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SUPPORTING DECOLONISATION IN MUSEUMS:

PART 2: ESSAYS

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Part 1: Guide

Part 2: Essays

Published 2025

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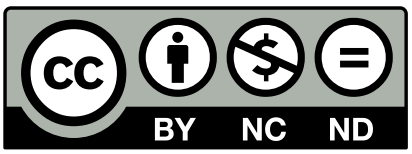

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How to cite this publication

Ukrainian Institute, ICOM UK, ICOM Ukraine, Museums Association and British Council (2025) *Supporting Decolonisation: Focus on Ukraine*.

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Essays

The essays are the work of individual authors based on independent research and do not necessarily represent the views of the partner organisations.

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Part 2: Essays

Overcoming Imperial Legacies in the Archives: The Experience of the Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine, Kyiv

Yaroslav Faizulin, Director of the Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine, Kyiv

The history of Ukrainian archives is inextricably linked to the colonial past of Ukrainian lands which, for a long time, were part of different empires including those of Russia, Austria-Hungary and, later, the USSR.

One of these archives was the Kyiv Central Archive of Ancient Records (KTsADA), the precursor of the current Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine, Kyiv (TsDIAK). Since its earliest days, authorities of the Russian empire actively used archival documents in setting colonial policy to substantiate territorial claims, to legalise the status of seized territories, to preserve property and to restrict the rights of conquered peoples.

Archival documents were used in the assimilation and Russification of 'newly annexed' territories under the guise of official euphemisms such as 'the revival of Russian antiquity', 'initiating the Russian Enlightenment', 'instilling national consciousness' and so on. When compiling archival descriptions, archivists were forced to use the 'current' imperial terminology (terms that would not be accepted today) such as 'Little Russia' or 'the South-Western Lands' to describe Ukrainian territories, and 'the Polish Uprising' to describe the rebellion of 1863-64.

With the occupation of Ukraine by the Russian Bolsheviks in 1920, the archival system was centralised and dependence on Soviet ideological institutions and terminology increased. Archives were forced to accept 'modern Marxist historiography' that formed the basis of academic research. In 1931, the KTsADA introduced 'new socialist ways of working' with an emphasis on 'socialist competition' and 'Stakhanovist' work practices. (The Stakhanovist movement rationalised workplace processes to increase productivity). In the 1930s, communist authorities campaigned to destroy archival documents that allegedly had 'no historical value'. To their credit, the KTsADA archivists did everything possible to prevent the destruction of valuable records. In the 1930s, many of the KTsADA staff became victims of communist repression, including the director, Viktor Romanovsky. In 1934, a pogrom took place at the Archive and practically all the staff were dismissed. They were briefly replaced by members of the Komsomol (Communist Union of Youth) who had neither the relevant education nor work experience.

In 1939 the KTsADA, along with six other central archives, was transferred to the system run by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (the NKVD or Soviet secret police) and came under the full control of the Soviet security agencies. In 1943, the Archive was reorganised into the Central State Historical Archives of the Ukrainian SSR in Kyiv (TsDIAK). Among other things, these agencies used archives to compile compromising information on opponents to the Soviet regime. Between 1939 and 1943, the personal files of so-called provocateurs, which contained information on people who were considered 'unreliable' in the eyes of the Soviet authorities, were stolen at the behest of the NKVD.

The post-war period witnessed a second wave of destruction of archival documents. A huge amount of valuable historical material in the TsDIAK was discarded as wastepaper. For example, between 1951 and 1956, 77,131 files and 3,621 kilograms of loose documents were destroyed from the collection of the Kyiv Spiritual Consistory alone. Among those deemed to have 'neither scientific nor practical value' were the Hrushevskyi Collection, No. 1235. Mykhailo Hrushevskyi was a prominent Ukrainian statesman and historian.

During the Khrushchev thaw (a period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s when Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev relaxed the repression of the Stalin era), a partial declassification of the archival collections of the TsDIAK began. Between 1956 and 1958, 91,273 TsDIAK files were declassified, with 3,136 files remaining in secret storage. Final declassification of the archives took place only after Ukraine gained independence in 1991.

Today, open archives are a priority. Ukrainian archivists in wartime conditions are making extraordinary efforts to allow unhindered access to documents and to improve the quality of archival services for all researchers. They are striving to keep up with, and sometimes even outpace, their European counterparts with digitisation. Here are just a few examples.

