

## MYTHS OF NATIONAL HISTORY IN BELARUS AND UKRAINE

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### *Introduction*

The term 'myth' needs to be used with considerable care in any discussion of historiography. Its popular association with a wholly imagined or chimerical past is one problem, but so is its use in critical or discourse theory,<sup>1</sup> given the tendency of the latter to limit itself to wholly autonomous self-referential worlds of meaning, divorced from any grounding in broader reality.<sup>2</sup> My intention in this chapter therefore is to argue that, although national and/or nationalist historiographies can indeed be understood as mythic structures, as 'narratives' in the broader sense, they must also resonate in a plausible past and find an appropriate place in the mainstream of popular memory in order to take root.

In the words of Anthony Smith, although

it is history, and history alone, which can furnish the bases of ethnic identity and the psychic reassurance of communal security that goes with it [...] it is not the amount of such history, or even its dramatic value, that is important; what nationalists require from their historical researches is the definition of a particular ethnic atmosphere, unique to that community, and the provision of moral qualities (and heroic embodiments) peculiar to the group.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, when acting as ethnic entrepreneurs, nationalist historians must sell a plausible product that is both effective and affective. The trick with historical myths, or identity myths in general, is that they must help constitute the collective identity of a social subject (in this case a 'nation') without that subject being aware it is

1. Ernesto Laclau (ed.), *The Making of Political Identities*, London, 1994; Chantal Mouffe (ed.), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy*, London, 1992; Agnes Heller, *A Philosophy of History in Fragments*, Oxford, 1993.
2. Bryna D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social Theory*, Philadelphia, PA, 1990.
3. Anthony D. Smith, 'The Formation of Nationalist Movements' in *idem* (ed.), *Nationalist Movements*, London, 1976, pp. 1–30 (8, 17). See also *idem*, *National Identity*, London, 1991, pp. 22, 25, 87; *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford, 1986, chapter 9; and 'Gastronomy or Geology? The Role of Nationalism in the Construction of Nations' in *Nations and Nationalism*, 1, 1995, 1, pp. 3–23.

being so constructed.<sup>4</sup> National myths cannot be *perceived* to be inventions. Although the predictable nature of their construction and combination may lead observers to emphasize the element of artifice, historical mythologies as popular systems of belief also need to be understood through the eyes of their adherents, for whom they need to be perceived as first-order truths. Therefore, although all states are engaged in the social construction of national identity through their influence on public historiographical narrative (especially in the school system and in the mass media), some have more success than others.<sup>5</sup> Some historical myths simply 'fit' popular traditions better than others.

The two East Slavonic states of Ukraine and Belarus provide an appropriate testing-ground for this hypothesis. Nationalist historians in both states have set themselves similar tasks: namely disentangling a national myth of descent from traditional Russophile historiography, celebrating a lost 'Golden Age' before forcible incorporation into the Russian sphere of influence, and demonstrating that, in contrast to autocratic and 'Asiatic' Russia, their nations are naturally democratic, demotic and 'European'. As with other ideal-type nationalist historiographies,<sup>6</sup> the definition of the contemporary nation as a community of fate that shares a collective destiny with past and future generations requires that it first be distinguished from its neighbours and enemies. History can then be presented as a morality play of national resistance and revival against the main national 'Other'.

The 'Other' for nationalists in both Ukraine and Belarus is Russia.<sup>7</sup> In both states, however, the representation of Russia as the 'Other' is a task fraught with difficulty. One half of the population of Ukraine is Russian-speaking; 21 per cent are ethnic Russians, but 33 per cent are Russian-speaking Ukrainians.<sup>8</sup> The latter, in particular, are subject to a

4. Roxanne Lynn Doty, 'Sovereignty and the Nation: Constructing the Boundaries of National Identity' in Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber (eds), *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 121–47. The term 'myth' is therefore only used with this point in mind.
5. See, for example, Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (eds), *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History*, London, 1995; Gail Hershatter, Emily Honig, Jonathan N. Lipman and Randall Stross, *Remapping China: Fissures in Historical Terrain*, Stanford, CA, 1996; and, on India, Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, Princeton, NJ, 1993.
6. Yael Tamir, 'Reconstructing the Landscape of Imagination' in Simon Caney, David George and Peter Jones (eds), *National Rights, International Obligations*, Boulder, CO, 1996, pp. 85–101.
7. Poland no longer occupies the prominent place in national demonology that it did a century ago. Jews and Lithuanians are also 'Others', but space is too short to discuss how they are represented.
8. Valeri Khmelko and Andrew Wilson, 'The Political Orientation of Different Regions and Ethno-Linguistic Groups in Ukraine Since Independence', paper

variety of cross-cutting cultural pressures; neither group traditionally sees Russia as alien, let alone hostile. Belarus is more homogeneous ethnically and linguistically (and regionally), but many, probably most, Belarusians have no idea of nationhood outside of a common cultural sphere with Russia.

This chapter compares nationalist historiography in Ukraine and Belarus by examining seven key myths that play a crucial role in nationalists' efforts to establish or solidify a national identity that is sufficiently distinguished from that of Russia/the USSR. It is argued that, although Belarus has had a particular problem with the physical dissemination of 'national' historiography, since the election of Russophile president Aliaksandr Lukashenka in 1994,<sup>9</sup> there were already more serious problems in Belarus than in Ukraine in terms of the popular 'receptivity' of the key nationalist myths. Belarusian nationalists have had to work with much less promising material, and their 'national idea' has been correspondingly weaker. In Ukraine, on the other hand, nationalist historiographical mythology has a powerful appeal for the Ukrainian-speaking half of the country and in key respects meets the requirements of *raison d'état*. Although more coherent, it remains, however, controversial. Its anti-Russian emphasis hampers its receptivity amongst the Russian-speaking half of the population of Ukraine, and is a potential factor inhibiting the development of their loyalty to the new state.

