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Decorated Cannons of the Hetmanate Period as Figurative and Symbolic Monuments of the Ukrainian Baroque

Abstract:

The relevance of the study lies in the need for a comprehensive understanding of Cossack artillery of the 17th and 18th centuries not only as a category of military weapons, but also as a significant phenomenon of Ukrainian material and symbolic culture of the Baroque period. In the context of contemporary Ukrainian realities, marked by the destruction, displacement, and marginalisation of cultural heritage, this issue acquires particular importance from the perspective of klironomy as a discipline concerned with the preservation of cultural memory. The study problem is defined by the insufficient scholarly attention paid to the figurative, symbolic, and ideological dimensions of decorated Cossack cannons. Previous studies have predominantly focused on technological, military-historical, or descriptive aspects, leaving the internal semantic structure of cannon decoration and its role in the visual legitimation of power largely unexplored. The novelty of the study consists in the interdisciplinary interpretation of decorated cannons of the Hetmanate period as figurative and symbolic monuments of Ukrainian Baroque culture. The article introduces a holistic analytical model that integrates art-historical, iconographic, semiotic, and klironomical approaches, allowing cannon decoration to be conceptualised as a coherent symbolic system rather than a set of isolated ornamental motifs. The subject of the study is the system of figurative, symbolic, and compositional meanings embodied in the artistic decoration of Cossack cannons of the 17th and 18th centuries. The object of the study comprises bronze decorated cannons commissioned by Ukrainian hetmans and members of the Cossack senior officers and preserved in museum collections of Eastern Europe. The study aims to conduct an interdisciplinary analysis of these artefacts as figurative and symbolic monuments of the Baroque era. The study employs a wide range of methods, including historical and chronological analysis, art-historical examination of Baroque stylistics, iconographic and semiotic interpretation of decorative motifs, as well as comparative analysis and attribution. The theoretical foundation of the study is based on the works of V. Modzalevskiy, P. Zholtovskiy, D. Stepovyk, A. Makarov, V. Paliienko, O. Malchenko, A. Buychik and other scholars who have contributed to the study of Ukrainian Baroque art, artistic metalwork, and Cossack material culture. The study demonstrates that the decoration of cannons constituted an integral symbolic system that transformed weapons into a “cultivated universe” of the Baroque worldview. Three key groups of decorative elements are identified: phytomorphic motifs (including acanthus, grapevine, rose, and the symbol of the “heart” as an expression of Ukrainian cordocentrism), zoomorphic images (the lion and the unicorn as embodiments of strength and divine protection, the nightingale as a herald of victory), and epigraphic elements (titular inscriptions recording social hierarchy and status). The conclusions of the study confirm that the compositional organisation of cannon decoration was based on the principles of vertical dynamism and triadic unity, corresponding both to the technological structure of the cannon barrel and to the Christian symbolism of the Trinity. It is established that decorated cannons functioned as instruments of political legitimation and as visual confirmations of the status of the Cossack senior officers as bearers of state authority, faith, and Baroque cultural identity.

Keywords: cannons, Cossack elite, museum collections, Baroque symbolism, Ukrainian historical and cultural heritage.

Introduction

The relevance of this article is conditioned by the need for a comprehensive understanding of Cossack artillery as a unique phenomenon of Ukrainian material and spiritual culture of the Baroque period. In the period from the late 17th century to the last quarter of the 18th century, cannons appear not only as a type of artillery firearm, but also as highly artistic monuments saturated with symbolism, heraldic signs, and emblematics that reflect the worldview of the Cossack elite, ideas of statehood, and the sacral protection of the faith. Of particular importance is the fact that a significant part of these artefacts is today located outside Ukraine or preserved in isolated museum collections, which is a consequence of historical processes of colonial removal of cultural valuables.

In the contemporary context of military hostilities on the territory of Ukraine, the topic acquires even greater urgency: systematic destruction of Ukrainian museums continues, monuments are being damaged, and museum exhibits are being looted in temporarily occupied territories. This makes the study of the artistic decoration of cannons from the period of the Hetmanate not only academically significant, but also important from the standpoint of klironomy—as the documentation, interpretation, and preservation of cultural heritage for future generations. The analysis of symbolism, ornaments, and inscriptions on cannons makes it possible to reconstruct fragments of lost historical memory and to counteract cultural erasure. Thus, turning to decoratively embellished examples of senior-officer and hetman artillery as figurative-symbolic monuments of Ukrainian Baroque constitutes a substantial contribution to contemporary scholarly and heritage-protection discourse and serves as an instrument for affirming Ukrainian cultural identity under conditions of military threat.

The novelty of the present study lies in the comprehensive interpretation of Cossack artillery of the 17th and 18th centuries not merely as military artefacts, but as figurative and symbolic monuments of Ukrainian Baroque culture. Unlike previous studies that focused predominantly on technological, military-historical, or descriptive museological aspects of cannons, this study proposes a holistic analytical model that integrates art-historical, iconographic, semiotic, and klironomical approaches. Such an interdisciplinary perspective makes it possible to reveal the internal symbolic structure of cannon decoration as a coherent visual language that articulated ideas of power, faith, legitimacy, and noble identity within the culture of the Hetmanate.

A further innovative contribution of the study consists in the systematic identification and interpretation of three interrelated groups of decorative elements—phytomorphic, zoomorphic, and epigraphic—considered as components of a unified allegorical programme. The article introduces the concept of the cannon barrel as a “cultivated universe”, in which technical force is transformed through Baroque aesthetics into a sacralised and ideologically charged object. By applying the principles of klironomy, the research reconceptualises decorated cannons as carriers of cultural memory and symbolic continuity, thereby expanding the methodological boundaries of heritage studies and contributing to contemporary discussions on the preservation and reinterpretation of Ukrainian material culture under conditions of historical loss and military threat.

The subject of the study is the system of figurative, symbolic, and compositional meanings embodied in the artistic decoration of Cossack cannons of the 17th and 18th centuries, including

phytomorphic ornamentation, zoomorphic imagery, heraldic representations, and epigraphic inscriptions, as well as their semantic functions within the Baroque worldview of the Ukrainian Cossack elite.

The object of the study comprises bronze decorated cannons of the 17th and 18th centuries, produced on commission for the Ukrainian Cossack senior officers and hetmans and represented in museum collections of Eastern European countries.

The study aims a thorough interdisciplinary analysis of decorated cannons of the Ukrainian Cossacks as figurative-symbolic monuments of the Baroque era.

Achieving this purpose involves addressing the following tasks:

- analyse elements of artistic decoration (phytomorphic, zoomorphic, and heraldic)
- reveal their metaphysical content;
- examine the architectonics of cannon barrels.

