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Symbols and Emblems as Part of the Sign-Space of Ukrainian Universities, Late 20th to Early 21st Centuries¹

Summary: The article traces the genesis of the symbols and emblems of Ukraine's classical universities in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The historical background of the body of symbols and emblems of the classical universities is reviewed. The current directions of the evolution of this symbolic complex are outlined. In particular, we conclude that at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, new symbols and emblems as a rule were created spontaneously and sporadically. In most cases, they are not systematic and represent a synthesis of Ukrainian and Western European symbolic forms. We consider the role of symbolic language in the self-representation practices of Ukraine's classical universities and show how the direction in which this language is evolving and the factors of its transformation can throw light on the present state of university culture. The prevailing symbolic eclecticism and low level of reflection in university communities regarding the use of symbols are interpreted as manifestations of the current crisis of university identity in Ukraine.

Keywords: emblem, symbol, symbolism, sign-space, universities of Ukraine.

The history of Ukraine's classical universities² is inseparable from the general university tradition, the genesis of which is prominently marked in the sign-space of these educational institutions. After Ukraine gained its independence and new principles of the functioning of the system of higher education were introduced, the Ukrainian universities faced a number of socio-economic and socio-cultural problems. Trying to consolidate the university community and demonstrate more clearly their advantages to the outside world, universities began to pay more attention to

¹ This study is part of the project "Practices of the Self-Representation of Multinational Cities in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Era," sponsored by the Contemporary Ukraine Studies Program at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta.

² When we speak of classical universities in Ukraine, we mean the nine establishments that meet the following criteria. First, they are multidisciplinary schools (classical universities not only in name, but also in structure and function). Second, they were founded in the territory of what is now Ukraine in the pre-Soviet and Soviet times — that is, they have a long history and, accordingly, well-established university traditions. Finally, the selected schools exhibit a high degree of ritualization in their institutional life. In particular, they follow stereotyped procedures and established rules for the use of symbols. The modern names of these universities are: the Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, Vasyl Stus Donetsk National University, Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University, Ivan Franko Lviv National University, I.I. Mechnykov Odesa National University, V.I. Vernadsky Taurida National University, Uzhhorod National University, V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, and Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University.

various forms of self-representation. University ritual practices and related symbols and emblems have become one of the most important elements in the corporative culture of the country's classical universities, an expressive component of the collective consciousness of university communities. Some of the symbols and emblems used today are traditional for Ukrainian higher education; others are borrowings that have been introduced only recently. What is important now is less to catalog various symbolic forms than to determine the ways in which they are perceived by those involved in university life, as well as the place and significance of symbols and emblems in the consolidation and self-representation of university communities in today's Ukraine.

The symbols and emblems of Ukrainian universities became a subject of study in their own right only at the beginning of the 2000s. In recent years, there has been an increase in scholarly interest towards the visual manifestations of university culture and the sign-space of educational institutions. Analyzing university culture as a set of practices and values, researchers reconstruct individual elements of the corporative consciousness of university communities and explore the symbolic space of universities.³ Methodologically, such studies usually draw on approaches developed in visual and cultural history. In particular, in this paper we propose to consider university symbols and emblems within the framework of the semiotic approach, focusing on the semantic and pragmatic levels of university symbolism.

This study is based largely on the collections of the institutional history museums at Dnipro, Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa, and Kharkiv universities. Some materials were provided by the staff of the academic libraries and Faculties of History of Donetsk, Taurida, Uzhhorod, and Chernivtsi universities. The images gathered in the course of research for this project were systematized as part of the work on the relational database of the emblems of the classical universities of Ukraine, built in the Microsoft Access 2010 database management system. In total, more than 500 images of university symbols are included in the database.⁴

It should be noted that most of the symbolic forms that can be seen today in Ukrainian universities are of medieval origin. Academic regalia, along with other university insignia (such as scepters, livery collars, seals, rings, keys, medals, or mantles), occupied a special place among university symbols and emblems at the “corporative” (“pre-classical”) stage in the history of higher education.⁵ Status markers were emblematic attributes that served to identify representatives of a university corporation, to distinguish them from members of other corporations (who displayed different corporative attributes or did not use such signs at all), and generally to reflect the university's privileged position.⁶