### 1. Myths of Origin

*Myths of origin* are one of the most important features of any national historiography, in so far as the questions 'Who are we?' and 'Where did we come from?' are vital first steps in establishing myths of national character. Significantly, Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalists have broadly similar myths of origin.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to traditional Russophile historiography, which imagined a relatively united East Slavonic community emerging in the second half of the first millennium AD (the so-called 'ancient Rus' nation' — in Russian *drevnii russkii narod* or *tri-edinaia russkaia natsiia*), they argue that, firstly, the Eastern Slavs were then little more than a loose collection of warring tribes, and that, secondly, by mixing with other local elements, different

presented at the conference on 'Soviet to Independent Ukraine: A Troubled Transformation', University of Birmingham, 13–14 June 1996.

9. Valentin Zhdanko, 'Perepisyvaem uchebniki, peredelyvaem istoriiu', *Belorusskaia delovaia gazeta*, 31 August 1995; *Pravda*, 25 August 1995.
10. Viktor Shnirel'man, 'Natsionalisticheski mif: osnovnye kharakteristiki (na primere etnogeneticheskikh versii vostochnoslavian skykh narodov)', *Slavianovedenie*, 1995, 6, pp. 3–13, also deals with rival theories of 'ethnogenesis'.

geographic groups of these tribes created three very different ethnic 'substrata' for the Ukrainian, Belarusian and Russian nations. Thus, for the Ukrainians, their ancestors were south-western tribes such as the *poliany* and *siveriany*, mixed with Iranian and Ural-Altai (mainly Turkic) elements; for the Belarusians, the north-western *kryvichy* and *dryhavichy*, mixed with local Balts. In a similar fashion, more northerly tribes, such as the *viatychi* and *sloviary*, supposedly mixed with the Ugro-Finns to create the basis of the Russian ethnic group.<sup>11</sup>

The myth of East Slavonic unity is therefore challenged at its very beginnings. In telling this particular story, however, the Ukrainians have a substantial advantage. The main task of Russophile archaeology in the tsarist and Soviet eras was to develop a theory of Slavonic pre-history in the lands around the Dnieper, rebutting rival (mainly German) theories of Gothic pre-eminence in the region.<sup>12</sup> The Ukrainians can, to a large extent, simply adapt such theories wholesale, arguing that the whole line of development through the Trypillians (3,500 to 2,700 BC), Cimmerians (1,500 to 700 BC), Scythians (750 to 250 BC) and Antes (sixth and seventh centuries AD) ended in a local (proto-) Ukrainian culture rather than a general East Slavonic one.<sup>13</sup> As the story told by tsarist and Soviet historians mainly unfolded on what is now Ukrainian territory, it is easily rewritten. In the words of the leading Ukrainian historian Iaroslav Isaievych, head of the International Association of Ukrainian Studies, 'it is perfectly natural that the ideologues of the Ukrainian national movement have sought [to uncover] the deep historical roots of the Ukrainian people',<sup>14</sup> and the Ukrainians have been blessed with ready-made source material with which to assert their antiquity.

Belarusian nationalists, on the other hand, despite some archaeological evidence (mainly burial sites) for their claim that local

11. For the Ukrainians, see (especially) V.P. Petrov, *Pokhodzhennia ukrains'koho narodu*, Kiev, 1992; Leonid Zaluzniak, *Narysy starodavn'oi istorii Ukraïny*, Kiev, 1994; and In.V. Pavlenko, *Peredistoria davnikh rusiv u svitovomu konteksti*, Kiev, 1994. For the Belarusians, Liudmila Duchyts, 'Bal'ty i slaviane na terytorii Belarusi ŭ pachatku II tysiachahodz' dzia', *Belaruskii histarychny ahliad*, 2, 1995, 1, pp. 15–30.

12. Viktor Shnirelman, 'From Internationalism to Nationalism: Forgotten Pages of Soviet Archaeology in the 1930s and 1940s' in Phillip L. Kohl and Clare Fawcett (eds), *Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology*, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 120–38.

13. Volodymyr Kyrychuk, 'Istorychni koreni ukrains'koho narodu: do pyttannia etnogenezu ukrains'iv', *Hessez*, 1994, 1, pp. 142–9.

14. Iaroslav Isaievych, 'Problema pokhodzhennia ukrains'koho narodu: istoriografichnyi i politychnyi aspekt', in his *Ukraïna: dawna i nova*, Lviv, 1996, pp. 22–43 (22).

Slavonic and Baltic elements had a long pre-history of intermingling.<sup>15</sup> have to rely more on the testimony of local toponyms and hydronyms.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, there is no real evidence of pre-Slavonic civilization to establish the antiquity of Belarus *before* the period of contact with proto-Russian tribes. The best the Belarusians can do is to claim that the Slavs originated on or close to Belarusian territory, 'between the Orda and Dnieper rivers, in the river basins of the Visla and Prypiat'.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Foundation Myths

All nations need a formal starting-point to their history, normally the moment when the process of 'ethnogenesis' is deemed to have culminated in the beginnings of formal statehood. Once again, for the Ukrainians this is relatively easy, as they can simply invert the history of Kievan Rus'. Given the Ukrainian nationalist argument that the Slavonic tribes who inhabited the Dnieper area from the seventh century AD were already 'proto-Ukrainians', then the state they established in the ninth century, Kievan Rus', can be claimed as 'the first Ukrainian state'. Furthermore, it is argued that Rus', although Byzantine in culture, drew on the proto-Ukrainian (pagan) traditions that had developed amongst the Trypillians, Sarmathians, Antes and others. The religion, art, architecture and language (see below) of Rus' were therefore all 'early Ukrainian'.<sup>18</sup> More northerly, proto-Russian, tribes played only a marginal or downright hostile role in the life of Rus', which was, after all, based in Kiev (the sack of Kiev by the northern armies of Andrei Bogoliubskii in 1169 occupies a prominent part in Ukrainian nationalist mythology).<sup>19</sup>

Belarusian nationalists, on the other hand, cannot claim the whole state of Rus' as their own; they have to make do with the assertion that its north-western marches were relatively autonomous. The principality of Polatskaia-Rus' (and later that of Novaharadok), founded by the *kryvichy* just as Kiev was founded by the *poliany*, is therefore described as 'the first state on the territory of Belarus', which was only briefly under the authority of rival centres of power such as Kiev and

15. Heorhi Shytkhai, *Kryvichy: Pa materialakh raskopak kurhanoli u Palnochnai Belarusi*, Minsk, 1992.

16. Author's interview with Anatal' and Valentin Hrytskevich, 2 September 1995.

17. V.F. Holubet, U.P. Kruk and P.A. Loika, *Tsi vedastse vy historyiu svatoi krainy?*, second edition, Minsk, 1995, p. 6.

