

19. Russian cavalry standard

1690-1696. Belonging to Mazepa's Zaporog Cossacks under the command of Mykhailo Myklashevski. Captured 1706 at Nieswicz, where Myklashevski was killed.

H. 176 cm, W. 99-264 cm. Cloth of wine-red silk damask. Ornament in paint (the silver colouring is blackened). Of the gilded inscriptions generally only the impressions remain.

On the tongue of the standard can be seen Russia's golden double eagle, surrounded by the initials of the titles of the co-reigning brothers, the Czar Ivan, d. 1696 (the reverse of the standard) and Peter the Great (the obverse of the standard). Down in the lower part is a medallion with the coat of arms of Mazepa, surrounded by the initials of his titles as Hetman of the Zaporog Cossacks (the reverse of the standard) and another coat of arms, surrounded by the initials "M M P" (obverse) relate to one of Mazepa's most prominent lords and generals Mykhailo Myklashevski Polkovnik (Colonel in Starodub from 1690).

The chief motif consists of the Archangel Michael - Mykhailo Myklashevski's namesake - and a Russian text, which translated runs as follows: "Michael with his sword will aid the Christians, the time is past when the Moslems shall be victorious over the Christians. Michael will destroy them as he destroyed the Evil One."

On the reverse of the standard the central motif is the Virgin and the Holy Child with Mary standing on the crescent of the moon. The surrounding text reads in translation as follows: "The half moon is the sign of the Ottomans. They wish to conquer the Christians and defeat them. Mother of Christ, full of grace, has placed herself above the moon; thereby the hopes of the Turks have been destroyed."

With its large size and tongued shape, this standard belongs to an originally mediaeval type of cavalry standards. The painted ornament, however, is of western European character and shows that the standard was made with a view to the state of war which during the actual time of the standard's manufacture, 1690-1696, was prevailing between Russia and Turkey. It is not bad propaganda to compare the Turks with the crescent moon, on which the Holy Virgin, the Zaporog Cossacks' patroness, is standing. More frequent was the custom of comparing the enemy with the Evil One, with the dragon which Michael puts to death.

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