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"Khozhenie to the Russian Land": The image of Kherson Province in Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1842) and in Alexander Schmidt's *Materials for the Geography and Statistics of Russia: Kherson Province* (1863)

*Alina V. Ilinykh*¹
*Nataliya V. Khalina*²
*Tatiana V. Chukanova*³

^{1, 2, 3} Altai State University, Barnaul, Russian Federation

¹ rouze18@mail.ru

² nkhalkina@yandex.ru

³ chukanova.64@mail.ru

Abstract. This article explores the construction of the artistic and essayistic image of Kherson Province in Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1842) and in Alexander Schmidt's *Materials for the Geography and Statistics of Russia: Kherson Province* (1863). In Gogol's narrative, Kherson Province emerges as a travestied 'paradise' space, conveyed through corresponding linguistic representations. Schmidt, through derivational sequences, outlines the mechanism by which the everyday space of the Kherson steppes – or the wild steppe – transforms into a non-hostile territory, a process dominated by the movement "towards a civil order." The use by both Gogol and Schmidt of individually "edited" versions of the Old Russian genre of *khozhenie* (a walking, or pilgrimage narrative) allows the authors to reconstruct the image of Southern Russia. They portray its genesis as a component of "Holy Russia" – the inner form of the language that constitutes a thinking personality of the Russian Empire.

Keywords: "khozhenie" (pilgrimage), Nikolay V. Gogol, *Dead Souls*, Alexander Schmidt, Kherson Province, semantic derivation, derivational sequences, predicative categorization of nation mental space, place image, imagology

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Научная статья
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**«Хожение по Земле Русской»: образ
Херсонской губернии в «Мертвых душах» (1842)
Н.В. Гоголя и в «Материалах для географии
и статистики России. Херсонская губерния» (1863)
А.О. Шмидта**

*Алина Валентиновна Ильиных¹
Наталья Васильевна Халина²
Татьяна Викторовна Чуканова³*

^{1, 2, 3} Алтайский государственный университет, Барнаул, Россия

¹ rouze18@mail.ru

² nkhalina@yandex.ru

³ chukanova.64@mail.ru

Аннотация. Освоение «новых» территорий – сложный процесс не только в государственно-экономическом, но и в семиотико-семантическом плане: ранее «чужие» территории должны были начать идентифицироваться для населения как «свои». Необходима имагологическая работа, способствующая выработке эмоциональной эмпатии новых территорий и их семантическому переходу из статуса «неповседневного» в статус «повседневно, коммуникативно обыденного». В качестве семантически осваиваемых и присваиваемых в XIX в. Российской империей территорий берутся Херсонская губерния и Крым. Изменению их имагологического статуса способствуют художественные и очерковые нарративы, примерами которых являются «Мертвые души» (1842) Н.В. Гоголя и «Материалы для географии и статистики России. Херсонская губерния» (1863) А.О. Шмидта. Херсонский сюжет романа Гоголя представляет собой художественный итог немногим более чем 70-летнего существования в пределах Российской империи новой административной единицы на порубежных территориях Северного Причерноморья и Приазовья – Новороссийской губернии, или Новороссии. К середине 1830-х гг. крымское пространство должно было стать для жителя Российской империи реалией его обыденной жизни (Alltag) и элементом его повседневности

(Alltäglichkeit). Чичиковской «деловой проект» в «Мертвых душах» позиционируется Гоголем как способ «оповедневния», сведения к исподу «крымской рациональности» посредством комической обработки идей ‘греческого проекта’ Екатерины II, реализуемого через присоединение Крыма, благодаря чему Россия получала свою долю античного наследства и возвращалась туда, где брало начало русское христианство, принятное в древнем Херсонесе, в память о котором был назван вновь построенный Херсон. Херсонская губерния становится центральным предметом в очерковом исследовании А.О. Шмидта. В «Историческом введении» книги воссоздается «неповседневная реальность» Херсонской губернии. Номинацией данной территории становится обозначение ‘Херсонские степи’, характеризуемое как «узел многих разнохарактерных и обширных пространств». В качестве единиц измерения территории автором берутся ‘пространство’ и ‘страна’. В повествовании Н.В. Гоголя рисуется облик Херсонской губернии как травестируемого ‘райского’ пространства, представленного репрезентантами-эмпативами (маркерами травестийной эмпатии): ‘херсонский помещик’, ‘умершие души’, ‘мертвые души’, ‘счастливое переселение’, ‘настоящий херсонский помещик’, ‘херсонские деревни’, ‘земли в Таврической и Херсонской губерниях’, ‘Чичикова слободка’, ‘сельцо Павловское’ ‘в Херсонскую их!’ и т.д. В очерковом нарративе А.О. Шмидта акцент делается на истории херсонской степи как великого пути, представленного лингвоментальными конструктами: ‘естественный путь в Европу всех кочевых племен Азии’, ‘станция временного сидения до сдвижения другими выходцами’; ‘узел многих разнохарактерных и обширных пространств’ и т.д. Для воссоздания образа Южной Руси Н.В. Гоголь и А.О. Шмидт используют древнерусские аллюзии (образ Земли Русской), частью которых выступают реминисценции средневекового жанра хожения, моделирующие образ Святой Руси. Это позволяет внести в описание социально-исторической повседневности сакральный оттенок.

