

From Japheth to Moscow: Narrating Biblical and Ethnic Origins of the Slavs in Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian Historiography (Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries)

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Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and onto them were sons born after the flood. The Sons of Japheth: Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras. And the sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, and Riphath, and Togarmah. And the sons of Javan: Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. From these the coastland peoples spread. These are the sons of Japheth in their lands, each with his own language, by their families, in their nations.

Genesis 10: 1–5

Both medieval and early modern European historiographers traditionally traced the origins of humankind from the biblical Flood and considered the sons of Noah—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—ancestors of everyone on earth: “The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled.”¹

Medieval and early modern authors paid particular attention to the status and place of settlement of a specific biblical progenitor. One such formula states that “*Sem ora, Cam labora, Iaffet rege et protege*” (Shem preaches, Ham labors, Japheth reigns and rules) and includes a list of lands settled by Noah’s descendants. In describing the distribution of lands, the Bible also assigns the lands of western and northern Europe to Noah’s son Japheth, who thus became the most favored candidate for progenitor of all Europeans.

¹ Genesis 9: 18–19 (King James Version).

The so-called Danube transfer theory was among the first constructs that took account of the origin of the Slavs. According to this theory, after the mixing of tongues during King Nimrod's construction of the Tower of Babel there was a great migration of peoples. Some came to Europe and settled on the banks of the Danube. All the lands around the Danube were considered the domain of the Slavs.

The "Danube transfer theory" was popular among Byzantine authors, from whom it was borrowed by Kyivan Rus' chroniclers. The *Tale of Bygone Years* in the Hypatian codex describes the origins of the Slavs as follows:

Upon the demolition of the Tower [of Babel] and the mixing of tongues, the sons of Shem took over the eastern lands, and the sons of Ham, the southern lands; as for the sons of Japheth, they took over the West, as well as the northern lands. [From the sons of Noah] came seventy-two [different] tongues, and the Slavic language [was spoken] in the tribe of Japheth, called Norki, that is, the Slavs. Ages later the Slavs settled around the Danube, where now the Hungarian and Bulgarian realm [is located].²

The "Danube transfer theory" grew in popularity and was extensively quoted by Polish, Czech, and Kyivan Rus' authors. In the course of the sixteenth century it was increasingly overshadowed by the "Sarmatian theory," which posited a migration from Babylon to the Slavic lands through Asia to Sarmatia, now equated with the ancient homeland of the Slavs. But accounts of the migration varied, and its sequence was differently presented in those accounts. Thus there was no consensus among early modern European authors on the origins of the Slavs, which were reconstructed on the basis of a combination of biblical genealogy with theories of migration.

Which Son of Japheth?

According to the Russian scholar Aleksandr Mylnikov, the earliest genealogies that identified Japheth as the forefather of the Slavs were written by the German Protestant reformer and historiographer Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560) and the Polish author Jan Długosz (1415–80). They claimed that the first European settler was Alan, a descendant of Japheth.³ Alan had three sons, the youngest of whom was Negro, who in

² Vasyl Yaremenko, ed., *Povist vremianykh lit: Litopys (za Ipatskym spyskom)* (Kyiv: Radianskyi pismennyk, 1990), 9.

³ A. Mylnikov, *Kartina slavianskogo mira: Vzgliad iz Vostochnoi Evropy. Etnogeneticheskie legendy, dogadki, protogipotezy XVI–nachala XVIII veka* (St. Petersburg: Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, 1996), 24.

turn fathered four sons. The elder son, Vandal, became the forefather of the Poles, while the other Slavs were descended from the younger sons.⁴ It should be noted that the division of biblical ancestors into elder and younger ones was an important device in the works of medieval and early modern European authors, allowing them to claim the seniority of certain peoples over others.

