

„THE ROBBER BROTHERS” AND RAZIN FOLKLORE IN THE WORKS OF A. S. PUSHKIN

**Tamusa H. Akhmadova, Inna B. Bachalova,
Petimat Kh. Khunarikova, Maryam Kh. Sadulaeva**
Chechen State University, Grozny, Russian Federation

Abstract: *The purpose of the article is to analyze the study of the first interest of A. S. Pushkin to the image of the national hero Stepan Razin. The idea that Alexander Sergeevich at the end of his life translated songs about Stepan Razin as one of the best examples of Russian folk art is substantiated. The idea is traced that Nikolay Raevsky played a decisive role in Pushkin's appeal to Razin folklore. The authors conclude that the poem by A. S. Pushkin's "The Robber Brothers" served as a kind of stimulus in the revolutionary mood of the Decembrists.*

Keywords: A. S. Pushkin, Caucasus, Don Cossacks, folk legends, Razin folklore, Stepan Razin, songs, „The Robber Brothers”.

The theme of peasant uprisings in the works of A. S. Pushkin is the basis for solving a number of fundamental issues of his social problems, but despite this outstanding importance, it is still not well understood. Researchers studied mainly the works of A. S. Pushkin about Pugachev.

Another leader of the peasant movement on the Don in the 17th century, Stepan Razin, who attracted Pushkin, is still aloof from the central issues and large themes of Pushkin studies.

We turn to the moment of the first interest of the poet to the image of Stepan Razin.

The Prisoner of the Caucasus, The Fountain of Bakhchisaray, The Flying Ridge of Clouds Is Thinning, Alas, why does she shine,

Summer journey of A. S. Pushkin in 1820 with the Raevsky family in the south of Russia turned out to be extremely fruitful for his poetry. "The Prisoner of the Caucasus", "The Fountain of Bakhchisaray", "Eugene Onegin" and a number of such lyrical works as "The Demon", "The Flying Ridge of Clouds Is Thinning", "Alas, why does she shine" were written under the impression of this unforgettable trip together with the wonderful Russian the family of one of the heroes of the Patriotic War of 1812. "Crimea is the cradle of my Onegin", said A. S. Pushkin, pointing to the connection of the central heroes of his favorite creation with the images of the young Rayevsky. No less creative impact on the poet had a "military Don" with spring flood, wide steppes, Cossack villages and folk legends. These extraordinary impressions of Alexander Sergeevich from nature, history and folklore of Podonschina

turned out to be no less fruitful primary source of his greatest creative ideas than the Caucasus and the “sweet Tavrida”.

The route of General Raevsky covered the Don Region at several points. After passing through Rostov, the travelers stopped for the night in the village of the Don Cossacks Aksai, the next day they dined with Ataman Denisov in New Cherkassk, and in the morning went to Old Cherkassy, which is rich in historical memories.

Don villages and towns were full of legends about the struggle of the Cossacks against tsarism, which often grew into real peasant wars and glorified the names of Razin, Pugachev, Bolotnikov, Bulavin. Some of these names were extremely fascinating to Pushkin, when he listened to the center of the Don Cossacks traditions and songs about the exploits of free Don.

A number of events of the famous Cossack uprising occurred in the old “Cherkassy town” and its district. The main area of activity of Razin was Don. He spent all his youth on the Don, the popular movement led by him was born on the Don, and he was captured and turned over to the royal authorities on the Don. In the Don region, there were age-old songs about this fearless defender of the oppressed people: *‘It happened with us, brothers, on the Quiet Don, / On the Quiet Don, in Cherkassy city. / A good fellow named Stenka Razin Timofeevich was born’*.¹

Pushkin especially appreciated this song and translated it into French at the end of his life, as one of the best examples of Russian folk art. In addition to this song, in the area of the Don Cossacks, stories about the son of Stepan Razin, his execution, and the girl on the thieves' vessel were known.²

This whole cycle of folk tales attracted Nikolay Raevsky, an intelligent, gifted, well-educated young officer of the Decembrist, great-grandson of Lomonosov to his mother, who planned to collect memories of Razin scattered among the people, hoping to write a story of his rebellion. Raevsky passionately loved poetry. He immediately sensed on the Don the richest ore of oral creativity and, perhaps, he was one of the first to indicate A. S. Pushkin on this topic.