18. See for example, Raisa Ivanchenko, *Kyiv 'ka Rus': pochatky Ukrainy 'kol derzhavy. Posibnyk z istorii*, Kiev, 1995, and Iaroslav Dashkevych, 'Natsiia i utvorennia Kyiv 'kol Rusi', *Ratusha*, 9 September 1993.

19. *Istoria Ukrainy dia ditei shkil 'naho viku*, Kiev, 1992, p. 38.

Novgorod (Kiev and Polatsk were at war between 1127 and 1129).<sup>20</sup> 'Like ninth century "Britain" [therefore], "Rus" was in fact a collection of rival kingdoms, with Kiev, Polatsk and Novgorod like Wessex and Mercia.'<sup>21</sup> However, semi-autonomous quasi-statehood provides nowhere near as resonant a beginning as the Ukrainian case.

In both cases the exclusion of (proto-) Russian elements from the history of Rus', as the first step in the trend towards the radical 'othering' of Russia, is potentially dangerous.<sup>22</sup> Too sharp a leap from the myth of East Slavonic unity to a one-dimensional portrayal of Russia as always and everywhere solely hostile can only strain the loyalties of Russophiles to the new Ukrainian and Belarusian states.

### 3. Myths of Descent and Myths of Statehood

Nationalist historiography likes to narrate a more or less continuous myth of national descent in order to refute the stereotypes of rival mythologies in which their nation plays only a temporary and/or marginal role. This is particularly important in the Ukrainian and Belarusian cases: in tsarist and Soviet historiography, treatment of the two nations was often perfunctory, save for the standard narrative of their teleological path towards eventual 'reunion' with Russia. *Myths of (past) statehood* are the most decisive way of counteracting such stereotypes; Ukrainians therefore claim a 'thousand years of state-building', Belarusians a 'centuries-long tradition of the development of statehood'.<sup>23</sup> However, in addition to its relatively weak beginning, the history of 'Belarusian statehood' has more natural gaps and discontinuities than in the Ukrainian case,<sup>24</sup> and rival Polish,

20. Hoorhi Shtykhaŭ and Uladzimir Piashevich, *Historyia Belarusi: Starazhytynia chasy i siaradniavechcha*, Minsk, 1993, text approved by Ministry of Education for fifth to sixth classes, pp. 105–34. See also Mikola Ermalovich, *Starazhytnaia Belarus': Polatski i novaharodski peryiady*, Minsk, 1990.

21. Author's interview with Valentin Hrytskevich, 2 September 1995.

22. The Ukrainian historian Petro Tolochko continues to argue that Rus' was the cradle of all three East Slavonic nations; see his *Kyivs'ka Rus'*, Kiev, 1996. See also M.F. Kotliar, 'Kyivs'ka Rus'' in V.A. Smolii (ed.), *Istoria Ukraïny: nove bachennia*, vol. 1, Kiev, 1995, pp. 40–94, especially pp. 73 and 89–90.

23. From the 1991 declaration of Ukrainian independence, *Holos Ukraïny*, 29 November 1991; from the 1994 constitution of Belarus, *Konstitutsiia respubliki Belarus'*, Minsk, 1994, p. 66.

24. Iaroslav Malyk, Borys Vol and Vasyl' Chupryna, *Istoria ukrains'koi derzhavnosti*, Lviv, 1995; Alena Abetsedarskaia, Petr Bryhadzin, Leonid Zhylnovich et al., *Dapamozhnik pa historyi Belarusi dla pastupaiuchykh u vyshchishyia navuchal'nyia ustanovy*, Minsk, 1995; and Mikhas' Bich, 'Dziarzhavnasci' Belarusi: stansilenne, strata, barats'ba za adnastlenne (IX st.–1918 hod)', *Belaruskaja minushchyna*, 1993, 5–6, pp. 3–7 and 21.

Lithuanian and Russian myths of statehood are more difficult to displace.

After the collapse of Rus' in the early thirteenth century, the Ukrainians can claim that its traditions passed to the kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia, which supposedly controlled nearly all the southern territories of Rus' until the 1340s.<sup>25</sup> Thereafter, there is admittedly a fallow period when Ukrainian lands fell (mainly) under Polish or Lithuanian rule, although Ukrainian historians nevertheless claim that the lands around Kiev under nominal Lithuanian control in fact remained virtually autonomous until the Union of Lublin in 1569.<sup>26</sup> From the mid-seventeenth century onwards, however, the Ukrainians have the all-important Cossack era to celebrate.<sup>27</sup> Not only are the Cossacks lauded for their democratic traditions and defence of the (Orthodox) faith, but it is argued that they revived many of the traditions of Rus' and that the polity they established after Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi's rebellion in 1648 was a true Ukrainian *state* rather than just an anarchic refuge for runaway serfs.<sup>28</sup> As the history of the Cossack 'Hetmanate' can be stretched up until the end of the eighteenth century, there is therefore a relatively short gap before 'national revival' begins early in the nineteenth century, culminating in the establishment of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR) in 1917–20 (see below).