Długosz, Matthias Mechovius (Maciej Mechowita, 1457–1523), and Marcin Kromer (1512–89) distinguished between “Asian” and “European” Sarmatia. They defined European Sarmatia as the homeland of “Greeks” and “Slavs,” identifying Javan, the fourth son of Japheth, as their ancestor. Mechovius and Kromer also considered Riphath, a son of Gomer and grandson of Japheth, the ancestor of those who inhabited the vicinity of the Rithean Mountains, namely the Rus', Lithuanians, Poles, Czechs, Moravians, and Illyrians.⁵ Other Polish authors, Bernard Wapowski (1456–1535) and Marcin Bielski (ca. 1495–1575), posited a different genealogy of Slavic origins: Japheth–Gomer–Ashkenaz–Germans and Slavs (see appendix).⁶

The Japheth–Gomer line was also the one followed by the most influential of the early modern Polish authors, Maciej Strykowski (ca. 1547–ca. 1593).⁷ According to him, after the confusion of tongues at the construction of the Tower of Babel, Japheth's son Gomer left Assyria with his people and went to the Sea of Azov, where he lived among the Cymbrs (*Cymbry*), Goths, and Alans on the shores of both the Azov and the Black seas. Later on, while looking for better lands, the descendants of Gomer settled on the banks of the Dnipro, Volga, Dvina, Buh, Dnister, and Nemunas rivers. Others settled in Cimmeria (between the Don and the Dnister), around the Cimmerian Bosphorus, and in the Crimea, where they waged a long war against the Greeks.⁸

It is also worth recalling that early modern authors made extensive use of the works of their intellectual predecessors, often borrowing or omitting certain details. As a result, most of their writings contain several, often contradictory, narratives. Thus the above-mentioned Polish works include elements of another narrative favoring Japheth's sixth son,

⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁵ Ibid., 23–24.

⁶ Ibid., 25–26.

⁷ This conclusion is based on a number of references to Strykowski in the works of early modern Ukrainian and Polish authors.

⁸ Maciej Strykowski, *O początkach, wywodach, dzielnościach, sprawach rycerskich i domowych sławnego narodu litewskiego, żemojdzkiego i ruskiego (1575)* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1978), 45.

Meshech, as the Slavic progenitor—a narrative that was further elaborated by Strykowski and fully developed in subsequent Ukrainian historical writings.

*The Rise of Meshech (Mosoch, Moskwa):
The Role of Polish Historiography*

The first to mention the Meshech lineage was Bernard Wapowski. In a lost history cited by Strykowski (1582), Wapowski claimed that the Slavs (whom he calls “*Slawaki*”) took their name from the Slavic Lake (“*ozera Sloveno*”) in the lands settled by Meshech (or Moskwa, as Wapowski calls him), a son of Japheth, which were named after him and became known as the Muscovite lands.⁹ The connection between Meshech, Mosoch, and Moskwa was based entirely on phonetic and orthographic similarities—another favorite device medieval and early modern writers employed to incorporate biblical and classical references into their narratives in order to prove authority and antiquity.

The next mention of Meshech/Mosoch occurred in the second edition of Marcin Bielski’s *Chronicle* (1564). In the first edition (1554), Bielski had argued for the following line of descent: Noah–Japheth–Ashkenaz (Jaskon, the founding father of the Sarmatians)–Tuiskon–the Poles and the Germans. His primary concern was to establish a common Roman Catholic genealogy including the Poles and the Germans. In the second edition of *Chronicle*, probably edited by his son, Bielski traces the descent of all Slavs from a single progenitor: Japheth–Meshech/Mosoch–the Slavs (“*Slawaki*”), switching from a religious to an ethnic designation.¹⁰

Up to this point, Meshech had only been mentioned as the common ancestor of all Slavs: it was Strykowski who made him a key figure of a historical narrative. According to Strykowski, in the year 1830 from the birth of Adam (774 years after the birth of Noah and 175 years after the biblical Flood), King Nimrod sent people to settle new lands. Among them was Madai (the third son of Japheth), the founder of Media and the forefather of the Medes, who migrated to the northern lands of Asian and European Sarmatia and settled there together with the sixth son of Japheth, Moskwa (Meshech), the progenitor of the Muscovites. Strykowski makes no further mention of Madai and goes on to develop the genealogy of Moskwa (Meshech), who had two sons, Lech and Czech.¹¹

⁹ Mylnikov, *Kartina slavianskogo mira*, 45.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25–26.