Ключевые слова: хожение, Н.В. Гоголь, «Мертвые души», А.О. Шмидт, Херсонская губерния, семантическая деривация, деривационные последовательности, предикативная категоризация ментального пространства нации, образ места, имагология

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In June–July of 1835, following his visit to relatives in Malorossiya (Little Russia), Gogol went on a trip to the Crimea, after which he began to work on *Dead Souls*. This is confirmed in a letter dated October 7, written upon his return to St. Petersburg. In it, while also requesting that Pushkin send back a comedy he had submitted for the poet's feedback (as he was in urgent need of money and had to deliver the play to the actors), Gogol announced, "I have begun to write *Dead Souls*. The plot has expanded into a very long novel and, it seems, will be quite amusing. But now I have halted at the third chapter. I am seeking a good informant with whom I can become briefly acquainted. I want to show in this novel, if only from one perspective, all of Russia" [1. P. 375].

Earlier, in a letter from Poltava dated July 15, Gogol had already hinted at the creative ferment spurred by his travels. Writing to Vasily A. Zhukovsky, he asked the poet to petition the Empress to retain his associate professorship in the Department of General History at St. Petersburg University, which was in jeopardy due to his absence during the Crimean trip – a journey he claimed was necessary to restore his health. In the same letter, the writer-professor described the abundance of ideas generated by his voyages through the southern Russian territories, "A great many plots and plans accumulated during my travels, so that if not for the hot summer, I would have now filled a great deal of paper. But the heat inspires a terrible laziness, and only a tenth has been committed to paper and yearns to be read to you" [2. P. 369–370].

The plot of Gogol's "very long novel" can be seen as an artistic reflection on the historical development of the Southern Russian borderlands. Chronologically, it represents a culmination of just over seventy years of existence for the Novorossiysk province (Novorossiya) – a new province carved from the Northern Black Sea and Azov regions that had been incorporated into the Russian Empire. This period began with the manifesto of November 21, 1764, which established the Little Russian Collegium. This act effectively abolished the restoration of various ancient rights of Malorossiya (Little Russia), returning it in the state of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, the "long novel" can also be interpreted as an analytical outcome of the more than fifty years following the absorption of the Crimean territories into the Russian Empire. This process was formally initiated in 1783, when Grigory A. Potemkin drafted the document that formed the basis for

the supreme manifesto, "On the Acceptance of the Crimean Peninsula, Taman Island and the Entire Kuban Side under the Russian State." The manifesto was signed by Empress Catherine II on April 8 (19), 1783 [3].

By the mid-1830s, the Crimean space was becoming integrated into the Russian imperial consciousness as both a tangible reality of everyday life (Alltag) and a normalized element of daily routine (Alltäglichkeit) [4]. A clear indication of this process was the 1834 publication of the *Guide du voyageur en Crimée* by Charles Montandon, a Swiss native who had taken up permanent residence in Crimea [5]. The very existence of such a guide-book signified the positioning of Crimea as a direct component of the southern Russian territories. This, in turn, testified to two significant developments: a) its transition from the status of a remote or "uninhabited" imperial periphery to a categorized and accessible space for everyday travel; and b) its transformation into a conceptual "ligament" within the Russian daily life. This integration served as a "melting pot of rationality" for the "Russian peasant," ultimately contributing to an evolving mental map of the empire's space and borders for its citizens.

In his analysis of everyday life as a differentiating concept that distinguishes one phenomenon from another, Bernhard Waldenfels emphasizes its capacity to alter the boundaries and meanings of differentiable spheres based on place, time, environment, and culture [4]. Within this framework, the 'everyday' is interpreted as that which is familiar, orderly, and proximate. This stands in direct contrast to the 'non-ordinary,' which exists as the unusual, outside the habitual order, and the distant.

B. Waldenfels conceptualizes everyday life – encompassing everyday knowledge, politics, law, history, art, and even phenomena like "marching saints" – as a domain of changeable and variable rationality. This rationality is embodied in semantic, regularly recurring, and transparent relationships that operate across diverse fields and styles of rational thought. It is thus appropriate to interpret the 1830s as the period during which a distinct "Novorossiysk rationality" was formed, characterized by a process of pluralization and the acquisition of what might be termed a "Crimean (or ancient) crucible of rationality." In Waldenfels's conception of everyday life as a crucible of rationality, pluralization signifies that an infinite number of forms of irrationality are met by specific, historically shifting forms of rationality. This framework provides a basis for understanding the diversity of realities – conditionally named Malorossiyan (Little Russian) and Great Russian –

that collectively constituted a single geopolitical and geopoetic territorial integrity. The notion of this territorial and semantic integrity was emphasized in the document "Note on Malorossiya (Little Russia)" [6], prepared for Catherine II to justify the policy on the status of the Hetmanate. The "Note" argued that the Malorossiyan people had since ancient times been defined as directly Russian. It attributed their historical separation to the weakened power of the Grand Dukes of Kiev, which led the people into a state of bankruptcy and internal ruin, ultimately inflicting considerable damage on the interests of the Russian state.

