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# Participation of Priazov'ye Greek Colonists in the Makhnovist Movement (1918–1921)

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(1918 – 1921 рр.)», 2008.

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The topic examined by us in the current article is located at the intersection of two separate problems. On one side is a still poorly-studied page in the history of the insurgent movement, on the other a practically unknown and un-researched phenomenon in the history of the Greek community of Ukraine. Despite the fact that over the last decade Ukrainian researchers have devoted great efforts in studying both these phenomena, their histories still contain awkward gaps which need to be filled in. We should also note that this investigation continues a series of articles by the author, devoted to the interactions of the Makhnovist insurgents with the ethnic communities of Southern Ukraine and the attitude of the latter to the struggle for the birth of an anarchistic, “stateless” society.

The author has set himself the goal of discovering the degree of participation of the Priazov'ye Greeks in the Makhnovist

movement and to shed light on the mutual relations of the pro-anarchist peasant movement and the Greek colonists.

We shall begin with the fact that the problem of the mutual relations of the Makhnovists with the Priazov'ye Greeks has its own historiography. As early as 1924, in Kharkov, the publishing house "Molodoy rabochiy" ["The Young Worker"] issued one of the first books on the Makhnovshchina. Its author was a former member of the Cultural-Educational Section of the Insurgent Army, Isaak Teper (real surname – Gordeyev), a member of the secretariat of the Anarchist confederation "Nabat" who betrayed his own comrades in 1921 and started working for the Extraordinary Commission (Cheka). In the beginning he worked as a secret agent among the Makhnovists, and then, after the suppression of the insurgent movement, took on the job of propagandist, exposing the loathsomeness of the internal life of the anarchist forces to the reading public of Soviet Ukraine. Although his book was a striking example of paid hack work, it even today enjoys a high level of respect from researchers as an unusually rich source of information issued directly from the core of the Makhnovist community. In our specific case the book is valuable because the author, posing himself the question – "where did the Makhnovshchina come from?" – provides an answer which many will find astounding: "... from a whole string of rich Greek settlements, such as Komar, Bogatir, Velikiy and Maliy Yanisol, etc."<sup>1</sup>.

Teper's point of view has not taken root in historiography. In the course of the next 65 years Makhno scholars studiously ignored this fantastic theory about the Greek origins of the Makhnovshchina until the well known Mariupol local historian Lev Yarutsky took an enthusiastic interest in it. In 1993 he became the author of the first published investigation of the participation of the "Mariupol Greeks" in the Makhnovist

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<sup>1</sup> I. Teper, **Makhno: from "united anarchism" to the feet of the Rumanian king**, (Kharkov, 1924). – p. 24

movement, which was dealt with in one of the chapters of his book. Somewhat softening the “Teperist” formula, Yarutsky nevertheless agrees with him in principle, declaring that “in 1918 when Nestor Makhno issued his call for an uprising, the first to respond were the villagers of the Greek settlements in the Mariupol region.”<sup>2</sup> However, every professional historian is quite familiar with the axiom that local historians, even the very best of them, often get carried away and see their wishes as reality, and therefore one must subject the results of their research to the most careful verification. In general this topic requires wide-ranging research, detailed study, and a broadening of interpretation through the introduction of new sources.

The first question which requires a pressing answer can be formulated as follows: why did the “Mariupol Greeks” act in an organized way against the “Denikinist” regime in 1918–1919? Why didn’t they support that regime like, for example, their next door neighbours, the German colonists? Certainly the Russian government had positioned itself, beginning from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as a defender of the interests, first of the Crimean Orthodox Greeks, and then of the Priazov’ye Orthodox Greeks. It was thanks to the efforts of Russian diplomats and State ministers that the Crimean Greeks were liberated from under the yoke of the Muslim Tatars in the Crimean Khanate and re-settled in the Priazov’ye steppe. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Greeks villages were subject neither to *panshchina* [compulsory service for a landlord], nor serfdom, nor military conscription. And here’s the surprise. When the Russian autocratic throne tottered and fell in 1917, the Greeks of Priazov’ye went to war not on the side of the “White Guards”, who wanted to revive imperial grandeur, but on the side of the Whites’ enemies, who were making great efforts to suppress the counterrevolutionary movement.

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<sup>2</sup> L. Yarutsky, **Makhno and the Makhnovists**, (Mariupol, 1996). – p. 178

The roots of this “treason” are hidden in the depths of centuries. The Crimean Greeks were re-settled on the territory of present-day Zaporizhia and Donets oblasts [provinces] in the 70’s and 80’s of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. An order of Prince Grigoriy Potemkin, governor of Novorosiysky province, recognized the borders of their new domain. The boundaries of the “Priazov’ye Ellada” ran from the Sea of Azov to the mouth of the Berda River, and then along the left bank of the Berda to the mouth of the Karatish River. Then the boundary went up the left bank of the Karatish as far as its twists, and from there to the upper reaches of the famous Kobilnoi ravine (now part of Kuibishev raion, Zaporizhia oblast – V. Ch.). Here the Greek boundary followed the right bank of the ravine, which leads to Mokriy Yal Creek. The territory marked out by the “most high prince” was settled exclusively by Greeks over a period of decades. Those who had previously dwelled on these lands, lands belonging to the Kalmyk panlanquin of the Lower Zaporizhian Host, had the right to remain there only until the end of the harvest of 1780. Then they had to settle somewhere else. Actually the prince indicated that if after ten years there was still free land in this district, then the possibility existed that different settlers would be allowed in. But G. Potemkin wasn’t counting on this happening, for the land was portioned out to the colonists at 60 desyatins per household on the average<sup>3</sup>. This was truly a generous chunk of land for agriculture and the prince anticipated a steady stream of settlers. But things didn’t turn out that way. There was no rush of settlers. The resettlement took place forcibly with the accompaniment of female weeping and wailing. In total 31,000 Greeks were re-settled in 20 villages and the town of Mariupol<sup>4</sup>. The Greeks had no desire to move from the coast of southern Crimea to the