The sign-space of early modern and modern universities was different from that in the Middle Ages — more laconic in its symbolic forms and with a predominance of territorial (state) symbols and emblems.⁷ This fully applies to universities founded in the Ukrainian lands of the Austro-

³ See for instance: *Університет в Російській імперії XVIII — першої половини XIX века*, ed. А.Ю. Андреев, С.И. Посохов, Москва 2012; Д.В. Майборода, *Символика отечественных образовательных учреждений середины XVIII–начала XXI в., диссертация [...] кандидата исторических наук*, Москва 2014; Є.С. Рачков, *Символи та емблеми класичних університетів України (кінець XX–початок XXI ст.)*, Харків 2018.

⁴ See Ye. Rachkov, *University corporate culture investigation using a database technology (based on materials of Ukrainian classical universities)* [in:] *Humanistyka Cyfrowa. Badanie tekstów, obrazów i dźwięku*, Lublin 2016, p. 132–146.

⁵ Here we use the periodization of the history of universities proposed by P. Moraw. He distinguishes three “models” of the university, which correspond to the three eras in the history of European universities: pre-classical, classical, and post-classical.

⁶ See: *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. 1, *Universities in the Middle Ages*, ed. H. de Ridder-Symoens, Cambridge 1992.

⁷ See: *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. 2, *Universities in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800)*, ed. H. de Ridder-Symoens, Cambridge, 1996.

Hungarian and Russian Empires. Rectorial regalia, university decorations and academic attire were integral attributes of the university corporation; they played an important role in the construction of a hierarchy of relations and in the reinforcement of status roles within university communities. At the same time, the universities of the Russian Empire were created in the wake of an extended period of criticism of the old “pre-classical” model of the university and so they only partially relied on the symbolic patterns developed in the medieval (“corporative”) university. The overwhelming majority of the symbolic forms of the latter were perceived by the members of the Russian university community as archaic and alien.⁸

The sign-space of the Soviet-era Ukrainian universities had virtually no connection with the traditions of the previous period. In the evolution of the sign-space of the Soviet educational institutions, two stages can be distinguished — before and after the mid-1950s. The first was marked by the almost complete absence of properly corporative university symbols and emblems



1. The illustrated part of the *Act for the Establishment of Lviv University*, 1784 (Museum of History of the Ivan Franko Lviv National University)

⁸ С.И. Посохов, *Университетская юбилейная культура на Востоке Европы*, “Res Historica” 2015, no. 39, p. 180.



2. **A:** The Great Seal of the Imperial Kharkiv University (Museum of History of the V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University); **B:** The Great Seal of the Imperial University of St. Vladimir (Museum of History of the Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University); **C:** Seal of the Imperial Novorossiya University (Museum of History of the I. I. Mechnykov Odesa National University)

and by the predominance of state symbols. In the postwar years, there were isolated attempts to revive some pre-Soviet elements of university symbolism (such as graduation lapel pins or student uniforms at faculties of geology and geography), which, however, had a different meaning in the new context. In the mid-1950s, a new era in the evolution of the sign-space of Ukraine's universities began. Along with Soviet state symbols, ideologically neutral images (primarily international symbols associated with learning and education) were increasingly used as emblems



3. Anniversary lapel pins of Soviet-era Ukrainian universities (Rachkov Ye., Database of Emblems of Ukraine's Classical Universities, Museum of History of the V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University)



4. Symbols of student construction brigades, 1960s to 1980s (Museum of History of the V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University)



5. Present-day emblems of Ukraine's classical universities (Rachkov Ye., Database of Emblems of Ukraine's Classical Universities, Museum of History of the V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University)

of educational institutions. Beginning in the second half of the 1950s, the diversity of sports emblems increased. University subdivisions, primarily faculties and departments, began to acquire their own repertoire of symbolic forms during the 1960s to 1980s. A special place in the university milieu of the 1960s to 1980s was occupied by the accoutrements of student construction brigades (such as khaki-colored jackets with badges, stripes, chevrons, etc.). An important role among the status markers in the Soviet era belonged to various state distinctions and decorations, group and personal.⁹

