principles, vol. 1* (IUniverse, 2002), 152.

40 John of Ephesus, as quoted in William Rosen, *Justinian's Flea: The First Great Plague and the End of the Roman Empire* (Penguin, 2008), 279.

quickly go against what was decided. They are always at odds with each other, and nobody is willing to yield to another.⁴¹

These accounts, coupled with the early Slavs reputation in conducting raids,⁴² seems to profile them as being a people that, in conjunction with Engels' definition of military democracy, were quite rapped up in both warfare and conflict. This militaristic element, combined with the ancient Iranian influences, likely formed the core (at least in part) of the democratic governing structure of the early Slavs.

While only a few reliable accounts have survived, we are still able to see a number of interesting parallels between the early Slavic form of governance and that of the Cossacks. Firstly, it should be noted that in the case of the Don and Zaporozhian Cossack groups, their democratic bodies are also essentially military democratic structures. Notably, the elected leader (which is referred to as an *ataman* or *hetman*) of the democratic council also doubled as the military leader of that particular group. Interestingly, this leadership position changed hands quite often, with the majority of Don Cossack *atamani* only serving for a year at a time.⁴³ This appears to have been similar to how the early Slavs conducted their democratic system, as is noted by Alfred Rambaud, in that in times of danger an early Slavic tribe “could elect a temporary head of state,” who would lead them out of the crisis, however, that leader would not

41 Maurice, *Maurice's Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*, trans. George T. Dennis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1984), 121-2.

42 This propensity of conducting raids is noted, once again, by John of Ephesus between 581 and 584. Specifically, he notes their pattern of stealing horses and weaponry (qtd. in Barford 143).

43 Mikhail Astapenko, *Donskie Kazach'i Atamani: Istoricheskie Ocherki-Biografii (1550-1920 Gg.)*. (Rostov-na-Donu: Priazovskii Krai, 1996), 9-10.

be permitted to stay in power following the crisis.⁴⁴ While variations might have existed amongst the early Slavic tribes in terms of selection of their leaders,⁴⁵ what is important to note is that, in terms of at least some of the early Slavs, there was a culture of not wanting to be subjugated to a given ruler for a long period of time, which is something that can also be said of the initial Don and Zaporozhian Cossacks.⁴⁶ It should also be noted that the early Slavs and the Cossacks were organized and governed in a sort of military-based federation as well.

Additionally, many Slavic tribes were made up of a number of *volosti* (cantons, or parishes), which were in relatively close proximity.⁴⁷ The *volosti*, which were often led by a council of tribal leaders, would in times of danger, elect a single leader from amongst them to lead the overall tribe out of a given crisis. This structure is not so dissimilar from the way in which the Don Cossack *Voiska* (or Host) was governed, from its inception in the early sixteenth century through the early eighteenth century. Much like the *volosti* of the early Slavs, the *Voiska* of the Don was also divided into various sub-units, notably: the *stanitsi*, which are subdivisions of the overall *Voiska*, and the *khutori*, which are subdivisions of a given *stanitsa*. In terms of the *stanitsi*, when an important decision, such as an election of an *ataman*, was to be made at the assembly (*Krug*) of the *Voiska*, each *stanitsa* would send a representative to that meeting in order

44 Alfred Rambaud, *History of Russia from the Earliest times to 1880*, ed. Nathan Haskell Dole (New York: H.A. Bolles, 1879), 57.

45 As is noted by Leonid Strakhovsky, there seems to have been variation amongst early Slavic tribes in that the head of the tribe “was either its senior male member or an elected chief, and direction might even devolve upon a prominent widow” (24).

46 As a result of the domination by the Tsarist Russian state, the Cossack assemblies degraded into nothing more than puppets of the Tsarist regime, noting that after 1723 the Tsar would appoint the regional *ataman* of the Don Cossacks, rather than filling the position through election at an assembly.

47 Alfred Rambaud, *History of Russia from the Earliest times to 1880*, ed. Nathan Haskell Dole (New York: H.A. Bolles, 1879), 56.

to take part. In this way, an analogy could be made between the *stanitsi* of the Don Cossacks and the *volosti* of the early tribal Slavs. In short, both organizational structures appear to have operated as a sort of feudal democratic federation, with each subdivision (*stanitsa* and *volost*) playing a key role in the operations of central apparatus. Whether this type of regional organization was something that was acquired from the ancient Iranian tribes, or whether it developed during the course of the evolution of the early Slavs is uncertain; however, it seems at least possible that, noting that the early Don and Zaporozhian Cossacks were composed largely of various Slavic peoples, the roots of the organization of the Cossack democratic governance structure may have developed from their early tribal Slavic precursors.

In the twelfth century, this same sort of institutional network that was present in the military tribal democracies of the early Slavs, was seemingly passed to perhaps one of the best examples of democracy in the medieval Slavic world: the Novgorod Republic (Russian: *Novgorodskaja respublika*).⁴⁸ As Pam Crabtree noted, the Novgorod Republic occupied a vast area, which went as far as “the White Sea in the north, and the Ural mountains in the east,” and its capital (Novgorod) was also “the largest center of medieval international and domestic Russian trade,” since it connected “Russia, western Europe, Byzantium, and the Muslim East.”⁴⁹ However, for the purposes of this discussion, the most distinguishing feature of the Novgorod Republic was its fairly democratic structure, which was relatively unique both for the period and for this region:

⁴⁸ As is commonly noted in history, Novgorod was initially the capital of *Rus'* until it was moved to Kiev in the ninth century. From that point, it was apart of Kievan Rus' until about 1136 when gained formal independence until the fifteenth century (Borrero 194-254).

⁴⁹ Pam J. Crabtree, *Medieval Archaeology: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Psychology Press, 2001), 349.

The citizen body was represented by the *Veche*, which was elected and had representation from all classes in society. The *knyaz* (prince) was elected by the *Veche* and he remained only as long as he performed his office to the satisfaction of the citizens. Every new *knyaz* was obliged to sign a *ryad* (contract) obliging him to abide by the laws of the city. The *posadnik* was the highest officer of the state after the *knyaz*. Originally the representative of the Grand Prince of Kiev, he came to fulfill a role similar to that of prime minister and was also elected by the *Veche*. The *tisyatski* in charge of trade and finance was also an elected office. The officials of the Novgorodian state remained in office so long they discharged their functions efficiently and honorably.⁵⁰

Ignoring the tribal governing structures of nomadic peoples that were still roaming the Siberian steppes at the time of the Novgorod Republic, it should be noted that this region's government was relatively distinct from many of its neighbors. From the twelfth century to the fourteenth century, both the *Vladimir-Suzdalian Rus'* (to the southeast of Novgorod) and the *Volynia-Galicia* (to the south of Novgorod) principalities were run as monarchies, differing from the Novgorod Republic.⁵¹ To be fair, however, Novgorod was not completely unique in terms of its

⁵⁰ Geoffrey Parker, *Sovereign City: The City-state through History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 125.

⁵¹ As is noted by Pam Crabtree, the rulers to the south were run with the prince as the unquestionable head of state (349).

democratic structure, especially noting that the city-state of Pskov also had a similar republican governing apparatus.⁵²

Nevertheless, it must be asked: Where did this Novgorodian republican type of governance come from? To answer this question, it is commonly believed that the *Veche* “may have had its roots in the older tribal practices” of the early Slavs, although “little mention of this more democratic institution is made in the chronicles until the eleventh century.”⁵³ Based on the previously discussed evidence on the government of the early Slavs, it seems quite likely that some sort of connection does exist. As is noted by Nicolai Petro, in terms of Novgorod:

There was, in fact, not one but many *Veches*, organized in pyramid like fashion. Each neighborhood had its own assembly, and the authority of the citywide *Veche* was viewed as a direct extension of the authority of the neighborhoods, each with its own seal and its own treasury...This administrative system was replicated in each of the republic’s five outlying districts, known as *prigorody*, where the local magistrate, though appointed by Novgorod, had to be approved by the local *Veche*.⁵⁴

This organizational structure resembles the way in which the early Slavic tribes were organized, in terms of how it was subdivided into a number of *volosti*. Specifically, noting that the

⁵² In regards to Pskov, it should first be noted that their republic “did not differ essentially in its internal organization from Novgorod,” with both a *Veche* functioning as a popular assembly and the election of executive officials being a common elements of the system on the whole. This similarity was no accident. Prior to its independence in 1349 as a result of the Treaty of Bolotovo, Pskov was actually a special autonomous region within the Novgorod Republic for a couple centuries (Colby & Williams 321).

⁵³ Walter G. Moss, *A History of Russia: To 1917* (London: Anthem Press, 2003), 24.

⁵⁴ Nicolai N. Petro, *Crafting Democracy: How Novgorod Has Coped with Rapid Social Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 128.

neighborhoods and *prigorody* had autonomy over themselves and the ability to influence the overall Novgorod Republic through a pyramid representation structure, it seems likely that, since the early Slavs also used a similarly federated structure, this system was inherited from the early Slavic tribes. Much like some of Slavic tribes that came before, Novgorod also elected leaders, who were not all-powerful, rather were subject to the collective desires of the people they governed. Furthermore, noting that the Novgorod Republic appeared in twelfth century, which was not long after the end of the early Slavic period, it seems at least possible that a connection exists between them.

In addition, as Nicolai Petro noted, the Novgorod Republic's primary "citywide *Veche* ratified its treaties, invited princes, declared war and peace, set taxes, conducted foreign relations, and served as the supreme court for public disputes."⁵⁵ This dimension of the Novgorod democracy is quite key for an important reason: Not only was the aspect of mitigating public disputes a similar attribute to one that existed within Nart Council, all of the above mentioned attributes were instrumental elements of both Zaporozhian and Don Cossack assemblies. While still lacking the military democratic component, the *Veche* of Novgorod represents the first notable compilation of many of the elements that would come to categorize the Cossack assemblies.

In the same vein as its ability to invite princes, the *Veche* of Novgorod also had the ability to choose and to "dismiss" its own leader.⁵⁶ In both this regard and in terms of presiding over

⁵⁵ Ibid. 128.

⁵⁶ Robert Auty and Dimitri Obolensky, *An Introduction to Russian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), 74.

judicial concerns, if an elected leader behaved badly, execution was certainly an action available to the *Veche*, as is noted in this example in *the Chronicle of Novgorod*:⁵⁷

The men of Novgorod held a *Veche* over *Posadnik* Dmitri and his brethren, because they had ordered the levying of silver on the people of Novgorod, for collecting money throughout the district [and] fine from the merchants, for enforcing the collection of taxes at fixed times, and everything bad... God knows how much any took secretly. And many grew rich from this... The same year they brought Dimitri dead ... and buried him.⁵⁸

These leadership related decisions were voted upon in the *Veche*, much in the same way a leader was elected, dismissed, and (if he did a particularly terrible job) executed in the Don Cossack assembly, as is noted by Shane O'Rourke: "Each year the outgoing *ataman* would have to face the judgment of the *Krug*. This was not a perfunctory ritual and on several occasions [*atamani*] whom the *Krug* felt had betrayed the interests of the Host were executed."⁵⁹ In terms of the other similarities, notably regarding the *Veche*'s authority in foreign affairs, the Cossack assembly, like that of Novgorod, also traditionally had "the right to vote on all vital issues," including those concerning "war and peace."⁶⁰ Moreover, while lacking a clear picture of how this chain of

⁵⁷ *The Chronicle of Novgorod* was the written record of the Novgorod Republic between 1016 and 1471.

⁵⁸ *The Chronicle of Novgorod*, as quoted in Geoffrey Parker, *Sovereign City: The City-state through History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 126.

⁵⁹ Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 28.

⁶⁰ M. I. Kraivsetnyi, "Istoricheskie issledovanija o kazachestve," REMZ, 2007, *Kazak: oznachaet democrat*, accessed October 2009, http://www.razdory-museum.ru/c_democrat-1.html.

governance evolved from the time of the ancient Iranian peoples through the time of the early Slavic tribes, it is visible that the essential elements that would come to constitute the Cossack assembly were present by the time of the Novgorod Republic.⁶¹ However, one element, which is a critical component of the Cossack democratic assembly, is seemingly absent from the Novgorod *Veche* structure. This is the military democratic element. In terms of this military democratic feature, while it may have been partially transferred from the cultural heritage of the early Slavic tribes, it was probably at least partially reinforced by the onslaught of the Golden Horde in the thirteenth century, who brought with them a military democratic tradition.

IV. The Golden Horde -

The Golden Horde “is the name of the western successor state to the Great Mongol Empire,” which was initially established by Genghis Khan, and “existed from 1259 to 1419.”⁶² At its peak, its territory included much of Eastern Europe, and stretched “from the Danube to the Urals and from Siberia to the Black Sea and the Caucasus Mountains.”⁶³ Without going into an overly detailed explanation, it should be noted that Golden Horde was composed of peoples of both Mongol and, perhaps more importantly for this analysis, Turkic classification. They ruled the Caucasus, Ukraine, and Southwestern Russia (including what is now the Don region) from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth century. At that point the Golden Horde disintegrated into a

61 Despite this lack of a clear picture, the evidence presented underscores the plausibility that at least some of these elements developed prior to this period.

62 Clifford J. Rogers, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare and Military Technology* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 214.

63 Sheilagh Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 109.

number of smaller successor states, including the Crimean Khanate and the Great Horde.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, there were plenty of opportunities for the cultural transference from the Golden Horde to what ultimately led to the Cossack assembly system.

While many credit the Mongol-Turkic invasion of *Rus'* as “contributing to, even creating, the despotism of Russian autocracy” by laying the foundations of the despotic Muscovite and post-Muscovite states,⁶⁵ it seems that they may have also paradoxically contributed to the development of Cossack democracy. Notably, there are a number of key similarities between the military governing body of the Turkic-Mongol hordes, which is referred to as the *Kuriltai*, and the governing structure of the Cossacks. In terms of the *Kuriltai*, which is generally defined as “a general meeting of warriors,” it was responsible for selecting a *Khan*, head of state, who would also act as the head military leader.⁶⁶ Regarding the *Kuriltai*'s structure itself, the following points should be made: 1) While there was a rule of succession recognized, “no *Khan* was deemed legitimately seated on the throne” until they were elected by the “various representatives” from the empire;⁶⁷ 2) All matters pertaining to the empire, both “military and civil,” were discussed at the *Kuriltai*, which was composed of a leader, members of the *Khan*'s family, as well as members of the empire's aristocracy, who were also generally military

64 Charles J. Halperin, *Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 59.

65 Abbott Gleason, *A Companion to Russian History* (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 78.

66 L. N. Gumilev, *Searches for an Imaginary Kingdom: The Legend of the Kingdom of Prester John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 179.