Since 2019, Ukrainian archives have been working with FamilySearch International (based in the USA) to implement the world's largest archival digitisation project, processing genealogical documents.

Commencing in 2020, the Interarchival Search Portal unites the electronic resources of state archives onto a single, easily searchable platform. In addition, more than

2.5 million digital records and over 700 full-text descriptions are already available on the Archium platform, created to provide access to the digitised collections of the TsDIAK.

The openness of Ukrainian archives facilitates the work of historians, museum workers, local historians, Ukrainian citizens and people abroad with an interest in family history. Every year, dozens of books based on materials from the TsDIAK are published. They cover the history of the Cossack Hetmanate (Zaporozhian Army); the formation of Ukrainian ethnic territory, individual cities and regions; the Ukrainian liberation movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; Ukrainian state-building; crimes against the Ukrainian people, including the Holodomor of 1932–33; and biographies of individual Ukrainian figures and entire families — topics that were taboo in Soviet times.

The TsDIAK has organised a number of exhibitions in partnership with Ukrainian and international museums including *Crossroads: Sweden and Ukraine through 1000 years* (organised by the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War, the Swedish National Museum of Military History and the Swedish National Archives); *Aeneid 225* (organised by the National Museum of the History of Ukraine); *The Dukes of Ostroh: European Dimension of Ukrainian History* and *Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and its Fiefdoms on Maps and Plans from the Collections of the Central State Archives of Ukraine* (organised by the National Preserve 'Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra').

These and many other projects, as well as the experiences of Ukrainian archivists in preserving archival heritage and making it accessible during the Covid-19 pandemic and full-scale invasion by Russia, will be useful to cultural heritage professionals globally to help prepare them for potential challenges, threats and emergencies, and to take steps to avoid the loss of cultural heritage.

Useful resources

Kyiv Central Archive of Ancient Records (KTsADA) Historical Background
https://tinyurl.com/4rh285sz

Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine, Kyiv (TsDIAK), Home Page
https://tinyurl.com/y2v4ezm6

Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine, Kyiv (TsDIAK), Online Catalogue
https://perma.cc/XC49-996S

Archival Information Systems, Interarchive Search Portal
(A single window for accessing digital resources of Ukrainian archives)
https://perma.cc/7YC6-C6Z9

Where are the Ukrainian Jews?

Vladyslava Moskalets, Centre for Urban History of East-Central Europe, Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv

Since the 14th century, an Ashkenazi Jewish community of more than 2.5 million people at its peak has lived in Ukrainian lands. They possess autonomy and a distinct culture. In public and scholarly discourse, these individuals are often referred to as Polish, Russian or Soviet Jews depending on their national affiliation or cultural context. The term 'Ukrainian Jews' is often omitted from discussion or perceived as a curiosity, whereas allusions to 'Russian' or 'Polish' Jews are common.

The term 'Ukrainian Jew' holds various meanings, depending on the geographical, cultural or political context. The most common interpretation refers to geographic affiliation, identifying individuals as Jews from Ukraine. The Yiddish dialect spoken in Volhynia (a historical region covering parts of modern-day Belarus, Poland and Ukraine), Podolia and Bessarabia (historical regions covering parts of modern-day Moldova and Ukraine) is known as Ukrainian Yiddish. However, since Jewish families lived side-by-side with other Ukrainians in both cities and villages, serving as intermediaries between nobility and peasants, there became many cultural overlaps in language, folk art and food. Historically, many Jewish people spoke Ukrainian in everyday transactions. The mystical movement of Hasidism used Ukrainian songs in their religious practices — as with the song 'Stav ya pyty' ('I started to drink') — and musicologists find additional similarities in Jewish and Ukrainian folk music. However, these shared practices did not necessarily lead to acceptance and assimilation.

In light of the acculturation discussed above, one of the most controversial issues has been the extent to which Jewish people aligned with the Ukrainian independence movement. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Jewish and Ukrainian political parties in Galicia (a historical region covering parts of modern-day Poland and Ukraine) made alliances, trying to break the dominance of the Polish nobility in parliament. In the Russian empire, the Jewish Zionist writer and journalist from Odesa Volodymyr Zeev Zhabotinski (1880–1940) advocated for cooperation between Ukrainian and Jewish national movements. Accepting a Ukrainian identity, some Jewish people participated in resistance to Russian imperial power, as in the case of author Hryts´ko Kernerenko (also known as Grigorii Kerner, 1863-1941). However, those cases were rare. Jewish elites in the 19th century usually followed the path of integration into the dominant

culture, identifying as German and later Polish in the Habsburg empire and as Russian in the Russian empire.