The process of the formation and evolution of classical-university symbolism in Ukraine in the late 20th and early twenty-first centuries is characterized by contradictory trends. For the most part, new university symbols and emblems arose spontaneously and sporadically, which led to the absence of official approval and lack of stability in their meaning; moreover, often university communities were not even aware of their existence. At the same time, some controlled and conscious developments were taking place in the field of university symbols. In particular, during the 1990 and 2000s, official school emblems were adopted by most classical universities,¹⁰ along with other symbolic paraphernalia (including flags, standards / banners, and anthems). The symbolic arsenal of university subdivisions grew notably more diverse during this period as well.¹¹

A specific feature of university culture in Ukraine is the diversity and eclecticism of its sign-space. Every year, universities are making more and more serious efforts in this direction. Undoubtedly, the role of symbolism in the university milieu is enhanced by the changes in the functions of higher education, which essentially can be described as the emergence of a “mass” (“postmodern”) university. For most universities in Ukraine, the symbolic forms they employ today are new. Examples of the influence of the European university tradition are the use by universities of academic attire (cap and gown) and standards, the establishment of rectorial insignia (scepter and livery collar), and others. It should be noted that some members of the university community categorically oppose symbolic borrowings. However, the majority acknowledge the need for “the deepening of the university tradition,” which is commonly seen as involving, among other things, an even greater expansion of the range of symbolic borrowings.¹²

Symbols and emblems serve as attributes of various practices of university self-representation — the ceremonies of matriculation and graduation, anniversaries, and other ritual practices. Despite the fact that different universities develop and use more or less typical symbols and emblems, this arsenal of signs is not entirely uniform. The catalog of university symbols and the practice of their public use have their own distinctive features at every school. For example, in the early 2000s, at the universities of Lviv and Chernivtsi there were attempts to

⁹ Е. Рачков, *Статусные отличия и ритуалы в знаковой среде классических университетов Украины конца XX — начала XXI вв.*, “Dzieje Biurokracji” 2018, vol. 8, p. 197–198.

¹⁰ The emblem of Kyiv University was adopted in 1994, as part of the celebration of the school’s 160th anniversary. Chernivtsi University acquired its emblem in 1997, and Lviv University — in 1999. Uzhhorod University adopted a coat of arms, flag, anthem, emblem, and badge in 2000, in time for its 55th anniversary. The emblem of Kharkiv University was approved in 2004, for its 200th anniversary. In addition, in the early 2000s the emblems of Dnipro, Donetsk, Odesa, and Taurida Universities received their present appearance. Attempts to modify the already existing university emblems continue to this day. See: Е.С. Рачков, *Символы та емблеми класичних університетів України (кінець XX–початок XXI ст.)*, p. 101–124.

¹¹ See: Е.С. Рачков, *Візуальна складова практик саморепрезентації класичних університетів України кінця XX–початку XXI ст.*, „Wschodni Rocznik Humanistyczny” 2015, vol. 12, p. 327–341.

¹² See: Інтерв’ю викладачів і співробітників класичних університетів України (2015–2016 рр.) [фонодокументи та транскрипції], Музей історії Харківського національного університету імені В.Н. Каразіна, ф. 7 (17 інтерв’ю); Інтерв’ю випускників Харківського університету 1940–2010-х рр. (2006–2016 рр.) [фонодокументи та транскрипції], Музей історії Харківського національного університету імені В.Н. Каразіна, ф. 7, ор. 21, тек. 1 (205 інтерв’ю).