67 Henry H. Howorth, *History of the Mongols: From the 9th to the 19th Century*, vol. 2 (Burt Franklin, 1880), 112.

leaders;⁶⁸ 3) the elected *Khan* was both a military leader as well as a leader of the empire's people;⁶⁹ 4) there were both regional and an empire wide *Kuriltai* that dealt with similar matters, including the election of leaders; 5) and it appears that the position of *Khan* was generally a position, which afforded him absolute power, that was held for life.⁷⁰ One point must be emphasized: in terms of almost all-major military related decisions, especially regarding large-scale campaigns and strategies, a *Kuriltai* was almost always called to debate and vote on the matter.⁷¹ This fact is aptly expressed by historian Joel Carmichael, who noted that before the Turkic-Mongol horde was "about to launch a campaign the Great Council -- the *Kuriltai* -- would convene at a staff headquarters. Operations and targets would be laid down, with the captains of all the major army units present to be given their orders."⁷² To be clear, key military operations were discussed in detail at the *Kuriltai*, with only the arm bearing generals and the main military leader making decisions on various matters of strategic consequence.⁷³

Interestingly, the position of the *Khan* "combined the roles of administrator, judicial arbiter, military leader and employer,"⁷⁴ which is quite similar to the role of the *ataman*, as will be discussed in detail in Section 2, of the Cossack assemblies. In regards to the role of military

68 H. Desmond Martin, *The Rise of Chingis Khan and His Conquest of North China* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), 314.

69 Mark M. Grossman, *World Military Leaders* (Infobase Publishing, 2007), 184.

70 Based on available information, it would appear that, since most *Khans* were in power until their death, the position was probably one that was held for life (Grossman 184).

71 Stephen R. Turnbull and Angus McBride, *The Mongols* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Pub., 1980), 3.

72 Joel Carmichael, *An Illustrated History of Russia*. (New York: Reynal, 1960), 26.

73 It would seem that at least to a degree, the *Kuriltai* of the Golden Horde seems to fall in line with the definition of a military democracy.

74 Zhanylzhana Dzhunusova, "The Democratic Tradition of Kazakhstan in Historical Context," ed. Yaacov Ro'i, in *Democracy and Pluralism in Muslim Eurasia* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 19.

leader, this connection is especially clear when noting the “absolute power” that the Cossack assembly vested in the elected *ataman* in times of war,⁷⁵ much like the absolute power that the *Kuriltai* vested in the *Khan* upon his election. Effectively, both the *Khan* and the *ataman* were absolute military leaders during war. Additionally, much like the *Khan*, the *ataman* was responsible for managing the affairs of the community, including administering punishments and arbitrating minor disputes, “when the *Krug* was not in session.”⁷⁶ However, these parallels are not only found in the positions of *Khan* and *ataman*, and also seem to exist within the operation of the *Kuriltai* itself.

The *Kuriltai* was quite military focused, and resembled the traditional (i.e. early) Cossack assembly, known to the Zaporozhian Cossacks as the *Rada*, in this regard.

The *rada* [assembly] was in essence a military council. Later Ukrainians made it a legislative institution of a putative nation, but in the [early] sixteenth century its deliberations were about military matters. The Cossacks participated in it as soldiers, not as citizens, and debated such issues as an offer of employment from an outside source, military tactics and routes, [and] the distribution of booty.⁷⁷

Taking this into consideration, it seems clear that the initial purpose of the early Cossack assemblies was to function as a military council of sorts, although it is inherently more inclusive than *Kuriltai*, since it permits the participation of all Cossacks, including soldiers, in the decision

75 Nicholas V. Feodoroff, *History of the Cossacks* (Commack, NY: Nova Science, 1999), 17.

76 Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 28.

77 Linda Gordon, *Cossack Rebellions: Social Turmoil in the Sixteenth-century Ukraine* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 84.

making process. Of course the Cossack assemblies, as they developed, began to symbolize more than just military councils:

The *Krug* embodied a form of direct democracy in which every [Cossack] took a direct and active part in the decision making process. It was a face-to-face encounter in which every-one had the right to speak, make suggestions and criticize those in authority...For the Cossacks the *Krug* was the very symbol of their freedom and they were fiercely loyal to it.⁷⁸

Moreover, the Cossack assembly, as most Cossacks came to understand it in the seventeenth century and thereafter, elected leaders and decided various (i.e. non-military) “matters of regional policy.”⁷⁹ Still, throughout its existence, it retained the militaristic democratic elements that defined it from the beginning, especially noting that not only were Cossacks considered a military caste throughout Imperial Russian history, the *ataman* would remain both their elected leader, at least until the early eighteenth century, and their military leader in times of war. It thus seems likely that the military emphasis of the Cossack assembly may have originated from the *Kuriltai* of the Golden Horde.

One last point that seems to support the link between the roots of the Cossack assembly and the Turkic-Mongol Horde lies in the realm of linguistics. For example, the term Cossack itself appears to come from the Turkic word *qazaq*, meaning “adventurer,” “wanderer,” or “free

⁷⁸ Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 27.

⁷⁹ John Ure, *The Cossacks: An Illustrated History* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2002), 266.

person.”⁸⁰ Adding to this definition is the fact that the word Cossack (pronounced *Kazak* in Russian) is generally accepted to be etymologically related to the word *Kazakh*, who are a Turkic people who inhabit modern day Kazakhstan. Since the ancestors of contemporary *Kazakhs* were part of the Golden Horde that occupied what became the Cossack regions in Ukraine and in Southern Russia, a connection between the ancestors of both these people, while unprovable, is certainly possible. What the presence of this etymology in two very distant regions may at least demonstrate is that there is a connection. This connection could either be similar ancestry between two peoples or the application of the same Turkic word by the Golden Horde to describe two distinct peoples. What is important to note then is that regardless of the precise reason as to why the Cossacks became referred to as Cossacks, the Golden Horde clearly influenced the development of the Cossack identity, thus increasing the probability that they may have played an instrumental role in the development of the *Krug*. This point is further emphasized by the Don Cossacks use of the term *ataman*, which appears to come from a Turkic language, and is said to have originated from the Turkic “*Ata-man*,” meaning “father of horsemen.”⁸¹ While the non-Turkic word *hetman* is used by the Zaporozhian Cossacks, in the place of *ataman*, the fact that the Don Cossacks use this word serves to emphasize the strong influence that the Turkic peoples had on the identity of many of the Cossacks. Taking this influence into consideration, there seems to be enough evidence to form a well-founded theory, stipulating that some key elements

80 Allan A. Metcalf, *The World in so Many Words: A Country-by-country Tour of Words That Have Shaped Our Language* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 58.

Chahryar Adle and Karl M. Baipakov, *History of Civilizations of Central Asia* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2003), 89.

81 The Economist (US), "The Cossacks: A Super-ethnos in Russia's Ribs," 1996, Introduction, accessed March 9, 2012, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-18975911.html>.

of the Turkic-Mongol system of governance may have contributed to the development of the Cossack system of governance. Moreover, the Turkic-Mongol influence (noting the other plausible historical elements discussed above) may represent the final key layer in a long ethnohistorical process of layering various features of historical systems of governance, contributing to the development of what is now known as the Cossack democratic assembly.

V. Section Conclusion -

Contrary to the view that the democratic traditions of the Cossack assembly spontaneously reemerged after the destruction of the Novgorod *Veche*, and contrary to the nationalist view of the Cossacks' purely Slavic origins, it would seem that the Cossack assembly is an ethnohistorical assemblage of various characteristics piled on from the time of the ancient Iranian peoples through the early Slavic tribes, the Novgorod Republic, and finally the *Kuriltai* of the Golden Horde. Beginning with the ancient Iranian peoples, a number of features of governance that can be found in the Nart Council, such as the judicial functions of that body, are similar in principal to those that are present in the Novgorod *Veche*. These features may have also been present in the tribal institutions of the early Slavic peoples, and are very much present in the traditional assemblies of Don and Zaporozhian Cossacks. In terms of the early Slavic tribes, we can observe a number of similarities, such as the federal organization of their system of governance, which existed both in the Novgorod *Veche* and in the Cossack assembly. In conjunction, the Novgorod *Veche* and the Cossack assemblies seem to share a number of features, notably in terms of the election of a leader, the inclusion of the male population in that process, as well as the ease by which leaders could be replaced. Finally, in terms of the Turkic-

Mongol Horde governing apparatus, the *Kuriltai* and the Cossack assemblies are both similar in their strong military related features, something that separates them categorically from the Novgorod *Veche*. Despite the fact that the picture is incomplete (since there are gaps in reliable historical data) a plausible ethnohistorical path, utilizing the previously presented information, does seem to exist and provides an improved perspective of the route that led the establishment of Cossack democracy in the late sixteenth century. At the very least, the previously stated analysis surely constitutes a more comprehensive explanation than that of nationalistically oriented spontaneous emergence view. At this point it will prove beneficial to discuss the history of the Cossack assembly itself, since such a discussion will shed light on how these inherited elements played (and continue to play) a role within Cossackdom (*Kazachestvo*).

SECTION 2: A HISTORY OF THE COSSACK ASSEMBLY

VI. Section Introduction –

In the fifteenth century, the Zaporozhian Cossacks are noted for the first time in what is presently Southeastern Ukraine. Although a precise date is unknown, they were likely the first to develop the well-known Cossack style assembly, which they referred to as the *Sich Rada* (*Sichova Rada*), in the sixteenth century. A *Sich* generally indicates a Cossack territorial and military administrative unit, generally applied to the Ukrainian Cossacks. The word *Rada* itself, probably a borrowed Polish word, generally is said to mean council or assembly. Additionally, the *Sich Rada*, which was the primary popular assembly for the Zaporozhian *Sich*, elected a *hetman*. The word *hetman* probably comes from a Germanic language with the etymological basis being “*Hauptmann*,” which roughly translates as “headman.”⁸² During the approximately three centuries that the *Sich Rada* existed, the Zaporozhians elected a multitude of *hetmani*, including the famous Bohdan Khmelnytsky, and passed a number of important measures.⁸³ These measures were generally of a military or of a judicial nature, however, the *Sich Rada* could very well take up almost any matter that had a significant affect on the Zaporozhian Cossack community. For these reasons, as well as others, the Zaporozhian *Sich Rada* is often romantically regarded as having been largely “governed by the principle of equality.”⁸⁴

82 *The Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 14 (Danbury, CT: Grolier, 1981), 168.

83 An exact number of elected Zaporozhian *hetmani* is uncertain, since many available sources disagree in this respect.

84 Paul R. Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its Peoples* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 195.

While this principle might have been present for a time near its inception, the *Sich Rada* gradually “gave way to decisions set by the Council of Elders (*rada starshyn*),” which was composed of “an elected judge, a chancellor (*pysar*), an aid-de-camp (*osaul*), lieutenants of varying military units (*kurinni otamany*),” as well as the head of the *Sich*.⁸⁵ By the seventeenth century the *koshovyi otaman*, which was a post that was (at this point in history) elected exclusively by the Council of Elders, had subverted the post of *hetman* to become the primary leadership position of the Zaporozhian *Sich*. To be clear, this move of power from the *Sich Rada* to the Council of Elders essentially signaled the beginning of the end of popular governance for the Zaporozhians. Events came to a head in 1775, when Tsarina Catherine the Great ordered the destruction of the Zaporozhian *Sich*.⁸⁶ By that point, however, noting the transfer of power to the Council of Elders, the argument could be made that it was only a shadow of its former self at the time of its destruction. Nevertheless, the Cossack popular assembly did not only exist in one region. As early as the sixteenth century it had already become part of the cultural tradition of the Don Cossacks, as is noted by Albert Seaton:

The customs and laws of the Don Cossacks became common to most of the new Russian-speaking Cossack Hosts (*voiska*), as they came into being. Many were shared by the other great host, the Ukrainian Zaporozhian Cossacks, further to the

85 Ibid. 224.

86 Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s - 1990s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 36.

west on the Dnieper, for the Zaporozhians and the Cossacks on the Don lived on friendly and close terms.⁸⁷

Albert Seaton's point is underscored by Figure 1, which highlights the fact that the Don Cossacks

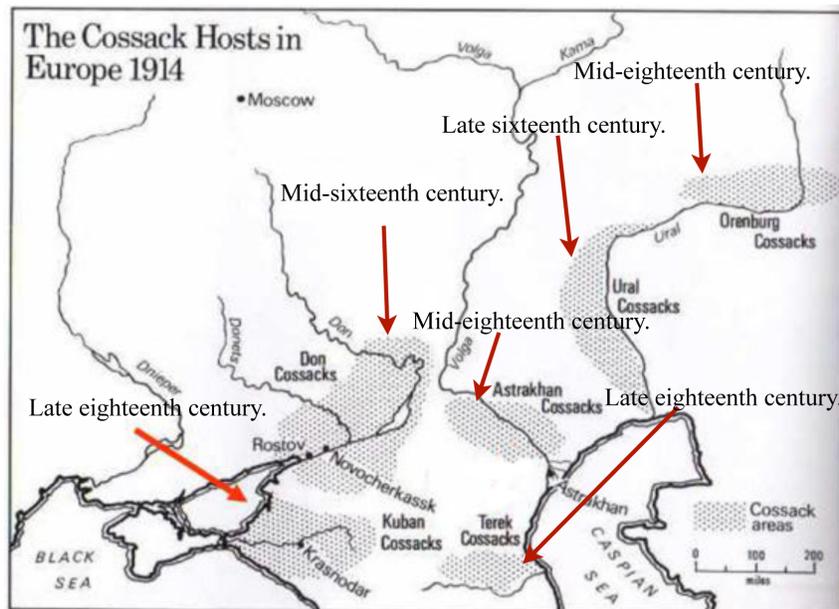


Figure 1: Distribution (as of 1914) and founding centuries of the Cossack hosts in European Russia.

were the first Cossack group to develop a host in European Russia.⁸⁸ Thus, noting that the Don Cossacks supplied the other various Cossack hosts, including the Kuban and the Terek, with the tradition of the popular assembly and noting that they arguably carried the

torch of the Zaporozhian democratic traditions, it may prove both prudent and efficient to simply focus on the popular assembly structure of the Don Cossack Host. After all, not only do the Don Cossacks have an unparalleled cultural heritage that is clearly intertwined with the history of the Cossack assembly in general, focusing on them will permit a more cogent discussion of the history of Cossack democracy.

⁸⁷ Albert Seaton, *The Cossacks* (Reading: Osprey Publishing, 1972), 9-10.

⁸⁸ This map was acquired and modified from the following source:
Albert Seaton, *The Cossacks* (Reading: Osprey Publishing, 1972), 26.

Bearing the above reasoning in mind, it must be noted that, since they appeared on the Don steppe in the sixteenth century, the Don Cossacks have played an important role in many of the critical junctures in Russian history. They protected and, in the minds of many modern *dontsi* (Don Cossacks), continue to protect Russia's southern border from invasion. In the past, they have fought on behalf of Russia against the Ottoman Empire, Napoleon, Germany, and variety nomadic groups, including the Tartars. In sum, they were, along with other Cossack groups in Tsarist Russia, members of "a military caste with special privileges," which were afforded to them in exchange for the expectation that they would fight for the Empire.⁸⁹ With many of their songs, oral traditions, and customs reflecting past military victories, one would be hard pressed to argue that their cultural heritage lacks warrior-oriented attributes. However, when listening to the *Hymn of the Don Cossacks*, which is still sung, a unique picture of the Don Cossacks emerges. In this hymn, the Don Cossacks sing:

The Children of the Don are called,
To the Assembly of the Sovereign Host,
The *Ataman* decides,
In accordance with their popular will.⁹⁰

With the remainder of the hymn underscoring the cultural importance they still place on their historical freedom, the Don Cossacks visibly continue to value the traditions of the *Krug*.

