

The life of the Righteous Petro Sahaidachny

Compiled and translated by Sava Beljovich

Petro Konashevych Sahaidanchy (June 1582 - April 20th 1622)

EARLY LIFE AND MILITARY CAREER

Petro Konashevych was born in the village of Kulchytsy (three miles from Sambir), Ruthenian Voivodeship (Przemsyl district) in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, (now Ukraine) to an Orthodox family of minor nobility and of mixed Ukrainian-Polish ancestry. His father's name was Konon, and his mother after the repose of his father took monastic vows and was tonsured with the name Macrina. His maternal grandfather, Elisha, lived in the family household. He was baptized on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul (June 29th) and given the name Peter (Petro).

During the years of 1589-1592, he received his primary education in Sambir. From 1592 to 1598 he studied at the famous Ostrog Academy in the Volhynia district, founded by Konstanty Vasyl Ostrogski, which was a center for Orthodox spirituality. One of Petro's teachers was Cyril Lukaris, who was the rector of Ostrog Academy and the teacher of Koine Greek. Later he became the Patriarch of Alexandria and the Patriarch of Constantinople and was murdered by the Turks.

The city of Ostrog was a major center of Orthodox spirituality after the Union of Brest-Livotsk. Many of the students of the Ostrog Academy wrote against the Uniates, including Petro Konashevych, who during his studies wrote a work called "Explanation about the Union", in which he defended the Orthodox Faith. The work was highly appreciated by his contemporaries, in particular the Lithuanian chancellor Lew Sapieha called the work "...most valuable" in a letter to the Jesuits.

After his graduation from the Ostrog Academy, the young Petro moved to Lviv, then later to Kyiv, where he became a home teacher and an assistant to the Kyiv land court judge Yan Aksak. He only served in these positions briefly as he chose to join the Zaporozhian Cossacks in the second half of 1598.

According to the contemporary sources, Petro Konashevych quickly gained respect due to his courage and intelligence. It was in Zaporizhzhia that Konashevych began to be called "Sahaidachny", which meant skilled archer. Not

long after his stay in Zaporizhzhia Sich, he was given the title of "Obozny", and placed in charge of all the artillery of the Zaporozhian Cossacks. In 1600, he was given the title of "Hetman", and participated in campaigns against the Turks, and helped restore Simeon Mohyla (the father of the famous Metropolitan Petro Mohyla) to power as the Prince of Moldova. At this time, the Zaporozhian Cossacks were loyal to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Between 1602 and 1603, he married the noblewoman Anastasia Povchenska at the age of 20, and they would have their first child, a son named Lukash in 1604.

Sometime in 1601, Petro was elected Chieftain (Koshevoy) of the Zaporzhan Cossacks. Between 1601-1603 he would fight against the Turks in Moldova then return to Ukraine. In 1606 he would lead the Cossacks to capture the Turkish fortress of Varna, they would also capture Perekop and Ochakiv. In 1608 and 1609, Sahaidachny carried out campaigns to stop Turkish piracy in the Danube and Dnieper rivers, during which they captured the Turkish fortresses of Kilya, Bilhorod and Izmail. In 1610 he was awarded a Mace for the first time. In 1612, a Cossack flotilla led by Sahaidachny successfully captured the Turkish fortifications at Gozliv, Badabag and Mesembria. In 1613, the Cossacks made two campaigns to stop Turkish pirates at the mouth of the Dnieper river.

In 1614, under the banner of fighting the enemies of the Holy Cross, the Cossacks would land in Sinope in Asia Minor, and two years later captured the Turkish fortresses of Kafa (Feodosia) and Trebizond, and besieged Constantinople. The allies of the Turks, the Tatars, would invade Samara, which led Petro Sahaidachny to retreat from Asia Minor and stop the incursion by the Tatars and recaptured Perekop and Ochakiv. In 1617, Petro Sahaidachny was awarded the Mace once again. Due to his campaigns, the piracy of the Turks had almost completely ceased in the Bosphoros and Liman.

Petro Sahaidachny did many reforms to the army of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, turning them from a war band into a proper army, he forbade drunkenness, looting and other lawlessness. He intergrated many priests into the Zaporozhian Cossacks as chaplains, which led to a greater rise in piety among the Cossacks.

WAR WITH MUSCOW AND THE RESTORATION OF ORTHODOXY

In 1618, the Diet of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth decided to attack the Kingdom of Muscovy. The Koshevoy only agreed to participate in the war on the

condition the persecution of the Orthodox would end in the Ukraine, to which he Poles only partially agreed to. Petro Sahaidachny was stripped of his status as Koshevoy as a result for not complying with their demands. During the war with Muscovy, command of the Cossacks was taken over by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Petro Sahaidachny lost most of his men. He sent the men still loyal to him to fight against the Turks rather than the Russians. The failure of the war against Muscovy caused the Poles and Lithuanians to resent the Orthodox Cossacks and consider them a "subversive element", and from then on tried to outlaw the Cossacks and disband them.