Building upon Waldenfels's concept of everyday life as a process through which individuals and societies are formed and organized, we can identify a downward orientation in this movement, which Max Weber defined as "familiarization" – a process of settling in, accomplished through education, the mastery of traditions, and the reinforcement of social norms. In this context, Chichikov's adventure in Gogol's *Dead Souls* can be interpreted as a process of "informing" reducing to *the underside*¹ of "Crimean rationality." This rationality, which had been arbitrarily elevated to the status of the "innocent" and the "ancient," is subjected to a comic re-processing. The novel engages ironically with the ideas of Catherine II's 'Greek Project,' which envisioned the annexation of the Crimea. As Andrei Zorin notes, this ideology posited that with the Crimea, "Russia received its share of the ancient inheritance" and returned to the place where "Russian Christianity originated" [7. P. 100] – a reference to ancient Chersonesus, whose memory was evoked in the naming of the newly built city of Kherson [8. P. 81–82].

Accordingly, to achieve the objective of portraying the "underside" or the "underbelly" of Russia in *Dead Souls*, Gogol selects a narrative method rooted in the ancient tradition of the *khozhenie* – a "walking," or a narrative

¹ *The underside* in V.I. Dahl's *Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language* is explained as 'the side or plane of an object facing down to the ground; sometimes even the bottom or the base'. Semantically correlated and derived from this unit are the underclothes – in the underclothes, under the underclothes that exist; the bottom, on which, above which there are other objects / Underclothes. Iconography. A caftan under a cloak; colloquially: trousers, trousers, pantaloons, trousers; under-wear – the underworld, the dwelling of sinful souls, hell, pitch, Tartarus, the underworld kingdom.

of a "traveler," "wanderer," "pilgrim," "skaska," or "embassy." This approach frames Russian artistic culture as a vivid reflection of a worldview with medieval antecedents, one that synthesizes political, moral, and artistic interests with the creative vision of the author.

Compositionally, pilgrimage and *khozhenie*¹ are distinguished by inserted episodes of legendary biblical content (not found in diplomatic and commercial walks), which correlate with geographical places (Kherson Province in *Dead Souls*), or with "shrines" and monuments of Christian culture, or, as in Gogol's case, with memories and symbolic reminders of antiquity. A clear example of this is Gogol's use of the names Themistocles and Alcides for Manilov's sons.

The name 'Themistocles' is a neologism formed by combining the name of Themistocles (c. 524–459 BC) – the Athenian statesman and commander of the Greco-Persian wars, a "founding father" of Athenian democracy who sought to establish Athens as a maritime power and who died in Asia Minor – with the letter 'jus' (Я) from the Old Slavic alphabet. This letter, which denoted Old Slavic nasal vowels, lost its nasal quality around the tenth century. It is generally held that both the small *jus* (ꙗ) and large *jus* (ꙗ) derive from a specialized form of the Greek letter αλφα. In Russian, the small *jus* (ꙗ) evolved into the modern letter 'Ya' (Я), while in Polish, its phonetic counterparts are represented by 'ę' and 'ą'.

In an attempt to demonstrate that the quality of his offspring's education corresponds to the *gravitas* of their classical names, the progressive father asks Themistocles to name the most significant cities in France and Russia:

"Themistocles!" said Manilov, addressing the older boy, who was making efforts to free his chin from the napkin the lackey had tied around it. Chichikov raised an eyebrow slightly on hearing this partly Greek name, to which, for some unknown reason, Manilov gave the ending "-us," but tried at once to bring his face back to its usual state. "Themistocles, tell me, what is the best city in France?"

Themistocles successfully demonstrates the required knowledge, for which Chichikov praises him highly: " The smarty! ", " such knowledge, at such an

¹ It is plausible to interpret Gogol's journey to the Crimea as a form of pilgrimage in its own right, not only to "get dirty in mineral mud," as an associate professor at the Department of General History of St. Petersburg University informs Zhukovsky in his letter dated July 15, 1835.

age!", "this child will have great abilities." In response, the grateful Manilov notes that this son, unlike his other son Alcides, who is less quick-witted, possesses a distinct set of talents. Manilov presents these talents as a suitable foundation for a future career in the diplomatic corps for Themistocles[us]es:

Oh, you still don't know him," responded Manilov, "he has an exceeding amount of wit. The younger one now, Alkides, this one is not so quick, but that one, as soon as he meets something, a bug or a gnat, his eyes suddenly start rolling; he runs after it and investigates it at once. I intend him for the diplomatic line. Themistocles," he went on, again addressing the boy, "want to be an ambassador?" "Yes," replied Themistocles, chewing his bread and wagging his head right and left.

The name of Manilov's second son, Alcides, also pays tribute to antiquity, though its significance is mythological rather than political. "Alcides" (from the Greek *alke*, meaning 'power') was the name borne by Hercules before his encounter with the Pythia. At birth, Hercules was given the name Palemon. In mythological tradition, he is often referred to as Alcides, denoting his descent from his grandfather, Alcaeus. This patronymic was established to affirm his earthly lineage through his nominal father, Amphitryon, the next in seniority, despite the belief that his true father was Zeus. Thus, the hero's full, original name was Palemon Alcides. The name "Hercules" itself, meaning 'glorified by Hera,' was bestowed upon him later by the prophetic priestess of the Delphic Oracle at the temple of Apollo on the slopes of Mount Parnassus.