The results of the study are addressed to historians, art historians, cultural studies scholars, and museum professionals engaged in the study, preservation, and interpretation of early modern material heritage. The article may be of particular interest to specialists in Ukrainian Baroque art, military history of the Hetmanate, and heritage studies, as well as to curators and researchers working with museum collections of artillery and decorative metalwork.

In addition, the materials of the study are intended for university lecturers, postgraduate students, and students of the humanities whose academic interests include symbolism, visual culture, and the interdisciplinary analysis of artefacts. Beyond the scholarly community, the findings may also be relevant for heritage practitioners and cultural policy experts concerned with issues of documentation, musealisation, and the protection of cultural memory in the context of contemporary military and political challenges.

Methods

The methodological framework of the study is grounded in a set of general scientific methods that ensure the consistency, validity, and interdisciplinarity of the research. The application of these methods made it possible to conceptualise decorated Cossack cannons as complex cultural phenomena situated at the intersection of military history, art history, and heritage studies.

The method of analysis was employed to decompose the artistic decoration of cannons into individual components, including phytomorphic, zoomorphic, heraldic, and epigraphic elements. This approach enabled the detailed examination of each decorative motif, its formal characteristics, and its symbolic content, as well as the identification of internal structural relationships between separate visual elements within the overall composition of the cannon barrel.

The method of synthesis was applied to integrate the results of the analytical stage into a holistic interpretative model. Through synthesis, individual decorative features were reassembled into a coherent symbolic system, allowing the author to interpret cannon decoration as an internally consistent figurative and semantic programme rather than as a random accumulation of ornamental details. This method proved essential for substantiating the concept of the cannon as a “cultivated universe” of the Baroque era.

The systemic approach was used to consider decorated cannons as elements of a broader cultural and symbolic system of the Hetmanate period. Within this framework, artillery was analysed not in isolation but in relation to contemporary worldview paradigms, political ideology, religious symbolism, and artistic conventions of Ukrainian Baroque culture. This approach made

it possible to reveal the functional interdependence between form, symbolism, and social representation.

The method of generalisation was applied to identify recurring patterns and typological features in the decoration of cannons produced for the Cossack elite. On the basis of comparative observations, common principles of composition, symbolism, and stylistic expression were formulated, enabling the classification of decorative elements and the formulation of broader conclusions concerning their metaphysical and ideological significance.

The historical method served as a general scientific foundation for situating the analysed artefacts within their socio-political and cultural context. By correlating specific cannons with historical figures, events, and processes of state formation, the study ensured the contextual accuracy of interpretations and avoided anachronistic readings of symbolic imagery.

The study employs the historical method, which makes it possible to trace the origins of cannons, the conditions of their production, and their connections with the political events of the 17th and 18th centuries and the destruction of Ukrainian statehood. The author uses chronological analysis to date individual artefacts and to correlate them with specific figures of the Cossack senior elite. A significant role is played by the art-historical method, aimed at analysing the stylistics of Ukrainian Baroque, the plasticity of ornamentation, and the compositional principles of casting. Through an iconographic approach, phytomorphic, zoomorphic, and emblematic motifs are interpreted as carriers of symbolic meanings.

The museum method is also applied, involving the study of artefacts from the collections of Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian museums, as well as the description of their state of preservation and exhibition context. In parallel, a heritage-protection approach is employed, within which cannons are considered unique monuments of material heritage requiring documentation, attribution, and protection. The author conducts attributional analysis, identifying patrons, craftsmen, and the functional purpose of artillery objects.

A substantial role is played by the comparative method, whereby Ukrainian examples are compared with European Baroque traditions and local features of ornamentation. The comparative approach makes it possible to identify both universal Baroque motifs (acanthus, palm, laurel) and regional symbols. The article also actively applies semiotic analysis, aimed at interpreting the symbols of the heart, animals, plants, and inscriptions as a sign system of the period.

The structural and compositional method is of particular importance and is used to investigate the architectonics of the cannon barrel and the principles governing the placement of decoration. The author adopts an interdisciplinary approach, combining history, art history, and museology. Special attention is given to the application of the method of klironomy (*Buychik 2019; Buychik 2024*), as cannons are interpreted as bearers of cultural memory and symbolic continuity of the Cossack elite. Within the klironomical approach, these objects are conceptualised as transmitters of values, faith, power, and identity.

Thus, the combination of general scientific methods with specialised art-historical, iconographic, semiotic, and museum approaches ensured a comprehensive and balanced methodological strategy. The general scientific methods provided the conceptual framework for structuring the material, while specialised methods enabled the in-depth interpretation of artistic and symbolic content. Within this integrated methodological model, the application of the klironomical approach played a unifying role, allowing decorated cannons to be interpreted as bearers of cultural memory, value transmission, and symbolic continuity. Such a methodological synthesis not only corresponds to the interdisciplinary nature of the research object but also expands the analytical potential of contemporary studies of Ukrainian Baroque heritage.

Literature Review

In preparing this article, the works of V. L. Modzalevskiy, P. M. Zholtovskiy, D. V. Stepovyk, A. M. Makarov, V. I. Paliienko, O. Ye. Malchenko, N. V. Babkova, A. K. Andruh, and others were used. In general, the historiography of the study of cannons of the Cossack elite is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines military history, art history, and the interpretation of the symbolic component of Baroque art.

The scholarly research of V. Modzalevskiy (1921) laid the foundations for the study of the history of Ukrainian casting, which is essential for understanding the technological context of artillery production. The comprehensive monographs by P. Zholtovskiy (1972; 1973) on artistic metalwork and casting in Ukraine make it possible to classify cannons as objects of high art by analysing their aesthetic qualities. In his article, D. Stepovyk (1988) examines the system of Baroque tropes, which helps to decipher the metaphysical meaning of the vegetal ornaments on cannons. The book by A. Makarov (1994) is key to interpreting the cordocentric worldview of the Cossack officer elite through the symbol of the heart in the decoration of artillery weapons. The article by V. Paliienko (1994) investigates Ukrainian artillery preserved in museums of the Russian Federation and records the scale of the removal of the cultural heritage of the Hetmanate.

A series of works by O. Malchenko provides a detailed account of the artistic decoration of cannons from the time of Ivan Mazepa, revealing the role of patronage in the development of cannon casting. In his studies, the scholar also analyses the morphology of Hlukhiv artillery, which makes it possible to identify local features of cannon production. His research into the album of F.Y. Telotta helps to reconstruct the appearance of lost cannons on the basis of 18th-century graphic sources. O. Malchenko (2008; 2011; 2013; 2016a; 2016b; 2017) pays particular attention to the stylistics of the decorative work of the Balashevych masters, which is important for the attribution of specific artefacts.