In late 1619, the Abbot of the Monastery of St. Michael of the Golden Domed in Kyiv (which Sahaidachny had been supporting financially since 1616), Job Boretsky, actively rallied for the restoration of the Orthodox Hierarchy, which Sahaidachny supported -- and he became the guardian of the monastery's school. Against the wishes of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Petro Sahaidachny supported the Orthodox brotherhood, and began facilitating a restoration of the Orthodox Hierarchy of Ukraine; which had ceased to exist after the Union of Brest-Livotsk.

In 1619, Petro Sahaidachny sent ambassadors to Moscow and swore allegiance of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to Tsar Mikhail Fedorovych and the "old ways" of Russia, and the Tsar thanked Petro Sahaidachny, desired their services, and gave them a light salary of 300 rubles a month. While in Moscow, Petro Sahaidachny had an audience with Patriarch Timothy of Constantinople, Patriarch Theophan III of Jerusalem, and Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow -- the writer of the famous Catechism.

after much deliberation, the Patriarch of Jerusalem and two other Hierarchs would travel to Moldova and Kyiv and consecrate Job Boretsky as the Metropolitan of Kyiv, Isaias Kopinsky as the Metropolitan of Przemsyl, Meletiy as Archbishop of Polotsk, Yosif as a Bishop for Vladimir on the Volyn, a Bishop in Lutsk, an Auxiliary Bishop for Przemsyl, a bishop for Kholm and an auxiliary Bishop for Polotsk at the insistence of Petro Sahaidachny.

Due to the restoration of the Orthodox Hierarchy of Ukraine, many returned to Orthodoxy and a greater spirituality once again flourished in Ukraine. Around this time, works like Fr. Zacharias' "Palinodiia", and "the Book of Faith", "the Spiritual Ladder" and other masterpieces of the Orthodox Church started to appear. In

March 1620 Petro was restored to the rank of Koshevoy awarded the Mace once again, and repelled a raid by the Tatars.

At the request of Patriarch Theophan III, Petro Sahaidachny gave a delegation of Cossacks to serve as the Patriarch's bodyguards on his journey to Moldova and later to Kyiv to perform the consecrations, sometime during this journey, Patriarch Theophan visited the Trakhtemirovsky monastery, which was founded by the Cossacks. Metropolitan Job of Kyiv wrote in his work "The Protestation and Pious Justification" in favour of Petro Sahaidachny's alliance with Moscow writing: "...with Moscow, we have the same faith and worship, the same origin, language and custom." also writing the Cossacks were "heirs of old Rus" and "...who in firmness are superior to those Roman Scipios and Carthaginian Hannibals..." The celebration with the alliance with Moscow and the restoration of the Orthodox Hierarchy in Ukraine was short lived, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth amassed an army to destroy the Cossacks. At the same time, the Turks had amassed an army against the Cossacks as well.

The Zaporozhian Cossacks had to face against a strong Polish and Turkish army. Petro Sahaidachny personally went to an embassy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth attempting to negotiate peace, to which the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth agreed to as a result, out of respect for the Koshevoy and his many years of service for the Commonwealth, and for fear of the Turkish horde. However, the Turkish Army led by the Sultan Osman II continued to invade Ukraine, as the Sultan's intentions were to invade and subjugate all of Europe.

BATTLE OF KHOTYN AND FINAL YEARS

Shortly before the battle of Khotyn, Petro Sahaidachny wrote about the Orthodox Ukraine saying: "The Kingdom (of Muscovy) will in no wise accept slightest demand or help from the schismatics (Roman Catholics)... and that we are unable to fight the Turks on our own. Our army that is not organized like that of the Poles, yet we do not fear the danger."

The armies met at Khotyn on August 30th, and despite the numerical advantage of the Turks-- who numbered 150,000 against the 41,000 Cossacks. The Cossacks held their ground -- due in large part to the tactical genius of Petro Sahaidachny. The Cossacks would launch successful raids on the Turkish encampments, and the Pasha (field commander) of the Sultan was mortally wounded after a cavalry charge led by Sahaidachny personally and amazingly, the Cossack cavalry did not

lose a single man during this charge. Due to mass desertions and casualties the Turks suffered, they agreed to a peace treaty that was brokered by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. After his return to Kyiv, he sent a delegation to the embassy in Warsaw hoping for the Poles to keep the promises to not attack the Cossacks, which they would not agree to.

The battle of Khotyn had great international significance. This battle forced the Ottoman Turks to abandon their plans to conquer Europe. The wicked Sultan Osman II was assassinated much like the Moabite King Eglon of old. The battle led to the greater decline of the Ottoman Empire, which spent centuries persecuting Orthodox Christians.