In the 20th century, for the first time, Jewish people identified openly with Ukrainian culture on a mass scale. During the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917-21, Jews were part of the government of the Ukrainian National Republic. This period marked the establishment of the 'Kultur-Lige' (Culture League), which promoted the Yiddish language in books, theatre and education. In the 1920s, during the period of 'korenization', a Soviet policy of promoting local languages and cultures to build local loyalty to the Communist Party and create national elites, Jewish writers and artists were integrated into the institutions of the Ukrainian Socialist Republic. In the 1930s, with the end of 'korenization', many Jews studied in Ukrainian schools because Yiddish or Russian instruction had become unavailable to them. Ultimately, the Holocaust destroyed Jewish communities in Ukraine. Some people, usually professionals, were able to evacuate while others survived by joining the Red Army. The majority, about one million Jewish people who remained in occupied Ukraine, were killed by Nazis and their collaborators.

After the Second World War (1939-45), Jewish people who remained in Ukraine were usually referred to as Soviet Jews and often spoke Ukrainian or Russian instead of Yiddish. The most prominent cases of Jewish solidarity with the Ukrainian cause were among anti-Soviet dissidents, for example Yosyf Zissels (born 1946), who later became a prominent Jewish activist in independent Ukraine.

During the Revolution of Dignity of 2013-14 and the current Russian war against Ukraine, many public figures from the Ukrainian Jewish community have begun openly to declare their allegiance to the Ukrainian state and the Ukrainian cause. For example, artist Zoya Cherkassky-Nnadi (born 1976), who currently lives in Israel, created a series of paintings relating to the Russian war against Ukraine and illustrated the first Haggadah translated from Hebrew into Ukrainian.

Recognising the Eastern European Jewry's Ukrainian context adds an important dimension to understanding cultural influences and the relations between Jewish people and other Ukrainians. By treating Ukrainian identity as a full spectrum of cultural and political attributes rather than a narrow ethnic or national characteristic, Ukrainian Jews and their contributions become increasingly visible instead of being subsumed under other population categories.

Useful resources

Paul Robert Magocsi and **Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern** (2018) *Jews and Ukrainians: A Millennium of Co-Existence*, **University of Toronto Press**
https://perma.cc/U2YH-QRLC

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, The Holocaust and World War II in Ukraine
https://perma.cc/4SLJ-ZPZV

Ukrainian Jewish Encounter
https://perma.cc/Q3ER-VXR4

Ukrainian Jewish Encounter, Timeline: from Antiquity to 1914
https://perma.cc/X6N5-VFLV

An ‘Imperial’ or a ‘Russian’ Avant-Garde?

Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj, Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta, Canada

Russia in the 19th century was both a multilingual and a multireligious empire…
The basis of legitimacy was obedience to the tsar…
Encyclopaedia Britannica, The Russian Empire
https://perma.cc/2QVD-6TTZ

The polity commonly called ‘Russia’ was, in actual fact, the Russian empire and the Soviet Union. There was no ‘Russia’ in a ‘national’ sense, and it is questionable if one exists even today. As British historian Geoffrey Hosking put it in *Russia: People and Empire*, the ‘building of an empire’ ‘impeded the formation of a [Russian] nation’ (xix). ‘For more than three centuries’, he wrote, the Russian empire’s ‘structures had been those of a multi-ethnic service state, not those of an emerging nation’ (478). As a result, a ‘fractured and underdeveloped nationhood has been [the Russians’] principal historical burden in the last two centuries or so, continuing through the period of the Soviet Union and persisting beyond its fall’ (xx). The failure of Russians to emerge as a cohesive nation does not mean they did not try. The crucial question for scholarship is how Russians went about attempting to achieve this and the consequences it had for non-Russians in the empire.