89 James Minahan, *One Europe, Many Nations: A Historical Dictionary of European National Groups* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000), 217.

90 Kazakdona, "Kazach'i Pesni - Gimn Donskogo Kazachestva Pesni Kazakov," *Kazachii Stan: Istoriya Kazachestva*, November 10, 2010, section goes here, accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.kazakdona.ru/index.php?nma=news>.

Moreover, the Don Cossacks have maintained a democratic mindset throughout their history, including the Soviet period,⁹¹ which is most visible in the traditional practices of the *Krug*.

It is not being suggested that the Don Cossacks ever had a modern democracy, in the generally accepted sense, especially considering the fact that women could not traditionally participate in the regional (host) *Krug* or the *stanitsa* variant of the *Krug*.⁹² However, it seems that their identity as Don Cossacks was, and is, intertwined with democratic principles, which are comparable, but not identical, to those found in many modern democracies. In the *Krug*, every male member of Don Cossack society, with no restriction on social class or standing, historically had “the right to vote on all vital issues,” including those concerning “war and peace, land distribution, judicial matters, etc.”⁹³ The Don Cossacks treated (and continue to treat) these rights with an almost sacred importance.

Additionally, Russian historian Stanislav Ausky notes that “*Kazak – chelovek svobodnyi*” (a Cossack is a freeman),⁹⁴ indicating that the word Cossack itself implies “democrat.”⁹⁵ This further underscores what one Don Cossack said in a 2009 interview, which was that “of course [our] most important tradition is the *Krug*.”⁹⁶ In another instance, when a

91 Although there is understandably a lack of documentation on the democratic practices of the Don Cossacks during the Soviet period, there is still evidence that their democratic mentality lingered beneath the surface of Soviet oppression.

92 A *stanitsa* is a large Cossack settlement, and typically has a substantial amount of outlying territory.

93 M. I. Kraivsetnyi, "Istoricheskie issledovanija o kazachestve," REMZ, 2007, 3, accessed October 2009, http://www.razdory-museum.ru/c_democrat-1.html.

94 Stanislav A. Ausky, *Kazaki: Osoboe Soslovie* (Moskva: OLMA-PRESS, 2002), 9.

95 M. I. Kraivsetnyi, "Istoricheskie issledovanija o kazachestve," REMZ, 2007, 3, accessed October 2009, http://www.razdory-museum.ru/c_democrat-1.html.

96 Andrei Yaistkii, "Personal Interview." Interview by author. May 20, 2009.

Don Cossack was asked what made them unique, he replied: “Our self-restraint, [our] respect for others, [our] courage, [our] willingness to defend our homeland, and our *Krug*.”⁹⁷ In almost every instance that a Don Cossack is asked what makes his people unique, the *Krug* is mentioned or implied. Thus, the history of the *Krug* (both the *Krug* of the Don Host, and the *stanitsa* variant), as well as its structure and organization, must be discussed in order to better understand the democratic mentality of the *dontsi*.

VII. 1548 – 1721: Early Democratic Attitudes and Practices –

As noted by historian Andrei Bartenev in his *Staraja vera kazakov (the Old Belief of the Cossacks)* a fire in the city of Cherkassk, the Don Cossack’s original capital, in 1744 “destroyed the archive of the host,”⁹⁸ which had contained key documents on the *Krug* prior to that point in history.⁹⁹ This catastrophe naturally creates some difficulties in researching and analyzing the early *Krug*, although it is not impossible. Based on oral stories passed down from generation to generation, a number of key facts are known about the early Don Cossack assemblies. As stated by Shane O’Rourke, who wrote one of the only historical accounts on the Don Cossacks in English, the early Don Cossacks (beginning in the sixteenth century) would meet at the start of the winter months and establish a camp, with as many as a hundred male Cossacks living

97 Vladimir Morozov, "Personal Interview," Interview by author, April 17, 2009.

98 Andrei Bartenev, *Staraja Vera Kazakov* (Spoloxi, 2001), 7.

99 It should be noted that the capital of the Don Cossacks would be moved to city of Novocherkassk (literally New Cherkassk) in the nineteenth century, and the city originally known as Cherkassk, would be renamed Starocherkassk (literally Old Cherkassk).

together until “the beginning of the campaigning season in the spring.”¹⁰⁰ In this especially rowdy situation, the Don Cossacks appear to have behaved quite amicably, with no evidence suggesting that there were any significant disputes. Apparently, according to Shane O’Rourke, part of what bound these early Don Cossacks together during the winter was “probably their shared sense of identity and comradeship, of what it meant to be a Cossack,” in addition to the fact that “mutual dependence” in the hostile Don steppe was a necessity for survival.¹⁰¹ This mutual dependence, shared sense of identity, and comradeship rests at the core of what is often referred to as “*kazach’e bratstvo*” (Cossack brotherhood),¹⁰² which in turn formed the base of the early *Krug*.

Not only did this Cossack brotherhood help promote the early *Krug*, but it also seems to have been “reinforced” by the *Krug*.¹⁰³ This result was achieved by giving them a place to vent their grievances verbally, by allowing all Don Cossacks to participate in making joint decisions pertaining the community, and by creating a medium for drunken rabble rousing, which helped them form strong bonds amongst their brethren. Most importantly, in addition to strengthening their fraternal bonds, the *Krug* embodied the ideal characteristics of the society of these early Don Cossacks, “in which all men were equal.”¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, available evidence indicates that

100 Shane O’Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press in Association with St. Antony’s College, Oxford, 2000), 105.

101 Ibid. 105.

102 *Obshekazachii Zhurnal*, *Obshekazachii Zhurnal* (Pravlenie Obshekazach’ego Tšentra v SASSH, 1953), 59.

103 A. Obgol’ts, *Duhovnoe Vozrozhdenie Rossii: Materialy Vserossijskoi Nauchno-prakticheskoi Konferensii*, vol. 1 (1993), 162.

104 Albert Seaton, *The Cossacks* (Reading: Osprey Publishing, 1972), 10.

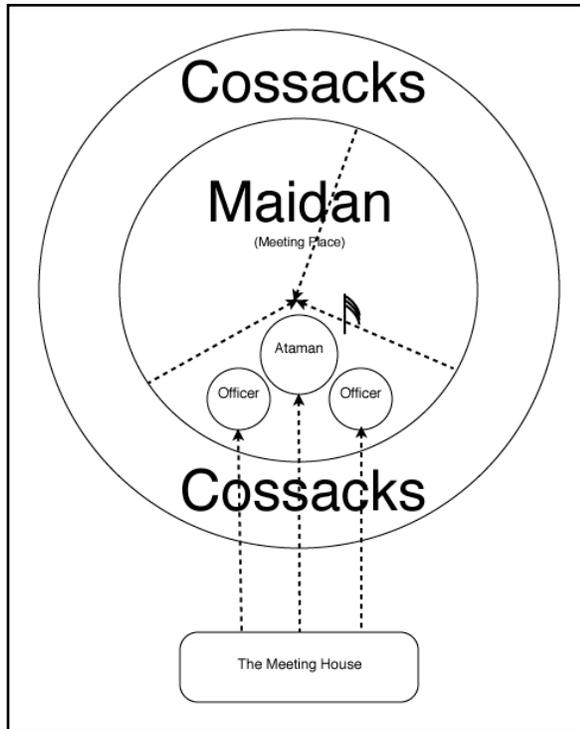


Figure 2: Structure of the Cossack *Krug*. It should be noted that the *ataman* (and his deputies) would reside near the center of the circle, near a flag of the Don Cossack Host. Any Cossack wishing to speak could step into the center of the circle and express himself.

this principle of equality, which was “political, social, and economic,”¹⁰⁵ amongst early male Don Cossacks was a key component in the structure and the activities of the early *Krug*.

In addition, the basic practices of the early *Krug*, which probably appeared at some point in the sixteenth century, would have a lasting impact on the way the *Krug* was organized up to the present day. To begin, the Don Cossacks would “all meet at a square” known as the

“*maidan*”¹⁰⁶ near a structure known as a “*stanovaja izba*,” which was a special meeting hut where “the *ataman* and his *esauli*” (deputies/officers) would reside prior to the convening of the *Krug*.¹⁰⁷ Once a quorum of Cossacks had

assembled, often considered to be at least two thirds of the available space, the *ataman* would

105 Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 32.

106 Banasukevich, V. D. *Gosudarstvennost' Rossii: Gosudarstvennye I Cerkovnye Učreždenija, Soslovnye Organy I Organy Mestnogo Samoupravlenija, Edinicy Administrativno- Territorial'nogo, Cerkovnogo I Vedomstvennogo Delenija*. Moskva: Nauka, 1996.

107 A. P. Skorik, *Kazachii Don: Očerki Istorii (I)* (Rostov-na-Donu: Izdvo Rostovskogo OBIIUU, 1995), 74-6.

convene the *Krug*. This structure is visually represented in Figure 2.¹⁰⁸ According to tradition, the *Krug* would begin with all the Cossacks standing in a circle around the *ataman* and his deputies. As noted by historian Brian Murphy, in this early variant of the *Krug*, and in many ways even today, “any man who wanted to express his views could step into the centre of the circle and speak his mind.”¹⁰⁹ This structure probably contributed to the fact, according to available accounts, that a typical meeting of the early *Krug* was often a very charged event, and often got very loud, as historian Robert McNeal, notes: “a person had been to a *stanitsa* assembly [...] would have a headache for a week after as a result of the crush and shouting.”¹¹⁰ Additionally, these early *Krug* meetings, if the local *Krugi* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are any indication, probably had a sizable drinking component.

The early *Krug* often was able to accomplish much while in session, although there have been several documented instances where it, unable to find a consensus, would devolve into a violent brawl.¹¹¹ When a matter had been sufficiently discussed, as noted by Shane O’Rourke, the *ataman* would ring a special bell “to signal a vote.”¹¹² A number of historians, both Russian and western, note a number of different procedures as to how a vote was taken in the early *Krug*. Generally, as historian Brian Boeck notes, “the fragmentary accounts of [the] Cossack

108 This figure was translated from the following source:

A. P. Skorik, *Kazachii Don: Ocherki Istorii (I)* (Rostov-na-Donu: Izdvo Rostovskogo OBIIUU, 1995), 75.

109 Brian Murphy, *Rostov in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920: The Key to Victory* (London: Routledge, 2005), 5.

110 Robert Hatch McNeal, *Tsar and Cossack, 1855-1914* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1987), 118.

111 One should not forget that Don Cossacks were also warriors.

112 Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 109.

assemblies” indicate that an issue was resolved “by majority acclamation,” which occurred when the majority of the present Don Cossacks signaled their approval on an issue by throwing their



Figure 3: Example of *Papakhi*. This photo was taken of some contemporary Cossacks supervising a graduation ceremony at a Cossack school, known as a *Kazachii Corpus*. They are wearing *papakhi*.

papakhi (See Figure 3)¹¹³ up in the air, while repeatedly shouting the word *lubo*, which is roughly translated as meaning good.¹¹⁴ Those Cossacks who shouted the word *net* (no), or sometimes *ne nado* (we don’t need it), indicated their opposition to a given measure.¹¹⁵ If a motion

was passed, all the members of the community were obligated to abide by the decision, and all Don Cossacks had to abide by decisions of the *Krug* of the Host. Perhaps one of the most interesting processes in the early *Krug*, further highlighting the democratic mentality of the early Don Cossacks, was the role of the *ataman* and his deputies in Don Cossack society.

113 Cossacks Wearing *Papakhi*, Rostov-on-Don, Rostov Oblast, Russia, personal photograph by author, April 15, 2009.

114 Brian J. Boeck, *Imperial Boundaries: Cossack Communities and Empire-building in the Age of Peter the Great* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 36.

115 Some historians have noted different voting procedures, for instance, some of them say that the Don Cossacks said *ne lubo* (it’s not good), rather than *ne nado* or *net*. It is more than likely that there were variations in the *Krugi* of the *stanitsi*. In the modern *Krug*, *lubo* is used to signal approval, while *net* is used to signal disapproval.

To put it simply, the *ataman* of the host was essentially the president of all the Don Cossacks, as well as their top military leader. Regarding the *ataman* of the *stanitsa*, he was the leader of his immediate community, and the head of the local military detachments (including the police) in that community. To be clear, this position was not like that of an absolute dictator, rather it was position one attained through election, and changed hands frequently in early Don Cossack history. To put things in perspective, from 1548 to the early eighteenth century around 40 individual *atamani* were elected to the *Krug* of the Host, with the majority of those *atamani* serving for a period of only one year at a time.¹¹⁶ To be fair, many of the *atamani*, including those that served only one year, would often serve more than once, such as Don Cossack *Ataman* Ivan Nos, who served in 1592, was replaced towards the end of that year, and then re-elected in 1594. However, it should not be mistaken that all early Don Cossack *atamani* served short one year terms,¹¹⁷ with *atamani* such as *Ataman* Andrei Korela, who allied with False Dmitri during the Time of Troubles, serving two sizable terms, with the first lasting from 1600 to 1603, and the second lasting from 1605 to 1612.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, what should be noted here is that many early Don Cossack *atamani* served short terms, and that *ataman* elections were a frequent occurrence. The reasons behind this frequent turnover is highlighted by Shane O'Rourke, who notes that:

On [a military] campaign the *ataman* received the unquestioning obedience of the Cossacks, but beyond this he could not expect deference. The Cossacks were not

116 Mikhail Astapenko, *Donskie Kazach'i Atamani: Istoricheskie Ocherki-Biografii (1550-1920 Gg.)*. (Rostov-na-Donu: Priazovskii Krai, 1996), 9-10.

117 In some cases, *atamani* served less than a year in office.

118 Mikhail Astapenko, *Donskie Kazach'i Atamani: Istoricheskie Ocherki-Biografii (1550-1920 Gg.)*. (Rostov-na-Donu: Priazovskii Krai, 1996), 35.

unaware of the attractions that the exercise of power had for those who wielded it and they sought through their [...] elections to prevent the emergence of a permanent elite among them. Each year the outgoing *ataman* would have to face the judgment of the *Krug*. This was not a perfunctory ritual and on several occasions *atamans* whom the *Krug* felt had betrayed the interests of the Host were executed.¹¹⁹

Although this may appear to be a bit excessive, what should be taken away from this is the strength of the Don Cossacks' democratic mentality during this time. Thus, rather than having a dictator like *ataman* exercising absolute power over them, these Cossacks had ultimate power over themselves.

This ultimate power over their own affairs was quite apparent in the judicial functions of the Don Cossack *Krug*.¹²⁰ With the participation of the community, rather than “employing courts staffed by professionals trained in written laws,” the early *Krug*, especially on the *stanitsa* level, “resolved conflicts by a process of public debate and decision.”¹²¹ As noted by historian Henry Williams, in early Don Cossack society there were no written laws, instead the *Krug* was “the living law,” and essentially “left complete liberty to the individual, so long as this was not

119 Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 28.

