

From Gold in the Scythian Steppe to Scandinavian Influence in Kyiv: Ukraine's Relationship with Europe in the Past Thirty Years, Portrayed in International Exhibitions

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ABSTRACT

Ukraine's international exhibitions are a medium for the self-image and external image of the state that emerged after 1991. While the first exhibitions still cultivated an image inherited from the Soviet era, after 2000, Ukraine's newly formulated foreign cultural policy began to increasingly support international exhibitions in order to present Ukraine as an independent historical and cultural entity, counteract Russia's interpretative dominance, and integrate Ukraine into the European cultural sphere. They were also intended to promote cooperation between Ukrainian and European museums and scholars. The legal dispute over the "Crimea exhibition" in Amsterdam further transformed cultural diplomacy into a debate about European values. Ukraine successfully positioned itself as a victim of colonial art looting and joined Western Europe's current efforts to return artifacts captured through colonialism. This strengthened Ukraine's image as part of a liberal Europe that defends the rule of law and cultural justice against Russian imperialism.

KEYWORDS: exhibitions, Ukraine, Scythians, Cucuteni-Trypillia culture, Crimea, Europe

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1 Introduction

International exhibitions have been a means of foreign cultural policy since at least the time of the nineteenth century's major world exhibitions.¹ With their accompanying cultural programs, international exhibitions are part of a more or less concerted campaign to strengthen the soft power² of one's own nation, i. e., to improve its image, reduce tensions, and build networks between curators, scientists, artists, and cultural politicians. In short, these events are a means of selling one's nation on an international stage.³

Yet, rarely has an exhibition become such a topic of international politics as *De Krim: Goud en geheimen van de Zwarte Zee* [Crimea: Gold and Secrets of the Black Sea] at Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam. When it opened on 7 February 2014, no one in the Netherlands knew that the Russian Federation would invade Ukraine and annex Crimea shortly afterward. Nor did anyone think that the objects loaned to Amsterdam for the exhibition would become the subject of a legal dispute between Ukraine and Russia, lasting until they were finally returned to Ukraine in November 2023. The exhibition has now been on display in the National Historical Museum in Kyiv since 4 July 2024, when Olena Zelens'ka, wife of the Ukrainian President, opened it. It is slated to remain open "until the end of the occupation of Crimea."⁴

When the exhibition was shown in Amsterdam, the director of Allard Pierson Museum, Wim Hupperetz, focused on one question: "Where does Europe begin and where does it end?" He emphasized that Ukraine, particularly Crimea, played a central role in answering this query. Europe is not a territory but an idea. So, if Crimea and with it, Ukraine, is understood as part of Europe, then it must also be part of the idea of Europe and part of the European community of values. Europe ends, then, where the values are no longer shared. Hupperetz

1 LEE DAVIDSON, LETICIA PÉREZ CASTELLANOS: *Cosmopolitan Ambassadors: International Exhibitions, Cultural Diplomacy and the Polycentral Museum*, Wilmington 2019; CHRISTIAN SAEHRENDT: *Kunstaustellungen in der Schweiz als Mittel der auswärtigen Kulturpolitik der Weimarer Republik und des "Dritten Reiches" 1919–1939*, in: *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte / Revue suisse d'histoire / Rivista storica svizzera* 54 (2004), 4, pp. 426–439; ANDREW JAMES WULF: *U.S. International Exhibitions during the Cold War: Winning Hearts and Minds through Cultural Diplomacy*, New York—London 2015. Cf. also: HEIKE DENSCHHELMANN: *Deutschlandbilder: Ausstellungen im Auftrag Auswärtiger Kulturpolitik*, Wiesbaden 2013.

2 JOSEPH S. NYE: *Soft Power*, in: *Foreign Policy* (1990), 80, pp. 153–171.

3 BRIAN WALLIS: *Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy*, in: ITIT ROGOFF, DANIEL J. SHERMAN (eds.): *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, London 1994, pp. 265–281.

4 *Just Like These Treasures, Crimea Will Also Return Home—Olena Zelenska at the Opening of the Scythian Gold Exhibition*, in: *Official website of the President of Ukraine*, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/tak-samo-yak-ci-skarbi-povernetsyadodomu-i-krim-olena-zelen-91949> (2024-08-27).

saw Ukraine as an area connecting Europe to Russia and Asia. The exhibition, therefore, presented Crimea as a region on the border between Europe and Asia, through which Europe was even linked to China via the Silk Road. In antiquity and the Middle Ages, Crimea united a colorful mixture of sedentary and nomadic peoples and was open to cultural imports even from the distant Middle Kingdom. The exhibition aimed to make clear that, through the Greek era and the Middle Ages, “European cultural history [was] inextricably linked to Ukraine’s significant heritage.”⁵

Using Crimea as an example, the exhibition presents Ukraine as an essential part of Europe. The exhibition lives up to the motto of the European Union (EU), “United in diversity,” by incorporating the continent’s different cultures, traditions, and languages, offering an example of peaceful coexistence and prosperity through trade, and including Ukraine in European history, from the era of the democratic Greeks to the Christian Middle Ages.

The exhibition in Amsterdam was by no means the only one organized by or in collaboration with Ukrainian museums and research institutes. On the contrary, such exhibitions were shown in numerous countries in Europe, Asia, and Northern America since Ukraine’s independence in 1991. Should these exhibitions, as part of cultural foreign policy, also attempt to valorize Ukrainian history such that Ukraine can be understood as an integral part of Europe by European audiences and those outside Europe? This question will be examined here, using exhibition catalogs, catalog forewords written by exhibition organizers, politicians, and diplomats, and press coverage of the exhibitions.

In general, exhibitions are often developed and successfully staged on pre-modern themes: In doing so, old state traditions are emphasized, as, e. g., by the PR China,⁶ but also comparatively young states, such as the United States, create a tradition reaching back into the depths of time with the help of such

5 PAULIEN RETÈL, TOON VUGTS (eds.): *De Krim: Goud en geheimen van de Zwarte Zee*, Amsterdam 2014, p. 7: “Dit project laat zien dat de Europese cultuurgeschiedenis onlosmakelijk verbonden is met het belangrijke erfgoed von Oekraïne.”

6 SANJA RADOVIĆ: *Gostovanje izložbe arheoloških iskopina Narodne Republike Kine u Jugoslaviji 1974. godine* [Visit of the Archaeological Exhibition in the People’s Republic of China in Yugoslavia in 1974], in: *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju* (2015), 3, pp. 77–92; SHING-KWAN CHAN: *Relics and Rapprochement: The Intricacies of Cultural Diplomacy in China’s First Archaeological Exhibition in the U. S. during the Cold War Era*, in: *Museum History Journal* 17 (2024), 1, pp. 76–94; DA KONG: *Museums, International Exhibitions and China’s Cultural Diplomacy*, London 2021; WU YAWEN: *The Research of International Exhibition and National Image—Taking 2010 Shanghai Expo as an Example*, in: *International Journal of Frontiers in Sociology* 5 (2023), 10, pp. 38–42; XI CHEN, HAIYUN WU: *The Projection of Chinese National Image by Chinese Overseas Exhibitions of Ancient Art*, in: *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 368 (2019), pp. 286–291.

exhibitions.⁷ Examples of staging pre-modern history (and archeology) from Eastern Europe since the 1960s include the Great Moravia exhibitions in Czechoslovakia,⁸ the Thracian exhibitions in Bulgaria,⁹ and the Scythian exhibitions in the Soviet Union.¹⁰ All these exhibitions harked back to what was perceived as a particularly glorious time in the “national”¹¹ past and were intended to show how important and culturally sophisticated their states had always been.

The exhibitions shown by Ukraine after 1991 had the same basic aim. Three thematic areas that attracted international attention can be identified. These are the Greek-nomadic antiquity, in which the Scythians were particularly visible; the Chalcolithic Cucuteni-Trypillia culture; and the Kyivan Rus’.

2 Greek-Nomadic Antiquity

There is a long tradition of research into Scythian history. This research began with Russia’s expansion into Siberia and was systematically promoted under Peter the Great. Golden animal and human figurines from Siberia, found in ancient burial mounds, were brought to St. Petersburg and kept in a “Siberian collection” in the *Kunstkamera*. With the conquest of the northern Black Sea steppe beginning in the eighteenth century, archaeological exploration began not only of Greco-Roman antiquity but also of Scythian monuments; General Aleksei P. Mel’gunov, governor of Novorossiiia, had the first kurgans excavated in 1763. Soon, a whole host of enthusiastic antiquity researchers appeared, who were increasingly controlled by the Russian state from the 1830s until the Imperial Archaeological Commission was founded in 1859. That commission

7 CHRISTINA LUKE, MORAG KERSEL: *US Cultural Diplomacy and Archaeology: Soft Power, Hard Heritage*, New York 2013.

8 STEFAN ALBRECHT, SUSANNE GRUNEWALD: *Großmähren in Deutschland: Die Großmähren-Ausstellungen in Mainz und Berlin*, in: STEFAN ALBRECHT (ed.): *Großmähren und seine Nachbarn*, Frankfurt am Main 2021, pp. 269–310.

9 FLORIAN-JAN OSTROWSKI: *Thracian Archaeology and National Identity in Communist Bulgaria: The Ideological Pattern of Museum Exhibitions*, in: EMILY HANSCAM, JAMES KORANYI (eds.): *Digging Politics: The Ancient Past and Contested Present in East-Central Europe*, Berlin—Boston 2022, pp. 45–76.

10 GRACE GLUECK: *Scythian Gold at Met Brightens Detente*, in: *The New York Times*, 1975-04-17; VÉRONIQUE SCHILTZ: *A propos de l’exposition “Or des Scythes,”* in: *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 119 (1975), 3, pp. 443–453; ANASTASIA KURLYANDTSEVA: *USA and USSR: The History of an Amazing Exhibition Exchange*, in: *International Journal of Cultural Research* (2021), 2 (43), pp. 127–142, here p. 132. See also: ANASTASIA KURLYANDTSEVA: *Khudozhestvennyi svyazi SShA i SSSR v 1950–1970-e gody: Khudozhniki, politiki, vystavki* [US-Soviet Arts Relations in the 1950s–1970s: Artists, Politicians, Exhibitions], Moskva 2021; ISABELLE CHARLEUX: *Or Barbare et Cavaliers Nomades: L’Asie des Steppes dans les catalogues d’exposition*, in: *Revue Bibliographique de Sinologie* 20 (2002), pp. 249–284.