The author of the study, N. Babkova, in her previous article considers cannons as military and political kleynods, emphasising their status-related character within Cossack society. In that article, the researcher applies the method of klironomy, which makes it possible to interpret cannons as transmitters of values and identity (Babkova, 2015). The article by A. Adruh (2021) is devoted to an analysis of metal sculpture in Chernihiv, which helps to contextualise cannon decoration within the general development of Baroque sculpture on the territory of Ukraine. The description of the collection of V. Tarnovskiy, prepared by M. Blakytyni (2013), is fundamental for the study of surviving examples of artillery in Ukrainian museums.

The scholarly output of previous researchers outlined above will enable the author to identify a synthesis of European emblematics and local symbols, such as the nightingale or the tree of life. The inclusion of works from art history is justified by the need to analyse the architectonics of cannon barrels and the principles of the “vertical dynamics” of decoration. Studies of zoomorphic images in specialised literature help to elucidate the magical and protective functions attributed to cannons. A comprehensive analysis of these sources demonstrates that the Cossack cannon was not merely a weapon, but also a “cultivated universe” of the Baroque individual. Such a broad historiographical overview once again underscores the necessity of protecting Ukrainian heritage.

Buychik and Tomanek (2023) emphasise the fundamental importance of studying the cultural heritage of the territory of the Republic of Ukraine as a dynamic and multilayered field of scholarly inquiry, particularly in the context of global discourses on heritage preservation and identity formation. Their work highlights the theoretical and methodological challenges inherent

in documenting, interpreting, and valorising material and immaterial cultural assets under conditions of historical disruption and contemporary conflict, arguing for an integrative, interdisciplinary research paradigm. This perspective resonates with and reinforces the present study's focus on the symbolic and cultural dimensions of artefacts, such as decorated artillery, as carriers of collective memory and cultural continuity.

Buychik (2019) presents klironomy as an emerging interdisciplinary science focused on the preservation of cultural heritage through a structured conceptual apparatus that unites philosophical foundations, cultural theory, and applied heritage-protection practice. The monograph systematises key categories (heritage, cultural memory, value, continuity, responsibility) and outlines methodological principles for identifying, documenting, interpreting, and safeguarding cultural objects as carriers of historically transmitted meanings.

Buychik (2024) further develops this framework by expanding klironomy into a comprehensive scientific model of cultural heritage, detailing its theoretical scope, research logic, and applied instruments for contemporary heritage management. The book strengthens the methodological dimension of klironomy by proposing an integrated approach to analysing heritage phenomena (material and immaterial) as systems of value transmission and social legitimation, thereby providing a relevant conceptual basis for interdisciplinary studies that interpret artefacts—such as Baroque-period objects—as bearers of cultural memory and identity.

The results of the study are intended for historians, art historians, museum professionals, cultural studies scholars, as well as students of the humanities. The material will be useful for all those interested in the military history of the Hetmanate and seeking to understand the place of Ukrainian Baroque art within the broader European cultural context.

Results

The private artillery of Ukrainian hetmans and colonels constitutes a unique embodiment of artistic casting of the Baroque era, representing the grandeur and aesthetic refinement of the national foundry tradition. Decorated cannons of the 17th and 18th centuries function as figurative and symbolic monuments that combine mystical zoomorphic images, refined vegetal ornamentation, and representational images of their owners. As a result of Ukraine's military and historical development and its interactions with neighbouring states, a vast body of these artefacts was removed beyond the borders of the country or lost. The few surviving examples have become priceless relics of the Cossack era, enabling the reconstruction of the spiritual world and political ambitions of the contemporary senior elite. Today, these unique works of art are dispersed across different countries, which necessitates a detailed examination of the specific museum collections in which they are preserved.

Museum collections in Ukraine contain eleven cannons dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. One cannon is held in the collections of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw. A significantly larger number of cannons belonging to the Cossack senior officers are preserved in Russian museums (twelve items). The destruction of Ukrainian statehood by the Russian government during the 18th century, together with the confiscation of Cossack insignia into imperial repositories—of which hetman and senior officers' artillery formed a part—resulted in the loss of a vast corpus of material monuments of the Cossack era and transformed the remaining examples of cannon art still visible in museum displays and collections into priceless artefacts.

The private artillery of Ukrainian hetmans and colonels comprises works of Baroque artistic casting, as it manifests splendour, ornamentality, an exuberance of imagination, and the grandeur

of the national foundry tradition. Analysis of the decoration of the surviving Cossack cannon specimens provides grounds for identifying three principal elements of ornamentation: vegetal (phytomorphic) ornament, animal (zoomorphic) imagery, and heraldic and emblematic representations.

Phytomorphic Ornament

One of the principal compositional motifs in the decoration of cannon barrels was phytomorphic ornamentation, in which images of various forms of acanthus leaves, grapevines, and palmettes occupied a dominant position. In the muzzle section of the barrel, figurative festoons (lambrequins), bouquets, and garlands were particularly popular, into which allegorical anthropomorphic and decorative zoomorphic elements were woven or with which they were intertwined. The ornamental patterns of most cannon specimens are characterised by S- or C-shaped forms. Frequently, the S-shaped ornament formed a heart-like configuration, as seen on the cannons of Colonels M.A. Borokhovych of 1693 and 1697 from the collection of the Russian Hermitage, the cannon of Colonel P.S. Hertsyk of 1692 from the collection of the Russian Central Military-Historical Museum, the cannon of Colonel I.F. Novytskyi of 1692 from the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw, and the mortar of 1698 cast to the order of Hetman I.S. Mazepa from the holdings of the Russian Military-Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineer and Signal Troops (*Malchenko, 2011*).

The use of the image of the “heart” in Ukrainian culture of the 17th and 18th centuries was interpreted by the scholar A.M. Makarov in his book *The Light of Ukrainian Baroque (1994)* as an allegory of the metaphysical centre of the Ukrainian cosmos, the “eye of the soul” that perceives the “light of truth”. He associated it with the aesthetics of the “cordial impulse” and with cordocentrism as a source of morality in the Ukrainian worldview. Within the milieu of the Cossack elite, the use of the symbol of the “heart” testified to the level of piety in contemporary society, which was nourished by religious motifs and the symbolism of Baroque art.

Local phytomorphic motifs were also an obligatory component in the decoration of cannon barrels. From the world of flora, preference was given primarily to species well known to the Ukrainian people, cherished by them, and endowed with noble qualities. According to D.V. Stepovyk (*1988*), these characteristics were transferred to a particular noble Cossack lineage and thus seemed to ennoble it. However, the register of phytomorphic symbols encoded in the decorative ornamentation of cannon barrels of the Cossack elite was rather limited.

