

The Cossacks, Right & Left Bank Ukraine

***Note created from Encyclopædia Britannica texts**



- In the 15th century a new martial society—the Cossacks (from the Turkic *kazak*, meaning “adventurer” or “free man”)—was beginning to evolve in Ukraine’s southern steppe frontier. The term was applied initially to venturesome men who entered the steppe seasonally for hunting, fishing, and the gathering of honey. Their numbers were continually augmented by peasants fleeing serfdom and adventurers from other social strata, including the nobility.
 - Banding together for mutual protection, the Cossacks by the mid-16th century had developed a military organization of a peculiarly democratic kind, with a general assembly (*rada*) as the supreme authority and elected officers, including the commander in chief, or **hetman**.



- Their centre was the Sich, an armed camp in the lands of the lower Dnieper “beyond the rapids” (za porohy)—hence, Zaporozhia (in contemporary usage, Zaporizhzhya).
- The Cossacks defended Ukraine’s frontier population from Tatar incursions, conducted their own campaigns into Crimean territory, and, in their flotillas of light craft, even raided Turkish coastal cities in Anatolia.
 - Attempts to control them institutionally and to limit their numbers through an official register created serious discontent among the Cossacks, who increasingly perceived themselves as forming a distinct estate with inherent rights and liberties. Sporadically over a half century starting in 1591, the Cossacks rose up in revolts that were put down only with great difficulty.
- In 1667 Ukraine was partitioned along the Dnieper River: the west, known as the Right Bank, reverted to Poland, while Russia was confirmed in its possession of the east, known as the Left Bank, together with Kiev (which actually was located west of the river); the arrangement was confirmed in 1686 by the Treaty of Eternal Peace between Poland and Russia.
- After the partition of 1667, the autonomous **hetman** state, or **Hetmanate**, was limited territorially to the east, in Left Bank Ukraine. At the head of the state stood the hetman, elected theoretically by a general Cossack assembly but in effect by senior officers, who in turn were largely swayed by the tsar’s preference.

- The terms of autonomy were renegotiated at each election of a new hetman, and this led over time to a steady erosion of his prerogatives. Nevertheless, for a century the Hetmanate enjoyed a large measure of self-government, as well as considerable economic and cultural development.
- The hetman state reached its zenith in the hetmancy of Ivan Mazepa (1639-1709). Relying at first on the support of Russian Tsar Peter I (the Great), Mazepa exercised near monarchical powers in the Hetmanate. Literature, art, and architecture in the distinctive Cossack Baroque style flourished under his patronage. Mazepa aspired to annex the Right Bank and re-create a united Ukrainian state, initially still under the tsar's sovereignty. But Peter's centralizing reforms threatened Ukrainian autonomy.
 - In 1708, in furtherance of his plans for independence, Mazepa made a secret alliance with Charles XII of Sweden, but in the decisive Battle of Poltava (1709) their allied forces were defeated. Mazepa fled to Moldavia, where he died shortly thereafter.
- In 1750 Russian Empress Elizabeth revived the hetmancy. On the accession of Catherine II (the Great) in 1762, the hetman and the starshyna petitioned for the restoration of the Hetmanate's previous status; instead, in 1764 Catherine forced their resignation. Over the next 20 years all vestiges of Ukrainian autonomy were eliminated, and in 1775 the Zaporozhian Sich, the bastion of the Cossacks, was destroyed by Russian troops.



- As compensation for their lost rights as a ruling elite in the Hetmanate, the Cossack upper classes were equalized with the Russian nobility; many entered imperial service, and some achieved the highest government ranks. Through education, intermarriage, and government service, the Ukrainian nobility gradually became Russified though many retained a sentimental attachment to the land and its folklore.
- The Right Bank was formally annexed into the Russian Empire, which along with some adjoining territories, formed part of the Pale of Settlement (a district separated from the surrounding country by defined boundaries or distinguished by a different administrative and legal system), to which the Jewish population of the empire was residentially restricted.
- The Crimean khanate was annexed in 1783.
- The sparsely settled southern lands (named *Novorossiia*, or New Russia) were colonized by migrants from other parts of Ukraine, as well as smaller numbers from Russia, the Balkans, and Germany. This colonization movement greatly expanded Ukrainian ethnic territory. The new Black Sea port of Odessa (Odesa) grew into a large and cosmopolitan metropolis.