The Belarusians, on the other hand, have no obvious polity to celebrate before the twentieth century. Despite claims that some Belarusians travelled south to participate in the Ukrainian Cossack movement, its influence on Belarusian society could only be indirect. To establish a tradition of statehood in the medieval period, therefore, the Belarusians have to displace Lithuanian historiography, claiming that the state established by Mindaugas (Mindaugas) in the late fourteenth century was in fact a Belarusian, not a Lithuanian, state, founded on the remnants of Polatskaia-Rus' and Novaharadok.<sup>29</sup> Subsequent confusion derived from the fact that 'the politonym [of the Lithuanian state] became used as an ethnonym [*litolisys*], even though

25. Iaroslav Isaievych, 'Halys'ko-Volyns'ka derzhava' in Iurii Zaitsev *et al.*, *Istoria Ukrainy*, Lviv, 1996, as approved by the Ministry of Education, pp. 75–84.

26. O.V. Rusyna, 'Ukrains'ki zemli u skladi Lytvy ta Pol'shchi' in Smolii (ed.), *Istoria Ukrainy: nove bachennia*, vol. 1, pp. 113–51.

27. In fact, until the historian Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi's pioneering reinterpretation of Rus' at the turn of the twentieth century, the Cossack era was much the more important Ukrainian myth, so long as the Russophile version of the history of Rus' held sway.

28. Valerii Shevchuk, *Kozats'ka derzhava*, Kiev, 1995; Valerii Smolii and Valerii Stepankov, *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi (Sotsial'no-politychnyi portret)*, second edition, Kiev, 1995.

29. Mikola Ermalovich, *Starazhytnaia Belarus: Vilenski peryiad*, Minsk, 1994.

80 to 90 per cent of the population was Belarusian'.<sup>30</sup> In fact, 'Lithuanian' (*litviny*) then meant Belarusian.<sup>31</sup> Belarusian law was the basis of the Lithuanian Statutes of 1529, 1566 and 1588, all of which were supposedly written in medieval Belarusian, which was only replaced by Polish as the official local language in 1696.<sup>32</sup> Elements of Belarusian statehood therefore survived even the political union between Lithuania–Belarus and Poland in 1569 (the Union of Lublin).<sup>33</sup>

However, the claim, even to a 'hyphenated' form of statehood in the Lithuanian–Belarusian era, is difficult to promote to modern-day Belarusians, who are accustomed to thinking of the late medieval and early modern periods in terms of religious conflict between Catholics and Orthodox. Traditionally, Roman Catholicism was associated with the Poles and Lithuanians and Orthodoxy with Russia, leaving little space for a separate Belarusian identity between the two. A narrative of separate Belarusian development therefore needs to be underpinned by some more positive attributes of national identity.

#### *4. Myths of National Character: Religion, Democracy and 'Europe'*

In the period in question, when religious adherence remained all-important, Ukraine at least was beginning to develop identity markers in terms of both an Autocephalous and a Uniate Catholic tradition. Ukrainian nationalists would claim that the original Church of 'Kiev, Halych [Galicia] and all Rus'' embodied a unique local style of Orthodoxy, that Kiev therefore contested Moscow's ecclesiastical authority after the latter unilaterally formed its own Metropolitanate in 1448 in supposed succession to the Church of Rus', and that Kiev established a rival Church that flourished between 1620 and 1686,<sup>34</sup> subsequently revived on no less than three separate occasions this century, in 1921–30, 1941–3 and 1990. Although the Moscow Church

30. Author's interview with Uladzimir Arlot, 5 September 1995.

31. Uladzimir Arlot, 'Kali my byli litovsami' in his *Taśamuniry polatskai historyi*, Minsk, 1994, pp. 136–73; Vitaŭt Charopka, 'Litviny — slavianski narod', *Belaruskaja minušchchyna*, 1993, 3–4, pp. 12–14; Paŭla Urbas, *Da pytan'nia etnichnai prymalezhas'ci starashchytnykh lit's'vymoŭ*, Minsk, 1994.

32. Uladzimir Šviahynski, 'Jakaja mova byla dziazhatnaja u Vialikim Kniaŭstve Litovskim?' in *Z'miŭser San'ko* (ed.), *100 pytan'niaŭ i adkazali ŭ historyi Belarusi*, Minsk, 1993, pp. 12–13.

33. Vitaŭt Charopka, 'Liublinskaja unia', *Belaruskaja minušchchyna*, 1995, 2, pp. 31–4.

34. Kost' Panas, *Istoriia Ukrainy koŭ tserkvy*, Lviv, 1992, pp. 15–89; Volodymyr Kisyk, 'Pro shliakhy rozvytku tserkvy v Ukraini i Rosii (XI–XVI st.)' in *Ukrains'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, 1993, 2–3, pp. 76–85.



has been dominant between times and the Ukrainian Orthodox have therefore tended to divide their loyalties between Moscow and Kiev, it is important that, in comparison to Belarus, a rival poll of attraction at least exists.

Ukraine also has a strong Uniate Catholic tradition.<sup>35</sup> Although the Union of Brest in 1596 that created the Uniate Church could originally be credited with provoking the Orthodox counter-reaction that produced the restoration of the Ukrainian Church in 1620, the redivision of Ukrainian lands in 1667 (the Treaty of Andrusovo) left the Uniate Church predominant in those western Ukrainian lands under Polish and later Habsburg rule, where it paradoxically became the main bulwark of Ukrainian national identity against the Roman Catholic Poles.

Belarus, on the other hand, had no real Autocephalous tradition before 1795 (or before 1596) to distinguish the Orthodox faithful in Belarus from their Russian counterparts. In order to make a claim of religious distinction, therefore, Belarusian nationalist historians rely on the claim that most of the population became Uniate Catholics after the Union of Brest in 1596. Furthermore, Belarusians supposedly accepted the Union more enthusiastically than the Ukrainians and the new Church was able to spread throughout Belarus, whereas in Ukraine it remained confined to the West.<sup>36</sup> It is therefore claimed that '80 per cent of the rural population' of Belarus was still Uniate Catholic when it was absorbed by Russia in 1795, and only 6–7 per cent were Orthodox.<sup>37</sup>

The Uniate Church was completely suppressed, however, by Nicholas I in 1839, and, unlike the Church in the Habsburgs' Ukrainian territories (Galicia and Transcarpathia), was unable to survive abroad, as virtually all Belarusian territory was now under Romanov rule. Therefore, even if nationalist claims about popular religious loyalties in 1795 are accepted (and more Russophile Belarusian historians continue to assert that the majority religion in

35. I.F. Kurts *et al.* (eds), *Tserkva i natsional'ne virodzhennia*, Kiev, 1993; N. Tsiryk (ed.), *Ukrains'ke virodzhennia i natsional'na tserkva*, Kiev, 1990. On the 1596 Union, compare V.V. Haiuk, Ia.R. Dashkevych *et al.*, *Istoria religii v Ukraini*, Lviv, 1994, with the more scholarly Borys Godziak and Oleh Tyhii (eds), *Istorychnyi kontekst ukladennia Beresteis'koï unii i pershe pouinna pokolinnia*, Lviv, 1995.