By and large, ‘Russianness’ and ‘Russian culture’ were constructed on the basis of the vast state and its lingua franca (Russian), which were combined with ethnic Russian characteristics. In this way, select elements of the multi-ethnic empire were coopted for Russian ‘national’ purposes. Non-Russian nationalities had difficulties countering this practice given the autocratic and authoritarian nature of a state dominated by ethnic Russians. What became known as ‘Russian’ was largely determined by the Russian nationalist agenda, often at the expense of autochthonous peoples. Russian efforts to square the circle of the empire to create a ‘Russian’ nation from a multi-ethic state were most obviously evident in relation to the Ukrainians and the Belarusians, whom Russians refused to recognise as separate nationalities, treating them as part of a single ‘Russian’ nation. Putin’s Russia has brutally resuscitated this ideology, but it has been a staple of Russian thinking and policy since at least the first half of the 19th century when the Ukrainian writer Nikolai Gogol (in Ukrainian Mykola Hohol', 1809–52) was constructed as a ‘Russian’ writer. The strange Russian

'nation-building' efforts, therefore, explain why artists like Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935) and David Burliuk (1882-1967) have traditionally been called Russians rather than Ukrainians and why, more generally, the multi-ethnic avant-garde in the empire or Soviet Union, which expressed itself frequently through the Russian language, is even now commonly dubbed 'Russian.' Current terminology, in short, empowers Russian imperial nationalism while usurping the Indigenous cultures of non-Russian peoples.

The so-called 'Russian' avant-garde in the empire should be recognised as a metropolitan, transnational phenomenon — and termed 'imperial' in acknowledgment of the fact that it was a product of many national groups, not just Russians. The empire was a unified political space with shared cultural elements but also identifiable differences. Artistic ideas and practices did not originate solely in places like Moscow and St. Petersburg. The mobility of cultural actors within the empire led to the interaction of artists and writers of different nationalities. That said, there is reason to speak of individual national avant-gardes — for instance, Russian or Ukrainian. These reflected transnational processes but also existed as separate national phenomena. Kyiv, Kharkiv and other cities of the empire were often centres unto themselves. Ukraine in the empire, and later as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, was conspicuous as a unique cradle for avant-garde trends. Curators and scholars must therefore avoid the prevailing tendency to subsume the national avant-gardes of the empire under the deceptive term 'Russian'. Artists like Malevich and Burliuk did not magically become 'Russian' simply by participating in metropolitan imperial activity. These artists had a transnational impact but their nationality cannot be reassigned to Russia.

Useful resources

Geoffrey Hosking (1998) *Russia: People and Empire 1552-1917,* **HarperCollins**
https://tinyurl.com/4tzruwfm

Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj (1997) *Ukrainian Futurism, 1914-1930. An Historical and Critical Study,* **Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute**
https://perma.cc/J9XN-TCPK

Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj (2003) **'Modeling Culture in the Empire: Ukrainian Modernism and the Death of the All-Russian Idea', in Andreas Kappeler, Zenon E. Kohut, Frank E. Sysyn and Mark von Hagen (editors)** *Culture, Nation and Identity: The Russian-Ukrainian Encounter, 1600-1945*, **Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 298-324**
https://tinyurl.com/3cwyvwzk

Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj (2011), **'Ukrainian Futurism: Re-Appropriating the Imperial Legacy', in Günter Berghaus (editors)** *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*, **Vol. 1, De Gruyter, 37-58**
https://tinyurl.com/4hz53kch

Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj (2013), **'Under Imperial Eyes: Ukrainian Modernist and Avant-Garde Publications', in Peter Brooker, Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker and Christian Weikop (editors)** *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines. Volume 3, Part II: Europe 1880-1940*, **Oxford University Press, 1341-1362**
https://tinyurl.com/2bw6z45h

Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj (2019), **'[Futurism in] Ukraine', in Günter Berghaus (editor)** *Handbook of International Futurism*, **De Gruyter, 853-870**
https://tinyurl.com/hn29kd4s

Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj (2024), *Nikolai Gogol: Ukrainian Writer in the Empire: A Study in Identity*, **De Gruyter**
https://tinyurl.com/49dhx6ej

The Challenges of Exhibiting Museum Objects from Crimea

Denys Yashnyy, Leading Researcher, National Preserve 'Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra', Kyiv

An accurate description of the history of Crimea in museum exhibitions beyond the Crimean Peninsula is almost impossible given the loss of the historical context of objects. Any exhibition devoted to the general history of Crimea, its historical periods or its people, is destined to be superficial. (This does not apply to art exhibitions, which have narrower frameworks and are more focused on specific manifestations of artistic culture). Despite these challenges, I can offer a few observations which, while not fully immersing readers in Ukrainian history, will provide greater perspective and context.

