**Divine Providence and the Party Line:**

**Russian-Ukrainian Relations in 16th and 20th century Historiography**

**by Polina Rikoun**

This talk examines the myth of Russian-Ukrainian unity—the view that Russians and Ukrainians are two branches of a single East Slavic people who emerged from a common ancestor state of Kyivan Rus’ and are bound together by a shared historical destiny ([Plokhy 263-64](#_ENREF_2); [Kohut](#_ENREF_1)). I focus on two key texts that helped articulate and disseminate the myth: *Synopsis, or a Brief Compilation from Different Chroniclers about the Origins of the Slavo-Rossian People and the First Princes of the Divinely Protected City of Kiev* (1678), and *Theses on the Three-Hundredth Anniversary of the Reunion of Ukraine and Russia* (1954). *Synopsis* was written in the Kyivan Cave Monastery and widely used as a textbook of Russian history in the eighteenth century ([Zhylenko 14-19](#_ENREF_6); [Samarin 35, 56, 58](#_ENREF_3)). *Theses* was composed by Soviet historians and party functionaries in Kyiv and Moscow; it defined Russia’s relationship to Ukraine and other republics and guided Soviet nationality policy until the fall of the USSR ([Yekelchyk 154-57](#_ENREF_5); [Velychenko 149](#_ENREF_4)).

Even though these texts were written in vastly different historical periods, they have much in common. First, I will briefly demonstrate their similarities along three crucial dimensions: 1) rhetorical situation, i.e. relationship between author, text and audience; 2) defining features of the unity myth, and 3) shape of the historical process posited by both documents. Second, I will analyze representations of historical process in greater depth, comparing the ways that agency and causality operate in both texts. Both in *Synopsis* and *Theses* history is governed by inexorable, trans-individual forces—divine providence and the will of the people, with the latter being focalized and carried out by the Communist Party. I will engage in close analysis of each text and its ideological context to explain why divine providence and the party line operate so similarly in these master-narratives of Russian-Ukrainian history.

Selected Bibliography

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