The recognition of the ancient motif in *Dead Souls*, which ostensibly provides a degree of ontological security to the Russian way of life, simultaneously calls into question not so much its reasonableness as its very intelligibility. According to the postulates of theories of "everyday-unimportant", daily life must possess its own distinct character, wisdom, and experiential knowledge, "Everyday life has its own experience and its own wisdom, its own face, its foresight, its repeatability, but also its strangeness, its weekdays and its holidays" [9. P. 72]. Within this framework, the human is conceived as an "unfixed" animal¹ existing "on the threshold between the

¹ Waldenfels, in order to confirm his thesis that "human culture is unthinkable without contrasting the everyday and the innocent," appeals to the "life experience" of animals, "If, for example, we allow ourselves to speculate a little about the daily life of a bee or a lion, then, naturally, the question arises: what is the daily life of a bee or a lion? The animal, according to all our experience, is 'rigidly fixed' through instinct and a genetic program. It has its own environment, within the boundaries of which its behavior

ordinary and the unusual", where these two states relate to one another as foreground and background, or as front and back.

For Gogol, the fundamental flaw of the "Novorossiysk policy" lies in its attribution of a metamorphosis – worthy of a Greek mythological plot and transforming individuals from "scoundrels into excellent subjects" – solely to the fact of their resettlement to the Kherson lands. This logic effectively assigns these territories a paradisiacal status. As Vladislav Krivonos suggests, translating this idea into the language of Christian theology implies that "the very nature of man and his being 'in the resurrection' will radically change" [10. P. 375]. However, such a transcendence of the threshold between the ordinary and the unusual, and the emergence onto a "new earth" marked as Edenic, can only occur, within the novel's logic, "on the model of the resurrection of the dead, who, thanks to Chichikov's ingenuity, became as if alive" [8. P. 81].

Scholars have suggested that in designing his plot, Gogol, drawing on his background as a former employee of the Department of General History at St. Petersburg University, may have adapted a practice from Roman military history. It is documented that during the financing of military campaigns, Caesar would distribute pay intended for soldiers who had died in previous engagements to the surviving legionnaires; this fund was known as *mortuus animarum*, or "dead souls."

As an epic narrative, the work was distinguished by its schematic features, which informed the reader – a participant in the creation of a collective history – about real historical events. This generic convention compelled the author-narrator to strive for an accurate depiction of occurrences in which he was a participant or witness. Within these narrative "sketches" (*khozhdeniya*), the writer's moral character, literary talent, and depth of thought were made visible. The level of imagery – that is, the capacity to verbally reconstruct the essence of an event and thereby elicit a corresponding reflective response aligned with the "worldview of the modern era" (Viktor V. Vinogradov) – is determined, according to Sofiya P. Lopushanskaya, by the "language of a thinking personality" [11]. The core of this "language of a thinking personality," as the scholar argues, dictates the co-existence of concrete and abstract spatial representations within language,

and perception are carried out. Is it a holiday for a cat when it basks in the sun? Does she transform herself by indulging in 'endless daydreams'?"

as well as the predominance of either figurative or rational principles [11–14]. Thus, the figurative concretization of described events serves as a method for supplementing or compensating for an underdeveloped system of abstract thinking [14].

The categories of space and time are fundamental to non-objective reality, which holds significant meaning for everyday experience [15]. The study of "imaginary" and "real" spatial images or earthly space enables scholars to identify the "habits of consciousness" characteristic of people in antiquity and the Middle Ages, revealing their inherent modes of assessing reality. In both Western and Russian medieval thought, the concept of space is inextricably linked to the relationship between the earthly and the otherworldly, the mundane and the sacred, the familiar and the unknown. Consequently, Gogol's use of the mental scenario of "khozhenie" as a mental framework to transcribe real events and relations of his own era allows him to employ "mental moves" that constitute these "habits of consciousness," thereby predisposing to a favorable and immediate engagement with the literary material. The *khozhenie* genre offers several distinct advantages for this purpose: 1) if the reader trusts the writer, they are more likely to accept the writer's assessment of reality and the veracity of the events described; 2) an intensified focus on a particular facet of life allows the reader to diversify their own "habits of consciousness"; 3) the genre employs the traditional stylistic device of "stringing," a feature common in folk art used to describe a complex object by first naming a larger entity, followed by a chain of progressively smaller components; 4) when describing objects and events of particular importance, the travel writer could deviate from a simple style and adopt a more elevated register, utilizing complex syntax, rhythmic speech patterns, and alliteration.

Within the *khozhenie* genre, everyday life – the writer's presence within an event, their placement of themselves within a specific, real locus that is juxtaposed with both other mundane spaces and a non-ordinary realm – becomes the signifier for those extraordinary spaces. This is achieved by transforming ordinary actions into substitutes that function as singular signs: copies, reproductions, or symbols of a higher reality [16]. Gogol adheres to the established conventions of the "walking" genre in the introduction to *Dead Souls*. As per these conventions, the introduction is designed to: a) acknowledge the tastes and expectations of his contemporaries; b) secure the reader's trust; c) assure the public of piety and moral standing;

d) assert the truthfulness of his narrative, convincing the audience that it is not a work of fiction; e) persuade the reader that everything recounted was witnessed directly by the author "with his own sinful eyes":

Through the gates of the inn in the provincial town of N. drove a rather handsome, smallish spring britzka, of the sort driven around in by bachelors: retired lieutenant colonels, staff captains, landowners possessed of some hundred peasant souls – in short, all those known as gentlemen of the middling sort. In the britzka sat a gentleman, not handsome, but also not bad-looking, neither too fat nor too thin; you could not have said he was old, yet neither was he all that young. His entrance caused no stir whatever in town and was accompanied by nothing special; only two Russian muzhiks standing by the door of the pot-house across from the inn made some remarks, which referred, however, more to the vehicle than to the person sitting in it.

