Introduction

On the sunny morning of March 31, 1814, the citizens of Paris witnessed a scene that their city had not experienced in almost four hundred years. Armed foreigners poured into the streets and squares, making their way into the city through the Pantin Gate. A multinational army, some of its units dressed in uniforms never before seen in Western Europe, paraded in front of shocked and confused, but also amazed and occasionally amused Parisians. At the head of more than one thousand corps, consisting of Russian, German and Austrian troops, rode on his grey thoroughbred Alexander I, the Tsar of all the Russias, the liberator of Europe, and the conqueror of France. As he led the march through the streets of the French capital, Alexander was followed by his colorfully dressed Cossack guards, an object of interest and amazement to some citizens of Paris and a source of unease and concern to others.

On one side of Alexander rode the King of Prussia, on the other – the representative of the Habsburg emperor. Suddenly Alexander stopped his horse and declared to the surprised crowd: "I do not come as an enemy; I come to bring you peace and commerce!" His words were met with cheers. It was a moment of triumph of Russian arms and the Russian spirit that history had not seen before and would never see again. Joseph Stalin recalled Alexander's capture of Paris when he met President Harry Truman in Potsdam after the Second World War. In 1945, as in 1814, it seemed that a new era was dawning: Russia had repelled a brutal aggressor and emerged from the abyss of near defeat to bring liberation to the nations of Europe and peace and prosperity to the world. But there was a catch. On both occasions, Russia was eager to share with the world a commodity that it lacked itself. Freedom was in short supply in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, and victory abroad bore the seeds of future defeat at home.[1]

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[1] Janet M. Hartley, *Alexander I* (London and New York, 1994), p. 124; Henri Troyat, *Alexander of Russia: Napoleon's Conqueror* (New York, 2003), pp. 187–206; Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, 1994), p. 398. On Napoleon's invasion of the Russian Empire and the campaigns of the

This book tells a story directly related to the growth and development of one of those seeds: the idea of the sovereignty and freedom of nations. The idea gained strength slowly but steadily throughout the nineteenth century, and in the wake of the First World War it brought about the disintegration of the Russian Empire. Few elements of Alexander's army of 1814 contributed more to unraveling the empire than the Cossacks. These colorfully dressed horsemen, who did not leave the French capital before introducing it to the concept of fast food – Parisian bistros have their origins in the Russian *bystro*, which means "fast" – were recruited from the steppe borderlands of the Russian Empire. Among those warriors were Cossacks of Ukraine or, in the official nomenclature of the time, Little Russia, who were particularly eager to join in the fighting and had high expectations of the war. Only a few decades earlier they had had an autonomous state with military units of their own. Now they had proved their loyalty to the empire and wanted it to recognize their service. The Cossacks did not expect the restoration of their state, but they hoped that their regiments would not be disbanded and that rank-and-file Cossacks who entered the imperial service would be exempt from peasant labor obligations. They were promised as much in 1812, when the state needed them to defend the empire. With the war won, the promises were forgotten.

By 1816 Cossack units in Ukraine had been dissolved, and the noble status of descendants of Cossack officers was again in question. Their special rights and privileges were taken away, and the conditions of their integration into the empire were demeaning. The Cossack conquerors of Paris found themselves victors abroad but vanquished at home. For the Cossacks of Ukraine this was a painful but not wholly alien experience. Their previous masters, the kings of Poland, had used them as cannon fodder for generations, luring them into state service in time of need and reneging on their promises thereafter. Back then, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Cossack response was invariably the same: they would rise in revolt, starting bloody uprisings that claimed tens of thousands of victims, and shaking the foundations of the Polish state. The largest of those uprisings, led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky in 1648, inaugurated a lengthy period of wars that set the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth on the road to partition in the late eighteenth century. It also brought many Ukrainian Cossacks under the sovereignty of the

Russian imperial army in Europe in 1813–14, see Dominic Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon: The True Story of the Campaigns of War and Peace* (New York, 2010).

