

ДОНЕЦЬКИЙ НАЦІОНАЛЬНИЙ УНІВЕРСИТЕТ ІМЕНІ ВАСИЛЯ СТУСА
УНІВЕРСИТЕТ САНКТ-ГАЛЛЕНА
УНІВЕРСИТЕТ ФРІБУРА

**МАТЕРІАЛИ
МІЖНАРОДНОЇ КОНФЕРЕНЦІЇ
«СУЧАСНА РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКА ВІЙНА:
СОЦІОІСТОРИЧНІ РЕАЛІЇ ТА ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ»**

Вінниця, 15 березня 2024 р.

Констанц
2024

*Рекомендовано до друку
Вченою радою факультету історії та міжнародних відносин
Донецького національного університету імені Василя Стуса
(протокол № 1 від 23 серпня 2024 р.)*

Сучасна російсько-українська війна: соціоісторичні реалії та перспективи: матеріали Міжнародної конференції (м. Вінниця, 15 березня 2024 р.) / за ред. Р. О. Литвиненка. Констанц. 2024. 250 с.

Пропонована збірка містить матеріали виступів на міжнародній науковій конференції «Сучасна російсько-українська війна: соціоісторичні реалії та перспективи» (15 березня 2024 р.), ініційованій Університетом Санкт-Галлена (Санкт-Галлен, Швейцарія), Університетом Фрібура (Фрібур, Швейцарія) та Донецьким національним університетом імені Василя Стуса (Вінниця, Україна), яка стала результатом швейцарсько-українського співробітництва. Присвячена змінам, які зазнала Україна після агресії РФ у 2014 р. та після початку повномасштабної війни в лютому 2022 р., конференція об'єднала науковців з України, Швейцарії, Німеччини, Польщі, Словаччини та Молдови.

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УДК 94:355.48((470+571):(477))'06"2014/..."

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**АРХЕОЛОГІЧНА СПАДЩИНА ПІВНІЧНОГО ПРИАЗОВ'Я:
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**THE NORTH AZOV REGION ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE:
CHALLENGES OF MODERN WARFARE**

Abstract. *The article is devoted to the enormous challenges posed by the modern Russia-Ukraine war to Ukraine's historical and culture heritage, including its integral part, the North Azov region archaeological heritage. From the very beginning of the war, eastern Ukraine's archaeological sites were the first to experience the Russian aggression destructive power. Particular attention is paid to the state of the burial mounds, which are primarily affected by the hostilities. It is noted that not only archaeological sites are being destroyed regarding the Russian military aggression developments. Museums are being ruined and stolen, including the North Azov region archaeological collections. Emphasis is placed on the real threat to the preservation of Ukraine's national culture heritage and its cultural values after the enemy's gross violation of the basic principles and generally recognised international law norms.*

Keywords: *North Azov region, culture heritage, archaeological heritage, Mariupol State University.*

Today, Ukraine's national culture heritage including its integral part, the archaeological heritage, is suffering from the enormous challenges posed by the Russia-Ukraine war that has been going on since 2014. Since the war started, eastern Ukraine's archaeological sites were the first to experience the Russian aggression destructive power.

The North Azov terrains within the Donetsk region in the country's eastern part are considered one of Ukraine's most archaeologically rich regions. In early 2021, according to the archaeological sites regional electronic database, more than 9800 archaeological heritage objects were officially registered in Donetsk region. Among the archaeological sites, mounds occupy a prominent place (over 90 % of the registered archaeological sites total number). This figure should also include the estimated large number of undiscovered sites [9, p. 16].

⁴ This work was supported by the Institute of Archaeology, SAS and Recovery plan Slovakia, call code 09/03-03-V01 and by the grant project VEGA 2/0017/24.

Research interest in the North Azov region barrow antiquities has had a long tradition. Initially, it was manifested through treasure hunting and the pursuit of ancient artefacts. Numerous scattered and fragmentary information about plundering and amateur excavations of burial mounds has been preserved. Further in the late 18th century, information about the mounds was mentioned by related professions specialists: geographers, geologists, and ethnographers. One can consider the mounds being significant as an archaeological source from the middle of the 19th century. As well since the late 19th century, the North Azov region antiquities – the mounds – have been studied as a specific archaeological source. Finally, the early 1970s in Azov archaeology were characterised by a sharp increase in the source base represented by the kurgan burial grounds materials investigated during new construction works in the reclamation zones, with further comprehension and comprehensive study. The materials obtained during the field research at new buildings of the 20th century last decades were mostly favourably distinguished by the perfection of excavation methods, the recording level, and, particularly, the field and reporting documentation high quality [6].