It is from the gates of a hotel in the provincial city of "N" that the journey – a quest for the Russian version of an "earthly paradise" – begins. In Gogol's work, this paradise is travestied through the space of Kherson Province [8, 16]. "In the case of Kherson Province, the issue is not merely one of a different scale of travestification, affecting the poem's entire world-image, but also of its different purpose, which is not limited to the ironic reduction of the narrative's subject" [8. P. 8]. According to Krivonos, the image of Kherson Province combines the properties of Arcadian¹ and eschatological space. It is a realm where the "peasants" – the "dead souls" acquired by Chichikov – having completed one cycle of existence, are poised to begin another. This new life receives a definitive assessment: "<...> though they are scoundrels now, upon being resettled to a new land, they may suddenly become excellent subjects" [17. P. 155].

The toponyms featured in the travestied paradise of "Kherson Province" are drawn from the everyday reality of Gogol's Crimean-Poltava journey in 1835. It is plausible that certain plot developments, and even the name of the protagonist, emerged during this trip, as Gogol passed through the lands of the neighboring Kherson Province after departing his native Vasilevka in the Poltava region [18]. Supporting this connection, the Kherson

¹ In *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*, the Crimean space is endowed with both Arcadian and eschatological characteristics. This treatment actualizes the mythologem of 'Arcadia as a place that death has already visited.'

Province is home to the Chichikleya River, a tributary of the Bug, on whose banks numerous settlements are situated. Among them is the large village of Novo-Pavlovka, which likely existed in the area as early as 1835; it is documented as a major settlement in the "Lists of Populated Places of the Russian Empire" from the 1860s and on military-topographic maps from the 1850s–70s. Adjacent to Chichikleya was the ancient Tatar fortress of Chikchakly, marked on maps from the 16th and 18th centuries. The Tatar word "Chik" signifies "edge," "limit," or "border" – a frontier. Historical works, such as that of Prince Myshetsky, refer to Chikchakly as a great city of the past. The 20-verst-long valley of the Chichikleya River was renowned for its fertile chernozem soils, a fact well-known in the capital; advertisements for the sale of "Chikchakli black earth" appeared in the *St. Petersburg Gazette* during the 1830s.

The origin of the protagonist's surname can be traced to Gogol's own writings. In his book *All Sorts of Things*, among the riddles he recorded, is the following, "Bigla chechitochka mimo moi voritochka, vibig chichik, – vona y stala" [19. P. 516]. Here, *chechitka* is a small bird of the finch family, and *chichik* is the male of this species. Simultaneously, Arkadiy Kh. Goldenberg situates the central motifs of Gogol's work within the context of Italian culture, correlating the protagonist's existential motif with Italian lexical units: *ciccia* (slang for 'body'), *ciccione* (slang for 'fat man'), and *cicalone* ('chatterbox') [19, p. 137]. This interpretation suggests that the character's name hints at a corporeal, carnal essence – a motif that resonates with the Rabelaisian concept of the material bodily lower stratum. This concept is associated with a decentralized universe, where the relative center shifts from the heavens to the earth, a place that, according to medieval cosmology, was the farthest removed from God: the underworld [21].

The administrative history of Kherson Province began on May 15, 1803, when, by a decree from Alexander I and the Senate, the provincial capital and administration were transferred from Nikolaev to Kherson, and the region was officially renamed Kherson Province. This reorganization followed an earlier decree on October 8, 1802, which divided Novorossiysk Province into Yekaterinoslav, Nikolaev, and Taurida provinces, with Kherson County initially assigned to Nikolaev Province. One of the first comprehensive descriptions of the region, *Materials for the Geography and Statistics of Russia: Kherson Province* (1863) [22], was compiled by Alex-

ander Ottovich Schmidt, a Russian military commander, General of Infantry, and veteran of the 1855 Crimean campaign. In 1859, the General Staff assigned Schmidt to conduct a statistical survey of Kherson Province, which military strategists considered a potential theater of future operations. Throughout the year, Schmidt studied the region's economy, topography, and settlements, spending at least two subsequent years editing the collected material. In 1863, he delivered a four-hour report on his findings at a plenary session of the General Staff, after which his work was published. For this achievement, Alexander Schmidt was awarded the Order of St. Vladimir, 4th Class, and promoted to the rank of Colonel in 1864. Upon commencing his assignment to compile a descriptive account of Kherson Province – a work the author himself categorized as an essay – Schmidt first acquainted himself with the region's existing literature and printed sources. This preliminary research aimed to grasp the current situation and identify the most pressing concerns for the local population. Subsequently, he undertook extensive travels throughout the province to verify and supplement his findings, as well as to investigate issues for which sufficient data was lacking or which emerged from observing the diverse living conditions of the inhabitants [21]. In terms of narrative structure, the *Materials* align more closely with later travelogues, such as Afanasy Nikitin's *Khozhenie (A Journey Beyond the Three Seas)*. These works detail the impressions gathered from visiting foreign territories – for Nikitin, with specific commercial objectives – and exhibit a pronounced reliance on firsthand experience. Judging by the content of the *Materials*' "Historical Introduction," the purpose of Schmidt's survey of Kherson Province was to assess the readiness of the Kherson steppe lands, and particularly of the peoples inhabiting them, for the development of civil society and the establishment of trade relations with various countries for "the mutual exchange of their products" [23]. Regarding the region's potential, Schmidt arrives at a definitive conclusion: endowed with the functional status of a "node of spaces," the Kherson steppes possess, under more favorable circumstances, clear prospects for a prosperous future.