The acanthus was the king of Baroque ornamentation. In no decorative system did a plant occupy such a significant place as in Baroque art. Despite its popularity in Antiquity and the Renaissance, within the artistic system of the Baroque the image of the acanthus leaf transcended the bounds of a purely decorative element. Unlike the static orderliness of Renaissance models, the Baroque acanthus acquired extraordinary plastic expressiveness: its lines became tense, twisted, and filled with inner movement. This transformation of form reflected the Baroque worldview, in which life was perceived as a continuous flow of energy.

On bronze cannon barrels cast during the time of Ivan Mazepa, acanthus scrolls framed the coats of arms of the owners and military symbols, transforming the weapon into an object of high art. Such decoration not only emphasised the status and wealth of the elite, but also carried a profound meaning: the life-affirming force of the acanthus on an instrument of death symbolised the idea of a “holy war” and the defence of the faith.

The metaphysical content of this image is revealed through the dialectic of suffering and triumph: owing to its natural sharpness, the acanthus was often identified with the crown of thorns, symbolising the path through trials towards victory. In the Ukrainian context, acanthus

shoots on cast cannons were often interwoven with grapevines or sunflowers, combining universal European emblematics with a local life-affirming worldview. Thus, the acanthus leaf appears as a universal instrument of the Baroque which, through aesthetic excess, glorifies spiritual strength and state grandeur (*Malchenko, 2008*).

In contrast to the celebration of life, cannon barrels of the Cossack elite also employed a folk motif concerning the mortality of all living things: among the flourishing flora appear images of poppy heads, symbols of eternal sleep and repose. For example, the symbolic image of a poppy head is depicted on the barrel of the cannon “Lev” of 1705, cast to the order of Hetman I.S. Mazepa (currently located outdoors at the Russian State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve “Moscow Kremlin”), as well as on the cannon of the Hadiach Colonel M.A. Borokhovych of 1697.

An obligatory element in the decoration of Cossack cannons was palm branches. In Christian symbolic tradition, the palm was a symbol of the victory of life over death, of resurrection and immortality. The palm branches with which the road of Christ to Jerusalem was strewn symbolised His suffering and His victory over death. Ukrainian founders of the Baroque period used the allegory of the palm branch as a symbol of the victory of the soul over earthly passions, an image of the defence of the Christian faith and of military triumph. In combination with acanthus leaves, the depiction of a palm branch emphasised the idea of the eternal spiritual development of the owner of the cannon barrel. The conjunction of palm branches with a laurel wreath underscored glory, both earthly and heavenly, and the sacred feat of the Ukrainian hetman (*Zoltovskyy, 1973*). All three elements are present on the mortar of 1698 cast to the order of Hetman Ivan Mazepa (preserved in the collections of the Russian Military-Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineer and Signal Troops).

A fairly widespread motif on the cannon barrels of the Cossack elite was the rose, often depicted in the form of a “ruzha”, rosette, or rosetta. In Baroque art of the period, the rose symbolised not only beauty, but also holiness and prayer, as it was associated with the rosarium or rosary, a chain of prayers addressed to the Mother of God. On bronze cannons of the Cossack elite, alongside laurel and acanthus, the rose softened the severity of military attributes, transforming the weapon into part of a “cultivated” universe. Here it functioned as a symbol of nobility and belonging to the European chivalric circle, in which the flower was a sign of elevated feelings and chosenness (*Zoltovskyy, 1972*).

For the ornamentation of Cossack cannons, foundry masters employed various types of rosettes: six-petalled, multi-rayed (“sunflower”), and the rosette known as the “Wheel of Jupiter”. O.Y. Malchenko believes that on cannon barrels these symbols signified the “place where light was born”, since they were most often depicted on the torus in the breech section of the barrel (the cannon of Colonel P.S. Hertsyk of 1692; cannon barrels made for the city of Konotop in 1697 from the holdings of the Russian Military-Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineer and Signal Troops; the cannons of Colonels I.F. Charnysh of 1713 and M.I. Myloradovych of 1717 from the collection of the Chernihiv Regional Historical Museum named after V.V. Tarnovskyy), or on the ends of the trunnions, where this ornamental motif fitted particularly well (the cannon “Lev” of 1705, the mortar of 1698, and the cannon of M.I. Myloradovych of 1717) (*Malchenko, 2017*).

At the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, a tradition emerged in Ukrainian art of completely filling the background of a work with plant ornamentation. This tendency also affected the decoration of Ukrainian cannon barrels. Foundry masters sought to cover their products with a continuous “ornamental carpet”, the principal artistic motifs of which were four-petalled and tulip-shaped flowers with branches and leaves. For example, on the cannon “Lev” of 1705,

despite the gradual narrowing of the barrel towards the muzzle, the plant ornament maintains its proportions and does not become distorted. If imagined as being unfolded onto a plane, it indeed resembles a rectangular carpet that seems to envelop the cannon barrel.

On certain cannons, the effect of a completely filled background was created by floral shoots—“vazons”—arranged along the central axis of the cannon barrel or localised in its muzzle section. The so-called “vazon”, with symmetrically curved branches that “grow” from the centre of the composition, was the most favoured ornamental motif of Ukrainian folk masters (*Makarov, 1994*). On the barrels of the cannon “Lev” of 1705 and the mortar of 1698, the shoot-“vazon” motif is less branched and is visually perceived as two separate ornamental forms that together create a unified composition. Similar stylised plant shoots, filled with simple geometric forms—dots, strokes, droplets—most often constitute the floristic ornament, in which the intricate pattern of stems with numerous bends and curves testifies to the influence of Baroque art.

The use of shoot-“vazon” motifs is closely associated with the allegory of the World Tree or Tree of Life. Closely linked to the latter is the symbolic composition “Christ the True Vine”, which appears on almost all surviving examples of cannon barrels cast at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries. Its presence on weaponry transformed the cannon into an instrument of “holy war” and the defence of the Christian faith. For the Cossack elite, this served as a visual confirmation of their status as “knightly defenders” of Orthodoxy.