Russian tsars, who were astute enough to offer the Cossacks autonomy, which they had not enjoyed under the Polish kings.[2]

Now, with autonomy gone, the regiments disbanded, privileges under attack, and the noble status of officer families in question, the Cossacks were powerless to strike back in their usual manner. Their response was unconventional and at first largely ignored by the empire. A few years after the Napoleonic Wars, a mysterious manuscript began to circulate among the dissatisfied Ukrainian elite. It was a historical treatise called the *History of the Rus'*, in which the term *Rus'* referred to the Ukrainian Cossacks. They were presented as a nation separate from the Russians to the north. The manuscript told the history of the Cossacks in a manner befitting the hopes and expectations of the Romantic age: its narrative was replete with heroes and villains, as well as enthralling battle scenes, victories and defeats, and graphic depictions of bloody reprisals. The nation of Rus' emerged victorious from its numerous ordeals. It overthrew the Polish yoke and joined the Russian Empire of its own free will, responding to religious and ethnic affinity with the Muscovite tsar and his nation. But the new authorities mistreated the brave but naïve Cossacks, taking away their ancestral name of Rus' and appropriating it for themselves. The author of the treatise claimed that his purpose was to give the heroic Cossack nation the recognition it deserved. He achieved much more than that.[3]

For almost a quarter century the text existed only in manuscript, copied and recopied by descendants of the Cossack officer elite. It became one of the most influential – and, from the perspective of the Russian Empire, most destructive – historical texts of the modern era. The first Russian intellectual to fall under the spell of the *History* was Kondratii Ryleev, a veteran of the Napoleonic wars and a leading poet of the era. The manuscript inspired him to write one of the most impassioned poems of the nineteenth-century liberation movement, the "Confession" of Severyn Nalyvaiko, the leader of a late sixteenth-century Cossack revolt. The poem sent thousands of young Russians into unequal battle with their government. Alexander Pushkin was the next poet to be inspired by the *History*, and one of the first to publish excerpts from it. Nikolai Gogol, another literary genius of the era, was eager to follow suit: some

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[2] For general surveys of Ukrainian history, see Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, 4th edn. (Toronto, 2009) and Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 2d edn. (Toronto, 2010).
[3] *Istoriia Rusov ili Maloi Rossii. Sochinenie Georgiia Koniskago, Arkhiepiskopa Beloruskago* (Moscow, 1846).

of the most impressive scenes of his novel *Taras Bul'ba* were based on the *History*. Despite his deep Ukrainian patriotism, Gogol, not unlike Pushkin before him, saw in the *History* a manifestation of Russian national spirit and imperial patriotism. A younger generation of Ukrainian intellectuals, led by the father of the modern Ukrainian nation, Taras Shevchenko, read the Cossack chronicle as a quest for national liberation. Thus interpreted, the *History*, which became known as the bible of the Ukrainian national movement, inspired thousands of Ukrainian patriots to fight for the freedom of their homeland.

The modern Ukrainian nation, which emerged from the ruins of the Russian Empire during the Revolution of 1917, employed the Cossack myth embodied in the *History of the Rus'* to legitimize its new state. In 1918 it revived the Cossack rank of hetman for its leader and chose for that office a descendant of one of the Cossack hetmans of the early eighteenth century. Independent Ukraine of the post-First World War era was soon crushed by the rising power of the Russian and Polish states, which divided the Ukrainian lands between themselves, but Cossack mythology survived the ordeal. Mykhailo Hrushevsky, Ukraine's greatest historian and the principal author of the Ukrainian national narrative, continued his research on Cossack history in Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s. His numerous students researched the history of Cossack statehood in Western Ukraine, which was under Polish rule during the interwar period. The Great Famine of 1933 and the accompanying persecution of the Ukrainian intelligentsia crushed the Ukrainian national revival in the USSR. Ironically enough, the outbreak of the Second World War and, in particular, the Soviet takeover of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus in September 1939 led to a revival of Cossack studies, which were considered useful for bolstering Soviet Ukrainian patriotism directed against Poland and, later, Nazi Germany.