Historically, however, this very status as a "node of spaces" proved detrimental to the peoples inhabiting the Kherson steppe. As Schmidt notes, "The Kherson steppes were always open to the predation of all nomadic tribes of Asia, serving as a natural route for them to Europe."

He further observes that "any cause which impacted the movement of peoples in any of these regions necessarily affected the inhabitants of the Kherson steppes; in short, this factor made the Kherson steppes a station through which peoples migrated and in which they settled only temporarily, until they were displaced by other newcomers." Schmidt employs a series of predicate attributes to construct for the reader an image of the Kherson steppes that corresponds to their historical function for the peoples who traversed and temporarily occupied these territories. He characterizes the region as "*the natural path to Europe for all nomadic tribes of Asia; a temporary station for settlement before displacement by other migrants; and a hub connecting many diverse and vast spaces.*"

Elena A. Eltanskaya defines spatial relations, in their most general form, as the juxtaposition in space of an object, action (event), or feature against a landmark, or locum [23]. In Schmidt's *Materials on Kherson Province*, the constructed model of the region's historical existence can be considered such a locum. Schmidt observes that the history of these lands, until a recent period, is not the history of a single people achieving historical existence and development (as in the histories of Western or mountain-dwelling peoples). Rather, it is "the history of a great route – a road along which many peoples passed, and if they halted in their movement, it was only temporarily, to rest, until the invasion of new barbarians" [22]. In the 18th century, the territory that would become Kherson Province was little more than a theater for predatory raids and "mutual devastation of the neighboring peoples, and was known as the 'wild field' " [22]. Regarding its "historical heritage," the landscape is scattered with countless burial mounds – silent graves of historical actors whose names have been lost. Schmidt effectively offers his own interpretation of the steppe's "wildness": it is the silence of history, which has absorbed countless human lives and, in doing so, devalued the essence of human existence, rendering it meaningless. This meaninglessness is physically imprinted on the land, with the steppe littered "at almost every step" with nameless graves of history's "makers," who have vanished without a trace. Beyond the faint ruins of a few settlements, there are practically no traces of the former inhabitants. These historical monuments make the Kherson steppes, in Schmidt's view, an "extensive cemetery of numerous and once-terrible peoples." This paints a rather gloomy and ominous image of the region's past: a cemetery of formidable peoples. From this perspective, the steppes themselves become a

place resembling the underworld – a realm into which not merely sinful souls, but entire sinful peoples descend for purification. Schmidt concludes that the history of Kherson Province as a whole, at least until the middle of the previous century, amounts to "nothing but a chronological reckoning of periodic invasions of peoples" [23].

In the "Historical Introduction," Schmidt reconstructs the "unimaginable reality" of everyday life in the 19th-century Kherson Province. The historically accurate designation for this territory is the 'Kherson Steppes,' which, in semi-otic terms, should be interpreted as "a node of many diverse and vast spaces." Schmidt selects the units 'space' and 'country' as the optimal descriptors and measures for the territory. In Dahl's *Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language* (1863), the word *space* (*prostranstvo*) belongs to the derivational nest of *prostornyi* ('extending, outstretched; vast, spacious, voluminous, large in size'). The term 'space' itself is defined as the state or property of that which extends or occupies a place, as well as the place itself – the expanse, distance, breadth, and depth considered in three dimensions. Within this derivational field, the unit denoting a large-scale sovereign entity is particularly noteworthy. Natalya E. Yastrebova observes that the parameter of width is more axiologically significant in the Russian perception of space than that of length. This "tendency" toward expansion appears to be a defining characteristic of the Kherson steppes, "The Kherson steppes, extending eastward beyond the Dnieper, are constantly expanding, merging with the vast steppes adjacent to the Caspian Sea, and extend far into Central Asia" [24]. This natural ontology of the steppes – their inherent properties of "expanding" and "stretching" – is consonant with a Russian perception of space that privileges lateral movement, which can be done without defining a clear vector of movement, direction, "where." An orientation toward width (latitude) does not imply a purely utilitarian relationship to space, that is, viewing it merely as a means of subsistence [25]. "The space that Russians engage with is alive. The very act of movement is a reward for a Russian person for traveling somewhere, for being in space, or for simply contemplating it" [20].

The second differentiating term for the lands of Kherson Province is "country" (*strana*), used here in the sense of "locality." This usage aligns with its definition in Dahl's *Explanatory Dictionary*, where the lexical unit "country" is explained as a "region," "expanse of land," "locality," "district," "area," "land," "state," or "part of the world." In the *Materials*, the lexeme "country" functions within specific contexts. For instance, Schmidt

writes, "What the country (emphasis added) that constitutes the present coastal strip of Kherson Province was like in reality, and in the most remote historical times, we find evidence in the legends of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, the father of history and the first geographer, who himself visited this country and described it 445 years before the Christian Era" [22]. He further notes, "But the geographical location of this country hindered the development of civil society" [24]. Finally, he argues that the region's features supported various livelihoods, "These features of the steppes fully contributed to the development of cattle breeding, fishing, and animal husbandry, and the rich land rewarded the labors of the farmer a hundredfold... thus, within the country itself lay all the conditions for the Nomads' transition to a settled way of life" [21].