11 In the Soviet Union’s case, exhibitions focused on the Russian past.

received all archaeological finds. The most valuable finds were given to the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and the rest were distributed to other museums throughout the Russian Empire.¹² This distribution method was and is still seen as problematic in Ukraine.¹³ As late as the eighteenth century, there was a lively debate about whether the Scythians were the predecessors of the Slavs. At the end of the Tsarist Empire, this debate gave rise to a narrative that identified the Russians with the Scythians—a narrative that has recently been taken up again, particularly by representatives of Eurasianism, such as Aleksandr Dugin.¹⁴ The origin of the Cossacks was also associated with the Scythians, which in turn led some Ukrainian writers and publicists to consider Scythia a “proto-Ukrainian” region.¹⁵

Scythian exhibitions have been shown many times, with Russia, specifically the Hermitage, usually taking the lead, while Ukraine and other countries with a Scythian past appear as junior partners.¹⁶ More recent examples include *Im Zeichen des Goldenen Greifen* [In the Sign of the Golden Griffin]¹⁷ at the Gropius Bau in Berlin and *Das Gold der Steppe: Fürstenschätze jenseits des Alexanderreichs* [The Gold of the Steppe: Princely Treasures Beyond the Alexan-

12 ANDREI IU. ALEKSEEV (ed.): *Zoloto skifskich carej v sobranii Ermitazha* [Gold of the Scythian Kings in the Hermitage Collection], Sankt-Peterburg 2012, pp. 17–22.

13 On the problem of restitution, see: SERHII IVANOVYCH KOT: *Povernennia i restyuttsiia kul’turnykh cinnosti u politychnomu ta kul’turnomu zhytti Ukrainy (XX – poch. XXI st.)* [The Return and Restitution of Cultural Values in the Political and Cultural Life of Ukraine (20th – Early 21st Centuries)], Kyiv 2020.

14 PETER J. S. DUNCAN: *Ivanov-Razumnik and the Russian Revolution: From Scythianism to Suffocation*, in: *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* 21 (1979), 1, pp. 15–27; JAKUB HAUSER: “Jsme Skythové—jsme Asiáté my...”—Eurasijstvi a uměni meziválečné emigrace ze Sovětského svazu: Sergej Mako a skupina Skify [“We’re Scythians—Asians, We Are...”—Eurasianism and the Art of Interwar Emigres from the Soviet Union: Sergei Mako and the Skify Group], in: *Uměni / Art* 57 (2009), pp. 172–184; ALEXANDER BLOK: *The Scythians*, in: *The Russian Review* 14 (1955), 2, pp. 117–120; OLEG VIKTOROVICH KIRICHENKO: *Obschestvenno-politicheskoe dvizhenie “Novye Skify” v sovremennoi Rossii* [The New Scythians Social and Political Movement in Modern Russia], in: *Traditsii i Sovremennost’* (2021), 27, pp. 68–86; ILIA LEONIDOVICH BRAZHNIKOV: “Skifskii suzhet” v russkoi kul’ture [The “Scythian Motif” in Russian Culture], in: *Vestnik Nizhegorodskogo universiteta im. N. I. Lobachevskogo* (2011), 4–1, pp. 332–337; MARINA DMITRIEVA: *Skythen, Amazonen und Futuristen: Der Steppendiskurs der 1910–1920er Jahre und seine heutigen Implikationen*, in: *Behemoth* 2 (2009), 2, pp. 45–62.

15 JAS’ OLEKSII VASYL’OVYCH: *Skifs’kyi mif* [The Scythian Mythos], in: *Entsyklopediia istorii Ukrainy*, Kyiv 2012, pp. 604–605.

16 For an overview of the older exhibitions, see: CHARLEUX.

17 WILFRIED MENGHIN, MANFRED NAWROTH (eds.): *Im Zeichen des Goldenen Greifen: Königsgräber der Skythen*, Berlin 2007.



Fig. 1:
Cover of the Exhibition Catalog
*Gold der Steppe: Archäologie der
Ukraine* (Schleswig 1991)

der Empire]¹⁸ in Mannheim and Leoben, an exhibition jointly organized by the Hermitage and museums in Kyiv and Azov. At the exhibition *Scythians: Warriors of Ancient Siberia*,¹⁹ sponsored by British Petroleum and shown at the British Museum 2017/18, there was no longer any trace of Russian–Ukrainian cooperation. Instead, the Ukrainian embassy complained that the exhibition propagandistically underpinned Crimea’s affiliation with Russia.²⁰

Despite traditional Russian dominance, Ukraine has also actively used the “Gold of the Scythians” theme from an early stage. The theme is popular not only due to the fact that such exhibitions can serve national narratives but also because “gold” always magnetically attracts visitors to the exhibitions. This is why the vast majority of exhibitions that Ukraine has shown abroad have the word “gold” or “treasure” in their title.

18 WILFRIED SEIPEL (ed.): *Gold der Steppe*: Museumscenter Kunsthalle Leoben, 26. April – 26. Oktober 2009, Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, Mannheim, 26. November 2009 – 25. Mai 2010, Leoben 2009.

19 ST JOHN SIMPSON, SVETLANA PANKOVA (eds.): *Scythians: Warriors of Ancient Siberia*. The BP Exhibition, London 2017.

20 Embassy of Ukraine to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—Comment of the Embassy of Ukraine on *Scythians: Warriors of Ancient Siberia* Exhibition at the British Museum, <https://uk.mfa.gov.ua/en/news/60864-shhodo-vistavki-ski-fi-vojini-starodavnyogo-sibiru-u-britansykomu-muzeji> (2024-10-08).

“Gold” was also in the title of the last international exhibition of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, which took place in Schleswig in 1991 and thus, after 24 August, became the first exhibition of independent Ukraine. It was called *Gold der Steppe: Archäologie der Ukraine* [Gold of the Steppe: Archaeology of Ukraine]. This exhibition was the result of ten years of cooperation between Kiel University and the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. Initially, the exhibition was intended to present current research on the Ukrainian steppe. This was illustrated by the fact that the cover of the catalog depicted a detail of a fifth-century BC gold pial, a horse’s head, from the Bratoliubivs’kyi Kurhan²¹ in the Kherson Oblast (Fig. 1), found during excavations only a year earlier in 1990. However, the material exhibited and discussed dates chronologically as far as the thirteenth century. This exhibition, like those to come, mainly showcased golden jewelry from the Scythian period. Examples included the famous pectoral from Tovsta Mohyla (Dnipropetrovsk Oblast), the equally impressive golden gorytos (i. e., a bow-case for a short composite bow used by the Scythians) from the Melitopol Kurgan (Zaporizhzhia Oblast), and a small golden boar figurine from the Khomyrna Mohyla Kurgan near Pokrov (Dnipropetrovsk Oblast). There were also silver figures from the early medieval hoard found near Martynivka (Cherkasy Oblast), a high medieval Polovtsian [?] helmet, a few ceramics, and deformed skulls from the Catacomb culture (2700–1800 BC). Remarkably, the so-called Trypillia culture (see below) is missing. Geographically, the exhibition focused on the oblasts of Kherson, Zaporozhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk, Crimea, and Cherkasy.

Another aim, mentioned in passing by the exhibition organizers and Petr P. Tolochko,²² was to make Ukraine better known and contribute to international understanding.²³ However, *Der Spiegel* was fascinated by something else. For the author, the exhibition was “a show with creepy Ukrainian treasures,” as a prepared antique skull was on display, with which, *Der Spiegel* continued, the “member of an ancient Ukrainian culture was able to vent at least some of his strange urges.” Admittedly, the magazine also paid tribute to the artistic refinement of a golden sword scabbard and mentioned Scythian–Greek connections. Yet, *Der Spiegel* did

21 ANATOLII KUBYSHEV, MYKOLA KOVAL’OV: Skifs’kyi Bratoliubivs’kyi kurhan V st. do n. e. na Khersonshchyni [The Scythian Bratoliubivsky Burial Mound from the 5th Century BC in the Kherson Region], in: *Arkheolohiia* (1994), 1, pp. 141–144.

22 From 1987 to 2016, he headed the Institute of Archaeology, first at the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR and then at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Throughout his life, he stood for the idea that Ukraine belonged to the Russian world. Pochesnii direktor Institutu arkheologii Ukraini: “Ja schitaiu sebia chastitsej Russkogo mira” [Honorary Director of the Institute of Archaeology of Ukraine: “I Consider Myself Part of the Russian World”], in: *Istorichna pravda*, 2018-11-07, <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/2018/11/7/153223/> (2024-11-12).

23 Das Ausstellungskonzept, in: RENATE ROLLE, MICHAEL MÜLLER-WILLE et al. (eds.): *Gold der Steppe: Archäologie der Ukraine*, Neumünster 1991, pp. 13–14; PETR P. TOLOČKO: *Archäologie der Ukraine*, *ibid.*, pp. 15–17.

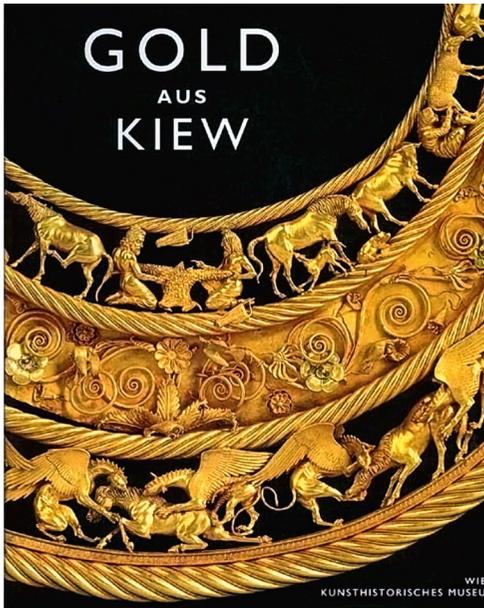


Fig. 2:
Cover of the Exhibition Catalog
Gold aus Kiew (Wien 1993)

not consider the research commitment behind this to be an academic collaboration of international standing, but merely a “gold-digger friendship.”²⁴

The exhibition in Schleswig met with great approval from the town’s northern neighbors. A museum in the Danish city of Odense launched a similar project called *Steppens nomader—skovens bønder: Ukraines arkæologi i 2000 år* [Nomads of the Steppe—Farmers of the Forest: Archaeology of Ukraine in 2000 Years]. Preparations began in October 1991, aided not only by political change but also by the fact that Odense and Kyiv were twin cities. However, the foreword to the exhibition catalog again reveals a sense of foreignness. It emphasizes how well the cooperation between very different worlds had worked in the exhibition’s preparation and the fascinating richness of this distant corner of Europe, which was actually closer to Asia. Of course, Scandinavian connections to Ukraine are also mentioned, namely the Goths, who were long thought to have once migrated from Sweden across Ukraine to Spain,²⁵ and the Rus’, the Scandinavian founders of the Kyiv Empire. But the exhibition intended to show a “new and exciting world in the East,” and an impression of strangeness and the unknown undoubtedly prevailed.²⁶

24 Gold der Steppe, in: Der Spiegel, 1991-08-04.

25 On the migration of the Goths, cf.: HERWIG WOLFRAM: Die Goten: Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts. Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie, 5th ed., München 2009.