120 The judicial *Krug* operations primarily occurred at the *stanitsa* level.

121 Brian J. Boeck, *Imperial Boundaries: Cossack Communities and Empire-building in the Age of Peter the Great* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 36.

harmful to the community.”¹²² However, if a Cossack somehow harmed, endangered, or defied the community, especially the will of the *Krug*, some very harsh punishments were in store for the perpetrator. The severity and method of these punishments was generally decided by the *Krug* through a majority vote, although minor offenses were often the responsibility of the local *ataman*.¹²³ Some punishments, which were popular sentences handed down by the *Krug*, entailed for an offender to be stoned to death, or to be sewn into a “sack and thrown into the waters” of the Don.¹²⁴ Besides their brutality, it must be emphasized that these punishments were democratically decided by the *Krug*, with even the *ataman* not being exempt from punishment.

The democratic inclinations of these early Don Cossacks was also visible in the role of the *Krug* in matters related to warfare. As Albert Seaton points out, the early *Krug* of the host decided all matters of “war and peace,” made critical decisions on military campaigns, as well as other types of key military matters.¹²⁵ Additionally, prior to the early eighteenth century, all of these military decisions were made without the authorization of the Tsar in Moscow. In fact, in matters of military consequence, as well as other areas of foreign policy, the Tsar dealt with the Don Cossacks through “the Department of Foreign Affairs (called then the Department of Embassies)” in Moscow, rather than through typical domestic channels.¹²⁶ Thus, the will of the

122 Henry Smith Williams, *The Historians' History of the World; a Comprehensive Narrative of the Rise and Development of Nations as Recorded by over Two Thousand of the Great Writers of All Ages*: (New York: History Association, 1907), 241.

123 Since the *stanitsa ataman* was also the head of the local police, he would generally be responsible for handling minor infractions, although there does not seem to have been an exact definition for a minor infraction was. Generally speaking, the definition of what a minor infraction was, like the law itself, was largely contingent on the fluid will of the *Krug*.

124 Stepan Zlobin, *Stepan Razin: Istoricheskii Roman*, 1st ed. (Gos. Izd-vo Xudozh: Lit-ru, 1960), 70.

125 Albert Seaton, *The Cossacks* (Reading: Osprey Publishing, 1972), 37.

126 George Vernadsky, *A History of Russia* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1972), 124.

pre-1721 *Krug* was in many ways absolute in the realm of foreign and military affairs of the Don Cossacks.¹²⁷ One example where the *Krug* of the host made an independent military decision was in the Don Cossacks' campaign against, and "the capture of Azov in 1637."¹²⁸ The fortress and city of Azov, referred to as Azak by the Turks, was originally controlled by the Ottoman Empire, thus, when the Don Cossacks attacked and captured the city, on independent instructions from the *Krug*, they were quite clearly engaging in a foreign and military policy that was both democratically decided and of their own volition. Another example occurred in 1630, when the Don Cossacks, abiding by a vote in the *Krug*, refused to join Tsar Mikhail's campaign against the Poles.¹²⁹ This denial to act on Mikhail's request quite clearly underscores the notion that the early *Krug* formed its own foreign policy. This, of course, is not to say that there were no collaborative military campaigns between the Don Cossacks and Moscow, such as their participation in the Azov campaigns in 1695-1697 under Tsar Peter I.¹³⁰ However, it does drive home the point that the early *Krug* of the Host made military decisions on its own.

At this point it would be pertinent to discuss the fact that unlike early Don Cossack society, where any man (runaway serfs, criminals, servants, etc.) who escaped to the Don could join their community and where all in the community could take part in the *Krug*, things had seemingly changed on the surface by the mid to late seventeenth century. In its place, according

127 Just to be clear, the *Krug* of the host was officially banned by the Tsarist government in 1721.

128 Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 32.

129 Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 31-32.

130 Viatcheslav Olegovich. Shpakovskii and David Nicolle, *Armies of Ivan the Terrible: Russian Troops 1505-1700* (Oxford: Osprey, 2006), 39.

to historian Peter Julicher, there “was a virtual oligarchy, dominated by a group known as ‘homeowners’ or *domovitye kazaki*, who lived downriver near Cherkassk and controlled the decisions of the *Krug*.”¹³¹ This point of view is supported by a number of historians who have studied the history of the Don Cossacks. However, before this point of view of the *Krug* during this time can be discussed, it should be noted that there is compelling evidence that shows that the democratic mentality of the Don Cossacks, in which all male Don Cossacks were viewed as equal, remained strong during this period.

The Razin Revolt of 1670-1671 underscores the fact that the democratic mentality of the Don Cossacks, which formed the foundation of many of the key principles of the *Krug* throughout Don Cossack history, had not been wiped out by the emerging Cossack elite. Briefly, Stepan Razin, popularly known as Stenka Razin, was a Don Cossack and the leader of a rebel army, largely composed of poor Cossacks and peasants, which conquered a sizable chunk of the Russian Empire in 1670. Despite having been born into the more privileged side of Don Cossack society, Stenka Razin sided with the poor elements of Russian society, including the landless peasants of the Don as well as the poor Don Cossacks. In fact, Razin is often quoted for a speech he gave to the “poor of the Don,” in which he said that: “Your sorrows are my sorrows... We will achieve a free life.”¹³² Moreover, it should be noted that by March 1670, “Razin had at his command some seven thousand Don Cossacks,”¹³³ in addition to substantial support amongst the

131 Peter Julicher, *Renegades, Rebels and Rogues under the Tsars* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2003), 80-1.

132 Stepan Razin as quoted in Evgeny A. Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History: Museum of the Revolution* (Edinburg: Edinburg UP, 2008), 25.

133 Lois Potter, *Playing Robin Hood: The Legend as Performance in Five Centuries* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 118.

overall Don Cossack population.¹³⁴ This strong initial support seemed to be largely due to the ideals of “his eventual program,” which “included the destruction of the great hereditary nobility, the governors, and the bureaucracy and Muscovite machinery of state that operated all over Russia,” with the ultimate goal being some sort of democracy for Russia.¹³⁵ As previously indicated, these egalitarian and democratically centered ideals, which formed Razin’s ideological foundation during the uprising, were essentially those that lay at the core of the historic mentality of the Don Cossacks themselves. Moreover, if what ultimately happened in the fortress city of Astrakhan is any indicator,¹³⁶ which was a city that Razin’s forces conquered and converted “into a Cossack republic,”¹³⁷ the democracy that might have been created may have resembled the Don Cossack *Krug*.

Although the Razin Revolt was ultimately put down, with some Don Cossacks even playing a role in Stenka Razin’s capture and escort to Moscow (where he was ultimately executed), it should not obscure the democratic and egalitarian undertones that it demonstrated. The initial reaction of a large portion of the Don Cossack population rallying to Razin’s cause in support of equality, democracy, and freedom from oppression, rather than sticking with the perceived unjust order, seems to indicate that a large number of Don Cossacks valued those ideals. The importance that the Don Cossacks placed (and still continue to place) on these ideals

134 As is often noted in historical accounts, Razin had the support of many peasants and was often referred to as their liberator.

135 George F. E. Rude, *Ideology & Popular Protest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995), 50.

136 In the city of Astrakhan, all property was divided up amongst the population, and small assemblies were formed to govern the city, with the goal of establishing a central democratic assembly.

137 Roberk Nisbet. Bain, *The First Romanovs. (1613-1725) A History of Muscovite Civilisation and the Rise of Modern Russia under Peter the Great and His Forerunners.* (New York: E.P. Dutton &, 1905), 169.

is reflected in many of their traditional songs and poems. As noted by Jacob Hartmann, “the place of honor” in many Don Cossack songs and poems “was always that of the great revolutionist, Stenka Razin.”¹³⁸ As further expounded upon by Paul Avrich, the Don Cossacks, who “descended [from] fugitives [of] Muscovite oppression, [...] cherished their freedom and independence,”¹³⁹ which likely contributed to their decision to follow Stenka Razin, who historian John Givens notes was “a symbol of freedom” and democracy.¹⁴⁰ This is a clear indicator as to how strongly many Don Cossacks valued those principles during this period. Furthermore, the Razin Revolt of 1670 –1671, shows that, despite the alleged deterioration of the democracy of the *Krug* during this period, the democratic mindset of the Don Cossacks was still alive and well. Still, the democracy of the *Krug* may not have been in such bad shape during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, although clearly not what it was, and surely was not just an oligarchy of homeowners as some previously noted historians have indicated.

The *Krug* of the Don Cossack Host made a number of interesting moves during the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century that demonstrates that it was not simply a puppet of the wealthy Don Cossack homeowners during this time. Historian Brain Boeck notes that “in 1685, [*Ataman*] Frol Minaev confided to a [Tsarist] government representative that in a recent *Krug* ‘he spoke to the Cossacks with tears in his eyes, [telling them] not to break the peace

138 Jacob W. Hartmann, *Soviet Russia Pictorial*, vol. 4-5 (University of Michigan, 1921), 108.

139 Paul Avrich, *Russian Rebels, 1600-1800* (New York: Norton, 1976), 59.

140 John Givens, *Prodigal Son: Vasilii Shukshin in Soviet Russian Culture* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 172.

with the Turkish Sultan and Crimean *Khan*, but they did not listen.”¹⁴¹ This account seemingly highlights the ever present independent-minded mentality of the Cossack popular assembly. In another instance, in 1690, “the *Krug* sent out” its annual “prohibition” decree against agriculture,¹⁴² despite the fact that many wealthy landowning Don Cossacks were actively attempting to setup farming estates around this time.¹⁴³ Although it was visibly deteriorating, especially since “the Tsar took the authority to appoint the *ataman*” of the host in the early eighteenth century,¹⁴⁴ what is important to note here is that the *Krug* of the Host was essentially operating as it traditionally had until it was banned by the Tsar in 1721. Still, it is also important to understand that the *Krug* continued to operate at the local level throughout the remainder of the Tsarist period.

VIII. Eighteenth Century – 1917: Don Cossack Democracy at the Local Level –

As noted by Shane O’Rourke, “long after the *Krug* [of the Host] ceased to exist its spirit was preserved in [...] every Cossack *stanitsa*.”¹⁴⁵ This spirit of the *Krug* plays a role in the reemergence of the *Krug* of the host during the Russian Civil War. Regarding the local level,

141 Brian J. Boeck, *Imperial Boundaries: Cossack Communities and Empire-building in the Age of Peter the Great* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 98.

142 James Stuart Olson, Lee Brigance Pappas, and Nicholas Charles J. Pappas, *An Ethnohistorical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires* Edited By..., Lee Brigance Pappas and Nicholas C. J. Pappas, Associate Editors. (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994), 174.

143 The extent to which the early Don Cossacks disdained agriculture cannot be emphasized enough, with many of them associating it with the oppression of serfdom. However, some entrepreneurial Don Cossacks saw the potential gains of agriculture, as well as having serfs, and tried to circumvent the traditional position of the *Krug* of the Host. They only really began to succeed following the dissolution of the *Krug* in 1721.

144 Samuel J. Newland, *Cossacks in the German Army, 1941-1945* (London, England: F. Cass, 1991), 73.

145 Shane O’Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press in Association with St. Antony’s College, Oxford, 2000), 28.

each *stanitsa* and *khutor*¹⁴⁶ elected their own *atamani*, and each *stanitsa* held *Krug* meetings with the overall community. It is important to note here that when the *Krug* of a given *stanitsa* was called, the members of the subsidiary *khutori* would also try to attend that meeting. On this point, since some *stanitsa* territories were particularly vast, such the *Veshenskaja Stanitsa*,¹⁴⁷ the distance between the primary settlement and a given *khutor* was sometimes quite great. As noted by historian Robert McNeal, this often contributed to logistical problems, especially during harvest season, when all members of the household were needed at home. The most obvious of these problems was that the assembly itself was often unable to reach a quorum, which was at least half of the eligible participants,¹⁴⁸ with many “making such a journey, only to find that there was no quorum and the meeting was rescheduled for the following week.”¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the assemblies, which were termed *shkodi* by the Tsarist government beginning in the late nineteenth century, of the various *stanitsi* were able to meet frequently and deal with a variety of issues that concerned their communities.

The most common topics discussed in the *stanitsa Krug*, besides local judicial issues, were those that concerned with land distribution. In short, in a custom that dates back before the eighteenth century, all male Don Cossacks, upon turning sixteen, were by default given a plot of

146 A *khutor*, according to the Don Cossacks, is a small subsidiary settlement of a *stanitsa*.

147 The famous writer Mikhail Sholokhov died in this *stanitsa*. It was said to have been 178,583 *dessiatin* in size at its height. One *dessiatin* is about 10,900 square meters.

148 The *Krug* of the Don Cossack host historically needed at least two thirds to have a quorum, however, local *Krugi*, for logistical reasons, often considered a quorum to be at least half.

149 Robert Hatch McNeal, *Tsar and Cossack, 1855-1914* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1987), 116.

land in their *stanitsa*, which the Don Cossacks still refer to as *pai*. The location of the land, which was initially “between 10 and 50 *dessiatin*” depending on the size of the *stanitsa* or *khutor*,¹⁵⁰ would be decided in the *stanitsa Krug* by a simple majority.¹⁵¹ These decisions were generally voted on very quickly in most of cases during the eighteenth century, and took into account land fertility, proximity to other plots of family members, as well as other important factors. However, when land and natural resources became scarcer in the nineteenth century, both the idea of *pai* and the overall method land distribution had to be reformed. This responsibility fell to the *stanitsa* assemblies, with many of them enlisting the help of “surveyors,” in order to properly redistribute the land so that all members of the Don Cossack community received a fair share of the available land.¹⁵² This included, of course, dividing up the land of the wealthy Don Cossacks, who through a variety of methods, had accumulated large estates of land by the early nineteenth century. In all the available accounts, the wealthy Don Cossacks were not thrilled about the prospect of having their land divided up, and did what they could to slow down the process. Nevertheless, despite the fact that they tried to “influence the surveyors work” through underhanded tactics,¹⁵³ the assemblies in all the *stanitsi* had established a system of regular land

150 However, a typical *pai* was generally considered to be around 30 *dessiatin*.

151 *Prometei: Zhizn' Zamechatel'nyh Ludei*, vol. 11 (Molodaiã Gvardiiã, 1977), 107.

152 Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 74.

153 Robert Hatch McNeal, *Tsar and Cossack, 1855-1914* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1987), 177.

redistribution no later than the year 1900.¹⁵⁴ Under the system that developed in most *stanitsi* by the end of the nineteenth century, land was regularly, often every five to ten years, re-divided relatively evenly amongst the eligible male members of the Don Cossack community. This practice is a clear indicator that both the Don Cossacks' historic democratic mentality and their cherished principles of equality were present and valued in their society during this time.

However, it is important to note a number of key developments that were having an effect on the basic structure of the Don Cossack local assemblies.

First and perhaps most importantly, with the establishment of the Don Statute of 1870, non-Cossacks were allowed to participate in the assemblies alongside the Don Cossacks. From that point on, the only time that non-Cossacks could legally be excluded from the assemblies is when the business at hand only concerned Cossacks. Nevertheless, "the Don Statute [of 1870] left intact the system of elected administration headed by a *stanitsa ataman*," albeit with the participation of non-Cossacks.¹⁵⁵ In many *khutori*, and some *stanitsi*, there were virtually no non-Cossacks, so this law had little effect in many locations. However, the Tsarist government's intervention, regarding the Statute of 1870, in the democratic traditions of the Don Cossacks ran even deeper than this. In addition to the fact that an elected *stanitsa ataman* now needed approval from the *ataman* of the Don Host, and the indirect approval of the Tsarist government, "the 1870 law" forced them to setup "separate courts, consisting of 4 to 11 judges elected by" the

154 By the year 1900, most *stanitsi* had system where, while each male member of the community was still entitled to *pai*, the local assemblies did what they could to ensure that all the members of their community were provided with an approximately equal share of the available territory of their home *stanitsa*.