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<sup>3</sup> **The Peoples of Southern Priazov’ye**, (Mariupol, 1996). – p. 21

<sup>4</sup> P. Lavriv, **The Colonization of the Ukrainian and Contiguous Steppes**, (Melitopol, 1997). – p. 11

genocide with respect to the Greek population of Pontus. And yet there was a plan to take the Makhnovist Army through the Caucasus to the aid of the Kemalists. Such intentions of the Makhnovists would undoubtedly have been condemned by the Priazov’ye Greeks.

Now we shall conclude. The Priazov’ye Greeks took the most active part in the Makhnovist movement of all the ethnic minorities in South Ukraine. While the Jewish colonists created their own companies in the ranks of the insurgents, and the Bulgarians did not exceed the squadron level, the Greeks were responsible for putting together two complete battle-worthy regiments. While the Bulgarians and Jews in 1920 tried in any way possible to avoid contacts with the insurgents, the Greek villages became the most reliable bases for the supply of manpower, horses, and food. Therefore it is hardly surprising that in 1937–1938 the Soviet government remembered the Greeks for their participation in the anti-Bolshevik struggle. The Greek community was accused of creating an insurgent counterrevolutionary organization that had as its goal to tear off a piece of the territory of the USSR and join it to Greece. The number of arrests was so great that L. Yarutsky is not without ground in comparing the scale of the repression in the Greek villages with genocide.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> L. Yarutsky, **Makhno and the Makhnovists**, (Mariupol, 1996). – p. 189

it stopped for several days in Velikiy Yanisol itself. It was here, in the Greek region, that the Gulai-Polye contingent linked up with the Crimean group of the RPAU(m), or least the remnants of it. The two Makhnovist formations had their rendezvous on December 6 1920 near Stary Kermenchuk. In December 1920 near the Greek village of Constantinople Makhno's three-thousand strong group was surrounded by the much larger forces of R. Eideman's Southern Group, but was able to break out of the encirclement and gain operational freedom.<sup>38</sup>

Being a dependable, secret supply-base for the Makhnovists became more and more difficult for the Greeks. In the autumn of 1920 an epidemic of foot-and-mouth disease rolled through the Greek villages, destroying horses. Then it affected birds, pigs, and cattle. The majority of households had to get through the winter of 1920–1921 with practically no provisions. And in the spring of 1921 a debilitating drought occurred. Aleksandr Agafonivna Delieva from Nova Karakuba recalled: "... everything dried up, all the crops failed, and there was a terrible harvest. For us and for many others terrible days began, the famine was awful."<sup>39</sup> Famine prevented the Priazov'ye Greeks from providing active assistance to the Makhnovist insurgents. The Insurgent Army moved to other regions of Ukraine that were not so noticeably affected by famine, and then completely collapsed under the blows of the superior forces of the enemy. It is also interesting that in 1921 a number of Makhnovist commanders seriously considered a campaign by the Insurgent Army in Turkey, in support of the revolutionary army of Mustapha Kemal. The Kemalists, for their part, were known for their fanatical anti-Hellenist convictions. Modern Greek historians have accused them of

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<sup>38</sup> P. Arshinov, **History of the Makhnovist Movement** (1918–1921), (Zaporozhia, 1995). – p. 182

<sup>39</sup> A. A. Delieva, "1848 – 1998, 150 Years of the Delieva Family" in **Sources of the History of Southern Ukraine, Vol. 9. Memoirs and Diaries**. Ch.2, (Zaporozhia, 2006).

steppe, to exchange the Black Sea for the Azov, a subtropical climate for the dry plains. But they submitted to the forces of the State and many Greek villages sprouted along the banks of Mokriy Yal Creek and along the shores of the Azov but none of the Greeks were in a hurry to thank the Russians for this. On the fringes of Zaporozhia a miniature Greece sprang up with an extent of 100 km from north to south and close to 50 km in width. In this territory of "Priazov'ye Greece" there still remained vacant land and its population ended up mixed with Ukrainian and Jewish elements, although the Greeks nevertheless predominated. The Greeks enjoyed a reputation among their neighbours of being crafty, unscrupulous farmers who had their wits about them, and were reluctant to associate with or form alliances with Ukrainians, although at the same time they were relatively harmless. Most of them were of the Orthodox faith.

To be precise, in the beginning the Greek communities supported the Makhnovists not in its anti-Denikinist, but in its anti-Hetmanate insurgency, at the end of 1918. The Austro-Hungarian occupation troops confiscated provisions from the Greek villages no less than from the Ukrainian ones; therefore the reasons for supporting the insurgents were similar. The first raid through the lands of "Priazov'ye Greece" was carried out by the Makhnovists in October 1918 and was successful to some degree. Immediately after the battle at Dibrivka on October 1 1918 which, properly speaking, marked the beginning of "Batko Makhno" and the "Makhnovshchina", Makhno launched a raid following the route Berdiansk – Mariupol – Yuzovka with the goal of raising the population in revolt. Passing through the villages of Gavrillovka and Ivanovka, the Makhnovist detachment headed for the "Greek town" of Komar. Here the Makhnovists dispersed the Hetman's militia and summoned the population to a meeting which was addressed by Nestor Makhno and Alexei Marchenko. They told the Greeks about the outright brigandage of the German occu-

piers at Velikomikhailovka [Dibrivki] and called upon the population to arm themselves and rise up against the bourgeoisie and its protectors – the Austro-German troops.