According to our calculations, starting from the research in the late 19th century and up to the present time, about 930 burial mounds have been fully investigated by excavations in the Donetsk region [9, p. 16]. As a result, over a century and a half of research, a significant quantitative source base has been accumulated that characterises the North Azov region and adjacent territories barrows. It is the burial mounds, concentrated mainly on watershed ridges and plateaus, that are primarily affected by the hostilities. Given the dominant topographical location on the ground and the shape of the mound itself as an artificial high rise, ancient mounds were often used to set up defence posts or lines (Fig. 1). This was the case in Ukraine during the Second World War. The same is happening during the current Russia-Ukraine war. Therefore, the mounds are perhaps the most affected by the fighting among other archaeological objects. However, the war has not spared other types of archaeological sites, as there are numerous destruction or damage cases to archaeological settlements, burial grounds, stone sculptures, etc. (Fig. 2) [3, p. 32].

Steppe mounds are archaeological objects that have always evoked the scholarly interest, at the same time drawing robbers' attention. They were always in plain sight and have always been an indispensable attribute of the North Azov region historical and culture landscape.



Fig. 1. An example of a 3 mounds kurgan group location surrounded by fortifications on Google Maps. Mariupol District, Chermalyk Village Council



Fig. 2. Destruction on the local significance archaeological site territory of "Kalmius Settlement" after the enemy bombardment

Over the centuries, mounds have suffered the most from anthropogenic impact among archaeological sites. The issue of looting at burial mounds and ancient settlements, which has become a nationwide disaster, has been discussed many times. Sad statistics display an exponential increase in the scale of this disaster, which primarily affects the steppe zone mounds.

Recently, new factors of archaeological heritage objects destruction and new threats have emerged, which have been multiplied during the hostilities. Regarding the treasure hunters' actions during the war states that under the military aggression conditions not only the military resistance issues but also the problems of preserving Ukraine's culture heritage are strategically important. These problems are directly related to the national identity issue, whose destruction is one of the enemy's main objectives. Archaeological heritage is Ukraine's culture heritage important and integral part. During the hostilities archaeological sites suffer irreparable damage [4].

Today, one can sadly state that not only archaeological sites are being destroyed under the Russian military aggression conditions. Museums, including the North Azov region archaeological collections, are being destroyed and stolen. The collection of sources on the Azov steppes ancient population history previously accumulated by many researchers at the beginning of the war was kept in various institutions and museum collections in different cities. The largest artefacts collection obtained by the Donetsk State University expedition stuff in the North Azov region burial mounds was kept within the Donetsk National University collections.

The fate of the collection itself after the 2014 occupation is unknown. In addition, part of the source case was kept in the museum institutions collections in other cities: The Melitopol Local Lore Museum, The State History and Archaeology Museum-Reserve "Stone Tomb" (Melitopol), and The Berdiansk Local Lore Museum. The fate of these collections after the large-scale invasion and occupation by the enemy in 2022 as well remains unknown to us.

In early 2022, the Mariupol Local Lore Museum was the most powerful museum institution in the North Azov region, with archaeological collections in its holdings. The Mariupol Local Lore Museum collection basis, founded in 1920, was an archaeological funds collection from the Historical-Church-Archaeological Museum at the Mariupol Men's Alexander Gymnasium. Since then, the funds have been regularly replenished with the archaeological research materials in the Azov region (Fig. 3).

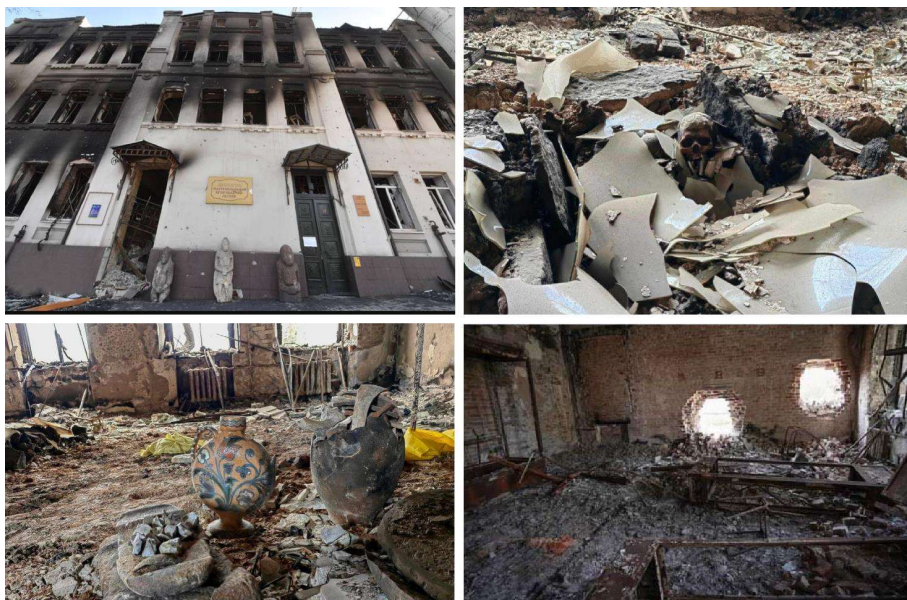


Fig. 3. Remains of the Mariupol Local Lore Museum archaeological collection

Thus, as of 1 January 2013, the museum's archaeological collection consisted of 2,689 main storage fund museum items and 670 scientific and auxiliary storage fund museum items. Materials from 16 Donetsk and neighbouring regions districts: Rostov, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Crimea are represented in the collection. The most voluminous collections are those of the Upper Palaeolithic – 1 077 items, Bronze Age – 889 items. The stone statues collection is significant – 38 units, 1 stele, 37 photo negatives of the 1930s. The Scythians, Sarmatians and the early Middle Ages were under-represented in the museum's collections. The Cossack period collection was rapidly replenished due to the ongoing excavations. There were 660 items on display, representing 21.7 % of the total archaeological collection and 26.2 % of the main storage collection. The "new building" period of archaeological research in the Azov region is mainly represented in the museum by the materials from the Mariupol archaeological expedition excavations, obtained under V. Kulbaka's leadership (607 items were included in the museum's collections) [2].