36. The 'West' included the Right (western) Bank of the Dnieper until the area was joined to the Russian empire in 1793–5. As in Belarus, Uniatism was eradicated on the Right Bank in 1839.

37. Anstol' Hrytskevich, 'Relihiinse pytanne i zneshniaia poliuka tsaryzmu perad podzeleniam Rechy Paspalitsai' in *Vesti AN BSSR*, 1973, 6, pp. 62–71 (63); and author's interviews with Hrytskevich, 2 and 5 September 1995.

Belarus was always Orthodox),<sup>38</sup> Belarusians and Russians have both been part of *Slavia Orthodoxa* for at least two centuries, which has left the Belarusians particularly vulnerable to retrospective myth-making concerning Russia's role in 'saving the Orthodox' from the Catholicizing threat of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or *Rzeczpospolita*.<sup>39</sup> (Belarusian nationalists, on the other hand, insist that Moscow's 'wars of liberation' in 1512-22, 1558-83 and 1654-67 were in fact wars of aggression against the Belarusian people.)<sup>40</sup> Significantly, it has proved extremely difficult to revive the Uniate Church in Belarus in the 1990s.

Outside the sphere of religion, both Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalists claim that their cultures are more naturally democratic and 'European' than Russia's (it is often argued that 'until the mid-seventeenth century links between Ukrainians and Belarusians remained so close that in many respects their cultures were inseparable').<sup>41</sup> Neither nation experienced Russia's 240 years under the 'Tartar yoke' or the consequent tendencies towards 'Asiatic despotism' (which Belarus supposedly escaped completely).<sup>42</sup> Moreover, even before the Renaissance and Reformation, Ukraine and Belarus had been organic parts of European culture, while 'the Muscovite state's ideological policy called for cultural isolation'.<sup>43</sup> Peter the Great's belated and only partially successful attempts to 'Europeanize' Russia only emphasized the breadth of the previous divide.

In further contrast to autocratic Muscovy/Russia, it is asserted that traditions of popular assembly (*viche*) and the urban autonomy provided by Magdeburg law survived in both Ukraine and Belarus until the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>44</sup> Both Ukraine and Belarus had early written constitutions, and Ukraine also had the democratic example of

38. For an attempt to steer between both points of view, see H.Ia. Halenchanka and L.S. Ivanova, 'Tsarkva na Belarusi' in M.P. Kastniuk *et al.* (eds), *Narysy historyi Belarusi*, Minsk, 1994, vol. 1, pp. 166-78, especially p. 178.

39. See the three essays by V.V. Grigor'eva and E.N. Filatova on Russophile versions of religious history in *Nash Radavod*, vol. 3, 1994, pp. 642-68.

40. In the latter 'Commonwealth' war alone, 53 per cent of the local population supposedly perished at Moscow's hands; Henadz' Sahanovich, *Neviadomaja voina: 1654-1667*, Minsk, 1995, p. 130.

41. Iaroslav Isaievych, 'Cultural Relations between Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians (Late Sixteenth through Early Eighteenth Centuries)' in his *Ukraina: davna i nova*, Lviv, 1996, pp. 198-213 (201).

42. Henadz' Sahanovich, 'Ti byla na Belarusi manhola-tatarskaja miavolis?' in San'ko (ed.), *100 pyttanniia i adkazai z historyi Belarusi*, pp. 8-9.

43. Isaievych, 'Cultural Relations between Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians', p. 204; Leonid Zaluzniak, 'Ukraina i Rosiia: rizni istorychni doli' in *Starozhytnosti*, 1991, 19; Anatol' Hrytskevich, 'Historyia hespalityki Belarusi' in *Spadchyna*, 1994, nos. 1, 3 and 4, pp. 85-93, 39-51 and 48-61.

44. Iazep Iukho, 'Shto takoe mahdeburgskae prava?' in San'ko (ed.), *100 pyttanniia i adkazai z historyi Belarusi*, pp. 20-1.

the Cossacks to follow.<sup>45</sup> In the Belarusian case, however, 'democratic' and 'European' traditions form relatively weak boundary markers, in so far as they fail to overlap with other lines of distinction. In the Ukrainian case, they at least help to reinforce a sense of religious exceptionalism among Uniate West Ukrainians and the central Ukrainian intelligentsia, who are largely Autocephalous Orthodox, although, once again, too simplistic a portrayal of Russia risks alienating those who remain loyal to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchy), which is still the largest Church in Ukraine.