One of the biggest challenges in attempting to recreate a 'live' narrative about Crimea is the established Russian perception of the region merely as a tourist resort. Even the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine made the Swallow's Nest castle in Yalta the symbol of the peninsula in 2021. Then, in 2023, LEGO chose the same building to promote Ukraine's architectural legacy. However, this pseudo-Gothic palace on Cape Ai-Todor was built by Russian architect Nikolai Sherwood by order of Moscow millionaire Sergei Rakhmanov in 1913. How can such persistent myths about 'Russian Crimea' be combatted in the exhibition space?

Another challenge is that the original names of most of the peninsula's settlements were changed to 'neutral' Soviet names after the forced deportation of Crimean Tatars in 1944. This in turn influenced the descriptions of museum objects from Crimea, especially those held in archaeological and ethnographic collections. One example can be found in the online collection of the National Museum of the History of Ukraine: https://perma.cc/XX7D-P5Y7. In a description of a decorative, gold headdress dating from the second half of the 4th century BCE, the archaeological find-spot is described as 'поблизу с. Огоньки, Крим' (near the village of Ohonky, Crimea). The village was named Ohonky in 1948 by a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic), replacing the historical name Орта Елі (Orta Eli) by which it had been known since the 18th century.

This example also deals with another topographical change, one that took place

during the 19th century, long before the Tatar deportations of 1944 — the renaming of the Ich-Baba barrow group as the 'Three Brothers'. Unlike the names of settlements, the naming of localities and geographical objects carried out during the 19th century was associated, on the one hand, with the simplification and translation of Crimean Tatar names by Russian settlers and, on the other hand, with the acquisition of property from Russian emperors by Russian military and civil servants. One such example is the original name of the Kok-Agach-Daglar massif, which was changed to the Mekenziev Mountains. Scotsman Thomas Mackenzie received part of the Kok-Agach-Daglary massif from Grigory Potemkin in 1786 for his service in the Russian fleet, and the name stuck to the massif during the first half of the 19th century. After 1944, renaming was systematic and planned, taking place over a short period of time.

The renaming of monuments also took place after the 2014 occupation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia. The Lower Dzhardzhava barrow group became the Hospital Mound; the Otarkoi burial ground, which had been given the post-1944 name Frontal-2, was renamed again as the Second Front. Moreover, after the Russian occupation of 2014, a significant number of Crimean archaeological sites were no longer linked to established place names but were named instead according to the preferences of the leaders of these illegal excavations so, for example, the Kremen-Burun Fortress became the Second Wall Settlement.

Reviewing the attribution of museum objects — in Ukrainian collections and elsewhere — with the aim of using historical place names in exhibitions is an effective way to counter colonial narratives and restore the historical context.

Useful resources

National Museum of the History of Ukraine, Archaeology Timeline (in Ukrainian)
https://perma.cc/PXA3-U2HP

United24, #LEGOWITHUKRAINE
https://perma.cc/D5PB-49FE

Gates from the Kyiv Pechersk-Lavra: a Case Study of Curatorial Practice at the V&A

Alice Minter, Senior Curator, the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

In February 2022, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia sent shockwaves around the world. The UK cultural sector rapidly sought to support Ukraine and its cultural heritage. Alongside physical help to salvage art collections, heritage professionals faced a moral obligation to use appropriate terminology when referring to Ukrainian heritage. The importance of this terminology was little understood for a variety of reasons, including historical domination and erasure by Russia. At the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), the desire to rectify this neglect prompted a necessary collections review.

As Senior Curator of the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collection, my attention focused on two magnificent pairs of silver altar gates, each nearly three metres high (figures 1 and 2). Both came from the National Preserve 'Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra', the Monastery of Caves, in Kyiv. The place has been a preeminent centre of Orthodox Christianity in Eastern Europe since the 11th century and is today a UNESCO World Heritage site. Even though the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra was officially recognised as a museum as early as the 1920s, the control of Ukraine by the Soviet Union, combined with Second World War (1939-45) bombardments and German occupation, forced the dispersal of a large part of the monastery's heritage, to the benefit of Russian institutions and collectors. Many other objects fell into the hands of collectors in America and across Europe.