¹¹ *O początkach*, 149. In this work Strykowski refers to Moskwa in one passage as Japheth’s sixth son and elsewhere as his sixth grandson.

In the year 375 after the Flood, Moskwa, “the son of Nimrod and grandson of Japheth,” passed away at the age of 270, survived by his four sons, the already mentioned Lech and Czech, as well as Moskwa and Ruś. The sons of Moskwa/Meshech emerged as forefathers of various Slavic peoples: Lech gave rise to the Poles; Czech, to the Czechs; the younger Moskwa, to the Muscovites, and Ruś, to the Ruthenians. Lech’s sons (Lytwon, Kaszub, and Samota) were the progenitors of the Lithuanians, the Baltic tribes, the Prussians, and the Samota tribes.¹²

Apparently deviating from the biblical account, Strykowski turned Moskwa/Meshech from a son of Japheth into his grandson. He also makes Lech and Czechs Japheth’s elder sons, while Moskwa and Ruś figure as their younger brothers. The progenitors of the Lithuanians, the Prussians, and other peoples are younger still—the grandchildren of Meshech and the children of Lech. The moral, as Strykowski presents it, is that just as younger children are obliged to respect and obey their elder brothers, the “younger” peoples should respect and obey the “elder,” more prominent nations.¹³

The story of Meshech/Mosoch/Moskwa was a minor theme for Strykowski, who gave primacy to the Japheth–Gomer line. By the late sixteenth century, however, Polish historiography began emphasizing the descent of the Slavs from Meshech (usually called Mosoch in Polish and Mosokh in Ukrainian historiography) in order to distinguish the origins of the Poles from those of non-Slavic peoples. The Japheth–Javan line obliged the Poles to acknowledge a common origin with the “schismatic” Greeks and even to defer to them as superiors. The Japheth–Gomer–Riphath or Ashkenaz line made them relatives of the Germans or Lithuanians. Furthermore, Polish writers came up with much better biblical references establishing a direct link between the Slavs and Mosoch rather than with Gomer. A citation from the prophet Ezekiel mentions Meshekh (interpreted as Mosoch) and Prince Rosh (interpreted as Ruś) in the same sentence, providing Old Testament “proof” of the ancient lineage of Rus’ and its link with Mosokh. The phonetic similarity of “Meshech,” “Mosoch,” and “Moskwa” enabled the chroniclers to trace Slavic origins to the earliest biblical times, just two generations from Noah himself. Moreover, in the sixteenth century the Poles did not yet feel threatened by Muscovy; hence the construction of a common Slavic lineage in which Mosoch/Moskwa was a key figure seemed a clever way of proving that the Slavs had biblical roots and of establishing their preeminence and superiority to other peoples. Moreover, Strykowski’s work made Lech and

¹² *Ibid.*, 150–52.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 149, 151.

Czech twins (or equals by birth) and elder brothers of the younger Moskwa and Ruś, thereby asserting the Poles' superiority despite the biblical primacy of Meshech (the elder Moskwa).

Ukrainian Adaptations of Biblical Genealogy

The first early modern Ukrainian work that raised the issue of Slavic origins was the *Hustynia Chronicle*, which dates from the early seventeenth century. Its author sets out to determine "from which ancestor did [the Slavs] originate."¹⁴

Japheth, the third son of Noah ... had seven sons. The first of them, Gomer, had three sons of his own: the first one Ashkenaz or Askan, from whom originated all of the German peoples.... Their first king, Tuiscon, reigned over vast lands in Europe, and not only over the German peoples ... but also over the Slavs of Sarmatia.... The second son of Gomer was Riphath ... descended from Riphath were the Paphlagonians, the Henets, the Enets, the Venedi, the Venethi, the Antes, the Alans, the Roxans, [and] the Roxolanians, who were the Rus', and the Alans, the Rus', the Moskva, the Poles, the Slovenes [*slaviane*], the Bulgarians, the Serbs, all those peoples of one nation and one tongue, which is Slavic.¹⁵