6. The Act of Matriculation, the Ivan Franko Lviv National University, 2012
(Ю. Гудима, *Про берла ректора і деканів Львівського університету*, “Каменярь” 2012, no. 6, p. 2 <<http://kameniar.lnu.edu.ua/?p=2851#more-2851/>>)

revive forms of corporative symbolism traditional for the universities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. So, in September 2014, a ceremonial session of the Academic Council of Lviv University for the inauguration of the Rector was held — the first such inaugural act at that institution in many years. The university insignia of office were conferred on the Rector: a livery collar, scepter, and seal. They emphasized the special status of the Rector as the head of the university corporation and “guardian” of the student community.¹³ Central among the various visual elements of the rectorial livery collar were the lesser coat of arms of Lviv University and the national coat of arms of Ukraine. The rectorial scepter is a replica of the original insignia,¹⁴ presented in 2012 at a matriculation ceremony by the Rector of Wrocław University to the Rector of Lviv University in recognition of the close historical ties and a decade of cooperation between the two institutions.¹⁵

Another example is the livery collar of the Rector of Chernivtsi University. For the 125th anniversary of the school, thanks to the efforts of university historians and Austrian philanthropists

¹³ Т. Шемберко, *Інавгурація Ректора*, “Каменярь” 2014, no. 1, p. 2.

¹⁴ In 1945, the chief regalia of Lviv University — the scepter and the seal — were removed by the school’s Rector Professor Edmund Bulanda to Kraków. In 1951, they were deposited at the Jagiellonian University Museum Collegium Maius. The scepter is often loaned for exhibition to the Museum of the University of Wrocław. See: Z. Piech, *Znaki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego jako system* [in:] *Znaki i symbole w przestrzeni publicznej*, ed. A. Jaworska, R. Jop, K. Madejska, Warszawa 2016, p. 38–39; A. Redzik, *Uniwersytet Jana Kazimierza ma 350 lat*, “Kurier Galicyjski” 2011, no. 1, p. 27.

¹⁵ О. Карабчук, *Урочиста посвята у студенту*, “Каменярь” 2012, no. 6, p. 1.

in Vienna, a replica of the lost livery collar of the imperial period was made.¹⁶ Today, this insignia is an important element of university rituals and celebrations, but a consistent tradition of its use has not yet emerged.

It should be noted that the overwhelming majority of the members of the university community of the late 20th and early twenty-first centuries do not reflect on the origins of university rituals and on the symbolic forms used in such practices. The creation of symbols is perceived today first of all in terms of publicity and advertizing, as part of a conscious and consistent branding policy.¹⁷ Therefore, despite the absence of a previous tradition of using rectorial insignia, other classical universities in Ukraine also have considered adopting them. At Kharkiv University, the idea of designing a rectorial livery collar was discussed as early as preparations for the celebration of the school's 200th anniversary. This project was part of a wider effort to develop a set of university badges, medals, and other paraphernalia in the 2010s. The central image used in all four livery collar designs that we have analyzed was the emblem of Kharkiv University.¹⁸ In the end, a rectorial livery collar was never adopted — probably because this insignia does not fit the school tradition.

Turning to university awards and decorations, we should note that the most common mark of distinction in universities is the graduation lapel pin. Beginning in the second half of the 1980s, the centralized mass practice of presenting lapel pins to new graduates was followed less and less consistently (in particular because of their dwindling and irregular production); it ceased altogether in the early 1990s.¹⁹ However, later on some universities adopted their own graduation lapel pins on the basis of the Soviet model, featuring their university emblems. These pins, despite their visual resemblance to the Soviet original, did not become as popular among the university community. No tradition of wearing them developed. They are perceived rather as souvenirs that university graduates receive in memory of their years of study, or token gifts for alumni and guests. In recent years, lapel pins issued by individual faculties to celebrate class reunions have become quite popular.

University decorations are less common, but clearly carry more weight in terms of status. They are issued both by universities and by individual faculties. The honors and awards system at Ukraine's classical universities assumed a more or less coherent form in the late 1990s and early 2000s. During this period, an array of special regulations were issued, establishing honorary titles ("Honorary Doctor," "Honorary Professor," "Distinguished Professor," and others), outlining the procedures for the granting of them, and listing their attributes and insignia. For instance, honorary doctors of Dnipro University receive the medal "For Loyal Service to DNU," a mantle, a diploma, and an official certificate.²⁰

In the early 2000s, in preparation for the 200th anniversary of Kharkiv University, a proposal was made to create a coherent system of school honors and awards. Today, this system includes the badges of Distinguished Professor and Honorary Doctor, the V.N. Karazin Medal,

¹⁶ С. Осачук, *Чернівці. Історія ланцюга*, "Незалежний культурологічний часопис "Ї" 2009, no. 56, online: <<http://www.ji.lviv.ua/n56texts/osachuk2.htm/>>.