The Kherson steppes, or the "wild field," exhibit a unique characteristic in their functional history – Schmidt defines as the "history of the great way." They existed predominantly in a "here-and-now" phase, a realm of everyday life and immediate space, lacking a durable, non-permanent dimension that would allow the past and future to converge in the present. This convergence is essential for leaving a lasting mental trace that guarantees the continuity between past and future.

By combining the categories of 'space' and 'country' within a historical focus, Schmidt delineates the mechanism by which the everyday space of the Kherson steppes – the wild field – transitioned into a non-hostile space, a movement toward "civil order" (citizenship). In this framework, the everyday space of the future "civic structure" becomes the signified non-everyday space. In the culture of the Russian Middle Ages, such non-linear spaces guaranteed the very existence of everyday life by providing the material for its construction, meaning, and interpretation; they reflected, preserved, and symbolically represented daily existence in special ways [16]. In the second introductory fragment of the *Materials*, "A Brief Historical Look at the Kherson Province," Schmidt enumerates the events that transpired in the steppes. The objective of this calculus is to simulate the "uninhabited space" of the wild steppe, or the great nomadic route. Here, everyday life should be understood as a "fusing rationality," in Waldenfels' terminology, "Along with the feverish (up-and-down) processes of melting and remelting, which are threatened by extreme forms of complete solidification and liquefaction, there is also a horizontal movement of the compound, 'fusion'" [4]. Schmidt's event calculus represents this "fusion" of the

life activities of various peoples, thereby constructing a living, extensive history of the Kherson steppes. It recounts the historical existence of peoples who did not merely "sit" awaiting displacement, but who settled there to procreate and actively create the history of their lives.

Within his essay, Schmidt highlights several events as particularly significant for constructing the heterogeneous space of 'Southern Russia': the Central Asian revolution, the establishment of Greek settlements (colonies), the appearance of the Slavs, and the rise of the Zaporozhian Cossacks.

The northern shores of the Black Sea in the 12th century BC were inhabited by the Taurians and Cimmerians, the latter possessing a city described as "covered with clouds and fog." Schmidt notes, "In this misty distance, the imagination of the Greeks pictured the northern coast of the Black Sea, until the Ionian colonies that arose later took possession of its waters (c. 750 BC)" [22. P. 4]. The 5th-century BC writer Herodotus of Halicarnassus visited the region, providing valuable descriptions in his works. Drawing on Herodotus's accounts, Schmidt concludes that a revolution among Central Asian peoples in the 7th century BC displaced the warlike Scythians from the Caspian coast. They began to pressure the Cimmerians and, in pursuit of them, began to crowd the Cimmerian and in this persecution entered the borders of Media. The foundation of Greek settlements in the region dates to this same period. The earliest among them was Olbia, also known as "The Feast of the Borystheneates" (Meletopolis), which became a center for trade with the Scythians and the site of a palace for the Scythian king Scyles. Gradually, new Greek colonies arose, establishing trade networks that extended as far as Sicily.

Citing Becker's latest research from the 1860s, Schmidt identifies the locations of Greek colonies on the Kherson coast: Odessos on the left bank of the Tiligul estuary near present-day Troitskoye (Koblevo); Skopuli near the village of Dufinka; the Istrian harbor on the right bank of the Kuyalnik estuary; the Isiakov harbor at the site of modern Odessa; Fisk at the mouth of the Baraboy River; and Nikonium near the modern city of Ovidiopol on the Otarik tract. The names Odessos, Scopuli, Istrian, Isiakov, Fisk, and Nikonium thus constitute the Greek acoustic imprint on the Kherson steppes.

As Schmidt observes, it is difficult to determine precisely when the Slavs first appeared on the northern shores of the Black Sea. However, historical evidence suggests that the Kherson steppes were inhabited by Slavic peoples long before the historical beginning of Russian history. By the mid-

sixth century, information about these tribes and their locations becomes more definitive. According to Jornand, the numerous Venedi tribe was divided into two distinct groups: the Slavs and the Antes. The Slavs inhabited the territories from the upper Vistula River eastward to the Dnieper, while the Antes settled the Pontic steppes from the Dnieper to the Dniester River.

The Zaporozhian Cossacks represent a distinct entity within this series of historical developments. Schmidt describes it as a "remarkable institution," while also noting the conflicting historical opinions surrounding it. Its origins are linked to the Slavic-Byzantine narrative. The desire of Slavic populations to establish relations with the Byzantine Empire via the rivers flowing into the Black Sea was consistently thwarted by nomadic tribes invading the coastal steppes. In response to these predatory raids, southern Russia was compelled to maintain permanent military detachments for defense. Over time, these borderland populations evolved into a distinct military society, known by various names throughout different periods. The Mongol invasion of southern Russia caused significant disruption and realignment among its inhabitants. Subsequently, the region came under the banner of Lithuania, which extended its military power to the Black Sea to combat Russia's enemies. The Lithuanian princes, in turn, sought to consolidate their authority in the Russian lands by imposing elements of their own political structure. Long before this period, the rivers flowing into the Black Sea – the Dnieper, Bug, and Dniester – were inhabited by militant bands of South Russian warriors who engaged in or protected fishing and other local industries. To secure his conquests, the Lithuanian Prince Witold decided to formally organize these disparate groups. These bands, based in the river rapids and other inaccessible parts of the river valleys, were perpetually engaged in conflict with their predatory southern neighbors. The central stronghold of the Zaporozhian Host, also known as the Grassroots Army (a name derived from their location downstream from the Dnieper rapids), was the Sich. Historically situated on the Dnieper, the Sich relocated several times.