As for the descent of the Slavs from Meshech, the author of the *Hustynia Chronicle* initially appears skeptical and largely uninterested. He makes only a brief mention of that lineage, citing no authorities and limiting himself to the observation that, according to some writers, "The sixth son of Japheth is Meshech. He, as some [authors] say, gave birth to the Muscovites and the Slavic peoples, whom I shall discuss below."¹⁶

Later on, however, the author takes a different tack, providing an alternative genealogy of the Slavs, who are supposedly descended from the progeny of Meshech, and citing the testimony of various ancient and thus authoritative writers. He then goes on to compare theories and establish the credibility of the "lineage of Riphath" over the "lineage of Meshech" on the basis of the authority of previous authors and, probably, his own preferences:

Some say that the Slavic people originated from Meshech, the sixth son of Japheth, and used to be called the Moschins or Moskva, and from those Moskva people came all of the Sarmatians: the Rus', the Poles, the Czechs, the Bulgarians, and the Slovenes. The ancient chronicler

¹⁴ V. I. Buganov, ed., *Gustynskaia letopis*, vol. 40 of *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* (hereafter *PSRL*) (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2003), 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

Xenophon also mentions the Moschins, calling them an evil and malicious people. Others, who are more learned, say that the Slavs originated from Riphath, the son of Gomer and the grandson of Japheth, and are not so evil as the Moschins. Others again say that [the Slavs] originated from those two peoples, who intermingled and became known as Slavs. They originate from Riphath, the son of Gomer.¹⁷

Yurii Mytsyk's analysis of the Lithuanian Rus' Chronicle (second half of the sixteenth century), the Ukrainian-language Bobolynsky Chronicle (second half of the seventeenth century), and the Hustynia Chronicle confirms that the "Meshech theory" made its way into Ukrainian historical and philosophical thought gradually over a period of at least five decades.¹⁸ Indeed, one sees the steady growth of the notion of a "Meshech lineage" from the first sporadic mentions in foreign and Ukrainian chronicles into the developed concept presented in the *Synopsis* (1674).

The Synopsis and the Meshech/Mosokh Theory

The *Synopsis* was published by the Kyivan Caves Monastery in 1674, again in 1678, and a third time in 1680–81. Following Maciej Strykowski, its anonymous author mentions Meshech/Mosokh as a progenitor of the "glorious Slaveno-Russian people" ("*slaveno-rosiiskii narod*").

Concerning the origins of the Rus' or the "Slaveno-Russian people," the *Synopsis* says the following:

The Rus' or, rather, the Russian people are Slavs as well, for they derive from their ancestor Japheth, and their language derives from a common language. Upon receiving their "glorious" name for their "glorious" deeds in times of old, they began to be called Russians from the dissemination of their tribes.... Those Russians received that name in times of old for their broad dissemination and settlement over a large part of the world, in many lands, some on the Black Sea, others on the Tanais or Don and the Volga rivers, and yet others on the banks of the Danube, the Desna, the Dnister, and the Dnipro. That is how all the Greek, Russian, Roman and Polish chroniclers present this.... Thus they are called "Russian" because of their dissemination [*rossĕianiia*] and differ from other Slavs only in name, but they are of the same tribe, and that is why they are called the Slavic-Russian or Glorious-Russian people.¹⁹

¹⁷ V. I. Krekoten, comp., *Ukrainska literatura XVII st.* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1987), 148.

¹⁸ Yurii A. Mytsyk, *Ukrainskie letopisi XVII veka: Uchebnoe posobie* (Dnipropetrovsk: Dnipropetrovskiy derzhavnyi universytet, 1978), 13, 75.