Spontaneous looting by the troops and organized removal of the valuables from the enslaved territories to the imperial centre are the two Ukrainian exhibits main sources which ended up in Russia. The pattern has remained the same for many centuries. Special decrees and orders were followed in the Russian Empire, and archaeological expeditions were systematically arranged to extract historical heritage from the colonized territories. Later, this practice continued in the Soviet Union. Private individuals would also contribute to the removal of valuables from Ukraine to Russia by selling and taking them when moving to Russia [1]. For example, M. Makarenko's, V. Yevseyev's, and P. Pinevych's archaeological collections were separated and partially deported before the current war outbreak. Back in the 1930s, the most interesting exhibits were transferred from the Mariupol museum to Leningrad and Moscow museums. In 1956 some of the materials were transferred to the Donetsk Regional Local Lore Museum collections [7].

Another museum institution that housed archaeological collections from the North Azov region is the Mariupol State University History and Archaeology Museum, which was established in 2016. The museum's funds were based on a small archaeological collection acquired during the Mariupol Archaeological Expedition and the University's expedition research activities. Despite the relatively

young age of MSU archaeology researches, the university expedition experienced its formation stage in Soviet times, as it is a direct successor of the Mariupol Archaeological Expedition (MAE), which existed in the last century 80s – early 90s. Mariupol archaeologist V. Kulbaka's activity (1954–2009) is inextricably linked with the Mariupol Archaeological Expedition. During its full existence period, the expedition investigated mainly such specific archaeological objects as burial mounds.

The works were carried out mostly in the North-Eastern Azov region. During the 1984–1995 period, the expedition investigated 62 burial mounds and one medieval earth cemetery. A total of 274 burials were discovered, dating from the Eneolithic to the late Middle Ages. In 1997, having moved to teaching at Mariupol State University, and being supported by the educational institution management, V. Kulbaka created a permanent archaeological expedition. During 25 years of archaeology development at Mariupol State University, his expeditions explored many ancient sites and accumulated a considerable sources fund. In general, the barrows study results carried out by the university expedition enrich the source fund for researching the Azov steppes ancient population and contribute to the archaeological heritage preservation and protection – an integral part of the humanity's culture heritage, a unique and irreplaceable knowledge source about the historical past [8].

Since the Russian full-scale invasion started in 2022, the Mariupol State University History and Archaeology Museum has not existed physically: the exhibition space was destroyed and the remaining collection as well as the funds were looted by the Russian military or looters (Fig. 4). The archaeological collection kept in the city museum also suffered a disappointing fate, unfortunately, after the Mariupol Local Lore Museum having been destroyed. All three institution buildings were ruined during the enemy bombardment, many exhibits were either burnt or stolen, and the fate of 60,000 exhibits is currently unknown.



Fig. 4. The Mariupol State University History and Archaeology Museum

Under the Russian aggression conditions, the National Council for Ukraine's Recovery from the War Consequences has developed a "Draft Plan for Ukraine's Recovery". The materials of the workgroup formulated the main problems to be solved within the Recovery Plan framework in the "Culture Heritage Preservation" direction. For Ukraine's archaeological heritage, among the key challenges due to the enemy's gross violation of the basic principles and generally recognised inter-

national law norms, it is necessary to emphasise: a real threat to the national culture heritage and its cultural values preservation; the Russian occupiers' illegal, violent and unjust actions against Ukraine's culture heritage and its cultural values [5].

At all archaeological sites damaged during the war, rescue research, large-scale and complex in its algorithm, will subsequently have to be carried out. Therefore, taking into account the existing and possible factors that currently affect the archaeological heritage preservation state, it is imperative to develop an action protocol at the legislative, methodological and practical levels to address the challenges of preserving Ukraine's culture and historical (archaeological) heritage. These tasks should be implemented within the national programme framework, with both national archaeological staff and foreign partners involved. In any case, future rescue archaeological research after the war should be preceded by large-scale demining of all Ukrainian territories and field surveys to inventory archaeological sites and monitor the condition of objects damaged during the hostilities.

In this regard among the key challenges posed by the enemy's gross violation of the basic principles and universally recognised international law norms, emphasis should be placed on: a real threat to Ukraine's national culture heritage and its cultural values preservation; the Russian occupiers' illegal, violent and unjust actions against Ukraine's culture heritage and its cultural values.

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