THE COSSACK MYTH

In the years following the Napoleonic Wars, a mysterious manuscript began to circulate among the dissatisfied noble elite of the Russian Empire. Entitled *The History of the Rus’,* it became one of the most influential historical texts of the modern era. Attributed to an eighteenth-century Orthodox archbishop, it described the heroic struggles of the Ukrainian Cossacks. Alexander Pushkin read the book as a manifestation of Russian national spirit, but Taras Shevchenko interpreted it as a quest for Ukrainian national liberation, and it would inspire thousands of Ukrainians to fight for the freedom of their homeland. Serhii Plokhy tells the fascinating story of the text’s discovery and dissemination, unravelling the mystery of its authorship and tracing its subsequent impact on Russian and Ukrainian historical and literary imagination. In so doing, he brilliantly illuminates the relationship between history, myth, empire, and nationhood, from Napoleonic times to the fall of the Soviet Union.

SERHII PLOKHY is the Mykhailo Hrushevsky Professor of Ukrainian History at Harvard University. His previous publications include *Ukraine and Russia: Representations of the Past* (2008) and *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus* (2006).
NEW STUDIES IN EUROPEAN HISTORY

Edited by

PETER BALDWIN, University of California, Los Angeles
CHRISTOPHER CLARK, University of Cambridge
JAMES B. COLLINS, Georgetown University
MIA RODRÍGUEZ-SALGADO, London School of Economics and Political Science
LYNDAL ROPER, University of Oxford
TIMOTHY SNYDER, Yale University

The aim of this series in early modern and modern European history is to publish outstanding works of research, addressed to important themes across a wide geographical range, from southern and central Europe, to Scandinavia and Russia, from the time of the Renaissance to the Second World War. As it develops, the series will comprise focused works of wide contextual range and intellectual ambition.

A full list of titles published in the series can be found at:
www.cambridge.org/newstudiesineuropeanhistory
THE COSSACK MYTH

History and Nationhood in the Age of Empires

SERHII PLOKHY
For Olena
Contents

List of figures page ix
List of maps x
Note on transliteration and dates xi

Introduction 1

PART I THE MYSTERY
1 A call for freedom 15
2 The Cossack annals 28
3 The birth of the myth 47

PART II ON A COLD TRAIL
4 A noble heart 69
5 The Cossack prince 88
6 The Kyiv manuscript 108

PART III PIECES OF A PUZZLE
7 A matter of time 131
8 Uncovering the motive 149
9 How did he do it? 170
10 The Cossack treasure 188
vi

Contents

PART IV  UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

11 People and places  207
12 The Cossack aristocrats  225
13 The liberated gentry  243
14 A history teacher  261

PART V  A FAMILY CIRCLE

15 A missing name  287
16 A son-in-law  307
17 The rivals  328

Epilogue  351
Appendix: Cossack family networks  369
Acknowledgments  371
Index  374
Figures

Between pages 176 and 177

1 The History of the Rus’, c. 1818. (Andrei Sheptytsky National Museum, Manuscript Division, no. 563.)
2 A Chronicle of Little Russia, 1813. (Volodymyr Vernadsky Library of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Kyiv), Manuscript Institute, I, no. 6099.)
4 Mykhailo Myklashevsky. From Chernigovskie gubernskie vedomosti, no. 666 (1895).
5 Myklashevsky mansion in Ponurivka at the turn of the twentieth century (Photo Collection of Chernihiv State Archives).
6 Archbishop Heorhii Konysky (unknown artist, Nizhyn Eparchy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church).
8 Vasyl Poletyka. From Kievskaia starina, no. 1 (1893).
10 Ivan Hudovyh. From Chernigovskie gubernskie vedomosti, no. 592 (1895).
11 Mykola Borozdna. From Chernigovskie gubernskie vedomosti, no. 164 (1894).
12 Stepan Shyrai. From Chernigovskie gubernskie vedomosti, no. 632 (1895).
13 Nikolai Repnin. From V. V. Ruban, Ukraїns’kyi portretnyi zhyvopys pershoї polovyny XIX stolitтя (Kyiv, 1984).
Maps

1 The Hetmanate and surrounding territories in the 1750s.

2 The Starodub regiment in the 1750s.

3 Imperial provinces: the Hetmanate as part of imperial Russia, 1809. From Kohut, *Russian Centralism*, p. xv.

Note on transliteration and dates

In the text of this book, a simplified Library of Congress system is used to transliterate Ukrainian and Russian personal names and toponyms. The same system is applied in non-bibliographic references to persons and places in the footnotes. In bibliographic references, where the reader must be able to reconstruct Cyrillic spelling precisely from its Latin-alphabet transliteration, the full Library of Congress system (ligatures and breves omitted) is used. Toponyms are transliterated from the language of the country in which they are now located, with the notable exception of the Starodub region of the Russian Federation, which in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries constituted part of the Ukrainian Hetmanate. In this particular case, both Ukrainian and Russian spellings are given on first mention. Pre-1918 dates in this book are given according to the Julian calendar, which in the nineteenth century lagged behind the Gregorian calendar by twelve days.
Map 1: The Hetmanate and surrounding territories in the 1750s.
Map 2 The Starodub regiment in the 1750s.
Map 3 Imperial provinces: the Hetmanate as part of imperial Russia, 1809.