### 5. Myths of a 'Golden Age'

Belarusian nationalist historiography also suffers from the lack of a particularly obvious 'Golden Age'. Most Belarusians would date it to the Lithuanian period, between the Unions of Krevo (1385) and Lublin (1569).<sup>46</sup> The 'Lithuanian-Belarusian' state was then the largest in Europe,<sup>47</sup> whose armies won famous victories at Grunwald (1410) against the Teutonic Order, and at Arsha/Orsha (1514) and Ulla (1564) against Muscovy (the anniversary of Arsha was the occasion for a large anti-Russian demonstration in Minsk in September 1996).<sup>48</sup> Frantsishak (Francis) Skaryna (1490–1552?) translated the Bible into Belarusian and helped Renaissance and Reformation ideas percolate into Belarusian culture.<sup>49</sup>

45. Iryna Kresina and Oleksii Kresin, *Het'man Pylyp Oriyk i ioho konstytutsiia*, Kiev, 1993; Iazep Iukho, 'Kali byla stvorana pershaia belaruskaja konstytutsiia?' in San'ko (ed.), *100 pytanniiaŭ i adkazai z historyi Belarusi*, pp. 25–6; Olena Apanovych, 'Demokratyzm derzhavnogo ustroiu i zhyttia Zaporoż'kot Sichu' in V.F. Huzhva (ed.), *Demokratia v Ukraini: mynule i maibutnie*, Kiev, 1993, pp. 93–102.
46. Aleh Loika, 'Tsi byŭ "zalasny vek" u historyi Belaruskaj dziaŭzhavy?' in San'ko (ed.), *100 pytanniiaŭ i adkazai z historyi Belarusi*, pp. 41–2.
47. See, for example, the maps in Vitaŭt Charopka, 'Liublinskaja unia' in *Belaruskaja minušchchyna*, 1995, 2, pp. 31–4; and Ivan Saverchanka, 'Stao takoe Vialikae Kniaŭstva Litoŭskae?' in San'ko (ed.), *100 pytanniiaŭ i adkazai z historyi Belarusi*, pp. 26–9 (28), showing the Kingdom during the reign of Vitaŭt/Vytautas (1392–1430).
48. Anatol' Hrytskevich, 'Barats'ba Vialikaha kniaŭstva Litoŭskaha i Ruskaha (Belaruskaj-Litoŭskaj dziaŭzhavy) z Teŭtonskim ordenam u kantasy XIV–pershaj palove XV st.' in *idem* (ed.), *Abradzhennje: Historyчны al'manach*, Minsk, 1995, vol. 1, pp. 36–61; Iauhien Filipovich, 'Khuo zh peramoh u Arshanahaj bitve?', *Nasza slova*, 1995, 18. See also Henadz' Sahanovich, *Voiska Vialikaha Kniaŭstva Litoŭskaha II XVI–XVII stst.*, Minsk, 1994.
49. Adam Mal'dis (ed.), *Spadchyna Skaryny: zbornik materialaŭ pershykh skarynalistykich chytanniŭ (1986)*, Minsk, 1989; Evgenii Nemirovskii, *Frantsisk Skaryna: zhizn' i deiatel'nost' belorusskogo prosvietelja*, Minsk, 1990; V.A. Chamarytski et al., *Skaryna i ioho epokha*, Minsk, 1990.

The difficulties of reinterpreting the Lithuanian–Belarusian period have already been detailed. The Belarusian ‘Golden Age’ failed to set Belarus off on a path that diverged from the Russian cultural tradition in the long term. Moreover, it is not an obvious model for contemporary Belarus. The Ukrainians, on the other hand, have at least two possible ‘Golden Ages’. The first, Kievan Rus’ at its zenith in the tenth and eleventh centuries, would also be classed as a ‘Golden Age’ by Russian historians. Only its patrimony is disputed. Ukrainians, however, would also class the period of Cossack-Orthodox revival in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a second ‘Golden Age’. Kiev was once again the centre of learning for the whole of Eastern *Slavia Orthodoxa* and its main window on the Western world. A uniquely national style of architecture and religious art flourished to a greater extent than in neighbouring Belarus, and Church traditions were modernized and ‘Europeanized’ (see above).<sup>50</sup> In fact, many Ukrainians would argue that Kiev was then more ‘advanced’ than Moscow, and that without the strong southern influence the later Petrine revolution would have been impossible (although Belarusians, interestingly, make similar claims).<sup>51</sup>

#### 6. Language Myths

The one obvious difference between the three East Slavonic nations is language. Nevertheless, rival mythologies concern the three languages’ origin and development. Russophiles claim that the Ukrainian and Belarusian languages were invented by nineteenth-century philologists, as a corruption of Russian through the artificial import of Polish and other words (according to one Russian author, 51 per cent of the words in a typical Ukrainian dictionary were Polish in source, and 38 per cent ‘Polish–Russian’).<sup>52</sup> Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalists, on the other hand, claim that their languages are in fact older than Russian.<sup>53</sup> Just as there was no ‘old Rus’ nation’, there was therefore no ‘old Rus’ language’ shared between Ukrainians, Belarusians and Russians.

50. Oleksa Myshanych (ed.), *Ukrains’ke barokko*, Kiev, 1993; Isaievych, ‘Cultural Relations between Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians’ (see note 41 above).

51. Bohdan Korchemnyk, *Dukhovi vplyvy Kyieva na Moskovshchynu v dobu het’mans’koï Ukrainy*, Lviv, 1993; Ivan Saverchanka, ‘Khto zasnavai kniadrūkavanne ŭ Maskve?’, and Aleh Trusaŭ, ‘Shto rabili belarusy ŭ Maskve ŭ XVII stahodzi?’ in San’ko (ed.), *100 pytannai i adkazai z historyi Belarusi*, pp. 36–7 and 45–6; author’s interview with Anatol’ and Valentin Hrytskevich, 2 September 1995.

52. I. Belich, *Otkuda vziatsia ukrainskii iazyk?*, Munich, 1977.

53. Hryhorii Pivtorak, *Ukrainci: zvidky my i nasha mova*, Kiev, 1994; Ivan Laskoŭ, ‘Adkul’ paishla belaruskaja mova’ in *Z historyjai na “Vy”*, second edition, Minsk, 1994, pp. 298–312.

Moreover, both Ukrainian and Belarusian supposedly have strong West Slavonic influences, the latter-day adoption of Russicisms being the result of artificial state-directed 'Russification'.<sup>54</sup> Russian is in fact the corruption, with French and other influences predominant.

