NEWS FROM THE EXCAVATIONS AT BATURYN IN 2006

From 1669 to 1708, Baturyn, located in Chernihiv province, was the capital of the Cossack Hetman state in central Ukraine. It flourished during the reign of Hetman Ivan Mazepa (1687-1709). In 1708, the town became a military base for Mazepa’s campaign against Moscow’s domination of Ukraine. In retaliation, Russian troops sent by Tsar Peter I ravaged Baturyn, annihilating its Cossack force of 6-7,000 and killing as many residents. This tragedy has remained in Ukrainian historical memory, but any research of Baturyn was politically taboo until Ukraine became independent.

In August 2006, the Canada-Ukraine archaeological expedition continued its annual excavations of this town. The Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS), the Shevchenko Scientific Society, Inc., and the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies (PIMS) in Toronto co-sponsor the Baturyn project. Dr. Zenon Kohut, Director of CIUS, is its patron and academic adviser. No funding was received for this year’s digs from any sources in Ukraine.

Dr. Volodymyr Kovalenko from the University of Chernihiv leads the Baturyn archaeological expedition. Dr. Volodymyr Mezentsev (University of Toronto, CIUS) and Prof. Martin Dimnik (PIMS) participate in this project and the publication of its findings. Some 120 students and scholars from the universities of Kyiv, Chernihiv, Nizhyn, Hlukhiv, and Rivne, the Baturyn Historical Preserve, and the University of Graz (Austria) took part in these excavations.

In 2006, the team conducted aerial photography of the Baturyn terrain to facilitate studies of the historical topography and urban planning of the medieval and modern town. Excavations of the remnants of the citadel’s defences showed that they consisted of two dry moats, a rampart with inner timber structures, bastions, and a fence with towers made of oak frameworks filled in with clay. Such traditional Cossack fortifications withstood cannon bombardment better than stone or brick walls.

Within the former fortress, archaeologists discovered a section of the foundations of Baturyn’s main cathedral dedicated to the Holy Trinity. The edifice was endowed by Mazepa before 1692 and ruined during the Muscovite attack in 1708. It was probably a spacious, cruciform, centrally planned masonry church with five or seven domes. This design was widespread in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries in central Ukraine and was derived from wooden folk prototypes.

Researchers resumed their excavations of the palace remnants in the citadel site and graphically restored its architecture and external decorations. It was erected by Hetman Demian Mnohohrishny (1669-72) and burnt to the ground by the Petrine army. The palace represented a relatively large, 25 x 21 m., one-floor brick structure typical of administrative or chancellery offices of the Cossack state and built in the distinctive Cossack Baroque style. A corridor divided this edifice into the larger hetman’s private quarter with an audience hall, and a smaller compartment, containing a kitchen and storage rooms.

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The expedition continued investigating the footings and wall debris of Mazepa’s residence (1700) in the Honcharivka suburb. Recent analysis reveals that this masonry palace (including its appendix) was 20 by 14.5 m. in size and three stories high with a mansard and double-slope roof. Unlike most Ukrainian Baroque civil structures, it had a deep square basement with four rooms and no central corridor or vestibule dividing the interior into two sections. The main facade was articulated by semi-columns of the Corinthian or Composite orders. It is the earliest known secular edifice in central Ukraine constructed and embellished primarily in the Roman Baroque style with some modifications of Vilnius architecture. In the 1670-90s, Western artistic influences reached the Cossack Hetman state via Lithuania.

Initial graphic reconstructions of the Honcharivka palace prepared by archaeologists from Chernihiv erroneously depicted it with a pure Italian Baroque exterior. These ignored important archaeological evidence regarding the application of regional Ukrainian Baroque features, such as the adornment of entablature friezes with multicoloured glazed ceramic rosettes. Thus, Mazepa’s villa near his capital is the first example of combined Italian (Roman) and Ukrainian Baroque decorative elements in civil architecture of the Cossack state. The 1708 destruction of Baturyn, however, halted the development of this hybrid palatial style in Ukraine. Excavations of this intriguing building, along with attempts to restore it according to available graphical and archaeological sources, should continue.

In the settlement adjacent to the fortress, remnants of a sizeable timber dwelling belonging to a wealthy Cossack officer were unearthed. It also perished in the fire of 1708. An ornate seventeenth-century Polish military belt of silvered bronze with a realistic relief of a mounted knight on its clasp as well as a carved bone die and locally produced earthenware with bright polychrome glazing featuring plant and geometric folk motifs were found there.

In the fortress’s bailey and suburbs, investigators discovered 13 silver and copper Polish and Russian coins, a silver thaler struck at Basel in 1622, a 1669 lead trade seal from Breslau (Wroclaw), a bronze finger-ring with an engraved coat of arms, three copper neck crosses, a baton and belt-buckle, a tiny cast vessel or candlestick likely from a church-plate, and an imported ceramic reticulated tile with Latin letters of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries. These finds testify to the economic and cultural vitality of the hetman capital and its extensive commercial relations with Europe.

In 2006, the team excavated 46 graves of the town’s inhabitants, dating to the seventeenth-eighteenth, on the grounds of the citadel and fortress. Among them were the remains of 17 children buried in shallow pits without coffins – casualties of the 1708 onslaught. This brought the total number of early modern graves uncovered in Baturyn (1996-2006) to 138. Approximately half of them, at least 65 graves, contained children, women, and elderly people, who were slain by the tsar’s army together with the town’s military personnel.

Excavations last summer have helped to advance our knowledge of Baturyn’s urban planning, lost fortifications, high standard Ukrainian and Western Baroque ecclesiastical and palatine masonry architecture and decorative techniques. They also shed light on native wooden residences of the Cossack elite, international trade, artistic folk ceramics, and the other local crafts. New archaeological evidence has corroborated and supplemented both the oral tradition and historical records on the massive punitive action taken against the hetman capital in 1708.

For more information on the annual excavations at Baturyn, please feel free to contact the author of this report (tel.: 416-766-1408; email: v.mezentsev@utoronto.ca).

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PHOTOS (6)

1. (Sobor 01) Uncovered fragment of the foundations of the Holy Trinity Cathedral. (This and all other photos by V. Mezentsev).


4. (Belt 01) Seventeenth-century silvered bronze belt from the house of a Cossack officer. Museum of the Baturyn Historical Preserve.

5. (Coins 03) Silver thaler (Basel, 1622) and lead trade seal (Breslaw, 1669). Museum of the Baturyn Historical Preserve.

6. (Cemetery 03) Excavation of the graves of victims from the 1708 massacre at Baturyn.