¹⁷ See: Інтерв'ю викладачів і співробітників класичних університетів України (2015–2016 рр.); Інтерв'ю випускників Харківського університету 1940–2010-х рр. (2006–2016 рр.).

¹⁸ Проекти нагрудних знаків, медалей та ректорського ланцюга Харківського національного університету імені В.Н. Каразіна, Музей історії Харківського національного університету імені В.Н. Каразіна, f. 7, op. 7, tek. 5.

¹⁹ See: Інтерв'ю викладачів і співробітників класичних університетів України (2015–2016 рр.); Інтерв'ю випускників Харківського університету 1940–2010-х рр. (2006–2016 рр.).

²⁰ Положення про звання "Почесний доктор Дніпропетровського національного університету імені Олеся Гончара" (нова редакція), online: <http://www.dnu.dp.ua/docs/Polozhennya_Doktor-2015.doc.>.



7. Graduation lapel pins of Ukraine’s classical universities, 1990s–2000s (Ye.Rachkov, *Database of Emblems of Ukraine’s Classical Universities*, Museum of History of the V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University)



8. V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University decorations: the breast badges of Honorary Professor and Honorary Doctor, V. N. Karazin Medal, best graduate medal (Museum of History of the V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University)

and the best graduate medal.²¹ Notably, the badge of Honorary Doctor of Kharkiv University visually resembles the breast badges issued to persons with postgraduate degrees in the Russian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.²² In turn, the idea of the best graduate medal evokes the medals awarded by the Imperial Kharkiv University to its best students in the first third of the 19th century.²³ However, the central elements on the Kharkiv University decorations today are corporative symbols — the school emblem and motto, the image of V.N.Karazin, and others.

Most university ceremonial occasions presuppose the use of academic attire. Some of Ukraine’s classical universities (Lviv, Kharkiv, Chernivtsi, and Uzhhorod) have developed their own systems of academic dress. Their crystallization took place mainly in the early 2000s and demonstrated the universities’ search for new symbolic forms. The cap and gown entered the university culture

²¹ Печатки, медалі та знаки Харківського університету, Музей історії Харківського національного університету імені В. Н. Каразіна.

²² See: Е. Рачков, *Статусные отличия и ритуалы в знаковой среде классических университетов Украины конца XX — начала XXI вв.*, р. 202–203.

²³ See: Д.И. Багалея, Н.Ф. Сумцов, В.П. Бузескул, *Краткий очерк истории Харьковского университета за первые сто лет его существования (1805–1905)*, Харьков 1906, р. 89; *Описание медалей и монет, хранящихся в нумизматическом кабинете Императорского Харьковского университета*, предисл. Р. Шерцль, Харьков 1910, р. 23; Е. Рачков, *Статусные отличия и ритуалы в знаковой среде классических университетов Украины конца XX — начала XXI вв.*, р. 203.



9. V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University participates in the "Parade of Universities," Kharkiv, 2011 (Museum of History of the V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University)



10. Procession of the graduates of the Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University, 2015 (T. Sporynina, *Procession of the graduates of ChNU*, <<https://verssiits1.wordpress.com/урочиста-хода-магістрів-чну/>>)

of Eastern Europe relatively recently. Despite the lack of a tradition of their use, they quickly became widespread. In Ukrainian universities, the right to wear gowns belongs to graduating students (mainly Master's), university officers, and honorary professors. The mantles of each university have their own distinguishing features (cut, length, the color of scarves). Faculty and university emblems are often used as special marks that identify the wearer.²⁴