“In the village of Komar,” Makhno recalled, “several Greek youths immediately joined our detachment with their own horses.” From Komar the Makhnovists went to the neighbouring village of Bogatir, inhabited by colourful Urum-Greeks who spoke a Crimean-Tatar dialect among themselves. A large meeting was also convened in Bogatir. Afterwards the Makhnovists visited still another Greek village – Velikiy Yanisol<sup>5</sup> after which they turned to the west. Just the casual mentioning of these villages has led to the notion that they were places where the “Makhnovshchina” was born. Makhno himself makes no further mention of any connections with the Greek colonists in 1918 in his memoirs or other writings. So why did Teper advance his theory of a Greek provenance of the “Makhnovshchina”? This theory, in our opinion, belongs to the same category as other “discoveries” of this renegade anarchist which, in contrast to the “Greek theory” of Makhnovist origins, have somehow taken root in the historiography of the movement. Teper echoed much of what the Makhnovists told him when, as a newly arrived anarchist from Kharkov in 1920, he uncritically accepted as the truth the tales he was told. For example, about the decisive influence on Makhno of the opinions of P. Arshinov, his supposed ideological mentor. Or about the practice in the Insurgent Army of secret political murders. The Greek version of the origins of the Makhnovshchina belongs to this category of unverified phenomena which are not supported by any other data.

After ridding themselves of the Hetman’s rule with the help of the Makhnovists, from the beginning of 1919 the Greek community tried to take up a strictly neutral position

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<sup>5</sup> N. Makhno, **The Ukrainian Revolution (July – December 1918)**, (Paris, 1937). – p. 109

seven men in Komar, 10 in Bogatir, and 12 in Constantinople, burning down huts as well.<sup>36</sup>

Already by the summer of 1920, a report to the intelligence section of the South-Western Front stated that in Komar alone agents had detected Makhnovist reserves of up to 1,000 infantry, “definitely of local inhabitants”.<sup>37</sup> These were so-called Makhnovist-podenniki [day-labourers]. “Makhnovist-podenniki” is an appropriate name for those villagers who supported the Makhnovists and Makhnovist politics, but who, for reasons of age or family obligations, could not serve continuously in the RPAU(m). And yet when large-scale, simultaneous operations were being mounted, which required a large supporting cast, these people would be invited to help out by Makhno or other commanders. Arming themselves as best they could, these partisan units took part in military operations and, in the event those operations were successful, the Makhnovist command rewarded them with a share of the military trophies. Afterwards the “podenniki” returned to their homes, hid their war gains, and carried on their lives as peaceful peasants until a new invitation from the Batko. It is hardly surprising that battles in the vicinity of the Greek villages invariably ended in triumphs for the Makhnovists.

Evidence that the Makhnovists considered the Greek villages their most reliable supply-base is the fact that in November 1920 the Rada (Council) of the Insurgent Army, together with the command staff, decided that in case of a treacherous attack by Red troops on Gulyai-Polye, their troops would withdraw towards the Velikiy Yanisol region, 60 versts to the east of Gulyai-Polye. In the event, after the main Makhnovist group broke out of the Gulai-Polye encirclement,

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<sup>36</sup> L. Yarutsky, **Makhno and the Makhnovists**, (Mariupol, 1996). – p. 182

<sup>37</sup> TsDAVOVU. F.2. – Op.1. – Spr. 689. – Arc. 6

the Bulgarian Abram Budanov. Everyone enjoyed the chebureki and Lashkevich brought some on a plate for the Batko, when he escorted the women home from the party late in the evening. In the hut where Makhno was staying Lashkevich amused Makhno's young wife for some time with silly card tricks. However, establishing good relations with Makhno's kin did not help. On the following day Lashkevich was tried in public and shot in the main square of Velikiy Yanisol. Immediately after the execution of Lashkevich, the Makhnovists produced another thief, a Greek partisan, "who had made himself rich in a hurry," and executed him as well. After this a meeting was held where the executions of these two people was explained. The villagers were satisfied. One of them announced: "It seems we have law and order here – you can't just help yourself to what belongs to someone else..."<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, in 1920, sensing the might of the Communist government and fearing repression, a section of the Greeks began to distance themselves from Makhno. On February 24 1920 the Makhnovists again arrived in Komar and held a meeting there. But in contrast to 1918, the Greeks did not contribute volunteers to the detachment. In consequence, Makhno even refused to meet privately with delegates from the villagers and would not come out of the hut where he was staying to meet them. On February 25 1920, according to the diary of L. Golik, the Makhnovist detachment visited Velikiy Yanisol. In spite of holding a meeting, sounding the alarm bell, and killing some Communist food requisitioners, the Greeks refused to fight.<sup>35</sup> But the beefed up food requisitioning system and the merciless repression of former Makhnovists very soon improved the situation. In March 1920 the 22<sup>nd</sup> Soviet punitive regiment shot

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<sup>34</sup> A. V. Belash and V. F. Belash, *The Roads of Nestor Makhno*, (Kiev, 1993). – p. 836

<sup>35</sup> "Diary of the Chief of the Makhnovist Intelligence Service L. Golik" in **Nestor Ivanovich Makhno. Memoirs, Materials, Documents**, (Kiev, 1991), pp. 167–171. – p. 168

and not get involved in the Civil War between the Russian "Reds" and "Whites". But time and circumstances soon made this neutrality impossible. In the first place, a third force – the Makhnovists – was present: it was clearly not Russian and established itself just to the west of the Greek settlements. Secondly, the "White Guards" categorically rejected Greek neutrality and began to exploit them in every way possible to benefit the "White" cause. The final straw for the long-suffering Greeks was the Denikinist mobilization at the beginning of 1919. Officers of the Volunteer Army conducted themselves in an extremely brutal fashion, acting not as liberators of their native land but more like pillagers in a conquered country. But at the beginning of 1919 there were still very few of these bullies. So people thought that if they organized themselves and found some allies, they could simply "stomp on these vipers".

