



ABOVE: Silver coin of King Vladimir of Rus-Ukraine
issued about 1000 A.D.

RIGHT: Official Trident Coat of Arms of Ukraine since 1992



TRIDENT

A Brief History of the National Symbol of Ukraine

by Andrew Gregorovich

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Ancient Trident

THE TRIDENT is an ancient design which consists of three upright tines (or teeth) joined across the bottom. It has existed in Ukraine at least 6,000 years and has been found in the Trypilian culture of which an example was discovered by the Dnipro River in 1930 according to V.I. Serhiychuk. One interesting example I have noticed is on the 2,500 year old famous Scythian gold pectoral which has a decorative trident design near the ends. Some ancient Greek coins also carry a trident design and examples of these have been found by archeologists in Ukraine.

The trident, or double trident, was the symbol of power in the ancient Assyrian Empire 2000 B.C. In ancient Greece the trident was the symbol of power of the mythological God of the Sea, Poseidon (or Neptune). It was also used in ancient times as a harpoon for fishing and as a weapon by gladiators fighting for their lives in the Colosseum in ancient Rome.

There are over forty theories on the meaning of the Ukrainian trident but these are all speculation. There have been attempts to link the trident with Celtic and Scandinavian origins influencing Kievan Rus (medieval Ukraine). However, the most probable cultural link is with the Byzantine Empire, the most powerful state in the medieval era. It was the source for Rus-Ukraine of the Christian religion and the dynastic link of King Vladimir with the Imperial family of Constantinople.



Emblem of King Sviatoslav of Rus, ca.960 A.D.
From Bila Vezha

Royal Trident of Kievan Rus

King Sviatoslav about the year 960 had a bident (two tined) royal insignia whose outside edges were virtually identical to the trident adopted by his son Vladimir. The trident was adopted as the symbol of the Kiev dynasty, the royal family of Kiev by King Vladimir of Rus about the year 985. It was in this year that Vladimir probably minted his first coins and included on them the trident symbol. (Vladimir or Vladymyr is the Old Ukrainian form of his name and Volodymyr is modern Ukrainian). In 988 he officially adopted Christianity from Byzantium by baptising the people of Kiev in the Dnipro River. Perhaps the trident became a symbol of the Holy Trinity at this time. Eventually, over two centuries after his death, King Vladimir Ist came to be known as Saint Vladimir.

During his long reign 980-1015 King Vladimir minted gold (zlotnyky, zlato) and silver (sriblyaky, serebro) coins and a variety of trident designs appeared on them. On his coins appeared the statement: "Vladimir on his throne and this is his silver (serebro)."

Ukrainian numismatists (coin experts) say that over 500 coins have been found in Ukraine carrying a trident design. The classic design of the Ukrainian or King Vladimir Trident is found on the coins of King Vladimir Ist. Numismatists list four major Vladimir Trident designs based on the lower part of the design. The designs II to IV were issued 1000-1015 A.D. with a large trident replacing the head of Christ on the reverse side of the coin. At least twelve variations of an artistically pleasing trident design were used on various coins by King Vladimir.



Coins of King Vladimir with the interwoven trident design.

ABOVE: 27 mm diameter 2.71 grams.

BELOW: 26 mm diam. They are slightly larger than an American quarter.

In addition to King Sviatopolk, King Vladimir's sons Iziaslav, Yaroslav and Mstyslav issued silver coins to raise the prestige of the state but apparently few were minted. Each king had his own distinctive variations of the trident none of which was identical to that of their father Vladimir. The most important variation was probably that of King Yaroslav, the greatest ruler of the Kievan Rus-Ukraine Kingdom. His version, found on his coins, was a simplified outline. He also used a more ornate version.

Although Saint Vladimir Christianized his nation, he did not include a cross on his trident design and the classic Vladimir Trident does not have a cross. There is a cross above the middle tine of some of his coins. However his sons, except Yaroslav, did include a crosslet.



ABOVE LEFT:
Coin of King
Sviatopolk.



ABOVE RIGHT:
Silver coin of King
Yaroslav the Wise.

RIGHT:
Ring with a Royal
Trident insignia.



Trident design on a brick
from the Desyatina
Church in Kiev, 980s.
From *Illustrovana Istorია*
by M. Hrushevsky.