California press mogul William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951) acquired both pairs of gates in 1935 from the dealer J&S Goldschmidt. They were subsequently sold and acquired by Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert in 1972 and 1973. The silver gates were first presented to the public at the *Monumental Silver* exhibition held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1973. They remained there on display until the entire Gilbert collection was transferred to the UK and shown at Somerset House from 2000 to 2007. Since 2008, the collection has been in the custody of the V&A and its dedicated Gilbert Collection curators.

After discussions with Maria Blyzinsky (Co-Chair ICOM UK) and Tetyana Filevska (Creative Director, Ukrainian Institute) I realised how uninformed we were and our

systems needed corrections. Initial changes were made in consultation with Tetyana Filevska who gave the correct name of the church from where one of the pairs of gates originated as well as the names of the craftsmen. She also provided historical context on the Russian empire, when the gates were made, and on Soviet looting of Ukrainian cultural sites during the 1920s, when the gates were removed.

Second, the V&A catalogue stated: 'Those gates were probably commissioned by Catherine the Great to celebrate her annexing of Crimea in 1784. The Empress stayed at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra monastery for a few weeks before touring in her newly annexed regions'. So many words that reflected the supposed supremacy of Russia. For example, the text used the superlative 'the Great' instead of referring to the empress as Catherine II, and the word 'celebrate' instead of 'mark'. The catalogue failed to explain the nature of Crimea's 'annexation' under Catherine II or the fact that her stay in the monastery was highly symbolic of her strategy to seize much of Ukraine and abolish Kyiv's autonomy.

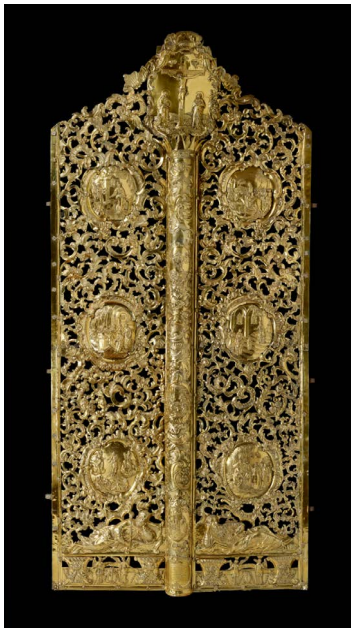
Third, my cataloguing lacked information about the monastery itself and the importance of the gates in the historical context of Kyiv craftmanship, or the Ukrainian silversmithing heritage. Similarly, I omitted mention of highly probable Soviet looting and the political significance of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra monastery in the face of Russian dominion.

As we worked towards rectifying this, we were also extremely grateful to be contacted by Maksym Ostapenko, General Director of the National Preserve 'Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra'. He and his colleagues — Deputy General Director Svitlana Kotliarevska and Chief Curator of Collections Iryna Martyniuk, as well as Natalia Onopriienko, expert art historian and artist-restorer of the Department of Scientific Restoration and Conservation of Moving Monuments — shared accurate information to correct errors in our narrative. We have started working closely together and the outcome will be a much richer, multi-layered interpretation, which will be available in the refurbished Gilbert Collection galleries opening in Spring 2026.

This is just one aspect of the V&A's wider effort to revise the cataloguing of our Ukrainian collections. In Autumn 2024, Ada Wordsworth, a PhD candidate in the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at University College London, began a six-month placement with us. There were two strands to her work: identifying Ukrainian heritage in the collections and reviewing terminology in the catalogues.

Wordsworth identified catalogue entries which needed rectifying — for example, where place names had been incorrectly identified or where Ukrainian artists' names were transliterated with Russian spellings — and those which required further research. She studied a selection of Ukrainian prints acquired by the V&A in the 1930s. Wordsworth also developed a resource that outlines agreed terminology and transliteration from the Ukrainian Cyrillic alphabet.

For the V&A, this is just part of an inspiring, conscious effort to adjust our narrative and vision of a wider European colonial history.