The results of the mobilization were much too paltry for the "White Guards". By February 17 1919 at the assembly points in the city of Mariupol and the two Greek regions closest not more than 500 of the at least 8,000 expected had appeared. Those summoned were restricted to men who had come of age in 1917 and 1918 and had not yet put in army service. In response the "White Guards" decided to launch a forced mobilization, which immediately provoked confrontations with village self-defense detachments. For example, on February 1 1919 the Whites sent a punitive squadron to the Greek village of Mangush, which lay on the road between Berdiansk and Mariupol. Upon arrival in the village, the White Guards called a general assembly, but attendance, especially by former frontovik-deserters, was sparse. Then the "Volunteers" began to demand soldiers from the Greeks, but those present told them: "We are not giving any soldiers." After this the Greeks were given some time to think about their situation, because the "Whites" intended to visit a nearby Greek village, Yalta, on the same day. The warning was given that if the

Mangush villagers did not rethink their position, the “White Guards” would seize their men by force and, as a measure of punishment, would take the 1915 and 1916 levies as well. But the Mangushans anticipated the “White Guards”. Their messengers got to Yalta before the Whites and warned their neighbours of the danger they were in. The Yalta men subject to the call-up fled the village before the “White Guards” arrived and went underground in another Greek village – Urzufa. In Yalta the infuriated “White Guards” acted with great cruelty. The village assembly was surrounded with armed soldiers and when the Denikinists learned that their recruits had escaped in an unknown direction, they began to plunder the property of the “deserters” – both livestock and other goods. The wives and fathers of the fugitives were interrogated vigorously and beaten with shampols [cleaning rods for rifles]. Many of the White soldiers refused to take part in these excesses so this unpopular task was taken on by the officers of the detachment themselves. Close to 25 women from Yalta fainted from the beatings on this day. At this time the Greeks from Mangush, Yalta, and Urzuf got together and entrenched themselves in the Mangush region. Help arrived in the form of a Makhnovist detachment from Novospasovka Station and a partisan detachment from the village of Derevetsk. Taking stock of their own strength, the numerically weak Greek insurgents sought protectors wherever they could find them, starting with the Mariupol party committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (Bolsheviks), to which they declared themselves subordinate.<sup>6</sup> But in time the Greeks recognized the value of their Makhnovist allies, noting that they were stronger than the Whites, having smashed a column of “Volunteers” which advanced on Mangush from Yalta.

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<sup>6</sup> L. Yarutsky, *Makhno and the Makhnovists*, (Mariupol, 1996). – p. 265

from January to the middle of March 1920, A. Lashkevich, commander of the 13<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the RPAU(m), was hiding in the hut of an old Greek in the village of Velikiy Yanisol. In January 1920 he miraculously avoided a Red pursuit and was able to escape from an encircled Gulai-Polye with the 4,500,000 karbovanets Army treasury.<sup>33</sup> This was the fund expropriated by the Makhnovists from the Yekaterinoslav bank in November 1919. After the main group of the RPAU(m) arrived in Velikiy Yanisol, its staff was visited by Greek partisans who began to tell stories about the dissolute life of Lashkevich. The latter had evidently lost his self-control after learning that he was infected with syphilis. Lashkevich spent money for anything he felt like, holding dances and parties, making generous gifts to mistresses, paying them as much as 200,000 Kb “per visit”, etc. “The Greeks are saying that this money, which cost the blood, lives, and health of many insurgents, is being so easily and shamelessly squandered by their commanders, that now they don’t want to fight for such commanders and intend to liquidate all those who get rich and live in luxury behind the backs of honourable insurgents, and only then go to the Front.” An investigation proved that Lashkevich only had 105,000 karbovanets left. This commander, who had previously been lionized for the capture of Yekaterinoslav, had to be shot according to all the conceptions of anarchist honour. But Lashkevich was not at all dispirited. While making his report about the money situation, he invited members of the Makhnovist elite to a soirée featuring a delicacy which was new to the Makhnovists – chebureki (chir-chiri to the Greeks). Makhno himself, having advanced knowledge of the fate of the commander declined to spend the evening eating chir-chiri, but his wife, the 23-year old teacher of the Ukrainian language G. Kuzmenko went, together with her best friend and a Makhnovist ataman,

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<sup>33</sup> Nestor Makhno, *The Peasant Movement in Ukraine. 1918–1921: Documents and Materials*, (Moscow, 2006). – p. 384



treated to the west. Davidov recommended to his superiors four candidates as regimental commanders, among whom was V. Tokhtamish. The new brigade had to be put together in the rear in the environs of the town of Kremenchug, where it had to be sent rifles and where training facilities were set up. But three of the four regimental commanders (the exception was Tokhtamish) mutinied and refused to leave their positions<sup>30</sup> hoping to continue to battle the Whites on their native soil. Under such conditions the Greek insurgents ended up “Makhnovized”, with the exception of their leader Tokhtamish. When in the mid-1960’s L. Yarutsky interviewed the former head of the Mariupol Party Centre in 1919–1920 V. Varganov about the participation of the Mariupol Greeks in the Civil War, he only hissed through his teeth: “Kulaks, Makhnovists...”<sup>31</sup>

