***OUR NATIVE PARTS IN THE COSSACK ERA***

If you arrive in Kherson by train and go from the railway station along Ushakov Avenue, you will pass by the monument to John Howard which is one of the city’s symbols. The same avenue will finally lead you to the beautiful Dnieper’s embankment. Look across the mighty river in the evening – and you will see the lights of Kherson’s suburb Tsiurupinsk. The place is older than the city – it is almost a thousand years old! It used to be called ‘Oleshky’. The site is no favourable: the famous ‘The Oleshky Sands’ is the largest desert in Europe now covered in man-made coniferous forests. The Ukrainian Cossacks (‘free men’) also built their fortification there called ‘The Oleshky Sich’ around the 18th century. There began the history of the present-day Ukrainian South.

Frequent Tatar attacks in the 15th-16th centuries made the south-eastern Ukraine depopulated. Neither Poland nor Muscovy wanted these territories. However, driven by harsh serfdom in Poland many Ukrainians started to flee there, forming a new society called the ‘Cossacks’. To protect themselves from the Tatars a military unit was formed on the lands of the lower Dnieper in the 1550s. It was named ‘The Zaporozhian Sich’ where "Zaporozhian" means "za porohamy" ("beyond the rapids").

The Polish government wanted to keep the defence structure and feared losing Ukraine. Therefore, the register to control the Cossacks was created and the loyal leader (‘hetman’) appointed. In 1578, the Polish were forced to give ‘the free warriors’ more rights to gain their support. The Cossacks then established their own policies sometimes even opposite to the Polish ones.

In 1648, after the years of tension between the Cossacks and Poland, Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky started a revolt and, in 1654, he signed the Pereyaslav Agreement with Muscovy. The Cossacks kept their autonomy but became officially part of Muscovy. However, in 1667, Right-Bank Ukraine was given back to Poland. The Cossacks were mostly resettled in Left-Bank Ukraine, and the hetman had power only on this territory.

The Crimean khan permitted some of the Cossacks to establish another Sich on the territory belonging to the Crimean Khanate. The Cossacks later rebelled against the khan. They returned to the Russian-ruled territory and, in 1734, Empress Anna Ioannovna allowed them to establish the New Sich in Oleshky.

No matter how courageous, self-organized and glorious, the ‘free armed men’ were felt to be a threat to any official government – either Polish or Russian. Catherine II, the Empress of Muscovy, destroyed the Sich in 1775.

As soon as the empire established itself in the South of Ukraine, the cities developed rapidly here inviting immigrants from all over the world. The people used Russian as the international language. Up to these days the Ukrainian South is bilingual: we commonly use Russian along with Ukrainian.