26 HENRIK THRANE: Steppens nomader—skovens bønder: Ukraines arkæologi i 2000 år (900 f.Kr. – 1240). Med katalog til udstillingen på Hollufgård, Hollufgård 1994, p. 3,

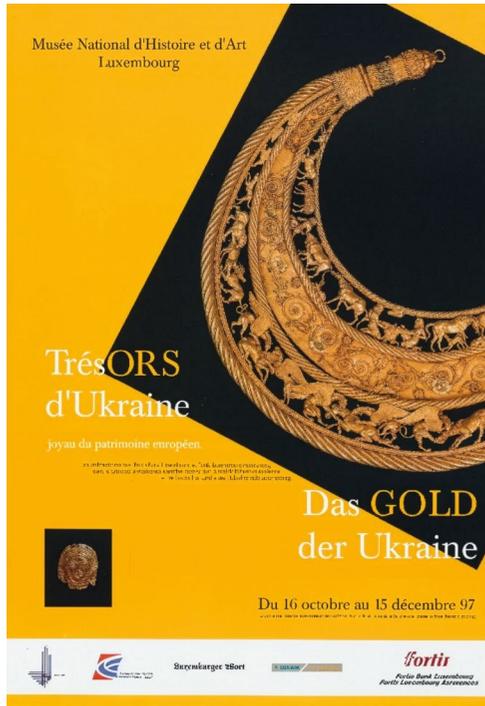


Fig. 3:
Poster of the Exhibition *Trésors d'Ukraine* (Luxembourg 1997)

As early as 1993, an exhibition of a different nature was shown in Vienna: *Gold aus Kiew: 170 Meisterwerke aus der Schatzkammer der Ukraine* [Gold from Kyiv: 170 Masterpieces from the Treasury of Ukraine]. While the cover featured fourth-century BC Tovsta Mohyla's Pectoral (Fig. 2), the exhibition was by no means focused on the Scythians. Instead, it included a great deal of medieval and modern goldsmith art from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, intended to “illustrate the historical connections and art-historical traditions between Ukraine and the rest of Europe.”²⁷ An exhibition curated by Wilfried Seipel, *Thora und Krone: Kultgeräte der Jüdischen Diaspora in der Ukraine* [Torah and Crown: Jewish Ceremonial Objects from the Ukrainian Diaspora],

indeed considers the Kievan Rus to be part of Russian, rather than Ukrainian, history: “The exhibition ends with Kievan Rus, the beginning of Russia’s actual history” (“Udstillingen slutter med Kiev Rus, begyndelsen til Ruslands rigtige historie”). A similar exhibition was shown in Finland in 1997. PÄIVI PYÖTSIÄ, RODERICK FLETCHER (eds.): *Oro: barbaarien kulta-aarre: Kulta-aarteita Ukrainan aroilta* [Oro: The Barbarians’ Gold Treasure: Gold Treasures from the Steppes of Ukraine], Helsinki 1997. (This catalog could not be consulted.)

27 WILFRIED SEIPEL: *Gold aus Kiew: 170 Meisterwerke aus der Schatzkammer der Ukraine. Eine Ausstellung des Kunsthistorischen Museums Wien, Wien 1993*, p. 9.

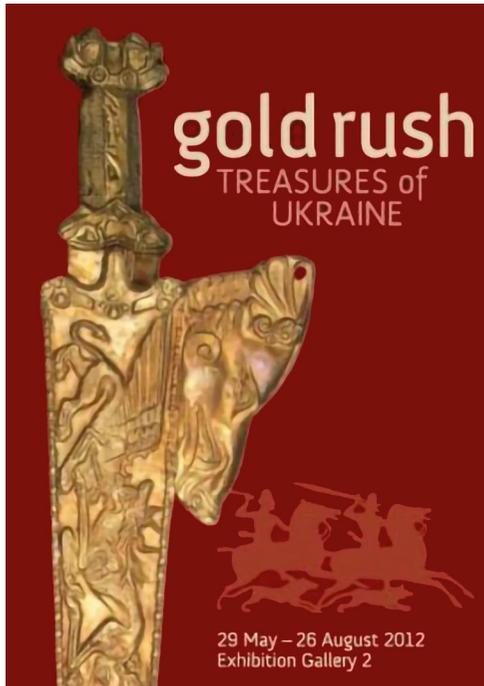


Fig. 4:
Poster of the Exhibition
Gold Rush: Treasures of Ukraine
(Singapore 2012)

which opened in September 1993, was also intended to highlight “the cultural significance, independence and European tradition of this state.”²⁸

This pair of exhibitions was conceptually combined and shown in Luxembourg in 1997.²⁹ Although a significant part of the combined exhibition was dedicated to Jewish culture in Ukraine, once again, only Scythian gold was used for advertising, featuring the same pectoral as in the aforementioned exhibition (Fig. 3). Luxembourg held the EU Council Presidency, which was the stated occasion for the exhibition.³⁰ Dmytro Ostapenko, Ukrainian Minister of Culture, took the opportunity to speak of the “reappearance” of Ukraine on the map of Europe and the artists of European civilization, which included the peoples

28 WILFRIED SEIPEL (ed.): *Thora und Krone: Kultgeräte der jüdischen Diaspora in der Ukraine. Eine Ausstellung, des Kunsthistorischen Museums Wien*, Wien 1993, p. 11.

29 CLAUDE FRISONI, SERGEI MICHAILOVITSCH TSCHAIKOVSKI: *Trésors d’Ukraine: A l’occasion de la présidence luxembourgeoise du Conseil de l’Union européenne, dans le cadre de l’accord culturel entre l’Ukraine et le Luxembourg; Musée National d’Histoire et d’Art, Luxembourg 16 octobre – 15 décembre 1997*, Luxembourg 1997.

30 In 2022, this was read in retrospect by *Luxemburger Wort* as if the exhibition had already been directly linked to the European perspective of Ukraine in 1997: “Luxembourg held the EU Council Presidency and ‘TrésORS d’Ukraine’ was also intended to culturally underpin the eastern enlargement of the European Union.” JEAN THILL: *Kunst trifft Apokalypse*, in: *Luxemburger Wort*, 2022-05-05.

who lived on Ukrainian soil in ancient, medieval, and modern times. It was his declared intention to show that Ukraine belonged culturally to Europe.³¹

The exhibition in Luxembourg was followed in the 1990s by numerous other gold and Scythian exhibitions using the same pattern and featuring the same items, the main purpose of which was to present Ukraine as an independent nation and scientific partner. These included, above all, exhibitions in the Far East, including in Japan, Singapore, and South Korea.³² The catalog for exhibitions in Japan in 1999 also showed the Scythian pectoral, although half of the catalog was dedicated to modern goldsmith art, a significant part of which was Jewish.³³ The same applies to the traveling exhibition *Gold Rush: Treasures of Ukraine*, shown in Yamanashi, Osaka, Seoul, and Singapore in 2012/13. Here, visitors were greeted by a poster showing a fourth-century BC Scythian sword and scabbard with a boar's head (Fig. 4). This exhibition was linked to events commemorating the establishment of diplomatic relations with Ukraine and the exhibiting countries. Audiences were meant to perceive interactions between their cultures and Ukraine, which was described as an important contact zone.³⁴ The fact that Ukraine was an important part of Europe played no role in these exhibitions.

Another traveling exhibition toured North America and Paris. It began with a somewhat more extensive exhibition in Montréal. Here, the entire temporal spectrum from the Stone Age to Trypillian culture to the Greeks was presented using 350 objects.³⁵ The exhibition was a great success in terms of visitor numbers, with the strong Ukrainian community in Montréal showing particular interest.³⁶ However, the idea of the exhibition, to show a Ukraine between Europe and Asia and East and West, was hardly noted in the press. In otherwise friendly reviews of the exhibitions, the plight of Ukrainian museums in the precarious economic situation of Ukraine was discussed as the real reason for the North American tour.³⁷ Only the organ of the Ukrainian diaspora, *The Ukrainian Weekly*, adopted the idea of the “natural corridor between Europe and Asia” and was pleased about

31 DMYTRO OSTAPENKO: Préface, in: FRISONI/TSCHAIKOVSKI, p. 11.

32 1999: Gold of Ukraine (Fukuoka, Hashirachō, Kyōto-shi, Yokohama); 2012: Gold Treasures of Ukraine (Yamanashi, Ōsaka, Seoul, Singapore).

33 Zolota skarbnytsia Ukrainy / The Gold Treasury of Ukraine, Kyiv 1999.

34 HWEI LIAN WONG: Gold Rush: Treasures of Ukraine, in: BeMuse 5 (2012), 2, pp. 56–60.

35 FRANCINE LELIÈVRE: Trésors des steppes d'Ukraine: Mémoire d'une exposition, Montréal 1998.

36 Succès de l'expo sur les steppes d'Ukraine, in: La Presse [Montréal], 1999-03-02, p. 6.

37 STÉPHANE BAILLARGEON: Stop sur les steppes: La chevauchée fantastique, in: Le devoir [Montréal], 1998-10-09, p. 12; MARIE-CHRISTINE BLAIS: De passionnants trésors d'Ukraine à Pointe-à-Callière, in: La Presse [Montréal], 1998-10-24, p. 16.

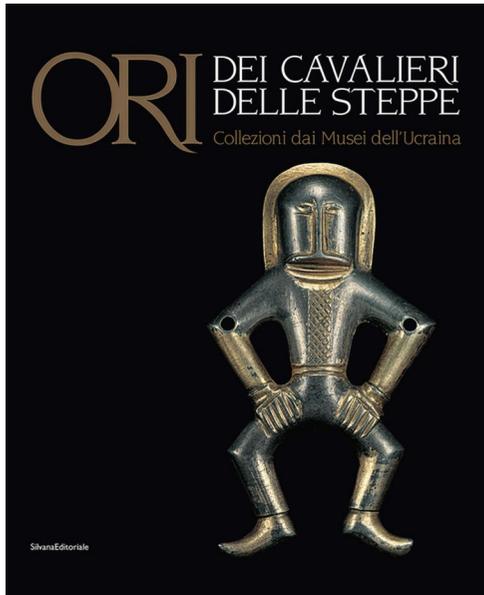


Fig. 5:
Cover of the Exhibition
*Catalogue Ori Dei Cavalieri Delle
Steppe: Collezioni Dai Musei
Dell'Ucraina* (Trento 2007)

the participation of Véronique Schiltz, the grande dame of Scythian research, who emphasized the importance of the steppe to Ukrainian identity.³⁸

The exhibitions in North America, *Gold of the Nomads: Scythian Treasures from Ancient Ukraine*, were somewhat reduced in their inventory, only showing around 170 objects in San Antonio, Los Angeles, Baltimore, New York, Toronto, and Kansas City. The exhibition organizers presented the steppe as a European space, and no one felt compelled to address this in the exhibition reviews.³⁹

When the exhibition was held in Paris from September to December 2001,⁴⁰ the theme of “Europe” was not pursued further in the media in general. Nevertheless, in the accompanying issue of the popular scientific journal *Dossiers d'Archéologie*, Ukrainian archaeology was placed in a European context, and

38 “Treasures from the Ukrainian Steppes” premieres in Montreal, in: *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 1998-12-13, p. 11.