In October 1919 the Makhnovists returned to Zaporozhia and again, for a couple of weeks, conquered “Priazov’ye El-lada”. But at the start of 1920 a new stage began in the relations of the Greeks with the Makhnovists, a stage which might be called the “supply-base period” (1920–1921). During this “supply-base period” the Greeks no longer formed ethnic units for the RPAU(m) [Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine (makhnovist)] at the level of a regiment, but gave the Makhnovists all kinds of support, becoming one of the components of their “partisan supply-base”. Thus, for example, if we look at the diary of Makhno’s wife, Galina Kuzmenko, we read that on March 18 1920 the Makhnovists left the anarchist Ogarkov in the Greek village of Bogatir in order to organize a local partisan detachment.<sup>32</sup> Stories in the Greek villages about the Makhnovists at times seem straight out of an adventure novel. Thus

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<sup>30</sup> A. V. Belash and V. F. Belash, *The Roads of Nestor Makhno*, (Kiev, 1993). – p. 266

<sup>31</sup> L. Yarutsky, *Makhno and the Makhnovists*, (Mariupol, 1996). – p. 188

<sup>32</sup> *Nestor Makhno, The Peasant Movement in Ukraine. 1918–1921: Documents and Materials*, (Moscow, 2006). – p. 833

M. Davidov, the commander of an insurgent detachment from the village of Stary Ihnativok, which later became the 11<sup>th</sup> Hnativsky Regiment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Insurgent Batko Makhno Division, also referred to the Denikinist methods of mobilization in the Greek villages. At the end of April 1919 he received two delegates from the village councils of the Greek villages of Beshevo and Lapsi. They sought immediate relief from the units of the Volunteer Army which were invading the villages looking for provisions and forage. “The delegate from Lapsi said: — ‘Believe me, Mark Timofiyovich, they won’t let us live. Every day we are subject to raids – they take anything that suits them, they even take the girls. Help us!’” On the next page of Davidov’s memoirs the Greek theme is continued. In a battle near the village of Veliko-Anadolem, the insurgents captured a slightly-wounded non-commissioned officer of Greek origin. Under interrogation, the latter said he had lain down on the field of battle deliberately in order to switch sides to the insurgents. Then he began to explain to the regimental commander the specifics of the behaviour of the Greek communities and their soldiers who had been mobilized into the Volunteer Army. “Two hundred men, all Greeks, were forcibly mobilized into a regiment and sent to the Front to make up for the losses of the White Army... During a night march almost half of them ran away. We [i.e., the non-commissioned officers – V. Ch.] also agreed to run away, only we were afraid of our own officers. There is no way we will fight with you [i.e., the Makhnovists – V. Ch.]. If you attack we will run away for sure. We will fire our guns for form, but only towards the sky.” “Why didn’t you kill your officers?” “We Greeks,” he declared, “don’t want to meddle in the affairs of Russians. Whatever you decide,

that's the way it's going to be. We're afraid to kill the officers: they're Russians. But it would be great if you killed them."<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of 1919 the Greek community was faced with a difficult choice. Which of the revolutionary camps should they support: the Communist or the Makhnovist? But the military alliance of the Makhnovists with the Bolsheviks in the first half of 1919 decided this dilemma for the time being. When the Front sector of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Zadniprovsy (Makhnovist) Brigade passed through the territory of "Priazov'ye Ellada", the Greek revolutionary partisan detachments became Makhnovist. A significant role in establishing good relations was played by the fact that the Makhnovists formally endorsed internationalism and regarded themselves as fighting primarily not for national, but for social liberation.

The local historian L. Yarutsky notes that he preserved for many years a paper by I. Chubarov on "The Partisan Movement in the Mariupol Region", written in 1966. Referring to the crisis of 1918/1919, Chubarov mentions the partisan detachment of V. Tokhtamish, which operated near the villages of Sary Kermenchuk, Novo-Petrikivik, Novo-Karakub, and Belikiy Yanisol. In the region of the villages of Maliy Yanisol, Cherkala, Kellerovik, Makedonivik, and Sartan, the partisan units of Sprutsko, Tsololo, and Bogaditzy were active. There was also mention of partisan units from the southern Priazov'ye villages of Mangush and Yalta. Let us note that the Greek colonists liked to name the villages founded by them in Priazov'ye after the towns where their forefathers previously lived in Crimea. The largest of the local insurgent groups was M. Davidov's regiment which counted as many as 3,000 men and had cavalry. There were many Greeks in it from the town of Sary Ignativits, although this was not a Greek but rather a Georgian village. In Davidov's regiment a separate Greek