Ukrainians claim that the 'proto-Ukrainian (southern Rus') group of dialects' were already well-developed even before Cyril and Methodius codified their alphabet in 863 AD,<sup>55</sup> functioning alongside and then gradually penetrating Church Slavonic to create early medieval Ukrainian-Belarusian (Ukrainians tend to argue that true linguistic differentiation between Ukrainian and Belarusian only took place after the Union of Lublin). Belarusian nationalists also argue that their language is older than Russian, but claim that Belarusian was already distinct from Ukrainian by 1569 (as the sixteenth-century 'Lithuanian' Statutes were supposedly written in Belarusian — see above).<sup>56</sup>

In the Belarusian case, however, language alone is likely to remain a relatively weak prop for national identity, for as long as so many Belarusians continue to regard their own language as lacking in prestige and, as a 'peasant tongue', incapable of serving as a means of access to the modern world. In Ukraine, the use of Ukrainian is on the increase, but outside of Kiev, and below the élite level, change has been slow since 1991. As only just over half of all ethnic Ukrainians are Ukrainian-speaking, language cannot be the only marker of national identity.

### 7. Myths of National Resistance and Revival

Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalists commonly characterize the 'Russian' period in their history as one of 'forcible occupation', 'imperial rule' and 'colonial status'.<sup>57</sup> There is no space here to discuss this particular myth, but the counter-myth of national resistance to occupation is of great importance to legitimizing independence in the modern period.

In the Belarusian case, however, national revival (*adradzhenne*) only really began in the period after 1906 and was unable to make much of

54. Stanislav Stankevich, *Rusifikatsiia belaruskas movy u BSSR i supratsiid rusifikatsiianamu pratsesu*, Minsk, 1994; Oleksandr Serbezhus'kol (ed.), *Anty-ruskyi*, Lviv, 1994.

55. Isievych, 'Cultural Relations between Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians', p. 34.

56. Lastok, 'Adikal' paishla belaruskain mova' in *Z historyiai na "Vy"*, pp. 299, 311.

57. See for example 'Khronolohii dukhovnoho ta fizychnoho nushchennia ukrains'kol natsii', *Rozbudova derzhavy*, 1995, 1, pp. 10–15; Mikhas' Bich, 'Ab natsional'nai kantsyptsyi historyi i historychnai adukatsyi u respablyty Belarus', *Belaruskii historychny chasopis*, 1993, 1, pp. 15–24 (20–24).

the opportunities provided in the period after the 1917 Revolution.<sup>58</sup> Although a Belarusian National Republic (BNR) was briefly established in 1918,<sup>59</sup> it only survived for a few months and has nothing like the same mythic resonance of the Ukrainian National Republic (UNR) of 1917–20, let alone the period of inter-war independence for the Baltic states. The 1920 Slutsk rebellion against Soviet rule occupies a prominent place in nationalist historiography,<sup>60</sup> but Russophiles downgrade it to an event of minimal importance or even deny that it happened.<sup>61</sup> It is therefore extremely difficult to displace the 1917 Revolution as the central event in popular historical consciousness of the period.<sup>62</sup> (Significantly, Belarusian president Lukashenka originally proposed 7 November 1996 as the date for his controversial referendum on expanding his constitutional powers.) Similarly, efforts to portray the 1863 Polish rebellion under the tsars as in fact a Belarusian struggle for 'national liberation' suffer from years of popular association of the event with the uprising of the hated Polish landlords.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, Belarus has no great liberation myth to rival the official Soviet version of the Second World War. The only serious rival to the Soviet partisans operating on Belarusian territory was the Polish Home Army;<sup>64</sup> the attempt by nationalists to set up a Belarusian Central Council and Belarusian Home Defence in 1944 is dismissed by Russophiles as the act of a handful of Nazi collaborators, whose main effect was simply to channel conscripted *Ostarbeiter* back to Germany.<sup>65</sup> Victory in the Second World War is still celebrated in traditional Soviet style.<sup>66</sup>

Ukraine, on the other hand, has more plausible myths of resistance and revival. Cossack resistance to the Russian state's gradual elimination of their rights and privileges continued up till the

58. Ryszard Radzik, 'Prychyny slabas' tsi natsyiatvorchaha pratsesu belarussd u XIX-XX st.' in *Belaruskii historychny ahliad*, 2, 1995, 2, pp. 195–227; and Steven L. Guthrie, 'The Belorussians: National Identification and Assimilation, 1897–1970' in *Soviet Studies*, 26, 1977, 1 and 2, pp. 37–61 and 270–83.
59. V.A. Krutalevich, *Na putiakh natsional'nogo samoopredeleniia (BNR–BSSR–RB)*, Minsk, 1995.
60. Anstol' Hrytskevich, 'Slutskae pal'tanne 1920 — zbroiny chyn u barats'be za nezalezhnasts' Belarusi' in *Spadchyna*, 1993, 2, pp. 2–13.
61. M.P. Kasziuk et al., *Narysy historyi Belarusi*, Minsk, 1995, vol. 2, pp. 71–2.
62. Significantly, the Kasziuk volume refers to the Belarussian SSR rather than the BNR as the period when the Belarussian people established 'self-rule': see the section 'Samavyznachenne belaruskaha naroda' in *ibid.*, pp. 65–76.
63. Holubet, Kruk and Loika, *Tsi vedaetsie vy historyiu svozi krajiny?*, p. 96.
64. Inŭhen Siamashka, *Armia Kraŭva na Belarusi*, Minsk, 1994.
65. A.M. Litvin and Ia.S. Paŭlaŭ, 'Belarus' u hady Vialikaj Aichynnaj vainy' in Kasziuk et al., *Narysy historyi Belarusi*, vol. 2, pp. 265–323 (306–7).
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 309–15.

destruction of their headquarters, the *Sich* fortress, in 1775.<sup>67</sup> Although the national revival of the nineteenth century was nowhere near as strong as similar movements in Poland, Estonia or the Czech Lands,<sup>68</sup> it was certainly stronger than in Belarus. Moreover, many Ukrainian nationalists have attempted to elevate the Ukrainian National Republic (UNR) of 1917–20 to the status of a legitimate *status quo ante* the imposition of Soviet power, as with the three inter-war Baltic states.<sup>69</sup> The new Ukrainian flag, hymn, state emblem and (since September 1996) currency all date from this period.