155 Canadian Association of Slavists, *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, vol. 30 (Canadian Association of Slavists, 1988), 215.

assembly.¹⁵⁶ This was contrary to their traditional system of having judicial matters decided by their *stanitsa* assemblies. Moreover, the Statute of 1870 quite visibly attacked the democratic traditions of the Don Cossacks. Despite this assault on their traditional system of self-government, the democratic mentality of the Don Cossacks still persevered through this period.

During this time, the democratic mentality of the Don Cossacks, despite the deterioration of their ability to democratically govern themselves, was still visible in the democratic elections for the *stanitsa atamani*,¹⁵⁷ which (in many ways) slightly resemble the activities that occur during the presidential campaigns in certain western countries. The best account of this practice in a *stanitsa* is visible in an account written in the Don regional newspaper, known as *Donskaja Rech'* in 1891, in which the presence of vodka seems to have been a necessary component to the unfolding of an unspecified *stanitsa* election. This account, which refers to the election of an unspecified *ataman*, notes that there was an “excitement that swept through the *stanitsa* at election time.”¹⁵⁸ The streets were flooded with the supporters of the candidates for *ataman*, who would buy a drink for anyone who happened to be walking by and promised to vote for their candidate. As McNeal notes, “the tavern was the principal institution of election campaigning in the *stanitsa*, [with] the wealthy candidates entertaining the impoverished with vodka and such

156 Robert Hatch McNeal, *Tsar and Cossack, 1855-1914* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1987), 117.

157 To be clear, despite the fact that the winning candidate for *stanitsa ataman* would still have to be approved by the *ataman* of the Host, there were still local elections, which saw very high levels of participation and enthusiasm from the local community.

158 *Donskaja Rech'*, as quoted in Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 122-3.

delicacies as a whole roast of ram.”¹⁵⁹ Although the Tsarist regime would ultimately have to approve the winning candidate, the active participation of the entire Don Cossack community in the election of an *ataman*, with political debates on the election occurring frequently around the *stanitsa*, gives one the idea as to how highly they valued democracy.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, the democratic mentality of the Don Cossacks seems to have been present at the end of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth century, while Imperial Russia moved toward revolution and civil war.

IX. The Return of the *Krug* of the Don Host –

With the onslaught of the First World War, the Don Cossacks, “like many Russian soldiers, [...] were unhappy with the Tsar’s leadership in the war.”¹⁶¹ Firstly, many of them were upset with the amount of casualties that they had been taking in the war, and many of them were simply unwilling “to attack the workers” that were protesting in Petrograd in 1917, contrary to their orders, during the time leading up to the February Revolution.¹⁶² According to some historians, some Cossacks were even rumored to have winked and smiled at the protesters, which likely instigated them further.¹⁶³ The role of the Don Cossacks’ disobedience in the Russian Revolution is expertly pointed out by Leon Trotsky, who said that: “it seems that the break in the

159 Robert Hatch McNeal, *Tsar and Cossack, 1855-1914* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1987), 118.

160 One should bear in mind that these debates were most certainly quite rowdy, and may have gotten a bit out of hand at times. After all, they might have a democratic mindset, but they are still Cossacks.

161 Samuel J. Newland, *Cossacks in the German Army, 1941-1945* (London, England: F. Cass, 1991), 79.

162 Murray Bookchin, *The Third Revolution: Popular Movements in the Revolutionary Era* (London: Continuum, 2004), 150.

163 Ibid. 150.

army first appeared among the Cossacks.”¹⁶⁴ Moreover, in 1917 it seems that after being oppressed by the Tsarist government, being forced to participate in a faltering conflict, and losing much of their autonomy, the Don “Cossacks had had enough.”¹⁶⁵

“Freed of their oath of loyalty by the overthrow of the tsar in February 1917,” the Don Cossacks reestablished the *Krug* of the Host and elected an *ataman*, Alexei Kaledin, on June thirtieth 1917, establishing what is often referred to as the Don Cossack Republic.¹⁶⁶ The Republic established its administrative center in Novocherkassk, which is where its “Don *Krug*,” also known as the Great *Krug*, regularly met and passed various laws and resolutions.¹⁶⁷ Structurally similar to the traditional *Krug* model previously noted, the Don *Krug* meetings were led by the *ataman*, which was a position held by Alexei Kaledin and later by Petr Krasnov,¹⁶⁸ and motions were passed by acclamation. There were a variety of issues that were brought before the Don *Krug* during this time, with all of them generally concerned with matters pertinent to this period in history. For instance, in a secret meeting of the Don Cossack *Krug* in 1918, they discussed the surge in anti-Semitism that seemed to accompany the start of hostilities with the Bolsheviks in the north.¹⁶⁹ The following are some of the minutes from that secret meeting:

164 Leon Trotsky, as quoted in Jamie Bisher, *White Terror: Cossack Warlords of the Trans-Siberian* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 34.

165 Allen L. Hamilton. and Paul K. Davis, *Encyclopedia of Warrior Peoples and Fighting Groups* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 60.

166 James Minahan, *Encyclopedia of the Stateless Nations: Ethnic and National Groups Around the World* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 2002), 541.

167 Clifford. Kinvig, *Churchill's Crusade: The British Invasion of Russia, 1918-1920* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 98.

168 *Ataman* Kaledin killed himself in early 1918, following a number of pivotal defeats. *Ataman* Krasnov eventually replaced him.

169 Many Don Cossacks, who were not terribly fond of the Jews to begin with, perceived a connection between the Bolsheviks (Communists) and the Jews. This naturally led to an increase in anti-Semitism among many Don Cossacks during the Russian Civil War.

Representatives of the Jews insisted that anti-Jewish articles should not appear and that the government should publish a document, showing that all nations are equal in its eyes, and that it defends on an equal basis the person and property of every citizen, whether Russian or Jew. Answering these points the Head of the Department stated that he saw no necessity for such a statement. The authorities will remember the words of the *Ataman* of the Don: ‘As long as I am in charge I will not allow any pogroms against the Jews.’ [...] After that the delegation [of Jews] expressed their thanks, and asked to convey their deep gratitude to the *Ataman* of the Don.¹⁷⁰

Regardless of the sincerity of the statements made in this meeting, since the traditional anti-Semitism of the Don Cossacks is well known, it is important to note that the *Krug* of the Host, with an *ataman* at its head, was adapting to fit the circumstances that it found itself in. However, at its core, the *Krug* still maintained the basic properties that were traditional, including its ability to make decisions of military significance.

In regards to the war effort against the Bolsheviks, the *Krug* was instrumental in the early phases of the Civil War. For instance, in September 1918, “the Great *Krug* approved the idea of advancing beyond the borders of the Don Region to occupy vital points on the approaches, mostly railway junctions in neighboring Voronezh and Saratov Provinces.”¹⁷¹ This account is important, since without such approval the Don Cossacks, who were primarily concerned with

170 The Great *Krug*, as quoted in Brian Murphy, *Rostov in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920: The Key to Victory* (London: Routledge, 2005), 56.

171 Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (New York, NY: Pegasus, 2007), 88.

defending their own territory, would not have easily agreed to any significant military campaign outside of the Don region.¹⁷² In another instance, although some historians refer to the Don Cossack Republic as a dictatorship, in which the *ataman* was the dictator, the Great *Krug* in February 1919 forced *Ataman* Krasnov, and his associates, to resign, “because the *Krug* expected that the departure of the pro-German leaders would open the way to increased Allied aid.”¹⁷³ This seems to indicate that many of the principles that had governed the Don Cossacks since the beginning, one of which was the power of the *Krug* over the *ataman*, was still very much a part of the Great *Krug* during the Civil War.¹⁷⁴

It must be emphasized that, at the very least, the Great *Krug* had fundamental elements stemming from the democratic traditions of the Don Cossacks.¹⁷⁵ During the Civil War, the democratic mentality of the Don Cossacks “enabled members of one *stanitsa* to act in co-operation with other *stanitsi* while the historical memory of who they were and what they had been allowed them to develop local co-operation into an independent Cossack republic.”¹⁷⁶ However, with the establishment of Bolshevik control over the Don region, along with Lenin’s genocidal program against the Don Cossacks,¹⁷⁷ the Don Cossacks’ democratic traditions,

172 Although the Don Cossacks were historically reluctant to fight beyond the boundaries of the Don region, they also felt it was their duty to adhere to the decision of the *Krug*.

173 Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919-1920: The Defeat of the Whites* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 21.

174 It should also be noted that all Don Cossacks had the right to voice his opinions at the Great *Krug*.

175 This of course should be noted in conjunction with the fact that traditional *stanitsa Krugi* also continued to function during the Civil War period.

176 Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 47.

177 Lenin’s anti-Cossack policy, known commonly as *raskazachivaniye* (decossackization), was a response to the perceived counterrevolutionary threat of the Cossacks, since many of them had fought against the Bolsheviks in the Civil War.

especially the *Krug*, were banned by the new Soviet state. This impediment did not mean that the Don Cossacks' democratic mentality had been destroyed, especially considering the fact that there were a number of signs of its persistence throughout the Soviet period.

X. The Soviet Period to the Present Day –

While the Don Cossacks who had managed to emigrate at the end of the Civil War continued to hold *Krug*-like meetings, such as the one held in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1935, which “was attended by 79 delegates,”¹⁷⁸ the Don Cossacks in the Soviet Union were being oppressed and subjected to something that can only be categorized as genocide.

The early Bolshevik rulers were determined to destroy all trace of the Cossack communities. The hosts, the land rights, and the *stanitsi* [...] all disappeared. A large part of the Cossack population was liquidated or deported. The singing of Cossack songs and the wearing of Cossack dress were strictly prohibited, and Cossacks, as counterrevolutionaries, were banned from enlistment into the Red Army.¹⁷⁹

For all intensive purposes, the traditional forms of the Don Cossacks' self-government were illegal during the Soviet period. Nevertheless, there were a number of points throughout the Soviet period where their democratic mentality broke through the veil of oppression.

¹⁷⁸ Aleksei Arsen'ev, "Vklad Bezhencev v Horovoe Iskusstvo I Cerkovnoe Penie v Serbii," *Zhurnal'nii Zal / Novyj Zhurnal.*, October 20, 2010, 9, accessed February 10, 2012, <http://magazines.russ.ru/nj/2010/259/aa35-pr.html>.

¹⁷⁹ Albert Seaton, *The Cossacks* (Reading: Osprey Publishing, 1972), 30.

The first most visible example occurred during the Second World War, with Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 in Operation Barbarossa. After an initial weeklong strangle hold on the region during November 1941, the Nazis re-captured Rostov-on-Don in July 1942, and soon after the surrounding region, which they were able to hold until February 1943. During the time of the occupation, with the help of *Ataman* Krasnov, who had immigrated to Germany at the end of the Civil War, the Don Cossacks organized themselves and fought alongside the Nazis.¹⁸⁰ In terms of the Don Cossacks themselves, the newly established *Ataman* Sergei Pavlov, with the blessing of the occupying Nazi forces, "headed a regional *Krug* [...] which had around 200 representatives," all of which were Don Cossacks.¹⁸¹ Under *Ataman* Pavlov, the *Krug* essentially became the regional government during the occupation, deliberating on issues and imposing laws on the population. When *Ataman* Pavlov was killed "on June 17, 1944, either shot mistakenly by a sentry or assassinated by a partisan," the Cossack *Krug* promptly "elected Colonel T.T. Domanov as their new *Ataman*."¹⁸² This election, as opposed to a new *ataman* appointing himself or being appointed by the Nazis, may demonstrate that the Don Cossacks still placed value in electing their own leaders. However, when the war started to go badly for the Nazis, the Don Cossacks fled westward with them, and ultimately surrendered to

180 Hitler's justification for this alliance is that the Don Cossacks were, in his view, the decedents of an ancient Aryan race. Hitler is also rumored to have been a fan of Mikhail Sholokhov's classic *And Quiet Flows the Don*.

181 Christopher Ailsby, *Hitler's Renegades: Foreign Nationals in the Service of the Third Reich* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, 2004.), 127.

182 Samuel J. Newland, *Cossacks in the German Army, 1941-1945* (London, England: F. Cass, 1991), 134.

the Allies in Central Europe. In the end, those who surrendered were repatriated to the USSR, where they faced the wrath of Joseph Stalin.¹⁸³

Following World War II, although the identity of the Don Cossacks, not to mention their democratic mentality, was significantly suppressed for some time, visible signs of it began to reemerge following the June 1962 uprising in Novochoerkassk, which has become known as Bloody Saturday. The uprising, although it was largely caused by a “30 percent increase in the price of meat and butter,”¹⁸⁴ became open “anti-government demonstrations.”¹⁸⁵ As noted by a number of historians, following the conclusion of the uprising, which was put down at the expense of 5,000 people’s lives, there was a clear Don Cossack cultural “reawakening, accompanied by the publication of the first Cossack-language dictionary and many reference books on Cossack history, culture, language, and nationalist aspirations.”¹⁸⁶ This resurfacing of the Don Cossack identity continued at a steady, albeit slow, pace through the late Soviet period,¹⁸⁷ however, with the collapse of the USSR in 1991, there was no longer anything holding it back.

183 The reasons behind the Allies’ decision to repatriate them, which has historically been referred to as the Betrayal of the Cossacks, was prompted by the obligations set forth at the Yalta Conference. The agreements made there stipulated that any Soviet citizen that found his way into Allied custody during or after the war, was to be returned to the USSR. Interestingly, the Allies also decided, for variety of reasons, to return Don Cossacks, such as *Ataman Krasnov*, who had emigrated at the end of the Civil War.

184 Samuel H. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novochoerkassk, 1962* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 21.

185 James Minahan, *One Europe, Many Nations: A Historical Dictionary of European National Groups* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000), 542.

186 *Ibid.* 542.

187 It should be noted that Mikhail Gorbachev is said to have supported the Cossack cultural movement during the 1980s.

The democratic mentality of the Don Cossacks returned to the forefront in 1991, with the renewed ability for local *stanitsi* to openly elect their own *atamani*, which was something that was not permitted during the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁸ Perhaps most importantly, “on November 20, [1991] a Great *Krug* of the Cossacks was convened in Novocherkassk” during which the Union of Cossack Republics of Southern Russia was proclaimed.¹⁸⁹ This event underscored the reality that many Don Cossacks, along with some other minority Cossack groups in the Don region, were seeking independence from Russia, and the establishment of their own independent Cossack republic. Although their efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, it is important to note that in addition to the fact that their democratic traditions had returned at the local level, the idea of *Krug* of the Host had also returned under the title of the Great *Krug*, which still functions as a regional assembly with certain powers up to the present day. Moreover, using a slight reapplication of something said by Shane O’Rourke, the fact “that there was anything left of the Cossacks,” let alone their democratic inclinations, after periods of Tsarist and then Soviet oppression, “is testimony to the strength of their identity.”¹⁹⁰ It should then be expected that, if history is any indicator, the Don Cossacks will continue to value their democratic heritage, which seems to be ingrained in their identity, for generations to come.