Heroic songs about the ancient peasant war were being promoted by an epic figure of the leader of the disadvantaged, despising death and leading the brute to a merciless battle with the royal warlords.

Razin's famous overseas campaigns lent the legendary grandeur of his name. Sunny Persia, with its oriental brilliance, unexpectedly

¹ Yu. G. Kruglov, *Russian folk poetry*, Leningrad, Prosveshchenie, 1981, p. 297.

² A. N. Lozanova, *Folk songs about Stepan Razin*, Saratov, 1828, p. 25.

announced its coloring to this lengthy song about the insurgent poor of the Moscow State. The great social tragedy of the 17th century was lit up with reflections of fabulous legends about the brave campaign of the Cossacks on the Khvalynskoye sea and about the unprecedented tribute collected by the Shamakhan fabrics, gems, gold and beautiful Persian women. The appearance of the ataman, a sage, a fearless fighter for the disenfranchised “mob”, conquering terrible torture, blockade and death, rose above all the tumultuous events of this spontaneous war. That is why Stepanushka, quartered on Red Square, according to legends and beliefs, escaped from his tormentors, hiding from them in the peasant world, and he only occasionally appears to his believers—he rides at midnight on the Volga's highland bank or swims in a pattern under silk sails. He came in the form of Pugachev to transfer landlords to the land of serfs, and he would come again to rescue the enslaved slaves.

Such was the powerful image, which rose in all its heroic growth from popular legends about the terrible offensive of the masses on boyar Russia. Vladimir, a saint with his fabulous vices, did not express the true power and tragic essence of national history; these powerless leaders of deprived villages and villages climbing their age-old oppressors expressed this power. It is noteworthy that the people in their song poetry put Razin above Ilya Muromets: “*Ship sails-/Steppe Razin is Ataman on it/Ilya Muromets is Esaul*”.

Don songs struck A. S. Pushkin. He wanted to show the image of a nationwide hero, who seemed to have acquired his greatest historical prototype. The author wrote that Razin is “*the only poetic face of Russian history*”. In the summer of 1820, thoughts of Stepan Razin and Pugachev appeared in the mind of the poet, which began to penetrate more and more deeply into his work.

The theme of daring Cossack raids soon enlivened with the poet's new impressions. In early August, the Raevskys set off on their way back from the Caucasus to the Crimea. They chose the direction from Pyatigorsk along the Kuban River with the lands of the Black Sea Cossacks on the Taman Peninsula. They passed through the Kuban serfs - Ladoga, Ust - Labinskaya, Ekaterinodar, guard villages, where Pushkin never stopped admiring the Cossacks. He wrote to his brother that someday “*he would read to him his remarks on the Black Sea and Don Cossacks*”.³ A. S. Pushkin did not dare to entrust the letter with his thoughts about the Cossack “liberty”, the features of which are still

³ A. S. Pushkin, *Full composition of writings*, volume 13, Academy of Sciences of the USSR Publ., 1937, p. 18.

preserved in the border villages. However, it is quite obvious from his later notes that the Cossacks captivate him as a phenomenon of protest and freedom in the realm of slavery and oppression, and that the bogatyr - Cossack for him is the poetic idea of the freedom.⁴

“The robber brothers” were the first attempts to realize the plan of the poem about Stepan Razin. The surviving passage depicts, however, ordinary robbers, although with some poetization of their case: “*Peers, funny nights, and our violent raids*”.⁵ Story about a split trip on a snowy night is also fascinating, but this is only part of a large poem on a different topic - about Cossack raids of the Razin type and about the love tragedy of the leader of the freemen. The historical accuracy of the plan is flawless: the army of Razin included fugitive convicts, various “walking people”. This, apparently, marked the way for the hero of the poem: he could dispel his longing in the great campaigns of the Cossacks and, perhaps, play a role in the love drama of prisoners of prisoners. In any case, in the further section of the plan, the place and nature of the action change dramatically. There are no longer forest murderers who kill single travelers, but fighting Cossacks-the ecasul and his chieftain, as the ranks and representatives of the Cossack troops. To develop this new environment, A. S. Pushkin appeals to folklore and historical legends about Razin. No matter how seductive for him the figure of the famous chieftain, he does not expect the opportunity to publish in the existing conditions of the Russian press a poem about this sworn enemy of tsarism, written by the exiled poet. He finds a way out in the generalization of the forbidden image, in that typification of the historical personality, which frees it from the need to preserve the true name of the hero.