Ukraine also has the powerful, albeit extremely divisive, myth of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and its long and bloody struggle against the Germans, Poles and Soviets from 1943 until the mid-1950s.<sup>70</sup> Claims as to the number of combatants mobilized by the UPA have recently risen as high as 400,000.<sup>71</sup> However, although the UPA is still revered as a historical symbol in west Ukraine, to which territories its support was largely confined,<sup>72</sup> it is reviled to an equal extent in eastern and southern Ukraine, where Soviet-era myths depicting the UPA as Nazi collaborators and the Red Army as the true liberators of Ukraine still hold sway. Ukraine can also point to a national dissident movement that, during its heyday in the 1960s, encompassed hundreds of activists, whereas Belarusian nationalist dissidents could be numbered on the fingers of one hand.<sup>73</sup> Many surviving dissidents are prominent political activists and have sought

67. I. Svamyk, 'Natsional'no-vyzvol'ni rukhy u XVIII st.' in Zaitsev et al., *Istoriia Ukraïny*, pp. 141–51; Larysa Bondarenko (ed.), *Ivan Mazepa i Moskva*, Kiev, 1994.

68. Cf. V.H. Sarbei, 'Stanovlennia i konsolidatsiia natsii ta pidnesennia natsional'nogo rukhu na Ukraïni v druhii polovyni XIX st.', *Ukraïns'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, 1991, 5, pp. 3–16.

69. Mykola Lytvyn, 'Vyzvol'ni zmahannia 1914–1920 rr.' in Zaitsev et al., *Istoriia Ukraïny*, pp. 213–51; Stanislav Kul'chyt's'kyi, 'Tsentral'na Rada. Utvorennia UNR' in *Ukraïns'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, 1992, 5 and 6, pp. 71–88 and 73–94; V.F. Verstiuk, 'Ukraïns'ka revoliutsiia: doba Tsentral'noi Rady' in *ibid.*, 1995, 2, 5 and 6, pp. 65–78, 79–88 and 66–78; Mykola Lytvyn and Kim Naumenko, *Istoriia ZUNR*, Lviv, 1995.

70. As the literature on the UPA is voluminous, the following are only paradigmatic examples; M.V. Koval', 'OUN-UPA: mizh "tretim reïkhom" i stalins'kym totalitaryznom' in *Ukraïns'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, 1994, 2–3, pp. 94–102; Oleh Bahan, *Natsionalizm i natsionalistychnyi rukh: istoriia ta idei*, Drohobych, 1994. See also Bohdan Iakymovych, *Zbroini sily Ukraïny: narys istorii*, Lviv, 1996, pp. 175–99.

71. The total includes members of other underground groups: Koval', 'OUN-UPA: mizh "tretim reïkhom" i stalins'kym totalitaryznom', p. 101.

72. Cf. Volodymyr Serhiichuk, 'V UPA — vsia Ukraïna' in *Vis'ko Ukraïny*, 1993, 6, pp. 74–84.

73. On Ukraine, see Heorhii Kas'ianov, *Nezhodni: Ukraïns'ka inteligentsiia v rusi oporu 1960–80-tykh rokiv*, Kiev, 1995. On dissent in Belarus, see Jan Zaprudnik, *Belarus: At a Crossroads in History*, Boulder, CO, 1993, pp. 109–10.

to play up their role in preparing the ground for the changes of the late 1980s.<sup>74</sup>

In comparison to Belarus, Ukraine therefore has more useful legitimization resources when claiming that independence in 1991 marked the culmination of centuries of struggle, albeit not the all-powerful 'national liberation myth' enjoyed by states with powerful pre-independence movements such as the FLN in Algeria or Vietcong in Vietnam.

### *Conclusions*

Neither Ukraine nor Belarus yet has a historical mythology capable of fulfilling all the functions which were cited at the beginning of this chapter. The problem for Belarusian nationalists is that it has proved extremely difficult to displace older pan-Slavonic and Soviet myths, without a powerful rival myth of anterior statehood or religious exceptionalism. In Ukraine, on the other hand, a relatively coherent narrative of origin and descent has powerful appeal to the nationally-conscious minority. However, because it excludes or caricatures genuinely complex aspects of the Ukrainian-Russian historical relationship, it runs the risk of alienating the Russian-speaking half of the population of Ukraine.<sup>75</sup> The new president, Leonid Kuchma, has therefore preferred to emphasize relatively safe topics, the Cossack movement in particular,<sup>76</sup> rather than the more divisive issues raised by his predecessor Leonid Kravchuk, such as the Great Famine of 1932-3, the UPA, or a history of Rus' without the Russians. Thus, in both states, the use and abuse of national history is likely to remain a politically sensitive issue for a long time to come.

74. See, for example, the eulogy by Anatolii Ruznachenko, 'Iak Ukraina zdobuvala nezalezhnist' i shcho z toho vykhodyt', *Suchasnist'*, 1996, 3-4, pp. 58-64; and the retrospectives in *Samostiina Ukraina* (the organ of the former Ukrainian Helsinki Group), September 1993, no. 27, and April 1994, no. 13.

75. See also my *Ukrainian Nationalism in the 1990s: A Minority Faith*, Cambridge, 1997, especially pp. 157-61. For some attacks on nationalist historiography, see the article by Petro Symonenko, leader of the revived Communist Party of Ukraine from 1993, "Natsionalna ideia": myfy i realnist' in *Holos Ukrainy*, 21 March 1996; and V.V. Kulesha, "Simvolika dolzhna otrazhat' istoriiu i traditiiu strany" in *Kommunist*, April 1996, no. 15.

76. *Holos Ukrainy*, 28 August 1995. Leonid Kravchuk was also more cautious before 1991, but thereafter increasingly associated himself with nationalist mythology. A prime example was Kravchuk presiding at the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Great Famine in Autumn 1993, which many participants characterized as attempted 'genocide' against Ukraine: *Literaturna Ukraina*, 16 September 1993.