188 Although a few *stanitsi* had an *ataman* during the Soviet period, they were appointed by the government, or made to win in fixed local elections.

189 Aleksei Mukhin, *Kazach'e Dvizhenie v Rossii i Stranah Blizhnego Zarubezh'ja 1988-1994 Gody*, vol. 1 (OOO Panorama, 1994), 122.

190 Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 47.

XI. Section Conclusion –

From the first records of them in the mid-sixteenth century, through the Tsarist period, through trials they faced during the Russian Civil War, and through the Soviet period, the Don Cossacks have somehow managed to hang on their democratic mindset, in which equality amongst Cossacks is fundamental. On this point, whenever they were permitted to do so throughout history, the Don Cossacks have turned to their democratic heritage, and utilized their traditional assemblies, *Krugi*, both on the local and host levels. What does this say about the Don Cossacks? As was previously highlighted, it speaks to how deeply the mentality and idea of democracy is entrenched in their identity. On this point, the entanglement of democratic values with the identity of the Don Cossacks is highlighted in an interview with Don Cossack Andrei Vasil'ev in 2009, in which he said that one of their most important and “unique tradition [...] is the *Krug*” and indicated that these democratic traditions are an essential part of who they are.¹⁹¹ Perhaps their democratic traditions have much to teach the west, with one Don Cossack stating that what they have had historically “was real democracy, unlike in America,” where the “Electoral College chooses the leader.”¹⁹² Interestingly, this statement takes on a slightly more complex undertone when considering that Cossack democracy’s possible ancient Scytho-Sarmatian legacy may bind it to western civilization in a previously unconsidered way, especially in terms of its possible connection to the Arthurian legends. It would then be beneficial to examine this possible ancestral connection, which becomes quite pronounced when one reviews

191 Aleksay Vasil'ev, "Personal Interview," Interview by author, April 19, 2009.

192 Jeffrey Tayler, "Russia's Holy Warriors," *The Atlantic*, October 15, 2010, 4, accessed February 05, 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/01/russia-apos-s-holy-warriors/3685/>.

the Sarmatian Hypothesis, since it may alter the way scholarship appreciates both the Cossack assembly as well as the roots of western political culture.

SECTION 3: THE SARMATIAN HYPOTHESIS, THE ARTHURIAN ROUND TABLE, AND THE *KRUG*

XII. Section Introduction –

The legend of the Arthurian Round Table, the assemblies of the ancient Iranian tribes, and the Cossack democratic assembly may not be aligned in terms of time, geography, and even authenticity, however, there do appear to be a number of interesting parallels between these bodies, which might point to a shared historical factor between them. If such a connection is shown to at least be plausible, it may cause all three of these traditions to be viewed in a new light. Beginning with the Arthurian Round Table, the first serious mention of it was made in the twelfth century by Wace, in which it was noted that:

This Round Table was ordained of Arthur that when his fair fellowship sat to meat their chairs should be high alike, their service equal, and none before or after his comrade. Thus no man could boast that he was exalted above his fellow, for all alike were gathered round the board, and none was alien at the breaking of Arthur's bread. At this table sat Britons, Frenchmen, Normans, Angevins, Flemings, Burgundians, and Loherins.¹⁹³

In this passage the core precept of the Round Table is described, which is simply that all men present at the meeting of Arthur's Knights would have an equal say, with none being raised above another. As highlighted in the previous passage, even foreign nationalities were among those considered equals at the Round Table. Quite simply, the Round Table itself, as is noted by

¹⁹³ Wace, *Arthurian Chronicles: Roman De Brut* (Echo Library, 2008), 57.

Arthurian scholar Wendy Berg, has endured over the centuries as a symbol of equality, and “has become synonymous with these qualities of fellowship, discussion and concord, the perfect symbol of a meeting place where disagreement and dissent can be resolved.”¹⁹⁴ However, the question must be asked: where did the Round Table mythos come from? Did it originate domestically in what is now the United Kingdom, where there may have been something from which the legend might have derived inspiration, or did it originate elsewhere? While nothing can be said for certain, the Arthurian Round Table mythos certainly possesses a number of key characteristics that are also in the *Nart Sagas* of the ancient Iranians, as well as the practices of their decedents, including the Cossacks of Southern Russia and Ukraine. Moreover, taking the Sarmatian Hypothesis into consideration, it seems quite possible that a historical link exists between the democratic practices of the Cossacks and the legend of the Round Table, which might add a new dynamic to the study of the Cossack assembly.

XIII. The Sarmatian Hypothesis: A Review

Before moving further, it is vital that we briefly review the Sarmatian Hypothesis, including key aspects of this view. The Sarmatian Hypothesis, which is thoroughly explored in *From Scythia to Camelot* by Scott Littleton and Linda Malcor, points to visible parallels between the Arthurian Legends and the Ossetian *Nart Sagas*, noting the presence of both Iazyges and Alans (both ancient Iranian peoples) in Britain and Northern France at key times during the formation of the Arthurian tales, and thus concludes that they were transmitted (at least in part)

¹⁹⁴ Wendy Berg, *Gwenevere and the Round Table* (Cheltenham: Skylight, 2012), 16.

to Britain from Alano-Sarmatian sources. Regarding the Iazyges, 5,500 Iazygian *cataphracti* (heavily armed horsemen) were dispatched from their homes to patrol Hadrian's Wall and defend it from the various rebellious northern tribes.¹⁹⁵ This relocation was brought about as part of the terms of a peace treaty between Marcus Aurelius and Iazygian chief Zanticus in 175 AD, which came about as a result of the Iazyges' loss to Rome in the Marcomannic War.¹⁹⁶ Following their service to Rome, many of these Iazygian cavalymen likely stayed in various settlements throughout Roman Britain, as is noted by Littleton and Malcor, and may have adapted their heritage to their new circumstances:

From the available evidence it seems that few if any of the Iazygian auxiliaries ever managed to get back to their homeland in the steppes, and in accordance with Roman policy in these matters a colony of Sarmatian veterans was established – Bremetennacum Veteranorum, a major Roman cavalry post near the modern Lancashire town of Ribchester in or near the vicus, or village, adjacent to the fort... Archaeological investigations at Ribchester and in an area just to the northwest, called the Fylde, have yielded a considerable amount of evidence that a Sarmatian community existed there for several centuries...[Further], a leader who successfully led the descendants of the Iazygian veterans and a fair number of Celts in a temporarily successful campaign against the Saxon invaders would

195 Kathryn Hinds, *Scythians and Sarmatians* (New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2010), 63.

196 Frank McLynn, *Marcus Aurelius: A Life* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2010), 366-8.

have inspired his own cycle of legends that may have eventually become identified with the epic tradition shared by the community he led.¹⁹⁷

Noting the presence of the Sarmatian ethnic enclaves in Britain for centuries following their relocation there, which might be accentuated by the fact that there are multiple rivers in the United Kingdom that still bear the ancient Iranian name Don (See Figure 4),¹⁹⁸ the possibility of the merging of traditions with those of the native population is most certainly plausible.¹⁹⁹ Pointedly, Leo Gumilev's work on ethnogenesis, notably in his *Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere*, seems to support Littleton and Malcor's hypothesis on this matter.

Approaching this hypothesis through the prism of the Gumilev's work on ethnogenesis, we must note that he highlights the possibility that "when territorial mixing of two populations occur," they will either merge into a single group, or will coexist in one territory for centuries.²⁰⁰ However, if the limitations on "exogamous" marriages between ethnic groups are relaxed, "it is always a symptom of the approaching disintegration of an ethnos."²⁰¹ Taking this into consideration, while the authentic Sarmatian ethnos in Britain may have disintegrated, due to their presumed intermarriages and interactions with the native ethnic groups of the region, it is probable that their decedents formed a new ethnic group, which incorporated certain cultural elements of ancient Iranian origin with those of the native corpus. The result, as Gumilev might

197 C. Scott. Littleton and Linda A. Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail* (New York: Garland, 2000), 18-23.

198 This figure was made using ARC GIS mapping software, as well as Photoshop.

199 The word Don, which is also the name of a river in Southern Russia, comes from the ancient Iranian word, meaning river.

200 L. N. Gumilev, *Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1990), 172.

201 Ibid. 172.

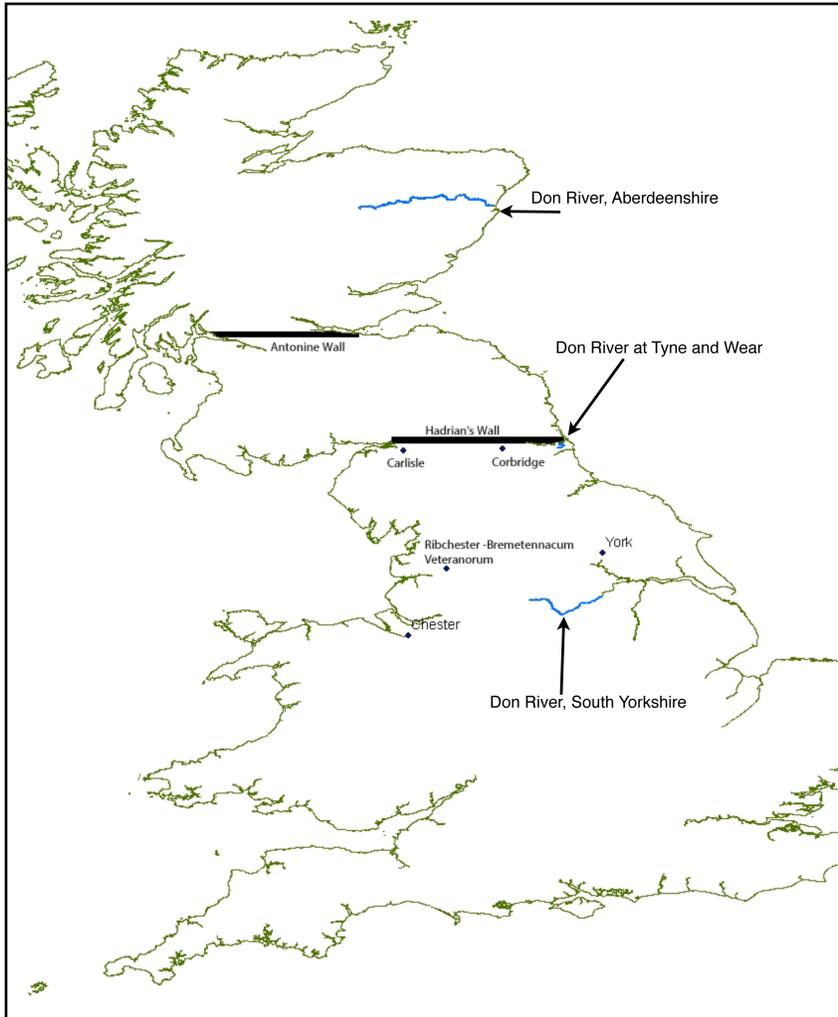


Figure 4: The River Dons of the United Kingdom. It should be noted that, due to a lack of reliable map data, only three of the five Don rivers in the U.K. could be mapped in this figure. In terms of the northern most Don river in Aberdeenshire, it is near a Roman fort known as Deer's Den, which may have been associated with Roman incursions (that may have included Sarmatians) as late as 200 AD.

point out, was that a new ethnos, which represented a mixture of the Sarmatian and native cultural elements, superseded its parent groups. In short, Scytho-Sarmatian cultural characteristics, which are at least partially reflected in the Nart Sagas, combined overtime with Celtic folklore and traditions, such as the locally originating legends of Merlin, and were possibly applied to historical figures, which generated a totally new cultural tradition. However, the ethnogenesis of

Iazyges in Britain, following their deployment there in 175 AD, is only part of possible route by which ancient Iranian influences may have integrated into the Arthurian legends.

In accordance with Littleton and Malcor's hypothesis, as well as Gumilev's work on ethnogenesis, it should be noted that in the fifth century there were a number of Alans that migrated to Gaul, notably in the Armorica region. These Alans, which remained an identifiable group roughly between the fifth and the twelfth centuries, were compelled to migrate to this region in response to the late fourth century Hun invasion of their homeland in what is now Southern Russia and the Caucasus.²⁰² As is noted by many scholars, these Alans brought with them a number of characteristics, which intermingled with the ethnoses of the people that were already in that region, perhaps bolstering in the ancient Iranian cultural elements left behind by the Iazyges centuries earlier.

Notably in terms of warfare, it must be said that traditionally the Celtic peoples of what is now Great Britain generally employed the use of chariots in terms of warfare, despite the fact that many other Celtic peoples across Europe have abandoned the practice generations prior, possibly due to Roman influences.²⁰³ Compounding this historical viewpoint, the sixth century Roman historian Procopius indicates that "horses were unknown to Britia," and that the Angles specifically seemed to be ignorant of their use and had a "habit of fighting on foot."²⁰⁴ Additionally, it should be noted that the Normans, who were known for their cavalry, did not become an identifiable group until the tenth century, and their predecessors, who were the Norse Vikings, were traditionally seafarers and generally had no room for horses on their boats known

202 C. Scott. Littleton and Linda A. Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail* (New York: Garland, 2000), 282, 242.

203 Ancient Military.com, "Celtic Warriors," *Ancient Military.com*, 2010, Celtic Cavalry, accessed March 07, 2012, <http://www.ancientmilitary.com/celtic-warriors.htm>.

204 Michael E. Jones, *The End of Roman Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 94.

as Longship. This is not to say that they did not field cavalry, with notable instances of cavalry use including the Battle of Sulcoit in Ireland (968 AD) and the battle of Montfaucon in France (888 AD); however, they “fought mostly on foot.”²⁰⁵ Thus, the tendency to use horseback cavalry and specially designed spears (i.e. lances) may have come to Britain via a non-domestic source, which may have been Alanic, since the Scytho-Sarmatians were well-known for their use of this category of war implements.²⁰⁶

This possible Alanic influence, in addition to the introduction of the steppe pony and the Alan hunting dog to Northern France, may have contributed to the origin of the image of the medieval knight. ²⁰⁷This fact is highlighted by historian Erik Hildinger:

As the Alani commonly fought in complete chainmail armor, armed with lance and broadsword and mounted upon armored horses, their influence on the Romans ... is obvious, and the idea of the fully armored cavalryman, which culminated in the medieval knight, continued to spread.²⁰⁸

The Alans would then seem to play not just a role in the Arthurian legends, but also may represent a core element of what became the medieval British ethnos, especially in terms of warfare. While there may have been some other reasons as to why the use of cavalry gained popularity in Britain during the Middle Ages, such as the “introduction of the stirrup,”²⁰⁹ it seems

205 Magnus Magnusson and Mark Harrison, *The Vikings: Voyagers of Discovery and Plunder* (Oxford: Osprey, 2008), 99.

206 A. V. Venkov, *Istorija Donskogo Kazachestva* (Rostov-na-Donu: Terra, 2005), 6-14.

207 Laura Knight-Jadczyk, *The Secret History of the World and How to Get out Alive* ([S.l.]: Red Pill Press, 2005), 249.