Vladimir's relative, Kniaz Sviatopolk, turned the trident into a bident with the left tine as a cross. Iziaslav, and Mstyslav included a cross bar near the top of the middle tine of their tridents to represent the Christian character of their states. King Yaroslav's children Iziaslav and Vsevolod adopted highly simplified designs of a trident and a bident which deteriorated with succeeding generations leaving no trace of the original design of Vladimir.

In the early 1100s the trident was replaced as the national symbol by Saint Michael the Archangel. St. Michael has remained the patron saint of the City of Kiev up to the present day. A wonderful monument of St. Michael a couple of years ago was raised in Independence square to mark the center of Kiev and Ukraine.

Except for Hetman Khmelnytsky's three pointed coat of arms design, which is a very distant echo of the Vladimir Trident, by the time of the Ukrainian Cossacks 1500-1775 there seems to be no memory of the Vladimir Trident. It became lost to Ukraine for over 700 years until Professor Michael Hrushevsky proposed it in 1918 as the modern coat of arms.

Popular Trident in the Culture of Rus and Modern Ukraine

According to Roman Klemkevich in *Ukraine: A Concise Encyclopedia*: "Tridents and bidents are found on many objects of that period: coins, stones, and bricks of significant buildings (palaces, castles, cathedrals, etc.), rings and bronze breast medallions, lead seals used as toll devices, ceramics, manuscripts." (vol. 1, p. 31). He says that there are now known about 200 variant trident designs.

The trident went far beyond its use on the coins and jewelry of the Kiev Royal family. Bricks of the Desyatina Church in Kiev carried the Vladimir Trident because it was built by him in 988-996. Trident designs also appeared in the interior decoration of St. Sophia Cathedral, the Mother Church of Ukraine. Even today there are many Ukrainian churches around the world which incorporate trident designs. Some churches, such as one in Oshawa, Ontario, carry a very clear Vladimir Trident prominently in their interior decoration.

Pottery of medieval Rus-Ukraine carried simple trident designs. Ornate trident designs have appeared in medieval illuminated manuscripts. Trident designs have appeared in the folk culture in embroidery, weaving and pottery. Tridents were considered a powerful omen for protection against evil and were painted onto peasant houses in Ukraine over the centuries. In the folk art of Western Ukraine, especially Hutsul, there are candleabras made of wood or pottery in the form of a trident. These were a subtle manifestation of Ukrainian resistance to Soviet rule which had so thoroughly wiped out the symbol. In modern times tridents have appeared on pysankas, the decorated Ukrainian Easter eggs, and it was even used as an emblem by a Ukrainian hockey team in North America.

There are many theories on the origin and meaning of the Ukrainian Trident which is *tryzub* (pronounced tre-zoob) in Ukrainian. For example, it is thought by some writers to be derived from the anchor of a ship, to represent an anagram of King Vladimir, an upside down church banner, or a bird diving down. The earliest coins of King Vladimir had a small trident design beside the king on the obverse side and the head of Jesus Christ on the reverse side. A large trident design replaced Christ on later coins and some writers think it therefore has a magic or religious significance perhaps representing the trinity.

King Vladimir's interwoven trident design is considered the classic version of this emblem and was the model for the heraldic coat of arms officially adopted by the independent governments of Ukraine in 1918 and in 1992. The Vladimir Trident is the format of the present official coat of arms of Ukraine today.

Although many believe the trident has a mystical meaning, in my opinion the Ukrainian Trident represents only a distinctive and esthetically pleasing design with no mythological, religious or other significance except that it was chosen as the symbol of the Kiev royal family. It has become a powerful symbol as the coat of arms of independent Ukraine and the Ukrainian nation.



Armed Trident of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists

The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists was founded in Vienna in 1929 as a political movement to promote the independence of Ukraine. OUN adopted as its symbol the armed trident (with a sword replacing the middle tine to symbolize Ukraine's armed struggle for independence) which was to remain until Ukraine became independent and then be replaced by the trident of King Vladimir. The OUN Trident was designed by R. Lisovsky.