Based on Razin’s biography, on legends and songs about him, Pushkin obviously assumes to freely state and process this factual data in a new genre of a romantic poem. The historical Stepan Razin will appear in the person of an anonymous chieftain, apparently acting in a different era, but preserving the basic traits of his character (after all, the heroes of the Caucasian Prisoner were anonymous). If the person turns out to be hidden, the most interesting phenomenon of Russian life and the immense character of the nameless folk hero will remain.

The plan of the poem is constructed in full accordance with the history and song legends, but without historical names. Short concise

⁴ N. V. Shelgunov, *Romanticism Russian*, 1873, p. 27.

⁵ A. S. Pushkin, *Complete works in one volume*, Moscow, Alfa-Kniga Publ., 2010, p. 520.

designations of A. S. Pushkin leaves no doubt about his source and hero's prototype.

In the poetic style of *The Band of Brothers*, there are traces of folk-song techniques inherent in Razin folklore, such as negative comparisons: "*A flock of crows did not fly/On piles of smoldering bones./Beyond the Volga, at night, around the lights/The detachment of the gang gathered*"⁶.

"*Brothers robbers*" not by chance begin with an ominous picture of the gathering of the crows on steel rotting remains. This introductory parallelism is also characteristic geographically or topographically, i.e. as a designation of the scene of the poem "beyond the Volga". This is one of the main theaters of the Razin movement. "Mother Volga" throughout its length, from its source to the Caspian Sea, was considered a great way for people to walk and became famous in the history of robberies as the main arena and a true haven of desperate and brave people: "*I was nursed, I was nursed by Mother Volga,/I went to the robbery from this side*".

The Razin songwriters also celebrate the endless Volga steppes, which are wide open for the companions of unrestrained freemen: "*Far away did you stretch the steppe,/From Saratov steppe to Tsaritsyn/Nobody go in the steppe,/Only the robbers went here*".

Echoes of riotous songs of the Cossack cycle are heard throughout the Pushkin poem. Ancient collectors and researchers of this folklore testify that the highest poetic dignity and warm sympathy are full of failures after the struggle, deadly wounds and shoots⁷. As is known, the action of the Robber Brothers is built on this: "*So what? Well done;/Not long brothers feasted,/Caught us/And the blacksmiths chained us to each other,/And the guards took to the prison*"⁸.

The central dramatic episode, unfolded in a broad dynamic picture, is the escape of the shackled brothers from the prison guard.

A. S. Pushkin remarkably caught and expressed in his poem that feeling of fraternity, camaraderie, inseparable friendship of Cossack and robber, which was celebrated in folk songs as the highest force of "walking people". The title of the poem indicates not only the degree of kinship of the characters, but also their indissoluble link in the struggle, in danger, in death. In historical terms, Stepan Razin's brother Frol, his closest associates-Serejka Krivoy, Vaska Us and others, were glorified for their unwavering loyalty to the ataman.

⁶ A. S. Pushkin, *Complete works in one volume*, p. 516.

⁷ N. Aristov, *On the historical significance of Russian predatory songs*, Voronezh, 1875, p. 153.

⁸ A. S. Pushkin, *Complete works in one volume*, pp. 517-518.

One of the main themes of the cycle - the rapprochement of Razin with the poor - was developed in the version about two brothers (the so-called "Astrakhan"). According to V.F. Miller, about the two brothers of Razin - Stepan and Frol, who actually performed together, there was an option about two Boyarchenkov brothers:⁹ *"In the glorious city of Cherkasy,/Two darling brothers/Lived there, lived"*.

These were the brothers of Razin; they did not go to the military office, but collected the poor for raids.¹⁰ All this goes out in a song beyond the borders of consanguinity and sings an inseparable Cossack partnership, connection and friendship across the grave. In the poem by A. S. Pushkin, the younger brother - robber, exhausted in imprisonment, calls his elder as *"comrade and friend"*. Somewhat later, this motif was also sounded in Koltsov's poems, especially in his "Senka Razin" (renamed "The Song of the Robber"), where there is a characteristic verse: *"Together with the brothers, for the prey/He flew like a falcon to the ends of the world"*.