208 Erik Hildinger, *Warriors of the Steppe: A Military History of Central Asia, 500 B.C. to 1700 A.D.* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2001), 62.

209 Stephen Morillo, *Warfare under the Anglo-Norman Kings, 1066-1135* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), 152.

that the introduction of the Alans may have played at least some kind of role in the quick rise in popularity of this type of warfare.

In terms of the Arthurian legends themselves, another interesting cultural element that was seemingly passed along to the British ethnos from their Alanic precursors is visible in the Sword in the Stone myth. This point is well presented by Littleton and Malcor, who note that:

It is interesting that the earliest appearance of the Sword in the Stone is in the “continental” (i.e. French) Arthurian romances in regions that were settled by Alans, specifically the eastern part of what became Brittany and the western portion of the Orleanais, where the sword cult was probably still very much alive. In Brittany and elsewhere in France, by the time Robert de Boron and other authors began to weave their tales about Arthur, Merlin and the Grail, this specifically Alanic element, a Christianized version of the embedded sword, had probably long since become part of the oral traditions about Arthur, Lancelot, and their exploits. Eventually this element conflated with the anvil theme, and in the late thirteenth century, thanks to growing popularity of French romantic literature, the episode diffused to England, where it surfaced for the first time in *Arthur and Merlin*.²¹⁰

In terms of how the sword in the stone element existed in pre-Christian ancient Alano-Sarmatian culture, the various ancient Iranian tribes, including the Alans, performed “a ritual involving the

210 C. Scott. Littleton and Linda A. Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail* (New York: Garland, 2000), 188-9.

removal of a sword from a stone.”²¹¹ This is further expounded upon by fourth century historian

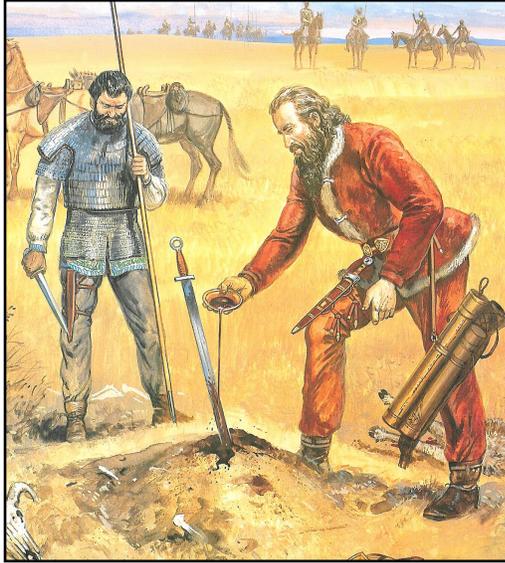


Figure 5: The Religious Sarmatian Sword.

Ammianus, who noted that the Alans “plunge a naked sword into the ground with barbaric ceremonies, and then worship it with great respect as Mars, their god of war.”²¹² The religious significance of the sword for the Sarmatians is highlighted in Figure 5.²¹³ However, this type of ritual, while similar, seems to notably diverge from the more famous Arthurian sword removal paradigm. Nevertheless, as is suggested by Scott

Littleton, it is quite possible that Ammianus “simply

failed to see (or hear about) this aspect of the matter,” regarding the removal of the sword from the earth.²¹⁴ Indeed, the practice of sword removal, in terms of gaining a reward, is also

highlighted within the story *How Setenaya Rescued Warzameg*, in which a girl offers her hand in marriage to the man who can withdraw a lance from the ground, in the *Nart Sagas*:

211 Shan M. M. Winn, *Heaven, Heroes, and Happiness: The Indo-European Roots of Western Ideology* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), 34.

212 Richard Brzezinski and Mariusz Mielczarek, *The Sarmatians, 600 B.C.-A.D. 450* (Oxford: Osprey Military, 2002), 44.

213 This image was acquired from the following source:

Richard Brzezinski and Mariusz Mielczarek, *The Sarmatians, 600 B.C.-A.D. 450* (Oxford: Osprey Military, 2002), 26.

214 Scott Littleton, "From Swords in the Earth to the Sword in the Stone: A Possible Reflection of an Alano-Sarmatian Rite of Passage in the Arthurian Tradition," *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 3 (1982): 58.

“I shall agree with you and call him an ugly, stupid fool if any one of you can pull his lance out of the ground,” she replied. “Furthermore, I shall give my hand in betrothal to the one who can do it.”

At this they began to shout, “I can do it! It will be easy!” They ran out of the house and one by one tried to pull the lance out of the ground, but without success.”

“Who is this person who has stuck this lance in the ground? They wondered.

“What is his lineage? We cannot pull it out!”²¹⁵

Clearly, recalling that the *Nart Sagas* are likely representative of the ancient folklore common to the Alans and the Iazyges, this passage seems to parallel (at least partially) the Arthurian legend of the sword in the stone, especially when one notes the linked acquisition of both his kingship and his wife Guinevere. In many variants of the Arthurian legends, the marital acquirement of Guinevere, as well as the kingship, came with the pulling of the sword of the stone, much like the previously noted instance in the *Nart Sagas*. However, due to the long term exposure of the Iazyges with Celts and the Romans, partially as a result of them being the first Sarmatian tribe to cross the Don River between 200 BCE and 50 AD, it is possible that they “had abandoned this particular aspect of the sword cult before they were defeated by the Romans and impressed into the legions.”²¹⁶ Further, recalling that the sword in the stone component was not present in all the

215 John Colarusso, *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus: Myths and Legends from the Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz, and Ubykhs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 74.

216 Scott Littleton, "From Swords in the Earth to the Sword in the Stone: A Possible Reflection of an Alano-Sarmatian Rite of Passage in the Arthurian Tradition," *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 3 (1982): 61.

early Arthurian legends, and the legend first appearance was in Northern France, it is more probable that, while the custom could have persisted with the Iazyges deposited in Britain in 175 AD, the Alans who migrated to Northern France in the fifth century were probably primarily responsible for the introduction of this element. Still, it is quite plausible that the Iazyges also contributed, at least partially, to the King Arthur legends.

This Iazygian contribution becomes detectable in the origin of the figure King Arthur, who possibly represents a compilation of historical and folkloric characters of both Alano-Sarmatian and native origin. In this regard the Iazygian soldiers', who were transported to Britain in 175 AD, sons "were strongly motivated to follow their fathers' footsteps," and "probably helped it to maintain its ethnic identity and to resist total assimilation into the indigenous Celtic population" at least for a time.²¹⁷ Some of the things maintained by the decedents of those initial Iazygian cavalymen may have included the legend of Batraz, a character of high importance in the *Nart Sags*, and who resembles the image of Arthur in many respects.

The most visible similarity between Batraz and Arthur is seen within the stories of both these characters' deaths. In Sir Thomas Malory's fifteenth century *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Arthur, following his battle with Sir Mordred, is mortally wounded and instructs his comrade, Sir Bedivere, to fulfill one last command:

"I would ask you to take my sword Excalibur to the shore of the lake and throw it in the water. Then return to me and tell me what you have seen."

"My Lord, as you command, it shall be done."

²¹⁷ C. Scott. Littleton and Linda A. Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail* (New York: Garland, 2000), 19.

Sir Bedivere took the sword, but when he came to the water's edge, it appeared so beautiful that he could not bring himself to throw it in, so instead he hid it by a tree, and then returned to the king.

“Sir Bedivere, what did you see?”

“My Lord, I saw nothing but the wind upon the waves.”

“Then you did not obey me; I pray you, go swiftly again, and this time fulfill my command.”²¹⁸

Following another failed attempt, in which he lies to Arthur a second time, Sir Bedivere returns to the lake and throws the sword into it, and, just before the sword is about to touch the water, the hand of the Lady of the Lake catches it. Upon hearing of this news, Arthur passes. This pattern of the leader's death is nearly copied in the death of Batraz, although some of the details differ.

After slaughtering a vast number of his fellow Narts in revenge for their complicity in his father's death and after resisting all the afflictions that God could throw at him, Batraz takes pity on the handful of survivors. He tells them that he has satisfied his need for vengeance and that he himself is ready for death, adding that “I cannot die until my sword has been thrown into the sea.” This latter stipulation causes great concern among the Narts, as the sword is so heavy that only Batraz can wield it with ease. In desperation they decide to deceive him. Hiding the sword, they report back that it has been disposed of in the

²¹⁸ Thomas Malory and Keith Baines, *Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur: King Arthur and the Legends of the Round Table : A Rendition in Modern Idiom* (New York: Bramhall House, 1988), 500.

accordance with his instructions. But when Batraz asks, “What prodigious things did you see when my sword fell into the sea?” they reply, “Nothing” – an answer that Batraz recognizes as a lie, since he alone knows what will happen when his sword enters the water. When the Narts finally manage to drag the wondrous weapon to the coast and consign it to the water, the sea becomes turbulent, boils, and turns blood-red. As soon as this is reported to Batraz, he dies, secure in the knowledge that his last wish has been fulfilled.²¹⁹

The parallels between these two stories, which both include the conditional death of their leaders and betrayal at the hands of subordinates, are quite clear and provide credence to the Sarmatian Hypothesis.

Further, noting that the historical Arthur is often said to have lived during the fifth century and noting that the Iazygian enclave probably persisted in the initial Roman veteran colonies (including *Bremetennacum Veteranorum*) as late as the seventh century, “a leader who successfully led the descendants of the Iazygian veterans and a fair number of Celts would have inspired his own cycle of legends that may have eventually become identified with the epic tradition shared by the community he led.”²²⁰ To be clear, this “epic tradition” might have included the ancient Iranian mythology, which may have been represented in the *Nart Sagas*, and could point to the Iazygian influence on the Arthurian legends. Without precise records, however, developing anything outside of the realm of hypothesis on the influence of Sarmatian folklore on

219 C. Scott. Littleton and Linda A. Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail* (New York: Garland, 2000), 68.

220 *Ibid.* 23.

the development of the King Arthur figure is all but impossible. Still, the similarities between Arthur and Batraz seemingly point to Iazygian influence, and could at least help substantiate the role of the Scytho-Sarmatian oral tradition on the Arthurian legends.

XIV. The Sarmatian Hypothesis and the Round Table –

While the question as to whether the Round Table, which was first noted in Wace's twelfth century *Roman De Brut*, ever truly existed in the British isles is debatable, it at least seems possible that, given the previously noted influences, the Alano-Sarmatian immigrants to the area played some kind of role in its integration into the Arthurian legends, in spite of the fact that the Round Table is not often considered in terms of the Sarmatian Hypothesis. Still, as was mentioned previously, there is quite a bit of evidence that suggests that at least some of the ancient Scytho-Sarmatian peoples possessed a "governing body," composed primarily of male members, assigned "to deliberate a course of action in the face of external threat, or to debate contentious problems" in their community.²²¹ As discussed in Section 1, there are a number of references made to this council within the *Nart Sagas*, which could easily be representative of the practices of Scytho-Sarmatian peoples. Admittedly, despite several examples of the Nart Council, specific discussion of it is sparse throughout the *Nart Sagas*. Still, as is underscored by evidence highlighted in Section 1 and the current section, the Nart Council may have constituted a judicial, military, and social body for the male members, which might be representative of the system that should be categorized as the nomadic steppe democracy, a system that Engles notes

221 Amjad Jaimoukha, "The Hearth Tree Circassian Cultural Miscellany," *Jaimoukha.synthasite.com*, 2009, 276, accessed November 2011, jaimoukha.synthasite.com/resources/Circassian_Journal.doc.

was likely quite militaristic by design, of ancient Scytho-Sarmatian society.

Noting the general importance of warfare in nomadic steppe democracies, it must be emphasized that, not unlike the warriors who participated in the Nart Council, King Arthur's Round Table was also composed of knights, who made decisions in areas of military concern. This practice is quite clearly visible within Layamon's version of the Arthurian legends.

Knights he had proud, and great in their mood, and they spake to the king of marvellous thing, and thus the assemblage said to the high king: "Lord Arthur, go we to the realm of France, and win all the land to thine own hand, drive away all the French, and their king slay; all the castles occupy, and set (garrison) them with Britons, and rule in the realm with fierce strength." Then answered Arthur, noblest of kings "Your will I will do, but ere (previously) I will go to Norway... And when I have done thus, I will afterwards come home, and get ready my army, and pass into France, and if the king withstandeth me, and will not yearn my peace, I will fell him with fight to the ground."²²²

While there are plenty of instances where King Arthur made unilateral decisions, his consultations with his Knights of the Round Table seem to have generally been of a more democratic nature than is traditional of a monarchy. This type of decision-making, especially in terms of waging war, is also quite evident within the *Nart Sagas*:

The Narts held a council to discuss how they could save Nasran and bring him home safely... The Narts waited for a very long time for someone to come

²²² Layamon, *Brut* (Teddington, Middlesex, England: Echo Library, 2007), 74-5.

forward and say “I shall go,” but no one volunteered to go on that dangerous path... Finally the Narts decided, “Let us all go together,” and off they went.²²³

While far from an ideal example, and noting that, like the Arthurian legends, the leaders of the Narts, such as Batraz, did make unilateral decisions from time to time, one should be able to extract from this that the Nart Council played a role in terms of military decisions. In terms of where these military decisions were made in both bodies, a table, which resembled an “Arthurian round table,” is often employed as the meeting place of the Nart Council in many variants of the *Nart Sagas*.²²⁴ In respect to this table, it must also be said that in both the Nart Council and Arthurian Round Table, the primary activity of both the knights and the Narts while together generally appeared to be feasting.²²⁵ However, these are not the only similarities between the Arthurian Round Table and the Scytho-Sarmatian Nart Council.

For instance, both bodies (at their core) seem to place a premium on freedom and equality (among men) at their core. These values are quite visible in the description of the founding of the Round Table in Wace’s twelfth century *Roman De Brut*:

Arthur fashioned the Round Table,
Of which many tales are told.
There sit his knights,
Each one equal to the next:

223 John Colarusso, *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus: Myths and Legends from the Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz, and Ubykhs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 160.

224 Ibid. 199.

225 C. Scott. Littleton and Linda A. Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail* (New York: Garland, 2000), 225.

They sit equally at the Table,
And are equally served.
None of them can boast,
That he sits ahead of the next.
None has a favored position,
And none is excluded.²²⁶

Not only does this description indicate that the “tales” of the Round Table had existed prior to Wace’s work, which point against it being a concoction of that author, this description of the Round Table underscores the importance of equality within this Arthurian assembly. Interestingly, this theme of equality is also reflected in the Nart Council.

The ideal of “fairness” amongst the Narts, which could also be interpreted as equality among the Narts, coupled with the ideal of “freedom,” noting that King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table upheld and “fought for the freedom of [their] country,”²²⁷ visibly underscore the Round Table’s similarity to the Nart Council. This point is quite clear when reviewing the following declaration of the Narts, which is present in the tale entitled *If Our Lives Be Short: Let Our Fame Be Great*.

If our lives are to be short,
Then let our fame be great!
Let us not depart from truth!

226 Norris J. Lacy, Geoffrey Ashe, and Debra N. Mancoff, *The Arthurian Handbook* (New York: Garland Pub., 1997), 62.

227 Nicole Dentzien, *The Openess of Myth: The Arthurian Tradition in the Middle Ages and Today* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004), 23.