Ukrainian Canadian Trident/ Maple Leaf Symbol

In the 1920s a Ukrainian Canadian school teacher in Alberta thought about combining the emblems of Ukraine and Canada to symbolize the Ukrainian Cana-

dian community. After Alexander Gregorovich was elected the first national President of the Ukrainian National Federation of Canada in 1932 he was able to realize his idea. He designed the official seal of the UNF which included a trident on top of a Canadian maple leaf. He chose the armed trident which symbolized Ukraine's struggle for independence. Mr. Gregorovich was the first person to combine Canada's maple leaf emblem with Ukraine's trident design to create an emblem representing the dual heritage of Ukrainian Canadians. He personally conceived and drew the UNF official seal (pechatka). However, he made the sword a more refined design than that on the OUN emblem. His idea has been copied by many Ukrainian Canadian organizations such as the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and the Saskatchewan Teachers of Ukrainian.

Jewelry carrying the trident design is very common in North America and is sold in Ukrainian bookstores. There are gold rings, brooches, necklaces and lapel pins, mostly with the Vladimir Trident design. However there are also some with the Trident / Maple Leaf design.



Trident in American Organizations

The Ukrainian Workingmen's Association founded in 1910 had used as its symbol the rearing lion which had been a western Ukrainian symbol. When it changed its name to the Ukrainian Fraternal Association it also chose a new organizational symbol with three elements. It combined the Ukrainian Vladimir Trident with the American and Canadian flags to represent the triple heritage of its members and the scope of its activities in the USA and Canada. The UFA has for many decades used the trident as a decoration for its conventions and for the stage of its annual festival in Verkhovina Resort, Glen Spey, N.Y. In the United States the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America created a symbol combining the Saint Vladimir Trident with the Statue of Liberty which had also been used by the UNA.



Trident Symbols of Organizations

The most famous Ukrainian organization today is Rukh (Movement) which was the organization which spear-headed the Ukrainian drive to independence under the leadership of Ivan Drach, Dmytro Pavlychko, V. Chornovil, L. Lukyanenko and others. The name was formed into a trident design.

A great variety and number of Ukrainian organizations have adopted various tridents to symbolize their organizations. The Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences (UVAN) established by Prof. J.B. Rudnyckyj in Winnipeg adopted the King Yaroslav Trident as its symbol. The St. Vladimir Institute in Toronto also adopted a simple stylized trident and woodcut artist Jacques Hnizdovsky created a special symbol for the St. Vladimir Library combining a stylized book with a trident.

Plast, the Scout association, uses a Vladimir Emblem combined with the international scout design and SUM, the Ukrainian Youth Association, has formed a trident symbol out of the Ukrainian initials of its name (CYM). The Ukrainian Canadian Art Foundation in Toronto has formed a trident out of its initials. The Ukrainian Self-Reliance League of Canada has formed a trident out of the initial letters of its name. Air Ukraine, the airline of independent Ukraine today, has taken the old theory that the Ukrainian trident represents a diving bird and has adopted it for its emblem.

Tridents on Books

Books have also carried trident designs. The 1939 *History of Ukraine* by D. Doroshenko had a trident on its cover as did the 1941 history of Ukraine by W.E.D. Allen. The recent book *Ukraine and Ukrainians Throughout the World*, edited by Ann Lencyk Pawliczko published by the University of Toronto Press in 1994 carried a prominent Vladimir Trident on its cover and spine. Trident designs have also appeared on Ex Libris book plates.

Ukrainian World Congress

The World Congress of Free Ukrainians founded in 1967 in New York city adopted an emblem with a Vladimir Trident floating over the globe which represented the 50,000,000 Ukrainians in Ukraine and scattered around the world. It was not intended to signify



that Ukrainians planned to conquer the world as did the Soviet Union's Hammer and Sickle emblem on top of the world. After the Declaration of Independence by Ukraine on August 24, 1991 the organization changed its name to the Ukrainian World Congress with permanent headquarters in Toronto, Canada. At its congresses the main decorative element has often been the trident.

Soviet Union Versus the Ukrainian Trident

When the Ukrainian National Republic declared its independence from the Russian Empire on January 22, 1918 President Michael Hrushevsky proposed the Vladimir Trident for the Coat of Arms in February. The design was officially approved on March 22, 1918 by the Central Rada (Parliament). The most familiar design was the small coat of arms with a laurel wreath. When it was conquered by Soviet Russia this became the symbol for Ukraine and its struggle for independence which was widely used by free Ukrainians in the western world.