The same motif sounds in his "Tosca at will": *"Where are my friends - comrades?/Where are you? Where have you scattered?/Apparently, they forgot the old time,/It used to be at midnight quiet/I shout, whistle to them from the forest"*.¹¹

All rich in motifs of razin folklore, the poem of A. S. Pushkin was burned in the Chisinau spring of 1823 (as in the Boldin autumn, the tenth chapter of Eugene Onegin). It is possible that the need to gloss over the image of the leader of the famous peasant war to the extent of his unrecognizability while maintaining the true features of his exceptional personality and unparalleled struggle created the insurmountable difficulties that forced the poet to abandon the further development of his plan.

When the passage "The Brothers of the Thieves" appeared in the press in 1825, the poem amazed everyone, according to V. G. Belinsky, with his bold national flavor: for the first time in literature, a Russian robber with a knife instead of daggers and pistols was made a hero. Judging by the plan, the continuation of the poem would show the Cossack trips in full width, revealing to their full height the powerful personalities of their famous chieftains, that is, would depict the old Russian freemen in all its expanse and power.

The introductory poem - the monologue "The Robber Brothers", surviving from this huge epic, is marked by a single striving and is

⁹ A. N. Lozanova, *Folk songs about Stepan Razin*, p. 58.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

¹¹ A. V. Koltsov, *Full composition of writings*, St. Petersburg, 1909, p. 106, 114.

expressed in a lively and bold language, close to the adverb of the criminal people depicted in it. A. S. Pushkin, highlighting only his favorite message "To Ovid", stated that *"he did not write anything better"*. However, the theme of the poem marked a significant stage of poetic growth, introducing new material into Russian literature. Pushkin gives here the first essay on the Russian jail, deploying a deeply human beginning in the sullen nature of the inveterate "criminal". In the poem, one can hear the hatred of lawlessness, humiliation and oppression, along with deep sympathy for the victims of government arbitrariness.

"The Robber Brothers" were highly appreciated among the Decembrists. Nikolay Raevsky, who played a decisive role in Pushkin's address to Razin folklore and even preserved a passage from the poem that was burned in 1823, highly regarded him for the simplicity of the story and the naturalness of the national language. "You will complete the consolidation in us of this simple and natural speech, which our public has not yet appreciated, despite the excellent images of "Gypsy" and "Robbers". „*You will, finally, reduce poetry from her joles*"-wrote this cleverest reader to Pushkin on May 10, 1825, as if sketching, in connection with Boris Godunov, the upcoming Russian poetry for a true depiction of life.

A collector of song tales about Razin and partly even a researcher of his movement, Nikolay Raevsky could sensitively and faithfully evaluate those remarkable features of realism, colloquial Russian speech and genuine democratic thought, which his brilliant friend had revealed, turning to the precious materials of peasant unrest. From conversations with Pushkin in the south and, probably, acquaintance with the draft version of the entire poem about the campaign of the Volga ataman, Nikolay Raevsky could particularly deeply and wholeheartedly embrace the idea of the Brothers of Rogues and appreciate this essay as a wonderful chapter of the lost epic about the powerful Volga ataman.

No less characteristic is the keen interest in this work of K.F. Ryleeva and A. P. Bestuzhev, who insisted on its publication in their almanac.

As a modern researcher correctly points out, even freed by Pushkin from elements of a sharp social significance... the printed version of the poem had a great influence on the formation of the ideology of the Decembrists, on strengthening their hatred for "damned slavery", for "autocracy". Not without reason, one of the participants of the movement, Steingel, in a letter to Nicholas 1, stated that "The Robber Brothers" breathe freedom, and put Pushkin's poem on a par with "Confession of Nalivayka" and "Voynarovsky" of K. Ryleev,

pointing out that these three works were crucial in the Decembrist political uprising.

All this testifies to the fact that the surviving leaves of the burnt manuscript of the “Robbers” preserved its protesting and liberating aspirations, which could strengthen and temper the rebellious moods of the poet’s most advanced peers. Among the political conspirators of 1825, the passage of the poem published in the Polar Star was not perceived as an extraordinary incident in the current prison chronicles, but as a genuine protest of the freedom-loving poet against oppression and enslaved people, revealing hidden charges of giant rebellion in the depths of Russian life.