Let fairness be our path!

Lust us not know grief!

Let us live in freedom!²²⁸

Coupled with the themes of fairness and freedom, this declaration's emphasis on "truth" also resembles the ideals that are also an integral part of Arthur's Round Table, which is demonstrated by the importance Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* places on "love, truth, and faithfulness."²²⁹ Further, while not concrete, there does seem to be some overlap in the values of both the Round Table and the Nart Council in this area.

In terms of equality and freedom, specifically noting that the Scytho-Sarmatian peoples historically lived nomadic lives on the Eurasian steppes as well as what is now Southern Russia, it is not surprising that these values were a key part of their mythology. This expectation occurs because they likely participated in a system of governance that can be referred to as nomadic steppe democracy, which is a system where, while the top position was often "held by the eldest male of a clan or tribe," there was "a strong elective element" that persisted among them.²³⁰ In such a system, in addition to having a strong military center, a leader had to earn the respect and loyalty of those he governed, in order to maintain a position of leadership. If he was not able to generate loyalty and respect, the people might simply "vote with their feet" and abandon the

228 John Colarusso, *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus: Myths and Legends from the Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz, and Ubykhs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 11.

229 Thomas Malory and John Rhys, *Le Morte D'Arthur: VOLUME 2* (New York: JM Dent, 1912), 315.

230 Jay Pascal. Anglin and William James. Hamblin, *World History to 1648* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1993), 406.

leader.²³¹ Interestingly, there are multiple tales in the Nart Sagas, in which a lack of respect is linked with the deposing of a leader. One instance is the tale entitled *Badan and Badanoquo of the Narts*, in which the other Narts pressured Badanoquo, son of Badan, to throw his old and “worthless” father off a mountain in accordance with their “customs.”²³² This unsavory perception of the elderly seems to coincide with what is commonly known about the Sarmatian peoples, notably the Alans:

Men who died in war were regarded as having died happily and seem to have been venerated by their descendants. Those men who lived until they could no longer fight were despised as degenerates and cowards.²³³

Thus, at least in some Scytho-Sarmatian societies, old leaders were quite liable to lose the respect of those they ruled, thus further promoting the idea that, along with various pieces of evidence presented in the *Nart Sagas*, they likely maintained a nomadic steppe democratic system, which might have also been reflected (at least partially) in the Arthurian legends of the Round Table.

In this regard, noting King Arthur’s desire to keep his nobles happy by having them “sit equally at the Table,”²³⁴ the Round Table system seems to resemble the nomadic democracy of the steppes, notably because (especially in Wace’s version) it was often viewed as an attempt to

²³¹ Ibid. 406.

²³² John Colarusso, *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus: Myths and Legends from the Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz, and Ubykhs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 270-4.

²³³ Bernard S. Bachrach, *A History of the Alans in the West: from Their First Appearance in the Sources of Classical Antiquity through the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973), 23.

²³⁴ Norris J. Lacy, Geoffrey Ashe, and Debra N. Mancoff, *The Arthurian Handbook* (New York: Garland Pub., 1997), 62.

appease the nobility and thus secure his position. Interestingly, following Mordred's insurrection as well as Guinevere's (his wife) infidelity with Lancelot, both perhaps symbolizing the loss of respect and loyalty of those he governed, his kingdom crumbled. While perhaps coincidental, the Round Table's resemblance to the nomadic democracy of the steppes is certainly noteworthy, since this same template may also be used to categorize the system of the ancient Iranian peoples. Furthermore, the parallels observable between the Round Table and the Nart Council would seem to follow the previously noted patterns of the Sarmatian Hypothesis, highlighting another possible Scytho-Sarmatian impact on the culture, practices, and folklore of the British Isles. Noting these connections, it might be beneficial to examine the parallels between King Arthur's Round Table and the Cossack *Krug*, since they both share a precursor – the assemblies of the Scytho-Sarmatian peoples.

XV. The Round Table and the Cossack Assembly –

To begin, there are similar elements that exist in both the Cossack assembly and the Round Table. The most visible would naturally be that both bodies met in a circle, which in both cases symbolized the unity and equality of both groups. This symbolism is made clear by historian Shane O'Rourke, who noted that the Cossack assembly "symbolized the unity and equality of all Cossacks."²³⁵ This assertion is further corroborated by Russian reporter Aleksandra Levshakova, who notes that: "The Cossack assembly is a symbol of equality and does not have a first or last. In the circle of the Cossack assembly, everyone is equal and

²³⁵ Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants: The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in Association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 27.

everyone has the right to vote. It is the basis of the Cossack traditions.”²³⁶ This idea of equality is also partially reflected in a verse of the 1918 *Hymn of the Don Host*:

The Children of the Don are called,
To the Assembly of the Sovereign Host,
The Ataman decides,
In accordance with their popular will.²³⁷

At the very core of this song, not only is there a reflection of how deeply the Cossacks valued their freedom just prior to the Bolshevik conquest of the Don region, but also there is a premium placed upon the overall voice of the Cossacks. As is perhaps indicated by the song, the *Ataman*'s decisions, like those of King Arthur, bore in mind the general will of the Cossacks, emphasizing that no one voice was greater than any individual Cossack, thus promoting the overarching idea of equality within this group. This is also visible within the assembly, or *Rada*, of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, which was “governed by the principle of equality.”²³⁸ Accordingly, unity was also crucial for traditional Cossack assembly, particularly in a military sense, noting that all decisions, including the call for war or peace, had a binding effect “on all Cossacks.”²³⁹ Further, the elements of unity and equality are a critical foundation of the Cossack assembly's circular

236 Aleksandra Levshakova, "Cossack *Krug* - Basis," Ekstra, June 22, 2007, 1, accessed April 07, 2012, http://extra-s.ru/news/news_659.html.

237 U. G. Volkov and A. V. Lubskii, *Donskie Kazaki v Proshlom I Nastojashchem* (Rostov-na-Donu: Izd-vo Rostovskogo Universiteta, 1998), 1.

238 Paul R. Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its Peoples* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 195.

239 Jane Burbank, Hagen Mark Von, and A. V. Remnev, *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 224.

nature, much like that of the Round Table, and seem to underscore the democratic mentality of the Cossacks discussed in Section 2.

Unity and equality are also quite pronounced within the roots of the Round Table. While Wace's version, which is the first recorded variant, of the Round Table describes it in terms of being established for pragmatic reasons (i.e. to keep Arthur's nobles in check), both these components seemingly lie at its core. More to the point, while the original meaning has become obscure in recent years, Wace's proposed foundation of the Round Table, born out of pragmatism, remains at its core in popular culture.

Without this fundamental expression of unity and harmony at the heart of [Wace's initial version of] the court of the Round Table, all that it later came to symbolize would be built on unstable ground. The very ethos of the Round Table is one of mutual respect and equality and if it lacks this basis it comes to nothing, even though the concept is deeper in its implications than Wace might have realized.²⁴⁰

These elements are seemingly supported by the circular nature of the Round Table, which, as it noted by William Mallory and Paul Simpson-Housley, "is not fortuitous."²⁴¹ The circular shape of the table, as is frequently noted, "symbolized equality between king and knights as well as among the heroic knights themselves, who formed a spiritual brotherhood."²⁴² In accordance

240 Wendy Berg, *Gwenevere and the Round Table* (Cheltenham: Skylight, 2012), 16.

241 William E. Mallory and Paul Simpson-Housley, *Geography and Literature: A Meeting of the Disciplines* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 149.

242 Patricia Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore* (New York: Facts On File, 2004), 400.

with this interpretation, it might then be said that the Round Table itself was not only representative of the foundation that supported equality and unity amongst the knights, but also seemingly linked them together through a sort of brotherhood. It is this element of brotherhood that is also a part of the Cossack assembly, which, like the Round Table, is visibly reflected within its circular shape as well.

In terms of brotherhood specifically, the Don Cossacks, for example, traditionally maintained a system “of warrior brotherhood,” which was “based on democratic governance, Orthodoxy, Russian language, and steppe culture,” that began with their earliest recorded appearance.²⁴³ Extrapolating upon this, it could be inferred that, much like the Round Table of King Arthur, the Cossack assembly is seemingly a part of the “spiritual brotherhood” of the Cossacks. However, the most obvious element of this Cossack brotherhood, and that of the Round Table, is that it was a brotherhood of warriors.

By design, both bodies, as highlighted previously, contained an inherent militaristic component, which is something that is especially clear in the Don Cossack assembly. As noted, within the Don Cossacks’ first capital of Cherkassk (now Starocherkassk), the Cossack *Krug* would “conduct negotiations with foreign envoys, conclude alliances, [...] declare war or negotiate peace,” and would also “elect the army *ataman*, who was the military leader and head of the administration.”²⁴⁴ An excellent example of the Cossack assembly declaring war is the Don Cossack *Krug*’s decision to attack and seize the Ottoman city of Azov in the sixteenth and

243 Jane Burbank, Hagen Mark Von, and A. V. Remnev, *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 9.

244 Geoffrey A. Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 116.

seventeenth centuries. It should also be noted that the *Rada* of the Zaporozhians, like the assemblies of most other Cossacks groups, was quite similar, in that it poured much of its efforts into military related matters. In general, the Cossack assembly's preoccupation with military matters is quite apparent in the events surrounding seventeenth century Cossack leader Stepan Razin's rebellion:

In March 1670, with the arrival of good weather, Razin mobilized his army for the new campaign. Nearly 7000 Don Cossacks, augmented by a few hundred Zaporozhian volunteers, gathered at Panshin near the crosspoint to the Volga, from which Razin's first expedition had been launched three years before. Stenka summoned a *Krug* and in a dramatic speech proclaimed his ambition "to go from the Don to the Volga and from the Volga into Rus against the Sovereign's enemies and betrayers and to remove from the Muscovite state the traitor boyars and Duma men and the *voevodas* and officials in the town... and to give freedom to the common people"... The Cossacks shouted their agreement.²⁴⁵

Not only does this example highlight the premium that the Cossacks historically placed on freedom, but it also points underscores the *Krug's* role in military related matters. Differing from the common image of the Round Table, however, the Cossack assembly most clear cut role in the area of military matters was the appointment of an *ataman* (or *hetman*) as the chief leader of the military in times of war. Still, the parallel military cores of both governing bodies must not be overlooked due to the minor divergences, which should be expected, noting that, while both

²⁴⁵ Paul Avrich, *Russian Rebels, 1600-1800* (New York: Norton, 1976), 78-9.

structures might be inherited from the ancient Scytho-Sarmatian peoples, they were both also exposed to different historical and geographical circumstances. Still based on the historical record highlighted in Section 1 as well as the previous discussion on the Sarmatian Hypothesis, these ancient Iranian peoples would seem to have contributed to both the Arthurian legends, as well as *Kazachestvo*.

XVI. Section and Overall Conclusion: Broader Implications –

While the Sarmatian Hypothesis, including the possible seldom-discussed Scytho-Sarmatian contribution to the Round Table myth, will likely remain within the realm of plausibility rather than provability, the parallels between the Nart Council, the Arthurian Round Table, as well as the Cossack assembly are at the very least intriguing. The evidence available hints at the possibility that both the Cossack assembly and the Arthur's Round Table are historically linked together through Scytho-Sarmatian ancestry. While the participation of women in all these bodies was limited to say the least, one cannot help but be impressed by certain key elements of this primitive democratic tradition, which visibly stood out against the backdrop of the monarchies of Europe and the tyrannies of Tsarist Russia. To the fault of both western historians as well as russified Cossack historians, the fundamentals of equality and unity amongst the warriors of both these bodies may underscore a jointly neglected Scytho-Sarmatian democratic heritage. As is noted by author Joseph Jacques, the following passage, from the early thirteenth century Arthurian Epic entitled *Lancelot*, is often implicated as having contributed to the idea of modern Western democracy.²⁴⁶

246 D. Joseph. Jacques, *Chivalry Now: The Code of Male Ethics* (Winchester, UK: O Books, 2010), 138.

Those are failing you of their own free will to whom you should have done great honor and given noble treatment and good fellowship: that is the lesser gentry of your land, by whom you should be maintained, for the kingdom cannot be held without the consent of the common people.²⁴⁷

This idea of the common people consenting to be governed is one that is commonly viewed as an instrumental component of most democratic western countries. Further, if the Arthurian tradition did indeed play a role in the foundation of what has now become modern Western democracy, and if the Scytho-Sarmatian peoples played a key role in helping to establish that initial Arthurian spark, we may then have to reevaluate the very core of western civilization. Additionally, if the Cossacks share that same ancestry, as is indicated as being quite plausible by the historical circumstances highlighted in Section 1, it provides a fascinating plausible historical link between western democracy and the lesser-known Cossack democracy. At the very least, this possible ancestral connection surely permits for western civilization and the Cossacks of Southern Russia and Ukraine to be analyzed from a previously unchecked perspective.

Indeed, it should at least be hoped that this connection, which could be artfully termed the Cossack Connection, might promote further scholarly work in areas pertaining to the Cossacks, which, politely put, is quite deficient in Western scholarly circles. Still, as is visible in Section 1, even the Russian body of knowledge in Cossack studies is seemingly more concerned with reinforcing nationalism, rather than providing accurate historical assessments. If honest historical assessments are attempted, the true complexity of Cossack history would reveal itself.

²⁴⁷ Martin B. Shichtman, James P. Carley, and Valerie Marie Lagorio, *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend : Essays in Honor of Valerie M. Lagorio* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 83.

This is a history, apart from a link to Arthur's Round Table, includes an ancient Iranian core, key Turkic-Mongol roots, and a Slavic foundation. Viewed in this light, the Cossacks, like their fabled assembly, are not only part of the historical identity of Russia and Ukraine, but rather are a product of a far more conglomerated set of ethnohistorical circumstances that made them who they are. It is then the complex mixture of predecessors, who also may have played a role in the evolution of western civilization, that contributed to the development of the Cossack assembly.

Noting the complex history of the Cossack assembly discussed in Section 2, having a more unbiased view of the historical foundation of the assembly allows for a better appreciation of its history. Beginning with the first recorded instances of the Zaporozhian and Don Cossacks in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, fundamental parts of their identities have placed an emphasis on freedom and equality. A number of them even held strong to this part of their identity through the Tsarist oppressions of the eighteenth century and through the Soviet oppressions of the twentieth century. This persistency is evident in the Cossack renaissance of the early 1990s, which was epitomized by the establishment of the Great *Krug* of the Union of Cossack Republics of Southern Russia in 1991. This stubborn continuation of this seemingly democratic oriented cultural tradition under the yoke of Tsarist and Soviet authoritarianism is quite remarkable, considering the pressure to give up this part of their cultural identity. It is simply a travesty that the historical processes that led to this complex democratic tradition, which may share its roots with that of the Arthurian Round Table, have not received much serious scholarly attention. This reality is especially unfortunate from a Wilsonian stand point, since, noting the strength and persistency of these democratic favoring cultural traits, the heritage

of the Cossacks could help promote a viable democratic future for both Russia and Ukraine.

After all, if the Cossack assembly contains the inherited ancient Iranian cultural elements that helped lay the groundwork for western democracy, who is to say that these same pieces could not be repurposed to bring about a more free and democratic future for those two nations.

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