¹⁹ Hans Rothe, ed., *Sinopsis, Kiev 1681: Facsimile mit einer Einleitung* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1983), 145–51. The references to "glorious" are, of course, a play on the words "*slava*" (glory) and "Slavs." Thus the Slavs are "glorious" by definition.

The *Synopsis* goes on to say the following about Meshech (Mosokh) and his tribe: “Mosokh, the sixth son of Japheth, is translated from Hebrew into Slavic as ‘one who stretches, disseminates, and stretches the bow,’ from the dissemination of the great and numerous Muscovian Slaveno-Rossian peoples—the Polish, the Volhynian, the Czech, the Bulgarian, the Serbian, the Croatian, and all others who speak a Slavic language.”²⁰ In this instance “Muscovian” is an adjectival form of “Mosokh,” meaning “those who came from the loins of Mosokh,” and does not refer to any polity.

Later on the author of the *Synopsis* points out that Meshech was the progenitor not only of the great Muscovite people but also of all the Rus' or Rossian people,²¹ and this name is known in all the countries mentioned above whose inhabitants speak one common Slavic language.²² Although the author continues mentioning other biblical ancestors, such as Asarmod and Riphath, it is Meshech whom he elevates to the status of direct ancestor of all the Slavs.²³

Both Mylnikov and the historian Iryna Zhylenko consider that the principal motive of the author of the *Synopsis* was to promote the idea of Slavic unity and establish an important role for the Slavs in European history.²⁴ This emphasis on the common origins of all Slavs was at variance with the accounts of other authors, such as Bernard Wapowski, who differentiated the Slavic peoples on the basis of their religious beliefs and other factors. Although Mylnikov and Zhylenko are basically correct, their interpretation does not suffice to explain the subsequent general acceptance of the “Meshech/Mosokh/Moskva” concept.

In my opinion, the difference between the *Synopsis* and previous Ukrainian works on this subject is best explained by their different objectives. The author of the *Hustynia Chronicle* focused on the role of Kyiv as the spiritual and cultural center of the Rus' lands within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth—an objective that did not require any development of the notion that Meshech was the forefather of all Slavs. By contrast, the main purpose of the *Synopsis*'s author was to underline the spiritual and cultural role of Kyiv as the center of the Rus' lands within the Muscovite state. His principal challenge was to link the political, his-

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 154–55.

²¹ By “Rus” and “Rossian” the author most probably meant the Slavs in general.

²² *Sinopsis*, Kiev 1681, 12.

²³ *Ibid.*, 152–55.

²⁴ Mylnikov, *Kartina slavianskogo mira*, 31–32; Iryna Zhylenko, *Lavrskiy almanakh: Synopsys kyivskiy* (Kyiv: Natsionalnyi Kyievo-Pecherskyi istoryko-kulturnyi zapovidnyk, 2002), 123.

torical and cultural traditions of ancient Kyiv with those of the younger Moscow, and emphasizing the “genealogy from Meshech” was one way of solving that problem. The “Mosokh concept,” then, is an example of the attempt made in the *Synopsis* to unite the history of the Kyivan and Muscovite lands in the context of a *single historical space*. The Ukrainian clerics were not only assigning Muscovy an important role in Slavic origins but also bringing it into their Slavic “project.” After all, the whole point of the work was to show that Kyiv was the foundation of the Slaveno-Russian people, religion, and culture—a foundation that now required the protection of the Muscovite tsar. By extending Slavic origins to the Muscovite territories, the Kyivan clerics sought to enlist the tsar and his armed forces into a number of their own projects: creating a Slaveno-Russian tsardom, raising a Slavic anti-Ottoman crusade, and protecting the privileges and wealth of the Kyivan Laura.