The Soviet Government, on behalf of Communist Moscow, was a fierce opponent of the trident symbol heritage of Ukraine. For example, in city hall square of Lviv there was a monument of Poseidon, God of the Seas, holding a trident. The Soviet government cut the trident off the top and it looked as if he was holding a stick. The USSR systematically removed all tridents from the territory of Ukraine which had been created by the independent Ukrainian National Republic in 1918-21.

For example, many grave stones of soldiers who fought for the Ukrainian National Republic were removed by the Soviet government. When I visited the Lychakivsky Cemetery in Lviv in 1975, I was told quietly where to look for the last surviving trident on a gravestone. By contrast, in the freedom of the western world there are many gravestones which have a trident design.



Coat of Arms officially adopted on March 22, 1918.
 LEFT: Great Coat of Arms of the Ukrainian National Republic 1918-21.
 CENTER: the Small Coat of Arms which was the most widespread version.
 RIGHT: The Great Seal of Ukraine, by Vasyl Krychevsky.

The USSR blackened and ridiculed the trident to its citizens in an attempt to compromise and destroy any respect Ukrainians had for their ancient symbol. For example, Soviet Ukrainian history books were not allowed to print images of the trident. This ban included the Vladimir Trident on medieval coins and the 1918 Trident of independent Ukraine. Both were completely banned by the Soviet censors in Ukraine.

Soviet propaganda linked the trident with the Nazi German swastika to discredit it and to give Ukrainians the image that it was a traitorous and evil symbol. Good examples of anti-Ukrainian and anti-Trident Soviet propaganda are the two books *Pid Chuzhymy Praporamy* by V. Bielyayev and M. Rudnytsky with clever drawings by V. Hryhoriev (Kyiv: Radyansky Pysmennyk, 1956) and *Liudy Bez Batkivshchyny* by Ya. Galan (Kyiv: Derzh. Vydvo Khudozhnoyi Literatury, 1952).

However, Germany during the WWII occupation of Ukraine from 1941 to 1944 did not allow the trident to be used as a symbol of Ukraine. The reason is simple. Germany did not plan to allow an independent Ukraine to exist. Ukraine was to be the *lebensraum*, or living space, for the German nation and the country was to be filled with German colonists. Ukrainians were to be executed, exiled or used as slave labor once the war was won by Germany because Hitler coveted the rich black earth of Ukraine. The Germans even sent trainloads of black Ukrainian earth to Germany. With Ukraine, Hitler said, no one will starve Germany again. An independent Ukraine symbolized by the trident was totally against all Hitler's plans for the German Reich.

For the 1988 millennium of Christianity in Rus' the Soviet Union issued what appeared to be a replica of a coin of King Vladimir. However the reverse was left completely blank because on the original coin a large Vladimir Trident was on this side.

But Soviet Ukraine could not eliminate the trident. In May 1989, during the 175th Anniversary celebration of Shevchenko's birth in Shevchenko Park in front of the University in Kiev, I saw from the speaker's platform Ukrainian blue and yellow flags and tridents pop up out of the crowds and pointed them out to Dmytro Pavlychko. Rukh, which was the movement and powerhouse for Ukrainian independence, displayed the Vladimir Trident at its congresses even before Ukraine was independent. Today Moscow's censorship efforts



LEFT:
Book by Ya. Galan.

BELOW:
Soviet anti-Ukrainian and anti-trident propaganda cartoon from Bielyayev



Official Coat of Arms of Ukraine, 1992, designed by Vasyl Lopata

have proven futile since there are now tens of millions of tridents in Ukraine. They appear on the postage stamps, on official government documents, on passports and on Ukrainian coins and paper currency such as the 1,000,000 karbovantsi kupon. The trident today is a positive symbol. The Trident symbolizes Ukraine.



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Ukraine Officially Adopts the Trident Coat of Arms

One of the earliest laws passed by Ukraine, on February 19, 1992, was the adoption of the Vladimir Trident as its official coat of arms, the blue and yellow national flag and the national anthem *Ukraine Still Lives*. The government invited artist Vasyl Lopata to create the official design of the Vladimir Trident on a Shield as its coat of arms. The official colors are a gold or yellow trident on an azure (light blue) shield. Sometimes the trident has been used on the national sky blue and golden yellow flag of Ukraine.