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<sup>7</sup> M. T. Davidov, "Among the Partisans," in *Zvesda*, 1959, no. 2. – p. 155

this restored formation was again ready to be thrown into the fray.<sup>27</sup>

In June 1919 the fate of Zaporozhia was decided in battles near Velikiy Tokmak. The strongest Makhnovist formations, including the Greeks, that were "distinguished by their discipline and hatred for the Whites" carried on a stubborn battle over the course of an entire week. "Makhno could not hold out any longer. He threw all the Greek units into the fray. The Whites smashed the Makhnovists, although their best regiments also suffered heavy losses. But the Whites prevailed because they were better armed and their military training showed itself to good effect."<sup>28</sup> The Makhnovists were forced to fall back beyond the Dnieper. But S. Dibets errs by exaggerating the losses of the Greek units. On July 6 1919 the 9<sup>th</sup> Zadniprovsy Regiment was still in existence. Again it was not entirely destroyed by Shkuro's troops. A situation report to the political section of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army describes its state after the regiment was transferred to the Reserve Brigade. "In the regiment one senses a partisan kind of atmosphere. The soldiers and their commanders are partial to Makhno. Among the soldiers there are some who are landlords [the Greek villages were regarded as prosperous – V. Ch.]. The regiment is battle-worthy... Nationalist [i.e. Greek – V. Ch.] sentiments are making their appearance along with antisemitism. The commissar and commanders are not taking steps to eradicate these phenomena. Political and cultural work is not being pursued. The leadership of the unit is dysfunctional..."<sup>29</sup>

Despite these characteristics, in the middle of June 1919 the commander of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army K. Voroshilov ordered M. Davidov to form a brigade from the Priazov'ye youth who had re-

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<sup>27</sup> A. V. Belash and V. F. Belash, *The Roads of Nestor Makhno*, (Kiev, 1993). – p. 248]

<sup>28</sup> A. Bek, "Such were the duties..." (Recollections of Dibets) in **Collected Works**, (Moscow, 1989). – p. 217

<sup>29</sup> RDVA. F.199 – Op.2 – Spr. 156. – Arc. 27

ations report to the intelligence section of the 14<sup>th</sup> Red Army, on this sector of the Front the enemy is pressuring our units, forcing them to retreat along the whole Front.”<sup>24</sup> On June 5 1919 Shkuro’s troops attacked the positions of the Makhnovists from the flank and the rear near the Greek villages of Kermenchuk and Karakub, gaining a victory and penetrating as far as the village of Rozovka to the west of the Greek settlements.<sup>25</sup> At this time the Greeks became the first refugees from the Makhnovist region. Some of them travelled with the Insurgent Army as far as Uman. Brigade Commander Belash notes: “It was impossible to hold the Front. Over a swathe of 100 versts the civilian population, afraid of falling captive to the Whites, retreated with the troops. An enormous wagon train wound its way to the west: herds of sheep and heifers mingled with carts piled with the villagers’ belongings. The women, in leaving their homes, took with them on the road a handful of their native soil. But where would they go? – this mass of civilians who were not necessary to anyone! Where would they find their saviour? These people were terrified of the Whites. In the hope of receiving support from the north, they retreated in that direction. But there was no help, for the north had its own problems.”<sup>26</sup>

On June 6 1919 Makhno submitted his resignation as commander to the division in a futile attempt to extinguish the conflict between the Anarcho-Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks. Belash took command of the insurgent troops and whatever war supplies were to be found in the rear area. At this time the replenishment of the 9<sup>th</sup> Greek Regiment was completed, and

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<sup>24</sup> RDVA. F.199. – Op.3 – Spr. 186. – Arc. 45

<sup>25</sup> **Free Kuban** (Yekaterinoslav). – 1919. – June 6<sup>th</sup>

<sup>26</sup> A. V. Belash and V. F. Belash, *The Roads of Nestor Makhno*, (Kiev, 1993). – p. 242

battalion was formed, under the command of Ivan Chuarov, whose name has already been mentioned<sup>8</sup>.

But soon the situation changed. In February 1919, in accordance with the Makhnovist command, most of the Greek detachments were amalgamated. The newly created formation already had as many as 1,500 partisans. On February 21 1919 the commander of the army group oriented towards Kharkov (later the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ukrainian Army), A. Skachko, issued an order for the creation of the three-brigade First Zdniprovsky Division, made up of nine regiments<sup>9</sup>. The Third Brigade in this division was made up of Batko Makhno’s units, and the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment (the third in the Third Brigade) was the Greek Regiment under the command of V. Tokhtamish, who was introduced as the regimental commander by P. Dybenko at Pologi Station<sup>10</sup>. Volodimir Feofanovich Tokhtamish was an Urum-Greek, a native of Velikiy Yanisol. The latter circumstance explains his Tatar surname. He began using the name “Tokhtamish” only when he was issued new documents by the Soviet government. During the revolt against the Hetman he organized a small partisan band at the village of Stary Kermenchuk (Staromlinovka). And in April 1919 P. Dybenko presented V. Tokhtamish with the Order of the Red Banner for the capture of Mariupol and proposed to the Council of People’s Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR that they express official gratitude to him<sup>11</sup>. Although he belonged to the Makhnovist formation, it was not surprising that Tokhtamish received the award because he had been gravitating to the Bolsheviks

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<sup>8</sup> L. Yarutsky, **Makhno and the Makhnovists**, (Mariupol, 1996). – p. 190

<sup>9</sup> **The Civil War in Ukraine 1918–1920: Collection of Documents and Materials**, in 3 Volumes, 4 Books; Vol. 1, Bk. 2, (Kiev, 1967). – p. 150

<sup>10</sup> A. V. Belash and V. F. Belash, *The Roads of Nestor Makhno*, (Kiev, 1993). – p. 90

<sup>11</sup> **The Civil War in Ukraine 1918–1920: Collection of Documents and Materials**, in 3 Volumes, 4 Books; Vol. 1, Bk. 2, (Kiev, 1967). – p. 292

for some time. He parted ways with the Makhnovists in the summer of 1919. Becoming a Communist, Tokhtamish in the 1920's was in charge of building a fish cannery of which he became the first director. In 1935 he died of a congenital disease<sup>12</sup>.