The Cossack myth gained new legitimacy in Soviet Ukraine after the war under the aegis of the "friendship of peoples" paradigm. That paradigm stressed the accomplishments of the Cossack hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky, who accepted the tsar's suzerainty over Ukraine in the mid seventeenth century. The Soviet authorities changed course once again in the early 1970s, banning further research on the subject because they saw the growing interest in the Cossack past as a manifestation of Ukranian nationalism. Their attempts to curb the dissemination of Cossack mythology were only partly successful. When in 1991 Ukraine reappeared on the political map of Europe, the new state was led to independence by activists deeply inspired by the *History of the Rus'*. Ivan Drach, the leader

of *Rukh*, the largest pro-independence Ukrainian movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s, took it upon himself to translate the *History* into modern Ukrainian in the months leading up to independence. The Ukrainian referendum of December 1, 1991, put an end to the Russian Empire in its modern, Soviet incarnation. Few historical works contributed more to this global transformation than the *History of the Rus'*.[4]

This book examines how the history of Cossackdom as a social estate and an autonomous polity was transformed into a nation-building myth that helped split the monolith of Russian imperial identity and laid the foundations for the rise of the modern Ukrainian nation. It addresses this task by taking a close look at the origins of the *History of the Rus'*, by far the most important text in the formation of the Cossack myth and Ukrainian historical identity.

The most astonishing fact about the *History* is that scholars are still unable to agree even on the most basic facts about this seminal work, including the name of its author. The introduction to the *History* claims that it was written over a long period by several generations of Orthodox monks. It was then edited in the 1760s by Archbishop Heorhii Konysky of Mahilioŭ in Belarus. No one accepts that version today. Like Ossian's poetry in Britain, the *Manuscript of the Queen's Court* in the Czech lands, and the *Tale of Igor's Campaign* in Russia, the *History* was the product of an era of forgeries in which entrepreneurial intellectuals were busy producing birth certificates for their nations – the older, the better. While the Scots and the Czechs know the names of their mythmakers and venerate the memory of James Macpherson and Václav Hanka, the Russians and Ukrainians are still divided with regard to their storytellers. The claim that the *Tale of Igor's Campaign* is a well-written mystification is widely accepted in the West but vehemently rejected in Russia. The puzzle of the *History of the Rus'* is of a different nature. Few scholars accept the old notion that it was produced by Orthodox monks and their archbishop, but questions about the author, the time and place of the work's creation, and its intended message continue to haunt historians, literary scholars, and linguists almost two hundred years after the first appearance of the mysterious text.

In my search for the author of the *History of the Rus'*, I use the term "author" in the broadest possible terms, encompassing possible multiple authors and editors of the work. I bow to historiographic tradition in

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[4] For the impact of the *History of the Rus'* on the development of Ukrainian national identity, see Parts I, II, and III of this book.

referring to that person, or group of persons, as "he." This implies no assumption that women were not involved, only the recognition that as of this writing we have no late eighteenth-century or early nineteenth-century historical works written by individual or collective female authors. The search for the author of the *History* constitutes the main story line of this book. Its two additional layers – a history of the Ukrainian Cossacks from the early sixteenth to the early nineteenth century and a history of the discovery, publication, and study of the *History* itself – serve to illuminate relations between history, myth, and nationhood from Napoleonic times to the present. By tracing the ways in which every new generation of students of the *History* reinterpreted the manuscript according to its own needs, fears, and models of its ever-changing national identity, I relate the search for the author of the *History* as a story of the search for modern Ukrainian and Russian identity. The book makes use of previously unknown archival sources, but its main conclusions are based on a textual analysis of the *History*, its sources, prototypes, and competitors. To make the results of my research accessible to readers not primarily interested in the details of intertextual relationships, I present my findings through the individual stories of scholars and potential authors of the *History*.

