

Title: Narrative and Politics in *Istoriia Rusov*
Author: Polina Rikoun, University of Denver

This paper offers a narrative analysis of *Istoriia Rusov* (*History of the Rus'*), examining how its narrative structure helps advance the political aims of the anonymous author and his social estate. A history of Cossack Ukraine, *Istoriia Rusov* was written in the early 1800s and remained among the most widely read and influential Ukrainian histories for the next hundred years (Plokhy 2006: 344, 337). Epitomizing the historiographic tradition of the Cossack elite (Velychenko 156), *History* reveals much about the mindset of this social group, particularly its perception of its relationship with the Russian imperial government.

A number of scholars argue that *History* is fundamentally loyal to the Russian crown; even though it denounces government abuses, it does so to plead for redress, not to incite resistance (Velychenko 216, 158; Plokhy 2005: 21). However, analysis of *History's* narrative and rhetoric suggests that its author takes a more aggressive stance, intertwining supplication with threat of retribution. This threat is articulated in a veiled form through the structure of *History's* narrative. The author creates an implicit parallel between the Cossacks' relationship with the Polish king and their relationship with their next overlord, the Russian tsar. Having established this parallel, the author uses the failure of the alliance with the Polish king—dissolved because the king repeatedly failed to uphold Cossack rights—as a cautionary tale for the Russian tsar, implying that history can repeat itself. The implication is that if the tsar fails to redress Cossack grievances, the alliance with him can be dissolved just as the Polish alliance was. This threat, however, is made very cautiously. With considerable rhetorical skill, the author makes the threat of secession appear to emanate directly from an unbiased and detached representation of historical events, while distancing himself from the idea of secession through explicit assurances of loyalty.

Studying the narrative and rhetoric of *Istoriia Rusov* can help us better understand how a writer of history, even one faced with the overwhelming power of absolute monarchy, can try to renegotiate power relations and attempt to gain a more advantageous position for his social group.

Works Cited

- Istoriia Rusov ili Maloi Rossii*. Moscow: University Printing House, 1846.
- Plokhy, Serhii. "Ukraine or Little Russia? Revisiting an Early Nineteenth-Century Debate." *Canadian Slavonic Papers*. 48.3 (2006): 335-353.
- . *Unmaking Imperial Russia*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.
- Velychenko, Stephen. *National History as Cultural Process*. Edmonton: CIUS, 1992.