The regiment he led covered itself with glory on the field of battle at Mariupol, Velikiy Yanisol, and Velikiy Tokmak in March – June 1919. Mariupol was regarded as the unofficial capital of “Priazov’ye Ellada” and the Greek Makhnovists considered it a matter of honour to drive the Denikinists out of it. The first attack of the Makhnovists on Mariupol took place on March 19 1919 and was directly connected with the ongoing Mangush saga. After their initial failure to subdue Mangush, the White Guards returned with new forces<sup>13</sup> and a half-battery of large guns in order to teach a lesson to the recalcitrant Greeks. But by this time the village was already occupied by the Makhnovist units which had captured Berdiansk. The Whites had to return to Berdiansk again, for the insurgents Greeks repelled them again and captured their artillery. The Greeks and Makhnovists pursued the Whites back from Mangush and got very close to the city, but they were afraid to storm it right away. In the port of Mariupol a squadron of French vessels was standing with gunboats and minesweepers which were equipped with not less than 60 guns. Therefore the attack of the Makhnovists on Mariupol on March 19 was put on hold as not sufficiently prepared. In order to guarantee success additional forces needed to be drawn in.

For the storming of Mariupol there was created a special group of two Makhnovists regiments: the 8<sup>th</sup> (“Novospasovsky”) and the 9<sup>th</sup> (“Greek”). The two regiments shared an artillery unit (12 guns), 21 machine guns, and

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<sup>12</sup> Nestor Makhno, *The Peasant Movement in Ukraine. 1918–1921: Documents and Materials*, (Moscow, 2006). – p. 917

<sup>13</sup> L. Yarutsky, *Makhno and the Makhnovists*, (Mariupol, 1996). – p. 268

huts.”<sup>22</sup> The commander of the 12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment Morozov was cut down on the field of battle, and together with him perished 600 Makhnovist cavalymen. The Greeks, fighting their way out of the village, used up all their cartridges and fought with bayonets against the Kuban Cossacks’ sabers. Near the village of Kermenchuk the regiment was finally surrounded by the enemy and completely cut to pieces. Only its commander V. Tokhtamish with a detachment of 400 men was able to escape to a safe place – all the other companies were wiped out to the last man. Shkuro’s troops also sustained heavy losses in this battle and had to stop for rest. But Belash somewhat exaggerates the pitiless nature of the battle. There were in fact Greek prisoners. General Andriy Shkuro decided to use one of them to deliver a letter to Nestor Makhno in person. The letter contained a proposition for switching his division to the side of the Whites. The Greek prisoner from the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment brought the letter to the Batko on May 21 1919 in the village of Svyatodukhovka. For good measure Shkuro even had the Greek dressed in a new English uniform in order to show his goodwill towards the Makhnovists. However Makhno answered the general in a brutal fashion. At the end of May 1919 the Makhnovists again drove Shkuro’s forces out of the majority of the Greek villages, but again not for long.

On June 3–4 1919 the First Caucasian Division of A. Shkuro, 3,000 sabers strong, with four light guns and a large quantity of machine guns of the “Lewis” type, launched a counterattack from the north on “Priazov’ye Ellada”, seizing the village of Bogatir.<sup>23</sup> Simultaneously, from the Mariupol sector on a front from Stary Kermenchuk to Urzufa the regiments of the Volunteer Army and the 3,000-strong detachment of General Mikhail Vinogradov launched an attack. According to an oper-

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<sup>22</sup> A. V. Belash and V. F. Belash, *The Roads of Nestor Makhno*, (Kiev, 1993). – p. 207

<sup>23</sup> *Free Kuban* (Yekaterinoslav). – 1919. – June 3<sup>rd</sup>

the Greek 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment at the village of Beshevo and the 12<sup>th</sup> (Don) Cavalry in the direction of the White Guard forces. On May 21 1919 these two formations came together. Before them in the valley of Mokriy Yaliv lay Shkuro's troops in the village of the Velikiy Yanisol which they had captured. The fate of the whole Makhnovist Front depended on the outcome of this battle. V. Belash mentions that the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment was made up predominately of Greeks from the Velikiy Yanisol region, where Shkuro's troops had already had time to initiate reprisals against their families and members of the village councils. Possessed by a thirst for revenge, the Greeks "like lions threw themselves on Velikiy Yanisol, dragging the Cossacks out of the huts into the street and shooting them."<sup>21</sup> But the thirst for revenge is not of much help in war. Although V. Belash stresses that "our commanders paid special attention to the manoeuvres and firing of the regiment", the attack on the settlement was made prematurely, without accurate intelligence about the environs. At the height of the battle, the main forces of Shkuro unexpectedly fell on the Makhnovist positions from the side of the villages of Komar, Constantinople, and Bogatir. Because of their on-going conflict with the Communists, the Makhnovist forces had deliberately not been supplied with ammunition for a month and the Greeks keenly felt this deficiency at the climax of the battle. Finally the Greeks could no longer endure the pressure from the Cossacks and began to retreat. Shkuro's forces attacked unremittingly, but the Makhnovist cavalry of Don Cossacks launched a counterattack, allowing the Greeks to fall back to Sary Kermenchuk. The Greeks units were composed of people from the same villages; "There were no cowards. The saber slashing was terrible. There were no wounded or prisoners... The insurgents defended their own families and

