

The Ukrainian Trident (Tryzub)-by Andrew Gregorovich

The national symbol and official coat of arms of Ukraine is a gold trident on an azure background (pictured above), the tryzub. As a state emblem, the trident dates back to Kievan Rus', when it was the coat of arms of the Riuryk dynasty.

There are various theories about the trident's origins and meaning. A trident was the symbol of Poseidon, the sea god of Greek mythology. It has been found in different societies, such as the Greek colonies on the Black Sea, Byzantium, Scandinavia and Sarmatia, and has been used in various ways; as a religious and military emblem, a heraldic symbol, a state emblem, a monogram, and simply a decorative sign.

The oldest example of the trident discovered by archeologists on Ukrainian territory dates back to the 1st century A.D. At that time, the trident probably served as a symbol of power in one of the tribes that later became part of the Ukrainian people.

The trident was stamped on the gold and silver coins issued by Prince Volodymyr the Great (980-1015), who perhaps inherited the symbol from his ancestors as a dynastic coat of arms and passed it on to his sons, Sviatopolk I (1015-1019) and Yaroslav the Wise (1019-1054).

Other rulers such as; Iziaslav Yaroslavych (1054-1078), Sviatopolk II Iziaslavych (1093-1113), and Lev Danylovych (1264-1301) used the bident as their coat of arms. Although the trident continued to be used by some ruling families as a dynastic coat of arms until the 15th century, it was replaced as a state symbol in the 12th century with the Archangel Michael.

The trident appears not only on coins, but also on bricks of the Church of the Tithes in Kyiv (986-996), the tiles of the Dormition Cathedral in Volodymyr-Volynskyi (1160), and the stones of other churches, castles and palaces. It was also used as a decorative element on ceramics, weapons, rings, medallions, seals and manuscripts. Because of its wide use in Rus', the trident evolved in many directions without losing its basic structure. Almost 200 medieval variations on the trident have been discovered.

Various versions of the trident are used by Ukrainian organizations: supporters of the Hetman regime and certain affiliates of the Ukrainian Catholic Church use a trident with a cross, nationalist organizations use a trident with a sword in its center (designed by R. Lisovsky), and the Ukrainian Native Faith Church has incorporated the trident into its blazing sun emblem.