39 RITA REIF: *The Golden Legacy of Scythian Warriors*, in: *The New York Times*, 1999-12-12; CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT: *Scythians, Trading Gold and Culture*, in: *Los Angeles Times*, 2000-07-01; PAUL RICHARD: *Barbarians with a Golden Touch*, in: *Washington Post*, 2000-03-19; *Following in Nomads' Golden Steppes*, in: *New York Daily News*, 2000-10-13; HOLLAND COTTER: *Golden Mysteries from the Cowboys of the Steppes*, in: *The New York Times*, 2000-10-13.

40 On the general reception of the exhibition, cf.: MARIE-CLARTÉ O'NEILL: *Chaque visite d'exposition est-elle une expérience unique? La réception de quatre expositions aux Galeries nationales du Grand Palais*, in: BERNADETTE GOLDSTEIN, JACQUELINE EIDELMAN et al. (eds.): *La place des publics: De l'usage des études et recherches par les musées*, Paris 2015, pp. 219–231.

its cultural heritage was explicitly recognized as part of a European cultural heritage by French archeologists. The development of Ukrainian archaeology was also Europeanized and detached from its Russian origin, to the extent that “Ukrainian” archaeology is also consistently referred to during the Tsarist period, in which archaeology took its first steps.⁴¹

The exhibition *Ori Dei Cavalieri Delle Steppe: Collezioni Dai Musei Dell’Ucraina* [The Gold of the Scythian Knights: Collections from the Museums of Ukraine], held at the Museo Castello del Buonconsiglio in Trento from June to November 2007, broke new ground. The use of a cover image never seen before in this context signaled that the Scythians and their gold were no longer the main focus. In contrast to the 1997 exhibition *Oro delle steppe dell’Ucraina* [Gold of the Ukrainian Steppe],⁴² which used the frequently shown golden gorytos with scenes from the life of Achilles, the 2007 exhibition used a silver figurine from the Martynivka Treasure (dating back to the sixth or seventh century) which is sometimes attributed to the Antes, sometimes to the Avars, and sometimes to other peoples (Fig. 5). Although the exhibition organizers wanted to show the splendor of the aristocratic life of the “Steppe Knights,” they primarily wanted to highlight cultural relationships between the urban civilizations of the Mediterranean and Asia, including the Greeks, Romans, and Persians. At the same time, unlike the exhibitions of previous decades, the 2007 exhibition in Trento focused on the commonality of nomadic civilizations from the Cimmerians to the Kipchak. The exhibition organizers presented Ukraine as “Europe’s eastern gate [*porta orientale d’Europa*] and the crossroads of the ancient nomadic peoples who had a profound influence on the history of the West.” Still, these nomadic peoples were presented as having definitively participated in the history of the West.⁴³ Their participation had only been forgotten due to a lack of written sources.⁴⁴ The exhibition *Goldener Horizont: 4000 Jahre Nomaden der*

41 JEAN-PIERRE MOHEN: L’or des rois scythes, in: *Dossiers d’Archéologie* 266 (2001), pp. 2–17; FRANÇOIS DJINDJIAN: La place de l’Ukraine dans l’archéologie européenne, *ibid.*, pp. 18–27. Even if it was clear that the independent Ukraine was the lender of the exhibits, the discussion in *Le Figaro* shows that Ukraine is still understood as *Russie méridionale*. JEAN-MARIE TASSET: ART au Grand Palais, ces barbares insaisissables qui terrorisèrent la steppe, au VIIe siècle avant J.-C. Les Scythes, l’or du blé, in: *Le Figaro*, 2001-09-28.

42 The exhibitions in Florence and Genoa in 1987 were similar. SERGIO SALVI: L’oro di Kiev L’arte dei popoli delle steppe, Milano 1987.

43 A journalist even went as far as to say, “the steppe [...] is a pregnant belly of warrior peoples that burst to the surface of history only to be absorbed into the robust stomach of Europe.” MAURIZIO ASSALTO: In mostra a Trento gli “Ori dei cavalieri delle steppe” La “società liquida”? E’ figlia dei nomadi, in: *La Stampa*, 2007-07-19.

44 Scintillanti capolavori delle popolazioni nomadi della steppa: L’oro emanazione divina [2018-01-01], in: *Stile Arte—Archeologia, Arte Antica e Contemporanea*, <https://www.stilearte.it/scintillanti-capolavori-prodotti-dalle-popolazioni-nomadi-della-step-pa/> (2017-12-31).



Fig. 6:
Cover of the Exhibition
Catalogue *Unbekannte Krim*
(Heidelberg 1999)

Ukraine [Golden Horizon: 4,000 Years of Ukrainian Nomads], first shown in Linz and then in Hanover in 2010, pursued a very similar concept. However, on this occasion, past relations among Central Europe, Austria, and Ukraine were emphasized.⁴⁵

The Crimean exhibitions of Ukraine were also exhibitions on the Scythians, but they stood out in political and historical terms due to the special character of Crimea, most of which has always been dominated by steppe peoples, but whose southern coast belonged to the Mediterranean cultural area since Greek colonization.

The exhibition *Unbekannte Krim: Archäologische Schätze aus drei Jahrtausenden* [Unknown Crimea: Archaeological Treasures from Three Millennia] in Heidelberg in 1999 was again (as it was the case with Odense and Kyiv 1994) a result of the town twinning with Simferopol and a welcome accompanying program at the third German Archaeological Congress. The basic concept of the exhibition was the “multicultural society,” in which various Crimean ethnic groups, from the Tauri to the Goths, who were at least partially present at the same time, were at the center of the exhibition.⁴⁶ However, the idea that Crimea

45 JUTTA LESKOVAR, MARTINA REITBERGER et al. (eds.): *Goldener Horizont: 4000 Jahre Nomaden der Ukraine*, Weitra 2010.

46 *Unbekannte Krim*, in: STADTBLATT [Heidelberg], 1999-12-05.

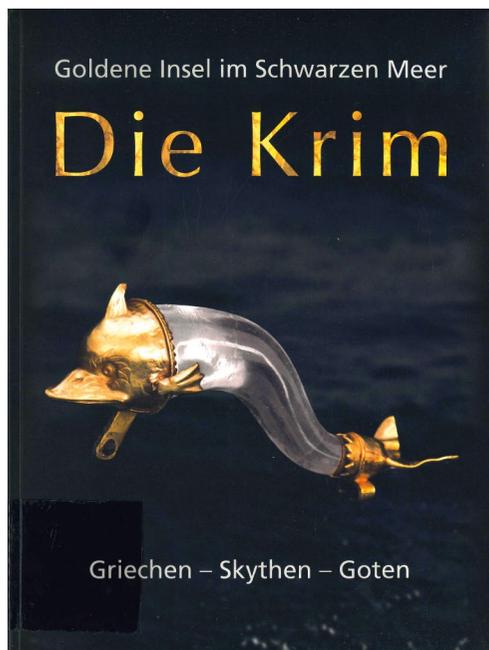


Fig. 7:
Cover of the Exhibition Catalogue
*Die Krim: Goldene Insel im
Schwarzen Meer. Griechen—
Skythen—Goten* (Bonn 2013)

is the intersection of two cultural zones was emphasized even more. Anatoly Ponomarenko, then-Ukrainian ambassador to Germany, explained, “Ukraine [was] a country settled and traversed by many peoples in its turbulent history, whose regions have absorbed influences from various cultures from both the West and the East.” At the same time, he emphasized that Ukraine was an “integrated part of Europe.” Beate Weber, mayor of Heidelberg, considered Crimea an important intersection of the Orient and the Occident. Meanwhile, Sergei Pavlichenko, director of the Museum of Regional Studies of Crimea, also emphasized Crimea’s role as a Eurasian intersection where symbiotic cultures emerged. In her foreword, curator Renate Ludwig concluded that the special exhibition contributed to a united Europe by “focusing attention on a region at the easternmost edge of our continent.”⁴⁷ The fact that the cover image of the exhibition catalogue was a somewhat inconspicuous silver eagle buckle decorated with a garnet, highlighting the Germanic settlement of Crimea, does not quite fit the usual narrative of “between East and West.” Rather, the image speaks of belonging to the West (Fig. 6).

47 ANATOLI PONOMARENKO: Grußwort, in: RENATE LUDWIG, THOMAS WERNER et al. (eds.): *Unbekannte Krim: Archäologische Schätze aus drei Jahrtausenden*, Heidelberg 1999; ERWIN TEUFEL: Grußwort, *ibid.*, p. 8; SERGEJ PAWLITSCHENKO: Vorwort, *ibid.*, p. 12; RENATE LUDWIG: *Unbekannte Krim—Archäologische Schätze aus drei Jahrtausenden: Ein Ausstellungsprojekt entsteht aus einer Städtepartnerschaft*, *ibid.*, pp. 16–18.

In this respect, the exhibition differed greatly from the next Crimean exhibition in Bonn in 2013, called *Die Krim: Goldene Insel im Schwarzen Meer* [Crimea: Golden Island in the Black Sea], for which the catalog's cover featured a gold and rock crystal clasp shaped like a dolphin from the burial mound of Nogajcik (ca. the first century BC to the first century AD) (Fig. 7). The Bonn exhibition also relied on Scythian gold in other respects, as did the already mentioned Amsterdam exhibition *De Krim: Goud en geheimen*.