© The Rosalinde & Arthur Gilbert Collection,
on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Figure 1 (left): A pair of partially gilded silver altar gates, for the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God, Hryhorii Chyzhevskyi, Kyiv, 1784. The V&A catalogue entry can be seen here: https://perma.cc/7DM7-7NPS

Figure 2 (right): A pair of gilded silver altar gates for the Church of the Exaltation of the Cross, Alexis Ishchenko, Kyiv, 1784. The V&A catalogue entry can be seen here: https://perma.cc/6UVQ-7RJH

Useful resources

National Preserve 'Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra'
https://perma.cc/3E44-Z4KN

UNESCO World Heritage Convention, Kyiv: Saint-Sophia Cathedral and Related Monastic Buildings, Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra
https://perma.cc/2L95-MKG4

Ada Wordsworth (2025) 'Meet the Boychukists: Ukrainian Modernism at the V&A', *The V&A*
https://perma.cc/JL9Z-7WYD

Decolonisation of Natural History Collections: The Perspective from Ukraine

Pavel Gol'din, Professor of Zoology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv

Natural history collections provide a specific type of heritage which can be seen from multiple perspectives. On the one hand, they mostly consist of items of natural origin — that is, they are not created by humans. On the other, they include multilayered cultural contexts created by humans: metadata; information on provenance; origin related spatiotemporal contexts; and histories of discovery, transfer and scientific research. Therefore, natural history collections and other scientific collections have both scientific and cultural value. They are recognised as cultural heritage by international laws, such as The Hague and UNESCO Conventions. Equally, natural history collections, as well as all kinds of natural heritage, are particularly important for Indigenous peoples and their survival. This is most evident with respect to physical anthropology and genetic resources of unique or locally important cultivated plants, domestic animals, and other species important for survival or cultural practice. The Nagoya Protocol is an international agreement to recognise the ownership of plants as well as the knowledge held about them by local peoples, and to share any benefits from such plants in a fair way. Ukraine is a signatory to the Protocol, but Russia is not.

Colonisation of natural history collections in the most straightforward sense includes physical appropriation through removal, transfer to the metropole, and retention there. The objects are also used for innovation, well-being promotion, education, prestige (treasure) or solely for the increase of knowledge. In these cases, they are rarely shared with communities of origin. Moreover, the most brutal colonial practices may involve destruction or another sort of elimination of natural items, including collections, as part of an attack on Indigenous identity or traditional ways of life. More insidious colonisation strategies may involve the appropriation of scientific heritage developed by individual researchers, communities of scholars, institutions or territories.

All these strategies have been deployed in Ukraine under Russia's off-and-on rule since 1800. Prehistoric anthropology and palaeontology are among the areas where the colonial narrative in relation to Ukraine continues to dominate in Russian research

and societal traditions. Especially tragic is the history of theft, appropriation and destruction of natural heritage of Indigenous peoples, such as Crimean Tatars, whose rights and hopes regarding natural heritage have been ignored.

In some cases, however, combined researchers' efforts have proved to be an effective way to resist colonial policy in the Russian-ruled past. An example is a well-known story of the discovery of dwellings in Mezhyrich which were constructed from mammoth bones. Ukrainian researchers recently discovered the specimens, which were kept in Ukraine. Special facilities for their preservation and exhibition in situ and ex situ were promptly established, and an international peer-reviewed publication of the findings was properly presented in due time. The Ukrainian origin of the objects and the Ukrainian nation's right to them was recognised at a global level at an early stage of research. The bones' subsequent representation and promotion as a part of Ukrainian heritage was relatively easy and never contested or attacked. This suggests that scientific tools or methods, such as publication in top scientific journals along with physical repatriation, can be helpful in decolonisation as well as in the assertion of Ukrainian heritage and identity. Also, recognition of natural history items as a part of Indigenous heritage (at least by explicit notation of their locality of origin with proper reference to their place in Indigenous traditions); development of the concept of shared heritage by the country and local (Indigenous) communities; and a return to historical names are crucial for decolonisation. Finally, the repatriation and reintroduction of items to their original context should be a core action, changing the stage in the natural history museum world.

Useful resources

I.H. Pidoplichko (1998) *Upper Palaeolithic dwellings of mammoth bones in the Ukraine: Kiev-Kirillovskii, Gontsy, Dobranichevka, Mezin and Mezhirich*, **BAR International Series 712.** (Two books by Ukrainain scholar Ivan Hryhorovych Pidoplichko, translated into English by P. Allsworth-Jones).
https://tinyurl.com/md9mmzzw

Crimean native names in Southern Ukraine (2021)
https://perma.cc/W6ZQ-27JS