

Tatiana Tairova-Yakovleva. *Ivan Mazepa and the Russian Empire*, trans. Jan Surer. Montreal & Kingston, London, Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020; xiv + 406 pp. Review by GALINA YERMOLENKO, DE SALES UNIVERSITY.

Tatiana Tairova-Yakovleva's Russian-language 2007 book, updated by the author and translated into English in 2020, deals with a controversial figure of Ukrainian history, Hetman ('ruler') Ivan Mazepa (1639–1709). Due to his siding with the Swedish King Charles XII against Peter I, in the 1709 Battle of Poltava of the Great Northern War, Mazepa has been traditionally viewed as a traitor in Russian historiography but considered a hero in post-Soviet Ukraine. In the West, Mazepa was popularized in the works of such Romantic writers as Lord Byron and Victor Hugo. The latter recounted a piquant moment of Mazepa's youth, when he was tied naked to a wild horse's back and made to ride in that fashion through the Polish and Ukrainian landscapes in punishment for his adulterous affair with a Polish lord's wife.

Tairova is not interested in the popular legends about Ivan Mazepa, nor does she narrate his comprehensive biography. Rather, the author focuses on the key moments of Mazepa's political career, involving his relations with Peter I and the Russian political elite, on the one hand, and his interactions with the Cossack leaders and his twenty-

year-long hetmanship of Ukraine, on the other. Thus, the book is structured more by topics than by chronology. The topical presentation of the material allows the author to synthesize a great deal of material detailing Mazepa's navigating between the Russian court and the Ukrainian Hetmanate. On the downside, such a setup may be rather challenging for the non-expert English-language readers, as they will have to remember loads of names and events from the different years and decades of Mazepa's career.

The Ukrainian, Polish, Russian, and English sources, on which this study relies, are referenced in the end notes spanning almost seventy pages. The absence of a full bibliography does not make it possible to estimate the total number of works used, the variety of primary sources, or the recency of secondary sources; nor does it make it easy quickly to locate the full bibliographic citation for each source. The Russian sources (pre-revolutionary, Soviet, and post-Soviet) are frequently cited, but, as becomes progressively evident from more reading, largely for the purpose of refuting the traditional Russian historiography's view of Mazepa as a man who betrayed Peter I. The extensive use of Mazepa's archive, rediscovered by the author in 2004, yields a variety of new conclusions that "are important for Ukrainian studies, as well as for the Russian Empire and Eastern Europe" (4).

The book presents a very glamorous image of the hetman as a man of great talents, including his sharp intelligence, intellectual acumen and breadth, superb education, knowledge of 6 languages, personal charisma. Mazepa emerges as an exceptionally smart politician, a born diplomat, an experienced courtier, a visionary ruler, a manager ahead of his time, and a great patron of arts and architecture. In tracing Mazepa's career in the 1680s–690s (in the earlier chapters of the book), the author arrives at two major conclusions. First, Mazepa's skillful political and economic hetmanship of Ukraine had led to the flourishing of the Cossack land and its "re-emergence" as a major power (123). Second, Mazepa was "Peter's chief strategic and military consultant" (80), a role he performed as a ruler of a Russian protectorate at the time. His skillful management of Muscovy's foreign affairs is evident from his actions during the Azon war campaigns, which aimed at "neutralizing the Turco-Tatar danger" and preventing the Ottoman-Russian war (138). For his role in the successful second Azov

campaign, he was awarded the Order of St. Andrew the Apostle the First-Called, becoming only the second recipient of the award at the time (*sic!*). For his other services to Peter I and Russia, Mazepa was also lavished with rich gifts, lands, and broad powers (6, 78, 103).