The Synopsis and the Muscovite Adaptation of the Meshech/Mosokh Theory

It may appear strange that although Ukrainian clerics ascribed primacy to the Muscovites and Moscow with regard to Slavic origins, the concept of Meshech/Mosokh was long ignored in Muscovy itself.²⁵ But the Muscovites were suspicious of writings emanating from Poland and Ukraine and therefore dubious about the Meshech/Mosokh theory.²⁶ In the Bible, the writings of the Greek historian Xenophon, and the *Hustynia Chronicle*, the descendants of Meshech were portrayed as evil and depraved, “exchanging goods for immortal human souls and copper dishes,” and so on. In 1642 the Swedish chronicler and diplomat Petrus Petrejus (Peer Peersson) used those descriptions to depict the Muscovites as strange and evil people who were a constant threat to neighboring lands.²⁷ Thus, while the Mosokh theory gave the Muscovites primacy when it came to Slavic origins, it also cast them in a negative light.

The author of the so-called *Mazurin Chronicle* (written sometime between the 1660s and 1690), Isidor Snazin, quotes entire paragraphs from the *Synopsis* but does not follow the Mosokh genealogy. Instead he adverts to another popular legend widespread in various seventeenth-century chronicles. It concerns the grandsons of Japheth named Skif and Zardan, who settled near the Black Sea and founded “Great Scythia.” Snazin then elaborates on their descendants, the Scythian princes Sloven

²⁵ Mylnikov, *Kartina slavianskogo mira*, 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 31–32.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 32, 130.

and Rus', who united warring tribes and led them in the mission of settling lands allocated to them by their progenitor, Japheth. Only later does he mention Meshech, who is portrayed as a chieftain of the Muscovites—a cumulative name for the subjects of Sloven and Rus', who lived between the Volga and the Don.²⁸ Another contemporary Muscovite historian, Ignatii Rimsky-Korsakov, completely ignores the “lineage of Meshech” concept, focusing on the succession of princes and tsars and on the “Orthodox” character of the Muscovite state and its rulers.²⁹

Despite this slow start, the Meshech/Mosokh theory gradually made its way into Muscovite intellectual circles. In 1699 a monk of the Afanasev Monastery, Timofei Kamenevich-Rvovsky, utilized the Mesh-ech/Mosokh concept in his work on the origins of the Muscovite and great Slaveno-Russian people. According to him, the progenitors Sloven and Rus' derived from the “loins of Herod” and were the descendants of Japheth and his son, Prince Meshech, the ruler of Muscovy.³⁰ Aleksei Mankiev's *Yadro rossiiskoi istorii* (The Nucleus of Russian History, 1715) further developed the Meshech/Mosokh version in Muscovite historiography.³¹ Mankiev asserted that Meshech/Mosokh was the patriarch and forefather of the Muscovite, Rus', Polish, Volhynian, Czech, Mazovian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian and other peoples who spoke one common Slavic language.³² He insisted on the Bible as the principal source for studying the ethnogenesis of the Slavs and was extremely critical of other theories that invoked false gods, animals, or “fictitious” persons as ancestors. He further Russified the theory by referring to Meshech/Mosokh by first name and patronymic, “Mosokh Yafetovich.”³³

Mankiev's work did not, however, popularize the Mosokh concept in Muscovy/Russia. Written in Swedish captivity, *Yadro rossiiskoi istorii* was not published until the 1770s and was soon displaced by the new secular historiography. It was the *Synopsis*, repeatedly published and sold throughout the Russian Empire, that introduced the concept to the Russian reading public. The *Synopsis* was considered one of the most widely

²⁸ “Mazurinskii letopisets,” in *Letopisetsy poslednei chetverti XVII veka*, 1–179, ed. V. I. Buganov, vol. 31 of *PSRL* (Moscow: Nauka, 1968); A. P. Bogdanov, *Letopisetsy i istorik kontsa XVII veka* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennaia publichnaia istoricheskaiia biblioteka Rossii, 1994), 37.

²⁹ Bogdanov, *Letopisetsy i istorik kontsa XVII veka*, 175.

³⁰ Mylnikov, *Kartina slavianskogo mira*, 32–33.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

³² *Ibid.*, 33–34.