The transformation of the sign-space of Ukraine's classical universities is part of the university politics of memory, the essential aim of which is to fashion new basic tropes of positive memory for university communities. Not surprisingly, throughout the 1990s to 2010s, university communities have paid special attention to the construction of various kinds of monuments. Examples include the statue of Yu.A. Fedkovych in the public garden of Chernivtsi University, opened in time for the school's 120th anniversary in 1995; the statue of V. I. Vernadsky by the main building of Taurida University, erected for the 150th anniversary of the scientist and the 95th anniversary of the school in 2013; and the monument "Science and the Universe," installed near the main building of Uzhhorod University to mark the 70th anniversary of the university in 2015. Among the classical universities of Ukraine, Kharkiv University's politics of memory appears the most consistent. In 1999, a monument was erected near its main building honoring the volunteers of the so-called "student battalion," who gave their lives for the country during the Second World War. In 2004, as part of the celebration of the university's 200th anniversary, the statue of its founder V.N. Karazin was once again moved. Now it stands in front of the school's main building. In 2010, in commemoration of the 206th anniversary of the university, statues of two eminent scholars were unveiled near its Northern Building — historian D.I. Bahaliy and mathematician A.M. Lyapunov. In April 2016, monuments were opened to the three Nobel Prize winners whose life and work was connected with Kharkiv University: biologist I.I. Mechnykov, economist S.A. Kuznets, and physicist L.D. Landau. In November 2017, a monument to P.P. Hulak-Artemovsky, a prominent cultural figure, writer and Rector of Kharkiv University, was put up near the school's main building.

To conclude, the complex of symbols and emblems as it exists today in Ukraine's universities began to take shape after the collapse of the USSR and the formation of a new system of university education. In general terms, another synthesis of the Ukrainian and Western European university traditions took place in the late 20th and early twenty-first centuries, which led to a kind of "renaissance" of the medieval and early modern symbolic forms of university life. This applies first and foremost to status signs, such as university insignia, awards and decorations, and academic dress. Despite a certain ambiguity among the university community towards the stock of symbols and emblems used today, they perform a number of important functions. First of all, various symbols and emblems define the symbolic boundaries of university-space, as well as construct a hierarchy of relations within university communities. Symbols and emblems are a tool for stratifying a university corporation; they fulfill regulatory and consolidating functions. The consolidating role of symbolism becomes especially prominent in the current situation of crisis, when the unity of university communities and their stable functioning are under threat. With the help of symbols, universities periodically remind themselves and the public of their deep roots and assert their internal unity and unique identity. In external relations and institutional competition, university symbols and emblems serve representative purposes. Symbols and emblems have the power to create an attractive visual image of a university, which becomes

²⁴ Є.С. Рачков, *Візуальна складова практик саморепрезентації класичних університетів України кінця XX — початку XXI ст.*, р. 336–337.

a basic necessity given the current commercialization and expansion (massovization) of university education. Symbolism is an attribute of various practices of university self-representation. Today, symbols and emblems are an essential part of the work of both maintaining and modernizing the traditions, norms, and values of university communities in Ukraine.

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Yevhen Rachkov, Символи и эмблемы как часть знаковой среды университетов Украины (конец XX– начало XXI вв.). В статье прослеживается генезис символов и эмблем классических университетов Украины в конце XX — начале XXI вв. Рассматриваются исторические предпосылки становления символов и эмблем классических университетов Украины. Прослеживаются направления эволюции символики классических университетов Украины на современном этапе. В частности, делается вывод, что в конце XX — начале XXI вв. новые символы и эмблемы, как правило, создавались спонтанно и спорадически. В большинстве случаев они не характеризуются системностью и представляют собой синтез украинских и западноевропейских символических форм. Обращается внимание на роль университетской символики в практиках саморепрезентации классических университетов Украины. Отмечается, что направленность эволюции и факторы трансформации символики свидетельствуют о состоянии университетской культуры на современном этапе. В свою очередь эклектичность символики и слабая рефлексия университетских сообществ относительно ее использования рассматриваются как проявления современного кризиса университетской идентичности в Украине.

Ключевые слова: эмблема, символ, символика, знаковая среда, университеты Украины.