Having suffered a gunshot wound at the battle, Petro Sahaidachny spent the last few months of his life in deep contrition due to the years of warfare and his involvement in all the men that fell in his army at Khotyn. He offered penance in churches and gave great contributions to the churches around Ukraine. As a gift of friendship, the Diet of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth awarded him a sword, inlaid with gold and diamonds with scenes depicting the court of Solomon and the battles of the Israelites against the Moabites, with an inscription in Latin saying: "A gift, to the Koshevoy Konasheych, for his campaigns against Osman". One of his many contributions to the Church was a bejeweled blessing Cross to the Cathedral of the Epiphany near the Kyiv-Pechersk lavra, which today is considered a treasure of the Ukrainian state.

During his last few months, he donated 15,000 gold coins to the Lviv Fraternal School, and funded the construction of a new church building at the Floriv monastery and helped decorate the churches of Kyiv. Five days before his repose, he wrote a will and placed Metropolitan Job Boretsky as the guardian and teacher of his son Lukash and his wife Anastasia. He donated the rest of his income to schools and the Cathedral of the Epiphany. Despite his critical condition, he still served as a political leader and was well noted for his sense of justice and fairness.

On the night of April 19th, 1622 the injury and subsequent infection due to the gunshot wound on his arm had finally taken its toll. Shortly before he reposed, a priest heard his confession, administered the Eucharist and gave him last rites. Early in the morning of April 20th, Petro Sahaidachny fell asleep in the Lord at the age of 40. At his funeral which was held on April 28th, a eulogy was read that praised his exploits to defend the Ukrainian land and his dedication and decoration to the Orthodox Church, and students from the Kyiv Fraternal School sung the

Psalms. He was buried at the Cathedral of the Epiphany in Kyiv. The attached monastery to the Cathedral was often called "the Sahaidachny monastery", and a silver Cross inlaid with an icon of St. John Chrysostom he donated to the monastery was above the Hierarchical throne.

LEGACY

Patriarch Theophan III wrote about Petro Sahaidachny in the restoration and protection of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine in 1627 writing: "...the matter would not have been possible without the support of the Koshevoy Petro Sahaidachny, whose actions in this case can rightly be called a feat equal to an apostolic one. This man was a sincere confessor of the Orthodox... after his repose, is revered in Russia as a devout believer."

During the renovation of 1690-1693, the Koshevoy's grave was moved to the southern wall of the Cathedral of the Epiphany. A popular Ukrainian folk song "Oh, on the mountains the reapers are reaping" mentions the military exploits of Petro Sahaidachny. The first few notes of the melody used to be played every 30 minutes in the bell tower of the Greek monastery of St. Catherine's in Kyiv. The church and bell tower were destroyed in 1929 by the Bolsheviks. The cathedral of the Epiphany was destroyed by the Bolsheviks in 1935 and Petro Sahaidachny's current place of burial is unknown. The Bolsheviks also during their occupation subjected Petro Sahaidachny's memory to a damnation. The prized sword of Petro Sahaidachny went missing at an unknown date, but in 1996 was found in a warehouse in Krakow, Poland. Today it is held in Wawel castle, near the Ukrainian border.

Today Sahaidachny is well remembered in Ukraine for both his political and religious contributions. There are several monuments across Ukraine dedicated to the righteous Koshevoy. Along with Metropolitan Job Boretsky, he is considered by many to be a Saint due to his efforts in restoring the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, defending the land of Ukraine from the enemies of Christianity, and his sincere repentance near the end of his earthly life.

Sahaidachny as a military leader is well remembered since he never lost a battle, and always attributed his victories to God and not himself. A well decorated general of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Yakov Sobieski (the father of Jan Sobieski) wrote of Petro Sahaidachny: "He was a man of great spirit, who looked for danger himself and not for others, was agile and active in battle,

watchful in the camp, slept little and did not drink... he was cautious at meetings and taciturn in all conversations... The Cossacks were the real winners near Khotyn and saved the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.", an Armenian chronicler by the name Auxentios wrote: "If it were not for the Cossacks, the armies of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth would have been defeated in 3-4 days. The victory was won only thanks to God and the Zaporozhian Cossacks."

Besides contemporary sources, a great resource for the life of Petro Sahaidachny comes from Timofiy Tyltovsky, in a work edited by Stefan Lukomsky in 1770 on the history of the Zaporozhian Cossacks. Other historians such as Mykola Markevich, Mikhailo Maximovitch (a descendant of St. John of Tobolsk and ancestor of St. John of Shanghai), Panteleimon Kulish and Dmytro Yavornytski all wrote about Petro Sahaidachny in their works.

There exist icons of both, one icon of Petro Sahaidachny is found in the St. Sophia's cathedral in Kyiv, in an adjacent chapel, and an icon of Metropolitan Job placed in the monastery of St. Michael of the Golden Domes, which was his residence for many years. Petro Sahaidachny is commemorated on April 7th, and Metropolitan Job of Kyiv on March 15th and October 2nd, the date he reposed in 1631.