In her welcome address for the exhibition in Bonn in 2013, North Rhine-Westphalia's Minister President Hannelore Kraft of the Social Democrats (SPD) emphasized the cultural diversity of Crimea, stating that the peninsula attracted numerous "people from far-flung regions of the world" and offered them a home. At the same time, she saw Crimea as an example of the "profound changes that have taken place in Europe over the past twenty years." She identified diversity, immigration, and European commonalities in the history of Crimea and suggested the audience consider Crimea's place in the future of Europe.⁴⁸ Pavlo Klimkin, ambassador of Ukraine to Germany, also emphasized the ethnic and cultural diversity of the peninsula and praised the peaceful coexistence of cultures, religions, and nationalities. He also recognized this peaceful diversity as important for "our common European home."⁴⁹

One of the exhibition curators, Michael Schmauder, emphasized to *Deutschlandfunk*, a public radio station, that Crimea had been a central European region for thousands of years and a hub between Asia and Europe. At the time of his interview in 2013, he said the region had been largely forgotten and out of focus.⁵⁰ In a Ukrainian-language interview with Inna Zavhorodnia at *Deutsche Welle*, Schmauder explained that the exhibition aimed to show visitors that Ukraine is not located in the middle of nowhere behind the Urals but is, in fact, closer to Bonn than Spain and that it is, therefore, an interesting and important region of Europe. Notably, Zavhorodnia explicitly asked whether the curators intended not to include the many archaeological finds from Ukraine held in Russia, such as those at the Hermitage. Schmauder denied this. This exchange foreshadows the later conflict over the cultural heritage of Crimea⁵¹ and the problem of the

48 HANNELORE KRAFT: Grußwort, in: STEPHANIE MÜLLER (ed.): *Die Krim: Goldene Insel im Schwarzen Meer. Griechen—Skythen—Goten*, Bonn 2013, p. 5.

49 PAVLO KLIMKIN: Grußwort, *ibid.*, p. 6.

50 Schmauder: *Die Krim ist Drehscheibe zwischen Asien und Europa*, in: *Deutschlandfunk*, 2013-07-04, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/schmauder-die-krim-ist-drehscheibe-zwischen-asien-und-europa-100.html> (2024-09-15).

51 INNA ZAVHORODNIA: "Vidkryttia" Krymu: Vystavka kryms'koi arkheolohii v Nimechchyni ["Discovering" Crimea: Crimean Archaeology Exhibition in Germany], in: *Deutsche Welle*, 2013-07-08, <https://www.dw.com/uk/vidkryttia-krymu-vystavka-krymskoi-arkheologii-v-nimeccini/a-16932593> (2024-09-15).

restitution of objects unearthed on the territory of Ukraine and subsequently brought to the Hermitage during the period of Tsarist Russia.⁵²

There were numerous press reactions to the exhibition in Bonn and Amsterdam, some of which went far beyond the exhibition concept and reflected on the history of Crimea in general. The *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* praised those responsible for the exhibition, writing,

“The Bonn museum once again delivers a lesson in Europe that is as exciting as it is instructive, showing how people have been on the move for thousands of years and have never allowed themselves to be held back for long by the stubborn notion of nation-states.”⁵³

Thomas Kliemann wrote for Bonn’s *General-Anzeiger* that Crimea was unknown to the local public. However, the exhibition showed that the peninsula is an “exceptional region within Europe,” as host to Athens’ granary, democracy, and the terminus of the Silk Road and as a hub between Asia and the Mediterranean.⁵⁴ Christian Thomas from the *Frankfurter Rundschau* praised the “mobility on the edge of the Eurasian steppe belt,” the cultural vibrancy of the contact zone, and the economic wealth of the Crimean granary. However, he wrote regretfully that “[t]he pragmatic Crimean coexistence of antiquity has not survived.” According to Thomas, the Greeks invented the barbarian, and “the rulers of Byzantium did everything they could to undo the Crimean tradition of ethnic and cultural diffusion.” Immediately after the Byzantines, Thomas mentioned that Adolf Hitler wanted to liquidate the Crimean population, and Stalin deported the Crimean Tartars. This framing incidentally shows the Eastern Romans in an unnecessarily bad light and glorifies antiquity. However, the author obviously did not want to leave the dark side of the peninsula unmentioned, so he included the Crimean War and World War II as central events in its history.⁵⁵

Finally, Peter Dittmar opened his far-sighted article in *Die Welt* on 9 November 2013 with the “archaeologist” Vladimir Putin, who dove for ancient amphorae on the Russian side of the Kerch Strait in 2011, and a comment on the problem that there is a demand among Russians to reincorporate the peninsula “gifted” to the Soviet Union by First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Nikita Khrushchev in 1954 into Russia. Barely four months after the article was published, Russia occupied the peninsula. Dittmar’s article, which, more than a review of the exhibition in the narrower sense, does not sing the praises of multicultural Crimea but sees the region above all as an eternal area of conflict—first between the “steppe barbarians” and the Greeks, then between Tatars

52 Cf. on the problem of restitution: KOT.

53 RÜDIGER HEIMLICH: Sie küssten und sie schlugen sich, in: *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 2013-07-05.

54 THOMAS KLIEMANN: Ausstellung im Landesmuseum: Die Krim als antike Drehscheibe der Kulturen, in: *General-Anzeiger Bonn*, 2013-04-07.

55 CHRISTIAN THOMAS: Treffpunkt, Tummelplatz, in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 2014-01-21.

and Russians. He emphasizes the expulsion of the Crimean Tatars by Stalin and Hitler's "Gotengau," two points that the Bonn exhibition did not include because its chronological span ranged from the fifth century BC to the fifth century AD.⁵⁶

Readers of the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and *Die Welt* were therefore not made familiar with the exhibition's idea of Crimea and its history as a once-European, multicultural, dynamic country. Instead, above all else, readers were given the peninsula's history of ethnic cleansing and wars that ran counter to European values.

3 The Cucuteni-Trypillia Culture

The archaeological Cucuteni–Trypillian culture is far less known than that of the Scythians, Cimmerians, Sarmatians, and, of course, the Greeks. It is a Chalcolithic culture found in southwestern Ukraine, Moldova, and parts of Romania between 5000 and 3000 BC. The culture is named after the site of Cucuteni in Romania respectively the Ukrainian village of Trypillia, where it was first discovered and described by the Czech-born researcher Vikentij V. Chvojka. Today, we know that the finds from Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine belong to the same culture. Among other things, it is characterized by black, white, and red ceramics and female figures, which inspired Russian and Ukrainian Futurism in the early twentieth century.⁵⁷ Above all, however, this culture is certainly impressive for its settlements of as many as 3,000 houses built across 300 hectares.⁵⁸ It invited and still invites comparisons with other early cultures, such as the Sumerians or ancient Egypt. Of course, the wealth and complexity of this culture also encourage people to make this extraordinarily old period of history known internationally.

The first exhibition of the Cucuteni–Trypillia culture with substantial Ukrainian participation took place in 2008 in Rome, in the venerable Palazzo della Cancelleria. It was organized under the aegis of the Ministries of Culture of Romania and Ukraine, with the participation of the Republic of Moldova. The Moldova National Museum Complex (Complexul Muzeal Național "Moldova"), represented by the General Director Lăcrămioara Stratulat, the Historical Museum in Kyiv, and the private foundation Cucuteni for the Third Millennium (Cucuteni pentru mileniul III) shared the preparations. The foundation also provided funding, as did HERS Consulting Group and the Romanian public authorities.

56 PETER DITTMAR: Krim in der Antike: Wo sich Putin als Unterwasserforscher versucht, in: *Die Welt*, 2013-11-09.

57 DMITRIEVA, pp. 49–54; MICHAEL KUNICHKA: Primitivism and Scythianism in Russian Futurism, in: *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies* 6 (2016), pp. 302–327.

58 BISSERKA GAYDARSKA, ANDREW MILLARD, BRIAN BUCHANAN, JOHN CHAPMAN: Place and Time at Trypillia Mega-Sites: Towards a New Synthesis of Analyses and Social Theory, in: *Journal of Urban Archaeology* 7 (2023), pp. 115–145.

In Rome, Ukraine continued a tradition of exhibitions that started in Romania, which had repeatedly presented the Cucuteni culture at home and abroad since World War II. For our purposes, it is noteworthy that Romanian foreign cultural policy used these exhibitions after the upheaval of 1989 as a means of European policy. In 1997, an exhibition went to the then-European Capital of Culture, Thessaloniki, where it was presented under the title *Cucuteni: The Last Great Chalcolithic Civilization of Europe* (1997) and placed in a European context for the first time. In his foreword, the Romanian foreign minister Adrian Severin described the Cucuteni culture as a pillar and shining culture of “Old Europe.” The political message was clearly that Romania, with its illustrious past, had been part of Europe since prehistoric times.⁵⁹

Even though Bucharest’s financial contribution and the number of exhibits from Romania had been significantly larger, the Romanian honorary committee, with the minister of culture and another senior official, was much smaller than the Ukrainian one. The latter included 17 people, including Minister of Culture Vasyl Vovkun and Minister of Foreign Affairs Volodymyr Orhrysko, but above all, the founders and eponyms of the private PLATAR Museum, and oligarchs Mykola Platonov and Serhii Taruta, who played a major, albeit dubious, role in the popularization and study of culture, as will be seen shortly. In his memoirs, Romeo Dumitrescu, president of the Cucuteni for the Third Millennium foundation and an amateur archaeologist active in science policy, is scathing about the Ukrainian committee. According to Dumitrescu, they acted very aggressively but hardly contributed any scientific expertise. He writes that the oligarchs Taruta and Platonov were “redoubtable businessmen” who had collected their personal exhibition in “more or less orthodox ways” and then taken it abroad for exhibition with no regard for law and order. As personal friends of the then-President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko, they wanted to use the Trypillia culture to enhance Ukrainian history and grow their own collections.⁶⁰ Despite disgruntlement between the two delegations, the greeting from Romanian Culture Minister Adrian Iorgulescu sounded conciliatory. He praised the cooperation between Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania, which “recreate[d], through a unique exhibition, the spiritual unity which once existed in the times of the Cucuteni–Trypillia communities.” Like the Romanian culture minister, the Ukrainian foreign minister praised the Cucuteni–Trypillia culture as the oldest in Europe (Fig. 8) and expressed the hope that the exhibition would provide an impetus for international understanding, a global process of democratization, and a “self-governing of modern culture.”

59 RADU-ALEXANDRU DRAGOMAN: A Political Chronicle of Romanian Archaeological Exhibitions: The Case of the “Cucuteni Civilization,” in: *Studii de Preistorie* 10 (2013), pp. 227–243.