The government of Ukraine quickly approved the trident for use on all letterheads of the government and for use on the signs at the entrance of all government office buildings and ministries. The Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) of Ukraine publishes an information publication *Vidomosti* which carries the official trident on its cover and title page.

The Ukrainian Trident has also visited space. When NASA sent the Ukrainian Colonel Leonid Kadenyuk into space he was wearing the trident badge of the National Space Agency of Ukraine as well as a Ukrainian flag on his right shoulder and an American flag on his left.

Postage Stamps and Currency

Independent Ukraine in 1918 took steps to produce postage stamps and currency carrying the trident coat of arms as symbols of its independence. Because there were huge stocks of stamps of the Russian Empire in Ukraine it was decided to overprint them with a trident to validate them as postage for use in Ukraine. Stamp collectors have identified hundreds of variations in these trident overprints and they are a subject of much interest. Ukraine also printed a series of new stamps carrying trident designs.

Currency was also printed by Ukraine in 1918 and these banknotes had the trident as a prominent design feature. Because of the difficulty of quickly minting metal coins Ukraine printed paper shah "coins" which were like its stamps and used these as small change with its banknotes.



Stamps of Ukraine 1918-21

When modern Ukraine became independent on August 24, 1991 plans were immediately implemented by the government of President Leonid Kravchuk to design and print banknotes and postage stamps. The first currency of Ukraine (karbovantsi), was designed by artist Vasyl Lopata and was printed in Canada. How-



A one million karbovantsi bank note with trident.

ever, surprisingly no tridents appeared on this first series of banknotes. The reason was that they were printed before Ukraine had officially adopted the trident as its coat of arms. The trident did appear on subsequent banknotes (kupons) of Ukraine, for example on the 500,000 Karbovantsiv banknote of 1994 and the 1,000,000 Karbovantsiv banknote of 1995 featuring the Shevchenko monument in Kiev.

Word Trident as a Symbol

Sometimes the word trident itself is used in English to symbolize Ukraine or Ukrainians. The Trident Press in Winnipeg was founded in 1909 to publish the *Ukrainian Voice* newspaper. There have been magazines that were named Trident. In Paris *Tryzub* was published 1925. In New York *The Trident* was published 1937-1941 and in Chicago *The Trident Quarterly* was published in the 1960s. In Chicago there has been a Trident Savings & Loan Association. Many Ukrainian credit unions have adopted the trident as their symbol and it appears on every personal check used by their patrons. Perhaps it should be mentioned that two letters of the Ukrainian Cyrillic alphabet, sh and shch, have the appearance of a trident.

Trident on Publications

There have been a great many publications which have incorporated a trident design on their cover or in their masthead. For example *Istoria Ukrainy* (History of Ukraine) was published in 1918 "In the second year of the rebuilding of the Ukrainian state with a prominent trident on the cover. *The Ukrainian Review* (London, Eng.) in 1989 used a stylized trident on its cover. The 1940 Yearbook of the Ukrainian Youth League of North America combined the trident design with symbols of the New York World's Fair and the US flag.

Many newspapers use the Vladimir Trident in the masthead of their front page. For example, *Ukrainian Echo* (Homin Ukrainy) in Toronto, *Meta* newspaper from Philadelphia, *Ukrainian Voice* (Winnipeg), *Svoboda* (New Jersey), and *Ukrainski Visti* (Detroit) all use the trident in their masthead.

The Trident Coat of Arms on a shield is a very powerful symbol of Ukraine as an independent state today. Like the American Eagle of the USA and the Maple Leaf of Canada, the Trident of Ukraine has become a popular symbol of the country. It is a strong link between Ukraine and its heritage 1,000 years ago in Kievan Rus. ■



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The Russian historian Nicholas Karamzin in 1815 was the first to express interest in the Rurikovich Trident as it is known in Russian history. The two publications of Andrusiak and Sichynsky are very useful in providing a list of older literature on the subject. It is of interest that because of strict Soviet censorship these two publications are virtually unknown in Ukraine today.

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Organizational Emblems

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Ukrainian National Federation