My main goal lies beyond the task of discovering the origins of a text that has mesmerized generations of scholars. In solving this particular puzzle, I attempt to put the *History* into its original political, ideological, and cultural context by establishing the time of its creation and identifying the circle of those involved in its production. I argue that the *History* was not a conscious manifesto of Russo-Ukrainian unity or of rising Ukrainian nationalism – the two opposing interpretations advanced by modern scholarship on the text – but an attempt on the part of the descendants of the Cossack officer elite to negotiate the best possible conditions for their incorporation into the empire. As the imperial authorities challenged the noble status of Cossack officeholders and liquidated the last vestiges of Cossack military organization, the Ukrainian nobility was eager to promote its historical achievements and prove that the descendants of the Cossack officers were equals of the Russian nobility. Indeed, the Ukrainian elite of the early nineteenth century claimed that the Cossacks were superior to the Russian nobles, as they were descendants of the Rus' tribes – the original founders of the Russian state and dynasty. The paradox that I highlight in my conclusions is that in contending for imperial elite status the creators of the Cossack myth laid the foundations for the rise of the new Ukrainian nation, leading to the demise of the all-Russian identity and the eventual collapse of the empire.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my research has been the fitting of my textual analysis and detective work into the broader context of the history of national mythologies. The dismantling of the "mythologized past," as Paul A. Cohen notes in his groundbreaking work on the events and historical image of the Boxer Uprising, "is seldom pain-free: it entails a loss, often irreversible, not unlike that resulting from death, that can be severely disturbing and may, because of this, be stubbornly resisted." Still, such dismantling is an extremely important task of history as an academic discipline. No less important is the study of historical myths and the process of mythmaking. In that regard, the story of the creation, dissemination, and reception of the *History of the Rus'* seems an ideal object of study. The *History of the Rus'* was a key text in the transformation of Cossackdom as a lived experience into a historical and national myth. No matter how idealized, inaccurate, and even fantastic the image of Cossack history presented in this text, it became an embodiment of "truth" about the past for generations of readers. As Cohen writes, "Once assertions about the past enter deeply into people's minds (and hearts), it is arguable that they acquire a truth of their own, even if this truth does not at all coincide with what actually happened at some point in past time. At the very least such assertions are true statements about what people *believe* and therefore must occupy a central place in any history of human consciousness."[5]

In my understanding of the term "myth," I follow the definition provided by George Schöpflin, a student of East European politics and coeditor of a collection of essays on *Myths and Nationhood*: "Myth is one of the ways in which collectives – in this context, more especially nations – establish and determine the foundations of their own being, their own system of morality and values. In this sense, therefore, myth is a set of beliefs, usually put forth as a narrative, held by a community about itself." According to Schöpflin, who in this case echoes numerous other scholars sharing an anthropological approach to the study of myth, "[i]t is the content of the myth that is important, not its accuracy as a historical account." The *History of the Rus'* seems to fit two of Schöpflin's nine categories of national mythology – the myths of military valor and ethnogenesis. By focusing on the heroic deeds of the Cossacks, the *History* provided the emerging Ukrainian nation with a story of its origins not as a social estate or a political entity but as an ethnic group of "native-born"

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[5] Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience and Myth* (New York, 1997), pp. 211–12.

Rusians (that is, inhabitants of Rus'). I argue in this book that by doing so, the *History* helped replace the myth of all-Russian unity with that of Ukrainian historical and cultural uniqueness. It also turned the Cossack myth into one of the cornerstones of modern Ukrainian identity.[6]

My immediate point of departure in interpreting the *History of the Rus'* as an expression and embodiment of Cossack mythology has been John A. Armstrong's discussion of the role of the Cossack myth in Ukrainian nation-building. He defined myth as "the integrating phenomenon through which symbols of national identity acquire a coherent meaning." Also crucial to my interpretation of the role of the Cossack myth in the formation of Ukrainian national identity is Anthony D. Smith's observation that "myths, memories, symbols and values can often be adapted to new circumstances by being accorded new meanings and new functions." These broad definitions and general assumptions worked very well for me in the past, when I dealt with the evolution of premodern East Slavic identities and the uses and abuses of Cossack history in post-Soviet settings. Although they provided a good general framework for this study as well, in the course of my work I found, to my surprise, that I could no longer rely exclusively on the familiar literature about nations and nationalism that includes works by Benedict Anderson, Miroslav Hroch, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm.[7]

When I began work on this book, I expected that the traces of the *History*'s anonymous author would lead me to a group of dreamy intellectuals who contributed to Miroslav Hroch's "heritage-gathering" stage of nation-building without having a clear political goal in mind. My research led me in a different direction. The circle of "unusual suspects" discussed in this volume consisted of notables not only politically engaged

6 George Schöpflin, "The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths," in *Myths and Nationhood*, ed. Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (London, 1997), pp. 19–35. On the formation of Ukrainian national mythology, see Andrew Wilson, "Myths of National History in Belarus and Ukraine," in Hosking and Schöpflin, *Myths and Nationhood* pp. 182–97.