³³ *Ibid.*, 34.

read books of its time: for example, between 1718 and 1722 an average of eight or nine copies were sold every month.³⁴

Meshech/Mosokh in Ukrainian Historiography

By the late seventeenth century the Mosokh concept had reached its apogee of development and popularity in Ukrainian ecclesiastical historiography. Teodosii Sofonovych, who wrote his *Kroinika* in 1672 (two years before the first edition of the *Synopsis*), developed the concept independently.³⁵ Later works, such as the *Chronograph* by Panteleimon Kokhanovsky (1681) and the *Expanded Chronicle of Rus'* (1681–82), simply incorporated the Meshech concept from the *Synopsis* without further embellishment. By the eighteenth century, however, its influence had begun to decline, mainly because of the appearance of a new genre of secular “Cossack chroniclers.” As Anatolii Momryk has noted, the “Cossack chronicles” completely ignored Meshech, focusing instead on overturning the Polish “Sarmatism” theory and replacing it with the alternative concept of a “Cossack Rus' people.” In so doing, secular Cossack authors discarded Meshech as a younger (less important) son of Japheth; instead, they referred to Japheth’s son Gomer as the biblical ancestor of the “Cossack Rus' people” and claimed the Khazars, Scythians, and Cimmerians as ancestors of the Cossacks.³⁶ Instead of looking for a common Slavic ancestor, the Cossack chroniclers were searching for one who would link the phonetically similar “Khazars” and Cossacks (“*kozaky*”).

This concept already appears in a work by Dmytrii Tuptalo, the bishop of Rostov on the Don, who believed that the Khazars were a people similar to the Scythians who spoke a Slavic (Rus') language. They lived on lands that had earlier belonged to the Cimmerians, who, like the Khazars, were descended from Japheth’s first son, Gomer. According to Tuptalo, the Khazars, well known for their glorious and courageous deeds and glorious life, eventually became known as “Cossacks.”³⁷

The Cossack colonel of Hadiach, Hryhorii Hrabianka, wrote in his chronicle (ca. 1710) that “the Little Rus' people, [also] known as the Cos-

³⁴ A. Yu. Samarin, *Rasprostranenie i chitatel peryvykh pechatnykh knig po istorii Rossii (konets XVII–XVIII v.)* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Moskovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta pechati, 1998), 20–46.

³⁵ See Feodosii Sofonovych, *Khronika z litopystsiv starodavnykh* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1992), 56, 58.

³⁶ Anatolii Momryk, “Bibliina henealohiia v etnohrafichnykh kontseptsiiaakh polskykh i ukrainskykh litopystsiv i khronik (do postanovky problemy),” *Mediaevalia ucrainica: Mentalnist ta istoriia idei* (Kyiv) 5 (1998): 111–18 (here 116).

³⁷ Zhylenko, *Lavrskyi almanakh*, 142–44.

sacks ... originated from the first son of Japheth, Gomer; after the departure of the ancient Cimmerians from the Cimmerian Sea [Sea of Azov] ... the Alanian Khazars settled on those lands; [they] spoke the same Slavic language and originated from the [same] forefather, Japheth."³⁸ The "Khazarian" genealogical line was also pursued in the political poem *Razgovor Velikorossii s Malorossiei* (Great Russia's Conversation with Little Russia), written by Semen Divovyeh ca. 1761–62.³⁹

Istoriia Rusov, most probably written at the beginning of the nineteenth century, mentions Sloven, Rus', the Khazars, and Meshech, but constructs its own theory. According to the anonymous author, the Slavic people were descended from Japheth and called "Slavs" after their ancestor Sloven, a descendant of Prince Ross, the grandson of Japheth. The author classifies the Slavs according to their way of life or outward appearance. Thus the Eastern Slavs were called Scythians because of their migratory habits; as for the Southern Slavs, they were called "Sarmatians" after their sharp bird-of-prey eyes and "Rus'" for the color of their hair. Those Slavs were also named after their ancestors—the Rus' after their ancestor "Ross," and the Muscovites after their prince Mosokh, a nomadic chieftain who settled on the banks of the Moskva River and subsequently gave his name to the city and kingdom of the Muscovites, or Rossians. As for the Rus', the bravest and most adventurous of the Slavs, they received the new name "Khazars" from the Greek emperors for helping them in their wars.⁴⁰

As these examples show, the "lineage of Meshech/Mosokh" either disappears from the "Cossack" writings of the 1700s or occupies a marginal place in the broader context of Slavic and Ukrainian-Cossack history.