Following the union of southern Russia with Moscow, the Zaporozhian Sich pledged its allegiance to the Tsar. Since then, the history of the Sich became inextricably linked with the history of Little Russia, while the steppes themselves remained politically marginal. Schmidt constructs a dynamic historical narrative of the Kherson steppes by creating a living, mobile image that, in his words, "breathes a soul" into past events. This is

achieved through a derivational chain of concepts: *Zaporozhye is a wonderful institution – squads are ready to repel predatory raids of nomadic tribes – border population, which has received a military character - militant bands of wandering South Russian warriors, who produced or those who patronized fishing and other local crafts – The Grassroots army – the Sich – the Zaporozhian Sich – the history of the Sich – the history of Little Russia – the Cossacks.*

Despite the Cossacks' claim over the Kherson steppes, both the lands and their inhabitants remained in a state of obscurity, receiving little significant attention. It was only during the reign of Empress Elizabeth Petrovna that these steppes attained a formal political existence, which in turn defined their historical trajectory.

As previously noted, the level of imagery – defined as the capacity to verbally reconstruct an event in a manner consistent with the "worldview of the modern era" – is determined by the "language of a thinking personality" [11]. In this study, the image of Kherson Province is presented through descriptions that constitute an inversion of the Old Russian genre of *khozhdenie* (a walking/pilgrimage narrative). This inverted form is manifested in the fictional work *Dead Souls* (1842) by Gogol and the historical essay *Materials for the Geography and Statistics of Russia: Kherson Province* (1863) by Schmidt. The linguistic mentality of these writers can be understood through Svetlana R. Omelchenko's basic model of "the thinking subject – the process of thought – the object of thought," which delineates the subject's mental activity [25]. For both Gogol and Schmidt, the object of thought is Kherson Province. The process of comprehension, which reveals the logical and semantic connections between the subject and the object of thought, contributes to the formation of immanent, implicit predicate structures. The configuration of these structures, in turn, generates the image of the object itself.

In Gogol's narrative, Kherson Province emerges as a travestied 'paradise' space, represented through a series of referents including the 'Kherson landowner,' 'civil regulations and further types of Russia,' 'dead souls,' 'happy resettlement,' 'real Kherson landowner,' 'three-field farm,' 'happiness and bliss of two souls,' 'Kherson villages,' 'lands in the Taurida and Kherson guberniya,' 'Chichikova Slobodka,' 'in their Kherson!,' 'village of Pavlovskoye,' and the notion that 'soon there may not be a corner left in all

of Russia, not pledged to the treasury.' This conceptual space is ultimately framed as 'the dream [that] took Chichikov into its arms.'

In Schmidt's essay, the focus lies on constructing an image of the Kher-
son steppe's historical existence. This is achieved by transforming the concept of its history as a "great way" – a concept articulated through linguistic constructs such as "*the natural path to Europe for all nomadic tribes of Asia*," "*a temporary station before displacement by other migrants*," and "*a node of many diverse and vast spaces*" – into a living history of the peoples inhabiting Novorossiya. Within this framework, historical events are fused into a coherent rationality that contributed to the development of civil society and the production of goods for exchange with other nations.

The use by both Gogol and Schmidt of individually adapted versions of the Old Russian genre *khozhdenie* enabled them not merely to describe, but to reconstruct the image of Southern Russia. They portrayed its genesis as a constituent part of "Holy Russia" – conceptualized as the inner form of the language of a thinking personality, a citizen of the Russian Empire. It was in accordance with the meanings embedded in this linguistic consciousness that human actions, whether ordinary daily acts or extraordinary deeds, were interpreted within everyday spaces.

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Информация об авторах:

Ильиных А.В. – аспирант кафедры медиакоммуникаций, технологий рекламы и связей с общественностью Алтайского государственного университета (Барнаул, Россия). E-mail: rouze18@mail.ru

Халина Н.В. – д-р филол. наук, профессор кафедры медиакоммуникаций, технологий рекламы и связей с общественностью Алтайского государственного университета (Барнаул, Россия). E-mail: nkhalina@yandex.ru

Чуканова Т.В. – канд. социол. наук, доцент кафедры социальной и молодежной политики Алтайского государственного университета (Барнаул, Россия). E-mail: chukanova.64@mail.ru

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Information about the authors:

A.V. Ilinykh, postgraduate student, Altai State University (Barnaul, Russian Federation). E-mail: rouze18@mail.ru

N.V. Khalina, Dr. Sci. (Philology), professor, Altai State University (Barnaul, Russian Federation). E-mail: nkhalina@yandex.ru

T.V. Chukanova, Cand. Sci. (Sociology), associate professor, Altai State University (Barnaul, Russian Federation). E-mail: chukanova.64@mail.ru

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