The later chapters of the book are devoted to proving that Mazepa was not the “hetman-traitor” that he is painted to be in Russian historiography. Tairova traces, step-by-step, how Mazepa was nearing his decision to cross over to the Swedish side, leading to his tragic downfall after the 1709 Battle of Poltava. Tairova claims that Mazepa acted not out of personal interest, but rather out of his great concern for the autonomous status of the Ukrainian Hetmanate, which was threatened by Peter’s radical administrative reforms of 1707–1708 (252) and his plans to incorporate a significant part of the Cossack land into the Russian empire (280–81; 289; 292–93). To support this argument, the author mentions the elimination of the hetman post in 1722, after the death of Ivan Skoropadskyi, as well as the 1783 discontinuation of the Cossack regiments by Catherine II, which occurred sixty years later (293).

One cannot help but notice, however, that the author creates a rather exalted portrayal of Mazepa throughout the entire book. While his diplomatic role in Russia’s domestic and foreign affairs was undoubtedly very significant, and he was considered to be a strong hetman (80) and a well-educated and progressive person (213), claiming that Mazepa “participated in founding of the Russian Empire,” is somewhat far-fetched. It also contradicts the author’s later argument that Mazepa opposed Peter’s administrative reforms of 1707–1708, which aimed at establishing an empire. Since Russia officially became an empire after the Great Northern War ended in 1721, it can as well be maintained that Mazepa’s siding with the enemy earlier in that war bespeaks his attempts to prevent Russia from becoming imperial.

The inconsistent or anachronistic references to the Russian “empire” throughout the book could be dismissed as insignificant, were it not for a more serious reason behind the author’s use of that word – to contrast the oppressive “imperial” Russia to the “reasonably democratic” Ukraine (273) to demonstrate that today’s confrontation between Russia and Ukraine had started back then. (Curiously, the author’s definition of “reasonably democratic” rests on the idea of

“fairly effective governmental structures at each level of administration”; but then, by that logic, Peter’s effective and meritocratic Table of the Ranks could also be considered “reasonably democratic.”) This ideological interpretation of Mazepa’s figure and the status of the Ukrainian Hetmanate vis-à-vis Russia is vividly seen in the book’s concluding paragraph: “In the Russian Empire, Mazepa became a hated symbol of Ukrainian separatism; for supporters of the Ukrainian national idea, he was a freedom fighter” (326).

The characterization of Mazepa as a “freedom fighter” (326) deserves a little attention. Was he only concerned about the autonomy of Ukraine? Was he not trying to consolidate his personal power? It is noteworthy that when the Kolomak Articles were being revised in 1687, Mazepa demanded that a paragraph be included in the new Moscow Articles, stipulating his role as the “supreme administrator of all the lands” (85). Mazepa intended to exercise his sole power to resolve the problem with the Cossakization (*pokozachuvannia*), i.e., the demands by peasants that they be extended the same rights and liberties as Cossacks (83–85). While this policy may have strengthened the autonomous status of the Ukrainian Hetmanate (79, 87), it does not characterize Mazepa as a democratic ruler. It looks like he was tightening his control rather than giving away freedoms to his people. Why is then Peter’s consolidation of power deemed “imperialistic,” while Mazepa’s “democratic”?

It should also be noted that Mazepa’s fight for Ukraine’s freedom did not manifest itself until late in his career. For many years of his hetmanship, Mazepa was striving to “harmonize” his policies with Peter’s demands (81). Considering how much discontent Mazepa’s policies and reforms caused among the Cossacks and how “very much alone” (122) he was at times, he had to consolidate his own administrative power, and Peter’s strong support was indispensable for this purpose at the time. On many occasions and at various moments, Mazepa could rely on no one else: he was “unpopular in various strata of Ukrainian society” (81); was supported by very few Cossack leaders (67); faced Cossack officers’ discontent (82, 107, 109) and serious opposition from various Cossack factions (84). He witnessed frequent uprisings by peasants and their Cossackization demands (83–87). Even in 1708, the last year of his career, he faced a peasant

unrest in Ukraine. Mazepa's unpopular policies are often blamed on other figures or forces: e.g., his unfriendly relations with Zaporizhia and their constant discontent are explained by the inconstancy and lack of principles of the Zaporozhians' part (110 ff.). If Mazepa's progressive reforms were so opposed by so many people, was he then the only freedom fighter of the Cossack Ukraine?