Conclusion

Early modern historians sought to establish a prominent lineage for the Slavs in general and their own people in particular, which made it necessary to find the closest possible links to the biblical Tower of Babel. To the extent that there was any logic in picking a particular son of Japheth, it lay in the availability of biblical or ancient references, the pos-

³⁸ Grigorii Grabianka, comp., *Deistviia prezelnoi i ot nachala poliakov krvavshoi nebyvaloi brani Bohdana Khmelnytskoho ...* (Kyiv: Vremennaia komissiiia dlia razbora drevnikh aktov, 1854), 5.

³⁹ Semen Divovyeh, "Razgovor Velikorossii s Malorossiei," in *Ukrainska literatura XVIII stolittia: Poetychni tvory, dramatychni tvory, prozovi tvory*, ed. O. V. Myshanych (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1983), 384.

⁴⁰ *Istoriia Rusiv*, trans. Ivan Drach (Lviv: Radianskyi pysmennyk, 1991), 36–38.

sibility of identifying a single progenitor of all the Slavs, and the kind of differentiation that a particular author was attempting to achieve (for example, differentiating Slavs from Greeks or from Germans).⁴¹ It was the sixth son of Japheth, Meshech or Mosokh (improperly identified in Slavic sources), who proved particularly useful for meeting these criteria.

The “genealogy from Meshech,” which elevates the Muscovites to the status of direct descendants of this biblical progenitor, emerges in the works of Polish authors attempting to find a single ancestor for all Slavs. Such all-Slavic “solidarity” did not prevent these authors from further differentiating the Poles and Czechs as descendants of the elder, more venerable sons of Meshech, while maintaining that the Rus’ and the Muscovites were descended from the younger, less respected sons. It should also be noted that in Polish historiography the “genealogy from Meshech” coexisted with other theories and did not constitute the primary narrative.

In Ukrainian historiography of the early seventeenth century, the idea of descent from Meshech was not very popular. The *Hustynia Chronicle* clearly preferred to trace the ancestry of the Slavs from Gomer—Japheth’s first son—and his son Riphath. A decided change from Riphath to Meshech is apparent in the Kyivan *Synopsis*, which should be seen as an attempt on the part of its author to link Kyiv and the Ukrainian lands with Moscow. Thus the identification of Meshech as the Slavs’ common ancestor offered a means of unifying two political, historical, and cultural traditions—those of ancient Kyiv and the younger Moscow.

This elevation of Meshech was less acknowledged in Ukrainian secular historiography, which was not so interested in establishing a common tradition with Muscovy. Nor was the “genealogy of Meshech” initially embraced by the Muscovites, who were more concerned about the negative biblical description of the descendants of Meshech than with making a claim for biblical primacy. The popularity of the Meshech concept was secured mainly by the *Synopsis*, which was printed in numerous editions and remained one of the most popular sources on Russian history until the early nineteenth century. That a theory that gives primacy of Slavic origins to Moscow and the Muscovites was first hinted at in German cosmography, taken up in Polish historiography, further developed into a virtual ideology by late seventeenth-century Ukrainian clerics, but subsequently rejected by Ukrainian Cossack writers and then only reluctantly absorbed into Muscovite/Russian imperial thinking, is one of the ironies of the history of early modern historical thought and narrative.

⁴¹ See the appendix.

Appendix

Biblical Ancestors of the Slavic Peoples According to Various Early Modern Authors