Thus, phytomorphic ornamentation was the dominant element in the decoration of cannons of the Cossack elite and played a key role in shaping their figurative and symbolic content. The use of acanthus, palm branches, roses, grapevines, and “vazon” motifs testified to a synthesis of pan-European Baroque emblematics with local Ukrainian symbolic tradition. S-shaped compositions in the form of a “heart” represented a cordocentric worldview and emphasised the piety and spiritual reflection of the Cossack elite. The combination of life-affirming plant motifs with symbols of mortality (poppy heads) formed a Baroque dialectic of life and death characteristic of the idea of “holy war”. Overall, phytomorphic decoration transformed the cannon from a utilitarian weapon into a sacralised artistic object that represented the nobility, faith, and state-building ambitions of its patrons.

Inscriptions

Alongside ornamentation, inscriptions played a special role in the artistic decoration of cannons. Introduced into the artistic structure of the casting, they significantly enhanced the decorative character of the cannon barrel’s composition. The compositional function of letters, words, and phrases embedded within the linear decorative background often brought the entire decorative scheme of the cannon into focus, imparting a sense of unity and completeness. This is particularly evident on the mortar of 1698 and on the cannon of I.F. Charnysh, where the dedicatory inscription is visually perceived as a continuation of the phytomorphic ornament.

Long phrase-based texts, grouped into several lines, intensified the decorative and planar character of the composition and contributed to its conventionality, that is, to the decorative quality of the overall section of the cannon barrel. Such a manner of decoration was designed for the simultaneous perception of word and image, which heightened the emotional impact on the viewer. Within the milieu of the Ukrainian Cossacks, extensive text was often perceived as an ornament or a sign containing additional aesthetic information. For example, on the cannons of I.F. Novytskyi from 1692 and M.A. Borokhovich from 1697, the ribbon inscription placed on the breech section of the barrel performed an additional role: it balanced this part in relation

to the muzzle section, which was somewhat weighed down by a bulky cartouche (*Malchenko, 2013*).

At times, the inscription performed a delimiting function, visually separating different sections of the cannon barrel and establishing certain emphases required by the patron. This can be observed, for instance, on the cannon *Lev* (Lion) of 1705, where information about the patron of the weapon (Hetman Ivan Mazepa and the head of the Hetmanate artillery, Friedrich Königsegg) is distributed across different parts of the barrel in accordance with the hierarchy of power. A similar approach was adopted by the author of the cannon of Hetman Kyrylo Rozumovskyi from 1753, which is housed in the collection of the Russian Military-Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineer Troops, and Signal Corps. The extensive dedication to the hetman himself, concentrated around the family coat of arms, is separated from the mention of the General Quartermaster S.V. Kochubei by a special band on the barrel. This indicates the secondary nature of the latter information, which was subordinated to the dedication to Hetman K.H. Rozumovskyi.

The only exception in which text acquired a dominant compositional significance in cannon decoration during the period of Ukrainian Baroque is the series of cannons of Hetman Kyrylo Rozumovskyi from 1753 and 1759, preserved in the Russian Military-Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineer Troops, and Signal Corps. On both cannon pieces, the textual dedication entirely prevails over the other few decorative elements, even over the large depiction of the Rozumovskyi family coat of arms. Thus, on these cannon units, inscriptions constituted the central element of decoration, serving as the sole illustration with multilayered meaning (*Babkova, 2015*).

In general, representational and explanatory inscriptions on the cannons of the Cossack senior officers were, in their functional purpose, very close to the book decoration of the Baroque period. In the case of cannon barrels, foundry masters were tasked with reflecting in inscriptions the name of the patron or owner of the cannon, his full title, his social status within Cossack society, his monetary contribution to the payment of the commission, and, more broadly, with emphasising his grandeur and nobility in every possible way. A skilfully executed “title” inscription could sometimes replace the owner’s coat of arms, as on the “unicorn” cannon of P.S. Hertsyk. Conversely, a coat of arms without an explanatory inscription did not fulfil its representational function, as exemplified by a Cossack cannon bearing a coat of arms based on the Polish heraldic emblem *Przyjaciel* from the Chernihiv Regional Historical Museum named after V.V. Tarnovskyi. To this day, scholars have been unable to identify the owner of this cannon (*Blakytnyi, 2013*).

Thus, inscriptions on cannon monuments of the Cossack elite fulfilled not only an informative but also an important compositional and decorative function, integrating into the overall artistic structure of the artefact. Title texts served as a means of representing social status, hierarchy, and the political legitimisation of hetmans and colonels. In certain cases, the inscription became the central element of the decoration, completely dominating other visual components. The spatial placement of texts reflected power subordination and deliberately emphasised the priority of the principal patron. In their functional character, cannon inscriptions were akin to the title pages of Baroque books, which testifies to the transfer of literary and emblematic principles into the sphere of artistic casting.

Zoomorphic Images

In addition to ornamental and titular–presentational inscriptions, the cannons of the Cossack senior officers were lavishly decorated with symbolic zoomorphic images. An analysis

of surviving examples of Ukrainian cannon casting of the 17th and 18th centuries preserved in museum collections has made it possible to identify the principal animal images depicted on officers' and hetmanate cannons: the unicorn, the nightingale, the wolf, the lion, and the dragon. During the period in question, the conception of artillery as a magical weapon associated with mysticism, incantation, or sorcery was quite strong. According to a generally accepted view, the most powerful cannons were those that embodied the magic of a particular beast. The likening of a cannon to a wolf, lion, unicorn, nightingale, or dog reflected a belief in the might of the animal image depicted on the barrel, together with all its martial and supernatural qualities. In official descriptions of the artillery parks of the Cossack state of the 17th and 18th centuries, clerks referred to cannons bearing symbolic images precisely in these terms: "lion," "wolf," "dragon," or else "under the lion," "under the wolf." Such inscriptions meant that the given cannon was under the symbolic protection of the lion or the wolf (*Modzalevskyi, 1921*).

The use of animal imagery on cannon barrels had a mystical and symbolic character. The animal figures employed on cannons were not isolated symbols but formed certain extensive, often hierarchical groups. One such classification was associated with the idea of the four elements: aquatic animals symbolised water, reptiles symbolised earth, birds symbolised air, and warm-blooded beasts symbolised fire. It is precisely animal imagery that dominates the decoration of cannon pieces preserved to the present day. Images of birds occur far less frequently. The symbolic meaning of each particular animal depended on its place in the worldview of Baroque art, as well as on the pose and setting in which it was depicted. On the cannons of the Cossack senior officers, only images of animals in motion—active action, unfolding and application of energy—are encountered (*Malchenko, 2016a; Malchenko, 2016b*).