60 ROMEO DUMITRESCU: O expoziție la Vatican (2008), in: *Studii de Preistorie* 8 (2011), pp. 215–234.

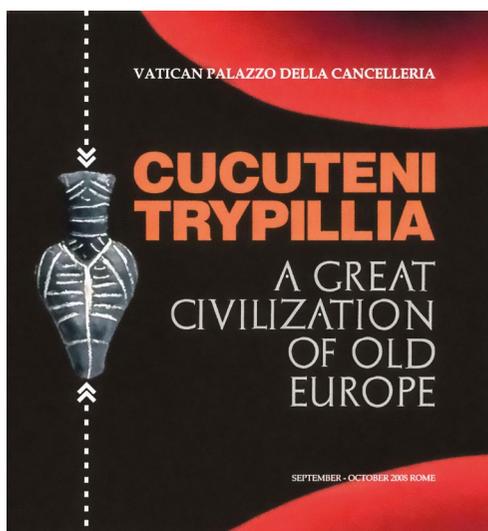


Fig. 8:
Cover of the Exhibition Catalogue
*Cucuteni Trypillia: A Great
Civilization of Old Europe*
(Rome 2008)

In the exhibition catalog’s joint foreword, the organizers wrote, “We hope that after you visit this exhibition illustrating this representative symbol of the prehistoric East-European civilization, the idea of the European Continent sharing ideals becomes closer to you.” Which ideals the organizers meant are not specified. However, it is possible that the Ukrainians were also committed to an “active civilization, maintaining important relationships with its neighbours” with a “prosperous and stable lifestyle,” as the Romanian archaeologist Nicolae Ursulescu wrote,⁶¹ and a “civilization [that] appeared as a result of the community relations, compatible with the modern ideals of democracy and self-government.”⁶²

The same exhibition had already been shown on a smaller scale in Warsaw, and even there, it was not without controversy. The Warsaw exhibition was entitled *Ukraina Światu: Skarby Ukrainy z kolekcji PLATAR* [Ukraine to the World: Treasures of Ukraine from the PLATAR Collection] and shown in the National Museum (Muzeum Narodowe). In addition to the exhibits from the Cucuteni–Trypillia culture, objects from the Cimmerian and Scythian periods, as well as the Byzantines and Kyivan Rus’, were also displayed.

In his welcome address, Polish President Lech Kaczyński expressed his hope that visitors would recognize “that Ukraine’s rightful place is within our great

61 NICOLAE URSULESCU: Cucuteni–Trypillia: The Space of a Civilization, in: LĂCRĂMIORARA STRATULAT, NICOLAE URSULESCU et al.: *Cucuteni–Trypillia: A Great Civilization of Old Europe*, Exhibition Catalogue, Palazzo della Cancelleria, [s.l.] 2008, pp. 16–20, here pp. 17–19.

62 YURI OLEKSIYOVICH SHILOV: Cucuteni–Trypillia Civilization in the Context of the Old Europe and the Near East, in: STRATULAT/URSULESCU, pp. 67–70, here p. 70.

European community” and “that a free and sovereign Ukraine should be and will always be an important element of the Western world.” Kaczyński went even further, stating that he was “deeply convinced that [the exhibition was] only the prelude to an even more integrated European future within NATO.”⁶³

The exhibition was widely discussed in the media—not without criticism. Radio Free Europe noted that many visitors⁶⁴ made negative comments about the owners and the origin of the collection, as they were convinced that most of the objects had been acquired illegally on the black market and from grave robbers. Polish archaeologists, in particular, expressed reservations, as the exhibited objects were deprived of their historical context and were an example of poor archaeological practice.⁶⁵

Overall, this exhibition⁶⁶ was obviously only a partially suitable instrument of cultural foreign policy. This was not due to the objects themselves, but to the oligarchic collectors and their, at best, semi-legal means of building their collections. The sometimes grotesquely exaggerated image of Trypillia as the starting point of culture par excellence, as the founder of the Sumerian and Hittite empires and the like, which had become so popular with Ukrainian politicians, including Yushchenko, but also in other circles,⁶⁷ could hardly be seriously conveyed. As such, Ukrainian scholars distanced themselves from the exhibition:

“In the end, the historical untruth becomes obvious, damaging the country’s reputation. And the Ukrainian myth of Trypillia does not elevate Ukraine, as its supporters hope. On the contrary, it humiliates it in the eyes of its neighbors while discrediting our science and making a mockery of our country in the eyes of civilized Europe. Of course, European scientists focus on scientific work and do not take these fictions into account, but they are also not involved at the highest levels of power.”⁶⁸

63 “Skarby Ukrainy z kolekcji Platar”—wystawa w Muzeum Narodowym [“Treasures of Ukraine from the Platar collection”—Exhibition in the National Museum], in: *Nauka w Polsce*, <https://naukawpolsce.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C72563%2Cskarby-ukrainy-z-kolekcji-platar-wystawa-w-muzeum-narodowym.html> (2024-08-26).

64 Wystawka skarbiv Ukrainy u Varshavi i zakhopliuie, i oburiuie [The Exhibition of Ukrainian Treasures in Warsaw Is Both Captivating and Outrageous], in: *Radio Svoboda* (2008-04-23), <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/1114756.html> (2025-11-18).

65 MONIKA KAMIŃSKA, MAGDA CIEŚLA et al.: *Ukraina świata: Ukraina nauce?* [Ukraine to the World: Ukraine to Science?], in: *Menhir: Czasopismo Archeologiczne* (2009), 7, pp. 82–83.

66 See also its 2016 reprise: ANDRZEJ JAKUBOWSKI: *Kontrowersje wokół wystawy ukraińskiej kolekcji zabytków archeologicznych w Szczecinie* [Controversies Surrounding the Exhibition of a Ukrainian Collection of Archaeological Artifacts], in: *Przegląd Prawa Międzynarodowego* (2016-09-08), <https://przegladpm.blogspot.com/2016/09/kontrowersje-woko-wystawy-ukrainskiej.html> (2024-09-07).

67 ANDREW WILSON: *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, New Haven 2022, pp. 25–27.

68 *Vidkryty lyst redkolehiii zhurnalu “Arkheolohiia” do mas-media Ukrainy* [Open Letter from the Editorial Board of the Journal “Archeology” to the Ukrainian Media], in: *Arkheolohiia* 3 (2012), pp. 143–148. “And the Trypillian-Ukrainian myth does not ele-

However, the influential, anti-government *Ukrains'ka Pravda*⁶⁹ noted as early as 2005, when PLATAR had already shown its treasures abroad on a small scale, that the reaction must be devastating in “civilized countries” in Europe. According to the paper, it was customary there to put looters on trial. “Only objects found in the nineteenth century or imported from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, or Ukraine are privately owned there.” We read on to learn that Ukraine had qualified itself as a failed state through the Trypillia exhibitions with the participation of PLATAR. The country was violating its own and European law, since in December 2003 the Verkhovna Rada ratified the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, which expressly prohibits illicit excavations and trade in illegally acquired archaeological objects. This was particularly embarrassing in relation to neighboring Poland, a leading country in the field of archaeology, where the plundering of archaeological sites was clearly condemned in the press and academic circles. Yushchenko was also explicitly criticized following the PLATAR-sponsored exhibition because he had presented himself as a lover of archaeology. If he were genuinely interested in archaeology, he ought to have fought the looters and not promoted private archaeological collections. “The government in Ukraine remains uncultured and illiterate,” wrote Petr Nezjurn. “It puts its own desires and interests above the interests of society and often ignores critical attitudes towards itself.”⁷⁰

4 The Kyivan Rus'

Only since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, and especially since its full-scale invasion in 2022, has Kyivan Rus' become the main focus of exhibition

vate Ukraine, as its supporters hope, but rather humiliates it in the eyes of its neighbors, and at the same time discredits our science and makes our country a laughingstock in the eyes of civilized Europe. Of course, European scientists are guided by scientific works and do not consider these fabrications, but they are also not involved in the highest echelons of power.”

69 SIMON GWYN ROBERTS: *Shades of Expression: Online Political Journalism in the Post-Colour Revolution Nations*, Chester 2013, p. 104.

70 PETR NEZHURIN: *Trypil's'ka kul'tura, politika i politiki* [Trypillian Culture, Politics, and Politicians], in: *Ukrainskaia Pravda*, 2005-10-20. On the pseudo-scientific debate on Trypillia culture and Aratta, see: SERHIJ SEHEDA: *Mifolohizatsiia pokhodzhennia ukraint-siv (problema Trypillia)* [The Mythologization of the Origins of Ukrainians (the Trypillia Problem)], in: JULIJA VOLODYMYRIVNA OLIJNYK (ed.): *Novitni mify ta fal'shyvky pro pokhodzhennia ukraint-siv*, Kyiv 2008, pp. 67–74; OLHA SHAKUROVA: *Pseudoscientific Versions of the Origin of Ukrainians and Their Critique by Modern Ukrainian Scientists*, in: *Ukrainian Studies* (2016), pp. 145–164. On the president's private collection, which apparently also came from “black” excavations, cf.: OLENA RUSINA: *Trypillian Threat*, in: *ARTnews.com* (2007-12-01), <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/trypillian-threat-178/> (2024-10-03).

organizers and visitors internationally. Major exhibitions on pan-European themes, such as *CREDO—Christianisierung Europas im Mittelalter* [CREDO—The Christianization of Europe in the Middle Ages] in Paderborn in 2013, often include exhibits from Ukraine. The same is true of exhibitions about Byzantium, where Ukrainian museums became one of the main lenders and were obviously able to compete successfully with Russian museums.⁷¹ The *Byzanz: Pracht und Alltag* [Byzantium: Pomp and Everyday Life] exhibition in Bonn in 2010 featured a particularly large number of objects from Ukraine. These exhibitions were an expression of the ever-increasing international integration of Ukrainian science and certainly also contributed to Ukraine being increasingly associated with “Europe.” However, the topic of “Byzantium” has recently been strongly associated with Russian imperialism in Ukraine, since Byzantium is once again understood in Russia as the ideological precursor of its own imperial greatness and mission, and cries of *Ukraina ne Vyzantya* [Ukraine isn’t Byzantium] could be heard, e. g., on the Maidan. Therefore, an exhibition dealing with Ukraine and Byzantium does not seem feasible at present.⁷²

So, while Ukraine and Russia only appear on the fringes of exhibitions with a general European theme, other exhibitions tell us more about the relationship between Ukraine and Europe, namely those dealing with Kyivan Rus’ and Russia or Kyivan Rus’ and Scandinavia.

4.1 Kyivan Rus’ and Russia

As it is well known, Ukraine is not the only country that sees itself in the tradition of Kyivan Rus’. Russia does, too, and not without good reason. In exhibitions, this leads to competing memories, as we have also seen with the Scythian exhibitions.