7 John A. Armstrong, "Myth and History in the Evolution of Ukrainian Consciousness," in *Ukraine and Russia in Their Historical Encounter*, ed. Peter J. Potichnyj *et al.* (Edmonton, 1992), p. 133; Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford and New York, 1986), p. 3. Cf. Serhii Plokhy, *Ukraine and Russia: Representations of the Past* (Toronto, 2008), p. 168; Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 4. For the dominant "modernist" approaches to the study of nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 2006); Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (New York, 2000); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2009); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1992); Gellner and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1992).

at home but also well integrated into the empire. Individuals potentially responsible for the production of the *History* and definitely involved in its reading and dissemination included highly placed imperial officials who made their careers and fortunes by extending imperial boundaries and administering imperial borderlands. They received their education in the imperial capitals and sent their children to imperial institutions of higher learning, which turned them into Russian writers and poets. Why would such people produce, reproduce and disseminate a text that not only glorified the Cossack past but also promoted a separate Rus' nation and eventually contributed to the fall of the empire? In order to answer that question, I had to put the results of my research not only into the historiographic context of nationalism and national identities but also into that of the evolution of empires.

The last decade has seen a tremendous growth of interest in the history of empires and an explosion of literature on the relations between empires and nations. What I found particularly useful was the emphasis of this new research on the simple fact that national ideology did not develop in a vacuum but grew out of the political and ideological context of empires. While the early promoters of nations had specific political goals in mind, they did not necessarily regard nation and empire as irreconcilable political categories. In their recent global history of empires, Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper note that the fathers of the American Revolution, like their counterparts in Haiti, "used imperial idioms and addressed imperial institutions" before they decided that the conflict was irresolvable and opted for secession. Nations did not replace empires overnight. They were conceived and formed within the boundaries defined by empires, and it is important to place the development of national ideas and mythologies into that historical context. "Once we get away from a nation-centered view of history and the assumption that history moves inexorably toward correspondence of one 'people' with one state," suggest Burbank and Cooper, "we can focus on longstanding debates over what democracy, citizenship and nationality actually meant and when, where, and to whom these notions applied – within empires, in interempire rivalries, in mobilizations against empires."[8]

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[8] Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton and Oxford, 2010), pp. 221, 245. For the recent literature on empires, see David Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415–1980* (New Haven, 2000); John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire since 1405* (London, 2008); Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York, 2003); Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals*

It is within this context of empire-defined historical, political, and intellectual space that I felt most comfortable placing my "suspects" and their ideas about history, politics, and the nation. There are a number of important specificities to be taken into account when examining relations between the elite of Ukrainian Cossack origin and the rulers of the Russian Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Unlike other social, religious, and ethnic groups in that empire (and many others), the descendants of the Cossacks were convinced – and the *History of the Rus'* offers the best evidence of that belief – that they were not conquered subjects but full participants in the ruling imperial nation, indeed, its most ancient, authentic, and central component. They considered themselves partners in the imperial undertaking and protested discrimination against them by the imperial center. The closest parallel to the Ukrainian/Little Russian situation in the Russian Empire is the role played by the Scots in the formation and expansion of the British Empire, and I benefited enormously from the extensive literature on the role of literary texts in the formation of Scottish mythology and identity *vis-à-vis* the British Empire and the notion of "Britishness."[9]

Kenneth McNeil, one of the recent writers on the subject, points out the "unique historical conditions in Scotland that produced a professional elite, which assumed a central role in shaping British imperial attitudes while simultaneously feeling the increasing dominance of English political and cultural influences." Anyone familiar with the role played in the formation of the Russian Empire and Russian imperial identity in the eighteenth century by natives of Cossack Ukraine, from such heavy-weights as Teofan Prokopovych and Oleksandr Bezborodko to the thousands of Ukrainian intellectuals, bureaucrats, and medical doctors (at one point, the latter made up more than two-thirds of all the empire's physicians), can recognize the parallels between Ukrainian and Scottish experiences of empire in that period. No less intriguing for a scholar of Russo-Ukrainian relations in their imperial context is McNeil's statement that the "ambivalence of the Scottish negotiation of the difference reflects

(London, 2001); Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007); Alexei Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism* (Budapest and New York, 2006).

[9] See, for example, Leith Davis, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation, 1707–1830* (Stanford, 1998); Stefan Thomas Hall, *The Role of Medieval Scottish Poetry in Creating Scottish Identity: "Textual Nationalism"* (Lewiston, N.Y., 2006); Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, 1997); Alok Yadav, *Before the Empire of English: Literature, Provinciality, and Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York, 2004).