On the cannon of Colonel P.S. Hertsyk of 1692, on one side of the piece a unicorn runs into battle against the enemy, while on the other it appears as a dignified lord among various animals—deer, wild boars, and reptiles—that honour it to the sounds of the viola and gamba (*Paliienko, 1994*). In general, the image of the unicorn on this particular cannon sample has a dual meaning. On the one hand, according to the canons of Baroque artistic symbolism, it is an embodiment of swiftness, strength, and the ability to overcome any enemy. It was regarded as the only animal capable of opposing the lion, which hinted at the extraordinary power of the cannon. On the other hand, the unicorn was perceived as a symbol of Christ. Its single horn was interpreted as a symbol of Divine truth and the unity of the Son with the Father, which was meant to "sanctify" the weapon for the defence of the faith. According to legends, the horn of the unicorn neutralised poison. On a weapon, this symbolised the "purification" or protection of the Cossack host from enemy intrigues and evil.

A significantly larger number of cannon pieces have survived bearing the more straightforward and unambiguous, in terms of interpretation, animal symbol of the lion. On the cannons of Colonels I.F. Novytskyi of 1692 and M.I. Miloradovych of 1717, as well as on the hetman's cannon of 1705, there is a depiction of a lion in the moment of a leap. This zoomorphic symbol is quite clear and universal for all world cultures familiar with the lion.

If among mythical animals only the unicorn could defeat the dragon, then among real ones only the noble lion—the symbol of might and power—could do so. Therefore, the depiction of the lion on officers' and hetmanate cannons symbolised the struggle of the Ukrainian state against the southern non-Christian countries—the Ottoman Empire and its vassal, the Crimean Khanate. Accordingly, the image of the lion on the cannon of 1705 allegorically emphasised the role of Hetman Ivan Mazepa in the confrontation with the Muslim threat. On the cannons of Cossack colonels, the symbolic image of the lion conveyed the idea that the colonel's authority and nobility rested on military force. Here the lion is the living support of the lineage, which

“carries” the owner’s name into the public and political sphere. In Baroque emblematic art, the lion symbolised an ever-vigilant guard. This was a clear signal: the colonel personally bears responsibility for the peace of his land, and the cannon is the instrument of this “lion-like” vigilance (*Makaron, 1994*).

In contrast to the symbols of the unicorn or the lion, the figurative depiction of the wolf did not have a positive semantic content in the Baroque cultural tradition. Most often it retained the negative, sombre connotations inherited from the Middle Ages. Therefore, only one Cossack cannon preserved to the present day bears an allegorical image of a wolf. O.Y. Malchenko (*2017*) considers this to be a manifestation of the direct influence of Russian cultural tradition on the masters of Ukrainian foundry work. On the muzzle of a small cannon of 1693, housed in the Russian Military-Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineer Troops and Signal Corps, an image of a wolf’s maw is cast, while on the breech there is an engraved coat of arms depicting a lion fighting a winged dragon. The combination of zoomorphic images with palm leaves may indicate the interpretation of the analysed cannon as a symbol of the infernal fury of a tamed wolf, whose master is the owner of the cannon barrel in all his might and Christian strength.

The symbolism of the nightingale as an element of cannon decoration is represented on the cannon of Colonel I.F. Charnysh of 1713. The entire surface of this small weapon is adorned with vegetal ornaments. The barrel bears a cast family coat of arms of a representative of the Cossack senior officers and presentational inscriptions, beneath which a nightingale on a branch is depicted. The bird symbol is organically combined with a poetic allegory as a means of associative image construction. According to the commissioner’s intention, the image of the nightingale was to be interpreted concretely and precisely, since it carried the principal ideological burden of the entire decorative programme of the cannon. It is expressive, fanciful, crowned with rich decorativeness, and rooted in an ancient Slavic tradition: the nightingale is a bird that sweetly announced victory. In Ukrainian folk tradition, the nightingale has always been associated with joy and happiness, with carefree delight, especially when the bird is depicted among branches (*Zholtovskyy, 1973*). The use of this symbolic image in artillery decoration, in the emblematic language of the cannon, was intended to inspire viewers with joy and to evoke memories of the euphoria of victory.

Birds were also cast among the garden-like décor on the cannon “Lion” of 1705. Against the background of vegetal symbolism generally characteristic of Ukrainian Baroque, the transmission of figurative meanings through feathered creatures and the delight in birds was perceived as an interesting decorative motif.

In general, the system of allegorical images on cannon samples was perceived by representatives of contemporary Ukrainian society as a system of living individualities endowed with a formidable, just, and for the time being hidden power, capable of leading their owner to unquestionable victory. This was seen as the principal promotional feature of Cossack cannon barrels, especially those cast by order of hetmans: the emphasis on the patronage of higher powers over those Christian knights who defeat non-believers in battle. Victory, in the view of the creators of artistic cannon symbolism, was the result of a complex interaction between heavenly forces and human deeds. The authors of symbolic images sought to convey to viewers the wisdom, strength, and nobility of their addressee through the images of particular creatures.

The use of specific symbols, decorative elements, and ornamental motifs, and their placement on cannon pieces, was directly connected with the architectonics of these military units. Emblems, ornaments, and inscriptions were usually composed by foundry masters on the vertical part of the barrel and formed a circle at the muzzle and near the trunnions; angels on cannons from Konotop, birds among branches on the cannon “Lion,” acanthus ornaments in

bands. In addition, the principle of “vertical dynamics” was taken into account on cannon samples, whereby images, inscriptions, and decorative elements were arranged one above another, creating a certain subordination and hierarchy of individual parts within a single whole. In general, cannons demonstrated a well-established arrangement of images and decorative accents that had taken shape as early as the Renaissance period (*Malchenko, 2016a; Malchenko, 2016b*).

For example, the most important presentational elements—coats of arms—together with textual dedications to the commissioners of the cannons were usually cast on the breech of the barrel. The coat of arms was accorded a rather significant place in the architectonics of cannon decoration. Most often it was harmoniously integrated into the overall decorative fabric of the cannon and, on lavish cartouches, was perceived as a stylised ornamental form (*Babkova, 2015*). Thereafter, the foundry masters presented the principal symbolic image of the barrel or a dedication to a person of lower rank than the owner of the artillery piece, but who had also sponsored its manufacture. Thus, on the cannon “Lion” of 1705, with a dedication to Hetman Ivan Mazepa, there is an inscription mentioning the head of the hetman’s artillery, Friedrich Königseg.

On the section of the barrel behind the dolphins, in addition to ornament, a zoomorphic symbol was often depicted: a lion, a dragon, or a wolf, which was meant to guard the muzzle of the cannon—the place from which fire and projectile emerge. Another important part of the weapon—the touch hole—was also decorated with animal images or with small icons bearing symbolic depictions of saints (*Modzalevskiy, 1921*).