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<sup>21</sup> A. V. Belash and V. F. Belash, *The Roads of Nestor Makhno*, (Kiev, 1993). – p. 207

a "Farman 30" airplane equipped with several bombs. From the division's reserve the divisional commander P. Dybenko allocated the armoured train "Spartak" for the storming of Mariupol. The defensive line of the opponent began in the suburbs of Mariupol at Sartan Station, which was defended by 1,000 White infantry with four light guns, armoured trains, and a squadron of cavalry. On March 28 1919, at 4 o'clock in the morning, the Makhnovist Greeks launched an attack on the city from the west.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Zadniprovsy Regiment during the attack on Mariupol came under fire by the French warships and the White artillery concentrated in the port. But they continued to push forward. The regiment, without firing, saving their ammunition until they had closed with the enemy, hurled themselves in a bayonet attack on the enemy's defense-works. The deputy commander of the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment was killed, but the assault continued. For its conduct in this battle the regiment was later awarded a coveted Red Banner<sup>14</sup>. Then came the night after the victory. During the night, looting and arbitrary searches began in Mariupol. It's possible the looting was not done by the Greeks, but by other Makhnovist and Red Army units present in the city. The secretary of the Mariupol Regional Committee L. Gorokhov a little later complained to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (Bolsheviks): "The entry of the Red troops was met with great enthusiasm... The looting, drunkenness, killings, persecution of Jews, and, chiefly, the normal politics of the staff and command personnel, which consisted of unsavory anti-government agitation, had a great influence in undermining the authority of Soviet power."<sup>15</sup> On the next day the Makhnovists in Mariupol routed the Cheka, which had been immediately set up by the Communists who

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<sup>14</sup> RDVA. F.936. – Op.1. – Spr. 4. – Arc. 183

<sup>15</sup> TsDAVOVU. F.1. – Op.1. – Spr. 17. – Arc. 3.

had emerged from the underground<sup>16</sup>. The Greeks from the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment remained in the city during these events and were later assigned to the defense of Mariupol. In April 1919 this function was fulfilled by one of the Greek battalions of the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment with a complement of 500 men<sup>17</sup>.

In April 1919, at the peak of the Makhnovist successes in Priazov'ye another Greek regiment made its appearance, referred to by the Makhnovist commander V. Belash simply as "the second", since apparently the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment was considered "the first" Greek regiment. This new regiment took part in battles with the cavalry general A. Shkuro near Maliy Yanisol<sup>18</sup>. Beginning in April 1919, "Priazov'ye Ellada" became a war zone through which the front line moved back and forth over a period of two months. In April 1919 this territory was lost by the Makhnovists, but by the end of the month they won it back again.

According to the memoirs of the secretary of the Berdiansk Revkom [Revolutionary Committee] S. Dibets, the Greek regiments of Batko Makhno "were distinguished by correct discipline, organization, and perseverance." L. Yarutsky, in particular, writes that he has not found any proof of their participation in the outrages and lootings characteristic of the Makhnovist poor peasants. We must note, however, that there is no evidence that they tried to put a stop to this looting, for example in Mariupol itself. An evaluation report written in pencil for the political section of the 1<sup>st</sup> Zadniprovsky Division informed the headquarters command at the beginning of April 1919 about the state of the 9<sup>th</sup> Zadniprovsky Regiment. "1) The mood is satisfactory. 2) There is a core of sympathizers [for the Bolsheviks – V. Ch.]. 3) They have a club, schools, and libraries in the

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<sup>16</sup> **The Civil War in Ukraine 1918–1920: Collection of Documents and Materials**, in 3 Volumes, 4 Books; Vol. 1, Bk. 2, (Kiev, 1967). – p. 292

<sup>17</sup> RDVA. F.199. – Op.3. – Spr. 371. – Arc. 11

<sup>18</sup> A. V. Belash and V. F. Belash, *The Roads of Nestor Makhno*, (Kiev, 1993). – p. 148

1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> companies; and a choir and an orchestra (organized at the beginning of April). There is a shortage of literature, and there are mobile literacy schools. 4) The regiment is battle worthy, but Left SR and Anarchist elements predominate."<sup>19</sup> As we see the Greek-Makhnovists in a brief period of time had created a rather solid military infrastructure.

At the end of April 1919 S. Dibets, together with the chief of the field staff of the Makhnovist brigade Ya. Ozerov, departed on an inspection trip to the Front. "Close to Mariupol we found the Greek unit. In the Greek villages the officer-punishers perpetrated merciless retaliation for any kind of revolutionary acts. The Greeks hate the Whites. They hate them so much they need only the slightest encouragement to engage them in battle. Iron discipline has been introduced in the Greek units." S. Dibets, although sympathetic to the Bolsheviks, devotes a virtual panegyric to V. Tokhtamish as commander of the Greek Regiment. He called his regiment the best in the Makhnovist formations: "The Greek units were the most reliable part of the Batko's troops, and at critical moments he would throw them into the most dangerous sectors."<sup>20</sup>

And critical moments indeed were at hand. In the middle of May 1919 the Kuban Corps of General Shkuro broke through into the Makhnovist rear from the north by smashing units of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division of the Red Army which were adjacent to the Makhnovists. The Kuban Cossacks occupied the Grishinskiy region and Shkuro was now able to attack from the north to the south with impunity – into the rear of the Makhnovist Front and "Priazov'ye Ellada". It was necessary to check the Kuban cavalry at any cost. And then the staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the Ukrainian Insurgent Batko Makhno Division (brigade commander V. Belash, chief-of-staff M. Davidov) started in motion

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<sup>19</sup> RDVA. F.936. – Op.1. – Spr. 12. – Arc. 9

<sup>20</sup> A. Bek, "Such were the duties..." (Recollections of Dibets) in **Collected Works**, (Moscow, 1989). – p. 205