The second grand conclusion about "Ukrainian separatism" (326) presupposes that Ukraine was unified in fighting for its independence against the imperial Russian. But, as mentioned above, there were serious social tensions and factional feuds within the Ukrainian Hetmanate. If Mazepa's reforms were so opposed by so many strata of Cossack Ukraine, then was the land really rallied around its strong leader Mazepa? As demonstrated by many historical studies, early modern Ukraine was torn between numerous cultural and religious groups. It has also been argued the Ukrainian Cossacks were fighting more for their own independence and estate privileges than for the land's overall freedom. Nor was the Russian society consolidated, for that matter, as it was torn between the westernized nobles and the conservative lower classes. Peter I was probably hated much less by the Ukrainian Cossacks and peasants than he was by the Russians Orthodox peasants, Old Believers, and traditionalists, who opposed his sweeping secular reforms.

In presenting her argument, Tairova works hard to undo the Russian historiography's "too many clichés" about Mazepa. While the author's use of Mazepa's letters certainly brings to light a great deal of interesting new evidence, one wonders whether so many primary documents (i.e., the papers of Muscovy's Little Russian Office or Foreign Office) held in the RGADA and other Russian historical archives should be dismissed from the Mazepa scholarship as unreliable (e.g., 47–48). At least, it is not clear why those primary documents are deemed less reliable than the "previously unused" (42) notes of the Scottish general, Patrick Gordon (1635–1699). Is it because the latter were written by a western (hence, more trustworthy) adventurer? In any event, it seems that a more rigorous and objective treatment of the historical sources on Mazepa would make the author's argument less subjective ("One can speculate," "It is likely," "There were probably," "It is highly unlikely," "High degree of certainty"—see pages 19, 42,

45) and, hence, more persuasive.

There is no doubt that Mazepa was a very gifted person and a shrewd politician. But to claim that he was more ethical in contrast to the corrupt Russian courtiers (e.g., Mazepa's unpleasant shock at the archaic Muscovite system of seniority/precedence [*mestnichestvo*], 19) is to paint a rather idealized portrait of the hetman. Was he not an expert power-player of his day? Did he not repeatedly change kings and masters throughout his career (5–7)? Did he not send a denunciation letter and give a bribe (pardon, the gift) of 10,000 rubles to Vasilii Golitsyn to secure the hetman's position when his benefactor, Hetman of the Left Bank Ukraine, Ivan Samoilovych, got in trouble? Did he not take advantage of the warring factions by playing them against each other (e.g., his role in the Naryshkin coup, 64, 78)? Did he not use his friends and romantic interests (e.g., Anna Dolska, 295) for collecting intelligence? Many successful Russian courtiers and Ukrainian Cossack leaders of that time did just the same to survive and retain power. After all, 'Machiavellian' was the political flavor of the day.

The most engaging pages of the book (at least to this reader) are those where the author contributes to the Mazepa scholarship some interesting new findings, without making grand historical parallels: e.g., the production of Regent Sofia's portraits by Leontii Tarasevych and the long "Ukrainian history" of panegyrics in her honor (59–61); the detailed history of taxation in the Ukrainian Hetmanate and Mazepa's reform of the leasehold system (87 ff.); Mazepa's little-known economic activities (100 ff.); the flourishing of Ukrainian culture during his rule and its considerable effect upon Petrine Russia (198 ff.).

Unfortunately, the Ukrainian nationalistic ideology and obvious anti-Russian sentiment, which inform this book, make the author's argument too one-sided. While fighting the Russian historiography's old clichés, the author creates the new reverse clichés. (One cannot help but recall an adage, "He who fights too long against dragons becomes a dragon himself.") Indeed, we must try to abandon the old clichés and to "learn from the tragedies and mistakes of our ancestors" (326). But imposing current political ideologies and biases upon the events of the past will hardly help us to learn anything; it will only deepen the existing cultural divides.