The highest point of the cannon barrel, its muzzle end, most often resembled either a decorated column capital or served as a prototype of the heavens crowning everything depicted below. For all strata of Ukrainian Baroque-era society, the most comprehensible symbols of heaven were images of angels.

Of the nine generally accepted angelic ranks, within the system of Cossack cannon decoration masters most frequently reproduced seraphim. The image of seraphim in Baroque art embodies heavenly fire, divine love, and the highest hierarchical proximity to God. Unlike the static Middle Ages, the Baroque endowed these beings with extraordinary dynamism, emotional tension, and decorativeness. Angelic faces, executed in accordance with the canons of Ukrainian visual art, are depicted on the cannon “Unicorn” of 1692, on the artillery of Colonel I.F. Novytskyi of 1692, and on the cannon created for the city of Konotop in 1697 (*Malchenko, 2008*).

Often angels were cast with symbolically rendered wings and arranged in a single row. Their images, crowned with haloes, formed a narrow decorative band that united the entire muzzle section of the barrel into a completed composition. In contrast to other symbolic images, angels were distinguished by the generalised nature of their designs and the absence of iconographic modifications across different cannon samples. The modelling of the images did not impress with a richness of plasticity and was characterised by a certain static quality. In the free fields on either side of the angelic row, phytomorphic ornament was usually placed.

Thus, the analysed decorations of Cossack cannons with zoomorphic symbols have made it possible to determine that animal motifs constituted one of the most expressive components of the symbolic embellishment of cannons belonging to the Cossack senior officers. The images of the lion, unicorn, nightingale, wolf, and dragon endowed the artillery with magical and sacral properties of an “ever-vigilant guard.” The unicorn and the lion functioned as allegories of military might and divine protection, while at the same time symbolising the defence of the Orthodox faith. The semantics of animal images were shaped through interaction with Baroque

cosmology, the idea of the elements, and conceptions of “sacred war”. Taken together, zoomorphic depictions created a system of allegorical characters through which ideas of victory, honour, and the nobility of the cannon’s owner were conveyed.

Rules of Composition

A high degree of decorativeness on cannon barrels of the Ukrainian Baroque period was achieved by foundry masters through generalisation and the application of principles of statics and symmetry. The symmetrical composition of cannon decoration manifested itself as a principle rather than as a perfectly symmetrical applied pattern. On cannon monuments whose technology aspired to the greatest possible symmetry, symmetry performed an organising role in the composition of decorative elements. An important role was also played by the craftsman’s intuitive striving for orderliness, completeness, and the integrity of the work. The symmetrical architectonics of cannon decoration were associated with statics, calmness, and balance. The closer a composition was to absolute symmetry, the statelier it appeared. In such cases, the cannon produced an impression of concealed power and unshakable tranquillity. To emphasise these sensations, certain symbols with symmetrical configurations were also employed (*Adrub, 2021*).

However, elements of symbolism that required an accentuated internal dynamism were predominantly depicted asymmetrically. For example, images of mythical and real animals and birds in motion were usually placed on the right side of the barrel, in its muzzle section, and positioned above the central horizontal axis: a unicorn and a lion running on the cannons of Colonels P.S. Hertsyk and I.F. Novytskyi from 1692; a lion in a leap on the cannon *Lev* (“Lion”) of 1705; and a dragon in a leap on the cannon of Colonel M.I. Miloradovych from 1717.

In the compositions of cannon products, a carefully considered decorative logic can be discerned. All surviving examples of officers’ cannon casting contain three compositional nodes in their inseparability, linked by semantic and harmonising relationships. Triadic unity constitutes a cornerstone principle in the construction of decorative compositions, since the number three has always symbolised completeness, stability, and perfection. In the Christian tradition, triangles, figures composed of three triangles, three angles, or other intersecting figures symbolise the Trinity—the existence of God in three hypostases. This principle of decoration corresponded to the three technological parts of the cannon barrel: the breech, the middle section, and the muzzle (*Makarov, 1994*).

Thus, the compositional organisation of cannon decoration was based on the principles of symmetry, vertical dynamism, and triadic unity, which corresponded both to the technological structure of the barrel and to the Christian symbolism of the Trinity. The most important representational elements (coats of arms and inscriptions) were concentrated in the breech section, while zoomorphic images predominantly guarded the muzzle zone. Symmetry performed an organising function, creating a sense of concealed strength and monumental calm. The asymmetrical placement of animal figures in motion emphasised the internal dynamism and martial energy of the weapon. Overall, the composition of cannon monuments emerged as a carefully conceived hierarchical system in which each element occupied a defined place and carried a specific symbolic meaning.

Discussion

The study examines the artillery of the Cossack senior officers not merely as military artefacts, but as figurative and symbolic monuments of Ukrainian Baroque culture. The decorative elements of cannon barrels function as representational narratives that combine

phytomorphic, zoomorphic, heraldic, and epigraphic components. They were intended to sacralise military power and to legitimise the social status of the owner. At the same time, a key problem in the study of decorated cannons lies in the fragmentary preservation of these monuments of the material heritage of the Ukrainian Cossacks, since a significant part of the Hetmanate's artillery was lost or removed beyond the borders of Ukraine. This complicates the construction of a comprehensive typology and the tracing of stylistic evolution.

The interpretation of such symbolic images as the acanthus, palm branch, lion, unicorn, and birds attests to a synthesis of pan-European Baroque emblematics with local worldview conceptions of Ukrainian society in the Cossack period. However, the boundaries between borrowed artistic models and autochthonous symbolic systems remain insufficiently delineated. The mechanisms of artistic transmission between foundry centres have likewise not been fully clarified. The influence of individual commissions by members of the Cossack elite on the formation of decorative canons also requires separate analysis.

In the klironomical dimension (*Buychik, 2019; Buychik, 2024*), cannons emerge as carriers of the cultural memory of the Hetmanate. Nevertheless, their contemporary musealisation often retains an object-centred and descriptive character. The semantic layers of ornamentation and inscriptions usually remain outside the focus of exhibitions. This foregrounds the problem of curatorial strategies and the narrative structuring of museum displays. As a result, artillery is perceived primarily as technical weaponry rather than as the symbolic heritage of Baroque culture.

Contemporary military realities significantly intensify the challenges associated with studying examples of decorated casting from the 17th and 18th centuries. The destruction of museums, damage to collections, and the looting of cultural property underscore the urgent need for digital documentation and inter-institutional cooperation. The creation of a unified register of Cossack cannons and the development of digital museumification are becoming important instruments for heritage preservation.

Issues requiring further discussion include the representation of the concept of “sacred war” in cannon decoration, the adaptation of Baroque visual language to local codes, and the role of digital practices in compensating for physical losses. No less important is the search for a balance between authenticity and interpretative presentation in contemporary museums.