Since its independence in 1991, Ukraine has expressly seen itself as the successor to the medieval Kyivan Empire. In the public remembrance culture, Volodymyr the Saint and Iaroslav the Wise are on the banknotes of Ukraine’s new currency, which is not called the *ruble* but the *hryvnia*. The country’s coat of arms, the *tryzub*, a trident, is a reminder of the oldest Rurikid period. Meanwhile, Prince Danylo of Halych is celebrated as a symbol of rapprochement with Europe. Ukrainian historiography has long insisted on the Ukrainians’ continuity

71 SARAH TEETOR: Exhibiting Byzantium: The Image of Byzantium in Major Exhibitions, 1977–2010, Wien 2014, pp. 42–75.

72 ANDRIY DOMANOVSKY: Vizantiis’ki vydyva rosiis’koho impers’koho revanshyzmu [Byzantine Visions of Russian Imperial Revanchism], in: Krytyka (2022), 7–8, pp. 2–7; ANDRIY DOMANOVSKY, OLEG FAJDA: “Vizantiishchyna”: Vizantiis’kyi tsyvilizatsiinyi spadok u Tsentral’no-Skhidnii Evropi [“Byzantium”: The Byzantine Civilizational Heritage in Central and Eastern Europe], Charkiv 2018, pp. 5–7; MICHAEL HAGEMEISTER: “Bereit für die Endzeit”: Neobyzantismus im postsowjetischen Russland, in: Osteuropa (2016), 11–12, pp. 15–37.

with the ancient Rus'. Russian historiography, on the other hand, sees a transfer of the Kyivan Empire to Moscow and sometimes also recognizes that Rus' is the common cradle of Russian and Ukrainian civilizations. Still, Russia always integrates the Rus' into a narrative of Russian statehood. This narrative has also been readily adopted into Western European historiography.

However, Kyivan Rus' has only recently begun to play a more significant role in public perception. There were certainly anniversaries to mark the 900th anniversary of the baptism of Rus' in Kyiv, in which Vladimir the Great was celebrated as the founder of both the Church of Russia and the Russian state. There was the millennial celebration at the end of the Soviet Union in Moscow, in which Ukraine hardly played a role. However, the central figure of the Middle Ages is Aleksandr Nevskii. Iaroslav the Wise does appear on the 1,000-ruble note, but less in the context of the Russian state tradition than as the founder of the city of Iaroslavl.⁷³

Large and popular exhibitions in Western Europe followed the Russian narrative unquestioningly. This applies, for example, to the exhibition *Sainte Russie: L'art russe des origines à Pierre le Grand* [Holy Russia: Russian Art from the Beginnings to Peter the Great], which opened at the Louvre in 2010 in the presence of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to mark the museum's Year of Russia. Another example is *Russen und Deutsche: 1000 Jahre Kunst, Geschichte und Kultur* [Russians and Germans: One Thousand Years of History, Art, and Culture] held in Berlin under the patronage of German President Joachim Gauck and Russian President Putin from October 2012 to January 2013 during the Year of Russia in Germany and the Year of Germany in Russia. In contrast, Ukrainian exhibitions have never enjoyed such influential patronage.

To a certain extent, the exhibition in Paris appropriated Kyivan Rus' for contemporary Russia. At the time, many hoped Russia under Medvedev would liberalize and open up to the West. Jannic Durand, the director of the Louvre's Department of Decorative Arts, declared at the time, "Kievan Rus' was in the orbit of Byzantium but broke away from it very early on, showing a certain autonomy and drawing on Western influence."⁷⁴ The image of Kyivan Rus' as a bridge between the Orient and the Occident was certainly accepted here, albeit without considering Ukraine. In fact, Ukraine, which refused to participate in the exhibition, was barely included in the 700-page catalog.⁷⁵

73 ANDREAS KAPPELER: La Rous de Kiev (IXe–XIIIe siècles), in: ERIC AUNOBLE, ANDRII PORTNOV (eds.): Histoire partagée, mémoires divisées: Ukraine, Russie, Pologne, Lausanne 2021, pp. 23–38.

74 NICOLAS SENÈZE: La fastueuse diversité de la Sainte Russie, in: La Croix, 2010-03-04.

75 YURI PYATNITSKY: Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo na beregakh Seny: Zametki o vystavke "Sviataia Rus': Russkoe iskusstvo s osnovaniia do vremen Petra Velikogo" (Ancient Russian Art on the Shores of the Seine: Russian Art from the Beginnings to Peter the Great), v Luvre v 2010 godu, in: Tyragetia (Serie Nouă) VI (2012), 2, pp. 365–386, here pp. 367, 371.

The exhibition in Berlin placed the Kyivan Rus' in a European context, but, at the same time, framed it as the beginning of German–Russian relations. Matthias Wemhoff, who curated the exhibition at the Neues Museum in Berlin, commented:

“In the beginning, there was a celebration, or more precisely, a wedding. In 1073, Prince Jaropolk of Kyiv married Kunigunde of Weimar. This marriage was apparently arranged by Jaropolk’s mother, Gertrude of Poland. She wanted to integrate Kyivan Rus, the first great empire on East Slavic soil, into the concert of the emerging European empires. This is a beautiful beginning of German–Russian relations and a beautiful beginning for our exhibition.”⁷⁶

With this in mind, visitors to Berlin entered the exhibition through a small hall showing the Egbert Psalter,⁷⁷ a manuscript from the Ottonian Renaissance with an astonishing European object biography that began around 980 on the Reichenau and led to Kyiv in the eleventh century, from where it finally came via Hungary to Cividale in Friuli.

On the one hand, this object biography showed once again Kyiv’s close connection to Europe and its integration into the dynastic and artistic circles of Europe. On the other hand, it demonstrated that, for the exhibition organizers at the time, the line of tradition led uninterruptedly from Kyivan Rus' to Moscow. As Hermann Parzinger, president of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation and one of the co-organizers, commented on *Deutschlandfunk*: “With the Ottonian Empire in the tenth century, starting from the Carolingian Empire, basically, the foundation [was] laid for the later state development of Germany.” He continued, “Conversely, with Kyivan Rus', of course, for the later state formation, which then flows into Russia, in[to] the Russian Tsarist Empire.”⁷⁸

4.2 Kyivan Rus' and Scandinavia

By incorporating the subjects of the Rus' and Scandinavia into its exhibitions, Ukraine aimed to challenge the prevailing narrative that Russia is the authentic heir of Kyivan Rus'.

The thirtieth anniversary of the Kingdom of Denmark’s diplomatic recognition of independent Ukraine was scheduled to be commemorated in 2022 with the organization of exhibitions in both countries. One of these exhibitions,

76 BIRGIT GÖRTZ: *Russen und Deutsche*, in: *Deutsche Welle*, 2012-10-04, <https://www.dw.com/de/russen-und-deutsche-eine-bewegte-beziehung/a-16281608> (2024-09-25).

77 MATTHIAS WEMHOFF: *Deutsche und Russen—Der Weg zur Ausstellung*, in: *Russen und Deutsche. 1000 Jahre Kunst, Geschichte und Kultur. Katalogteil*, Petersberg 2012, pp. 8–17, here p. 12.

78 THOMAS FRANKE: “Diese Ausstellung ist überschaubar,” in: *Deutschlandfunk*, 2012-06-20, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/diese-ausstellung-ist-ueberschaubar-100.html> (2024-09-25).



Fig. 9:
Poster of the Exhibition
RUS—Vikinger i øst
(Moesgaard 2022)

RUS—Vikinger i øst [Rus: Vikings in the East],⁷⁹ which opened at the Danish Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus on 22 January 2022, included numerous exhibits from Ukraine.⁸⁰

The exhibition had been in preparation since 2019, when the Historical Museum in Moscow, the Hermitage, and the museum in Novgorod, as well as the Ukrainian museums, were asked if they wanted to provide exhibits. All of them agreed at the time. However, when Ukraine imposed sanctions on Russian museums in 2020, and Russian museums demanded guarantees from Denmark that their objects would not be confiscated, the Moesgaard Museum was forced to do without the Russian objects. Yet, as Fedor Androshchuk, a Viking researcher very active in Scandinavia, had become director of the Ukrainian National Museum, it was agreed that the exhibition would still be shown. To this end, the exhibition narrative was reworked, focusing on the Baltic coast and the Baltic States as the *adgangen til Kyiv* [Gateway to Kyiv]. To complement this narrative, loans were requested from Baltic, Polish, and Scandinavian museums. This gave the exhibition a different character, as Russia was now left out, and the connection between Rus’–Ukraine and the Scandinavian and

79 Why Artefacts from Ukraine Impressed Danes: Interview about the Exhibition “Rus—Vikings in the East,” 2022-04-16, <https://old.nmiu.org/bloh/item/61-why-artefacts-from-ukraine-impressed-danes-interview-about-the-exhibition-rus-vikings-in-the-east> (2025-11-15).

80 The Varangians played no part in the somewhat earlier Viking exhibition in Berlin in 2014: GARETH WILLIAMS (ed.): *Die Wikinger*, München 2014. The same applies to the 1992 Council of Europe exhibition, where the Varangians were prominently represented, including in the title, but the Kyivan Rus’, with the exception of Novgorod, was virtually absent: ELSE ROESDAHL (ed.): *Wikinger, Waräger, Normannen: Die Skandinavier und Europa 800–1200*, Mainz 1992.

European worlds was emphasized more strongly than planned.⁸¹ The Rus' was understood and presented as a cultural melting pot of Slavs, Scandinavians, and steppe peoples.⁸²

In preparation for the exhibition at the Moesgaard Museum, the Ukrainian Embassy aimed to show “the history of Ukraine in its European context” and, at the same time, network the Ukrainian museums. The Ukrainian Embassy took the opportunity to emphasize that more Viking objects have been found in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe.⁸³ However, this Ukrainian perspective on the history of Scandinavian Rus' was not immediately accepted. The public enthusiastically received the exhibition after the coronavirus pandemic-related restrictions were lifted.⁸⁴ However, the focus was not so much on Kyivan Rus', but rather on the idea that the Vikings had traveled to Baghdad on camels and thus connected Scandinavia with the exotic Abbasid caliphate (Fig. 9).⁸⁵ Even if the idea that was adopted, that “the history of Medieval Ukraine [was], the Kyivan Rus’,” it was written immediately afterwards that Rurik “was ‘invited’ from southern Scandinavia to Russia at the behest of local tribes.” According to the Press release from Moesgaard Museum, “Gradually, a Viking and Slavic creolization set in, leading to the formation of Russia proper.” And the “Kyiv realm” was understood as the “mother of the Russian realm.”⁸⁶ Ukraine was, therefore, initially seen in a European context, not as an independent subject,

81 TINE KNUDSEN: *Vikinger i krydsild mellem Rusland og Ukraine [Vikings Caught in Cross-fire between Russia and Ukraine]*, in: *Magasinet MUSEUM*, 2022-10-18, <https://www.magasinetmuseum.dk/vikinger-i-krydsild-mellem-rusland-og-ukraine/> (2024-09-26).

82 FEDIR ANDROSHCHUK: *From Vikings to Rus—the Danish Connection*, in: *Rus—Vikings in the East*, Højbjerg 2022, pp. 89–109.

83 *Embassy of Ukraine in the Kingdom of Denmark: Danish Archaeological and Ethnographic Moesgaard Museum Will Host an Exhibition Dedicated to the Ties of the Vikings with Kyivan Rus with the Support of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine*, 2021-08-06, <https://denmark.mfa.gov.ua/en/news/deputy-minister-of-culture-and-information-policy-of-ukraine-met-with-director-of-danish-moesgaard-museum> (2025-11-17). What exactly is meant by “Western Europe” remains unclear. Presumably, the part of Europe that was visited by the Vikings as traders and raiders in the ninth to tenth centuries.