The results obtained in this study open several promising directions for further research. First, a more detailed comparative analysis of decorated cannons of the Hetmanate with contemporaneous European artillery from Central and Western Europe appears particularly relevant. Such a comparison would allow for a clearer differentiation between pan-European Baroque iconographic conventions and specifically Ukrainian symbolic codes, as well as for the identification of channels of artistic transmission between foundry centres.

Second, further research is needed on the regional schools of cannon casting within the territory of the Hetmanate and neighbouring regions. A focused examination of local workshops, masters, and patronage networks could contribute to the reconstruction of stylistic lineages and the attribution of currently anonymous artefacts. This line of inquiry would also deepen understanding of the relationship between individual commissions by members of the Cossack elite and the formation of stable decorative and symbolic canons.

A third important direction concerns the expansion of klironomical analysis to issues of contemporary musealisation and digital heritage. The creation of comprehensive digital catalogues, three-dimensional models, and unified registers of surviving Cossack cannons would make it possible to compensate, at least partially, for the irreversible loss of many monuments.

Such digital practices would also enable new forms of symbolic interpretation, comparative visual analysis, and narrative presentation within museum and educational contexts.

Finally, further interdisciplinary research should address the broader cultural semantics of the concept of “sacred war” and political legitimization as expressed through artillery decoration. An in-depth study of how military objects functioned simultaneously as weapons, sacral symbols, and instruments of social representation would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Baroque visual culture as a whole. In this sense, decorated Cossack cannons may serve as a productive case study for analysing the interaction between power, faith, aesthetics, and cultural memory in early modern Europe.

Thus, the manuscript delineates a promising interdisciplinary field that integrates historical, art-historical, museological, and klironomical approaches to the understanding of artillery heritage as an important component of Ukrainian and European cultural memory.

Conclusion

Summarising the results of the study of the artistic decoration of Cossack artillery of the 17th–18th centuries, it may be concluded that the decorated guns of the Hetmanate period constitute unique figurative and symbolic monuments of Ukrainian Baroque. The analysis conducted made it possible to identify three key groups of decorative elements: phytomorphic ornaments, zoomorphic images, and heraldic-emblematic representations, which together reflect the worldview of the Cossack elite of the time.

The intermediate findings of the research indicate the profound metaphysical content of each element. Phytomorphic ornamentation, in particular S-shaped forms resembling a “heart”, embodied the idea of Ukrainian cordocentrism and the piety of the patrons. The use of acanthus, palm branches, and rose flowers transformed the weapon into a sacral object symbolising “holy war”, the victory of life over death, and the nobility of its owner. Motifs of “flowerpots” and the “grapevine” associated the artillery with the symbolism of the Tree of Life and the defence of the Christian faith.

Inscriptions on the barrels not only enhanced their decorative quality but also fulfilled a clear representational function, consolidating social status and hierarchy within Cossack society. Titular inscriptions often replaced or complemented coats of arms, emphasising the state grandeur of hetmans and colonels.

Zoomorphic images (the lion, unicorn, wolf, and nightingale) endowed the weapons with the magical character of an “unsleeping guard”. The lion and the unicorn symbolised invincible strength and divine truth, while the nightingale acted as a herald of joy and victory.

The compositional structure of the decoration was based on the principles of “vertical dynamism” and triadic unity, corresponding to the technical division of the gun into three parts and at the same time alluding to the Christian symbolism of the Trinity. The use of seraphic images in the muzzle section was interpreted as a prototype of heaven and divine fire.

The primary purpose of the study—to conduct a thorough interdisciplinary analysis of decorated cannons of the Ukrainian Cossacks as figurative and symbolic monuments of the Baroque era—has been fully achieved. Through the integration of historical, art-historical, iconographic, semiotic, and klironomical approaches, the research has demonstrated that Cossack artillery of the 17th and 18th centuries functioned not merely as military equipment, but as complex cultural artefacts embodying worldview, ideological, and representational meanings characteristic of Ukrainian Baroque culture.

The first study task, which involved the analysis of the elements of artistic decoration (phytomorphic, zoomorphic, and heraldic), has been successfully accomplished through the

systematic examination of preserved cannon specimens from museum collections. The study identified the dominant role of phytomorphic ornamentation, the expressive symbolic function of zoomorphic imagery, and the representational significance of heraldic and epigraphic elements. This analytical classification made it possible to reconstruct the internal structure of cannon decoration as a coherent visual language rather than a random assemblage of motifs.

The second task—revealing the metaphysical content of decorative elements—was addressed by interpreting ornaments and images within the broader framework of Baroque symbolism and Ukrainian cultural tradition. The analysis demonstrated that vegetal motifs conveyed ideas of life, resurrection, and spiritual continuity; animal images embodied concepts of divine protection, vigilance, and victory; and inscriptions articulated social hierarchy, legitimacy, and noble identity. In this way, cannon decoration was shown to encode complex metaphysical meanings related to faith, power, and the concept of “sacred war”.

The third study task, focused on examining the architectonics of cannon barrels, was fulfilled through a structural and compositional analysis of decorative arrangements. The study established that the organisation of visual elements was governed by the principles of vertical dynamism, symmetry, and triadic unity, corresponding both to the technological structure of the cannon and to the Christian symbolism of the Trinity. This finding confirms that the spatial distribution of ornament, imagery, and inscriptions was intentional and ideologically meaningful, reinforcing the perception of the cannon as a hierarchically ordered symbolic whole.

Taken together, the resolution of these tasks confirms the internal consistency of the research design and validates the proposed interpretative model. The study substantiates the view of decorated Cossack cannons as “cultivated universes” in which technical force, artistic form, and symbolic meaning are inseparably linked. By achieving its stated aim and addressing each research task in a systematic manner, the article contributes to the advancement of interdisciplinary studies of Ukrainian Baroque heritage and highlights the potential of klironomy as an analytical framework for interpreting material culture as a bearer of cultural memory and identity.

Thus, the study demonstrates that the system of allegorical images on gun barrels was perceived by contemporaries as a “cultivated universe”, in which technical power was harmoniously combined with high aesthetics. Cossack guns functioned not merely as instruments of death but as visual confirmation of the status of the Cossack officer class as “knight-defenders” of Orthodoxy and bearers of European Baroque culture. Despite the fact that a significant portion of these monuments has been lost or removed to foreign museums, the surviving artefacts remain invaluable evidence of the flourishing of domestic foundry art. The results of the study underscore the need for further research and popularisation of this heritage as an integral component of the pan-European cultural context.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that is no conflict of interest.

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