84 NIELS PEDERSEN: *Anmelder taber kæben: 6 hjerter til ny vikingeutstilling [Reviewer’s Jaw Drops: 6 Hearts for New Viking exhibition]*, in: *Politiken*, 2022-01-25; NINA GAUNØ FREDBERG: *Folk strømmer til museum for at se vikingeutstilling til millioner [People Flock to Museum to See Viking Exhibition Worth Millions]*, 2022-01-24, in: B. T., <https://www.bt.dk/samfund/folk-stroemmer-til-museum-for-at-se-vikingeutstilling-til-millioner> (2025-11-25).

85 HENRIK ANDERSON: *Ny udstilling på Moesgaard: Vikingernes sult efter sølv førte dem helt til Bagdad [New Exhibition at Moesgaard: The Vikings’ Hunger for Silver Took Them All the Way to Baghdad]*, 2022-02-13, <https://jv.dk/kultur/ny-udstilling-paa-moesgaard-vikingernes-sult-efter-soelv-foerte-dem-helt-til-bagdad> (2024-09-26).

86 *Rus—Vikings in the East*, in: *Medieval Histories*, 2022-03-08, <https://www.medieval.eu/rus-vikings-in-the-east/> (2024-09-26).

but as part of Russian history. It was not until the full-scale attack on Ukraine beginning in February 2022 that this perspective changed. From that point forward, reporting focused on the fact that the Moesgaard Museum had become a haven for Ukrainian cultural assets.⁸⁷

Protecting Ukrainian cultural assets from Russian attack became the new theme of Ukrainian exhibitions after the lucky coincidence at the Moesgaard Museum. The exhibition *Aux origines de l'image sacrée: Icônes du musée national des Arts Bohdan et Varvara Khanenko de Kyiv* [The Origins of the Sacred Image: Icons from the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Arts in Kyiv] from June to November 2023 not only demonstrated solidarity with Ukraine and offered protection to Ukraine's cultural assets but also told the story of how patrons of European stature, such as Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko, were active in Kyiv as early as the nineteenth century and were well-connected throughout Europe.⁸⁸

An exhibition was briefly opened in Tallinn in late January 2024 titled *Looted Treasures: Gold from Ukraine*. It was later also shown as a poster exhibition at UNESCO's Paris headquarters.⁸⁹

According to an Estonian Radio report, the exhibition featured objects confiscated from a vehicle that crossed the Estonian border from Russia to "Europe" in 2018. That seizure comprised around 300 objects from looted excavations in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, including Scythian gold, medieval bridles, and ancient and medieval coins.

These objects were presented to the Ukrainian ambassador as part of the exhibition,⁹⁰ which underlines the fact that Ukraine was and is a victim of Russia's colonial exploitation. However, while the focus in 2022 was still on rescuing Ukrainian cultural heritage from the Russian Federation, the repatriation of stolen goods is now being emphasized. Just as the loot from Estonia was returned to its owners in January 2024, the Scythian treasures from Amsterdam triumphantly arrived in Ukraine and are now being exhibited there.

87 ANDREW CURRY: "You Can't Get Back Specimens": Ukrainian Scientists Rush to Save Irreplaceable Collections, in: Science, 2022-03-09, <https://www.science.org/content/article/you-can-t-get-back-specimens-ukrainian-scientists-rush-save-irreplaceable-collections> (2025-11-18).

88 MARION BENAITEAU: The Origins of the Sacred Image. Icons from the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Arts in Kyiv, in: Espace presse du musée du Louvre, 2023-06-07, <https://presse.louvre.fr/?p=1063000210337> (2024-09-26).

89 <https://www.unesco.org/en/event/looted-treasures-gold-ukraine> (2025-11-16).

90 MERILI NAEL, HELEN WRIGHT: Estonia Hands over Confiscated Gold and Silver Treasures to Ukraine, in: ERR.ee, 2024-01-23, <https://news.err.ee/1609230815/estonia-hands-over-confiscated-gold-and-silver-treasures-to-ukraine> (2024-09-26); MERILI NAEL, MARCUS TUROVSKI: Estonia to Return Gold Treasure Seized on the Border to Ukraine, in: ERR.ee, 2024-01-18, <https://news.err.ee/1609225506/estonia-to-return-gold-treasure-seized-on-the-border-to-ukraine> (2024-09-26).

5 Results

The international exhibitions, organized and designed by the museums in Kyiv and Crimea with the support of Ukrainian foreign cultural policy (which was only formed after 2000), initially had several objectives. Above all, the exhibitions were intended to publicize Ukraine as an independent and distinctive historical subject with a long and rich history and break the Russian monopoly on interpretation in the process.⁹¹ In conjunction with other measures, these exhibitions were designed to ensure that Ukraine, with its rich cultural and intellectual traditions, would become an organic part of the European community.⁹² They were also expected to provide museums and academics with the opportunity to network in Europe and the wider world.

Moreover, efforts were made to assign Ukraine's past a particular role in European history. The pioneering Ukrainian exhibitions drew on extant concepts from the Soviet past, especially the Scythian exhibitions, which chiefly presented the illustrious aspects of the Scythian or Cimmerian-Greek period. This epoch was soon imbued with a significance that rendered Ukraine an integral part of Europe, concurrently serving as a gateway to the East and a bridge to Asia. In ancient times, exhibition organizers, diplomats, and politicians found examples of the cultural diversity, colorfulness, and economic prosperity they desired for the European present, of which Ukraine was to be a part.

The concept of Scythian exhibitions, specifically dedicated to showing ancient nomadic cultures, and, where relevant, the Mediterranean cultures with which they were associated, has now evolved into exhibitions centered on nomads. While the Scythian exhibitions were able to benefit from a high degree of recognition, those organized by Ukraine competed with Russian exhibitions, a prospect that became unthinkable from 2014 onwards. The conventional Russian interpretation of the Scythians as the forerunners of the Russians, and the emerging awareness in Ukraine that the vaults of the Hermitage in St. Petersburg were filled with "Ukrainian" Scythian gold, have led to a shift in the focus of these exhibitions. This shift has been further compounded by the growing reluctance

91 MARIA KUSHNAREVA: *Ukraiins'ka kul'turna dyplomatiiia pid chas viiny: Dosvid, problemy, perspektyvy* [Ukrainian Cultural Diplomacy during War Time: Experience, Issues, Prospects], in: *Naukovi praci Nacional'noi biblioteki Ukraini imeni V I Vernads'kogo* (2023), 67, pp. 35–53; SERGIY GERSYMCHUK, HANNA SHELEST: *Perception of Ukraine and Ukrainian Culture Abroad: The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Research Report June–December 2021, [s.l.] 2021*; A. O. RUDNIEVA, YU. H. MALOVANA, M. S. ARSENIUK: *Kul'turna dyplomatiiia iak instrument formuvannia imidzhu Ukraini* [Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool for Forming the Image of Ukraine], in: *Rehional'ni studii* (2024), 37, pp. 63–67.

92 VIACHESLAV TSIVATYI: *Zovnishnia kul'turna polityka Ukrainy: Formy, pryntsyipy, stratehii rozvytku (1991–2011 rr.)* [Ukraine's Foreign Cultural Policy: Forms, Principles, Development Strategies (1991–2011)], in: *Mizhnarodni zv'iazky Ukrainy: Naukovi poshuky i znakhidky* (2011), 20, pp. 80–93, here p. 83.

of Ukraine's cultural foreign policy to act as Russia's junior partner, which has been evident since the 2000s. Instead, there was an increased focus on younger steppe peoples such as the Pechenegs or the Kipchaks, who in turn had directly influenced the history of medieval Central Europe.

The legal dispute over the objects at the Crimea exhibition in Amsterdam unintentionally became a discussion about European values. It was not difficult for Ukraine to present itself as a victim of colonial art and cultural looting. This argument resonates well in Western Europe, where countries with their own colonial histories now strive to clarify provenance and return unlawfully acquired artifacts to the societies affected by colonialism. The principles of the rule of law, the protection of cultural heritage, and the fight against colonialist ideologies are being framed as shared liberal values of Europe in contrast to the actions of the imperialist Russian Federation.

Efforts to capitalize on the Trypillian culture proved unsuccessful. While this undoubtedly fascinating culture of the Chalcolithic could not impress with artefacts of the same caliber as the mainly gold-based Scythian exhibitions, it did offer surprises, such as unexpectedly large cities and innovative techniques, along with a functioning, prosperous, and egalitarian community, which the exhibition organizers proudly interpreted to mean that Ukraine was already part of the European avant-garde in the Chalcolithic. However, the exhibits originated from looted excavations, which were not only tolerated but also financially supported by prominent government officials. Additionally, the exhibitions were tied to a somewhat absurd portrayal of history. Because of these issues, the exhibitions failed to garner international acclaim and instead projected an image of a corrupt Ukrainian state that openly disregarded the fundamental principles of European cultural policy.

Given the great importance of Rus' for Ukraine, it is surprising that it was not the subject of international exhibitions earlier. This only happened sometime after Russia annexed Crimea and is perhaps due not least to the research interests and network of Fedir Androshchuk, the new director of the Kyiv National Historical Museum at the time. In those exhibitions, Ukraine presents itself as the true heir to Rus', whose Scandinavian origins are strongly emphasized so that Scandinavian audiences can understand Ukraine as part of their own culture.⁹³ At the same time, Danish society can see itself as a shelter for endangered Ukrainian culture and history, protecting the cultural heritage from the Russian aggressor, who now wants to appropriate not only rather abstract, almost oriental treasures but a part of its own, Scandinavian, and thus European, history.

93 At the same time, Ukrainian research distanced itself from the new anti-Normanism in Russian academic circles and the mass media. JONATHAN SHEPARD: Back in Old Rus and the USSR: Archaeology, History and Politics, in: *The English Historical Review* 131 (2016), 549, pp. 384–405, here p. 387, and, e.g., SERGEY RADCHENKO: Putin's Histories, in: *Contemporary European History* 32 (2023), 1, pp. 57–60.

From the outset, the exhibitions discussed in this article were intended to convey a positive image of Ukraine. Within Europe, Ukraine wanted to be seen as part of European history and community, in which cultural diversity, peaceful coexistence of peoples, democracy, and economic prosperity thrive. Outside Europe, the aim of the exhibitions was to present Ukraine as an old, important, and independent nation without further emphasizing Ukraine's Europeanness.

However, it took time for this image to be accepted by the public. Ultimately, it was probably only Russia's 2022 escalation of war against Ukraine that led to the nation being perceived as part of a free Europe.

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