“Printing” the Ruthenian Identity: An Examination of Polemics in 17th Century Ukraine

“[Books] are products of artisanal labor, objects of economic exchange, vehicles of ideas, and elements in political and religious conflict.”
Robert Darnton

The origin and evolution of the Ukrainian identity is a widely-discussed topic with a rich and contentious historiography. Many scholars have revisited this topic in the aftermath of the 2013-2014 Euromaidan events and subsequent conflict with Russia in Ukraine’s Donbass.¹ These events have raised new questions about Ukraine’s historical relationship to Russia and how the Ukrainian “narod” conceives of its national identity as separate but equal to its Russian counterpart.

A peculiar but under-examined element that sets the Ukrainian identity apart from the Russian identity is the role of the printing press in the development of the two peoples’ histories. In his book, Origins of Slavic Nations (2006), Serkhii Plokhy briefly hones in on the press as a key difference between the evolution of an early Russian, or Muscovite, identity and an early Ukrainian, or Ruthenian, identity. He notes that the former was shaped largely “at the courts of the tsar and the metropolitan, while the second was shaped by a broad spectrum of secular and religious elites that gained access to the printing press in the last decades of the

sixteenth century.” In an earlier work, *The Cossacks and Religion in Early Ukraine* (2001), Plokhy notes that the introduction of printing “stimulated the development of religious and political thought” and “helped to strengthen communal ties within Ruthenian society,” but does not return to the significance of the printing press again in this or any subsequent works.  

This paper seeks to establish the printing press as a crucial contributing factor in the consolidation of a Ruthenian identity in the 17th century Ukrainian lands. This paper will examine the period of Ukrainian history from 1595 to 1622, when polemics surrounding the Union of Brest dominated the culture of the elite educated classes. Through the life of Meletij Smotryč'kyi, a skilled polemicist and key figure of the cultural revival in the Ukrainian lands, we can better understand this pivotal period in Ukrainian history.

**The Ruthenian Identity**

Before a Ukrainian identity was consolidated in the early 20th century, the people who would become Ukrainian experienced a tumultuous history as “Little Russians” and “Ruthenians”. The Ruthenian identity included Ukrainians and Belarussians living in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth up until the 1780s, when the Ukrainian lands split in two: right-bank Ukraine was subsumed by the

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Kingdom of Poland, and left-bank Ukraine was subsumed by Muscovy. For those under Muscovite control, a Little Russian identity emerged, while those under Polish control maintained their Ruthenian identity.

But when did a distinct Ruthenian identity first emerge? Paul Magosci (1996), Timothy Snyder (2003), and Serkhii Plokhy (2006) point to the second half of the 16th century as the period which catalyzed the development of a Ruthenian identity. Two important events occurred in this period: the Treaty of Lublin in 1569 and the Union of Brest in 1595. The Treaty of Lublin united the Kingdom of Poland with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania into a single state, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Prior to the treaty, the Ukrainian lands were divided between Lithuania and Poland; after the union, most of the Ukrainian lands fell within the Polish Kingdom. These included the southern Slavic territories of the Bratslav, Kyiv, and Volyn regions, while the northern Slavic territories (approximately modern day Belarus) were turned over to Lithuania. Notably, the territories dominated religiously by Orthodoxy and linguistically by Ruthenian were turned over to the Kingdom of Poland, a place which had been racked by the battle between Protestantism and a Catholicism set against the backdrop of the Renaissance for the past half of a century. Snyder describes Ukraine’s exposure to this battle as “intellectual fireworks” which lit up “against a darkening sky.”⁴ The cultural presence of the Orthodox church was suddenly outstripped by the Protestants and Catholics.

Though a formidable Orthodox revival movement was launched by several powerful Orthodox elite—giving Ruthenians their first complete bible in Church Slavonic—the Orthodox church steadily declined under the Polish Kingdom where it was forced to compete with rival faiths. Matters were made worse in 1595 when the Church of Rus’ broke with the Patriarchate of Constantinople and placed itself under the authority of the Pope of Rome as part of the Union of Brest. This church became known as the Uniate Church. This church retained the Eastern Christian liturgy, but affirmed Catholic dogma. The union split the church loyalty in two between the Uniate Church and Orthodox Church and sparked a fiery debate that continued for several decades.

Snyder and Plokhy disagree on the consequences of the Union of Brest. In *The Reconstruction of Nations*, Snyder argues that as a result of the Union (compounded by the implications of the Treaty of Lublin) the Ruthenian gentry became increasingly polonized—that is, elites adopted Polish as their language, converted to Roman Catholicism, and embraced Polish economic practices such as binding peasants to the land. According to Snyder, this process widened the cultural and economic gulf between Ruthenian peasants who remained loyal to the Orthodox church and their Roman Catholic Ruthenian lords.\(^5\)

Plokhy’s interpretation of the Union’s aftermath differs significantly. In *The Cossacks and Religion in Early Modern Ukraine, and Origins of Slavic Nations*, Plokhy argues that Ukrainian society was not intellectually ‘awakened’ until the Union of

\(^5\) Ibid. (110-11)
Brest thanks to polemical discussions surrounding the union. The discussions penetrated discourse among the broad spectrum of Ruthenian elites, “from the princely stratum and the church hierarchy all the way down to village priests, burghers, and Cossacks.” According to Plokhy, these polemics were “important factors promoting the crystallization of pre-modern national consciousness in Ruthenian society of the time.” Whereas before the treaty of Lublin and Union of Brest, the Rus’ identity was local, post-Union Ruthenian elites developed a shared “early modern national identity” that was shaped by their shared loyalty to Orthodoxy but extended beyond confession to include a conception of a geographic territory and a “Ruthenian nation” as “the supreme communal value.”

This paper takes up Serkhii Plokhy’s argument as its framework and seeks to explore the modes of discussion that catalyzed this awakening. In short, what role did the printing press play in the development of the Ruthenian identity? How did these crucial discussions evolve, and with them, the conception of a Ruthenian identity?

**Printing in Ukraine**

Though printed books arrived in Ukrainian cities just a few decades after the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in mid-15th century

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6 Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*. 199.
Germany, it took considerably longer for the technology to arrive in the Ukrainian lands. Cracow became the first major center of printing in the region in the late 15th century. In Cracow, Poles, Lithuanians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Italians, Hungarians, Czechs and other ethnic groups made up a cadre of printing craftsmen who printed books in multiple languages. The Ukrainian lands would have to wait another century for print shops to be established in their cities; the earliest of these were established in Ostrih and L’viv in the late 16th century. Printers who had been trained in L’viv established Kyiv’s first printshop at the Kyivan Caves Monastery as late as 1616.

Between the late 16th century and early 17th century, printing presses began popping up across the region: there are twenty five presses known to have existed within the Ukrainian lands in this period, spread across seventeen villages, cities, and towns. Seventeen of them were owned by Orthodox Ukrainians and produced books either in Ruthenian or Church Slavonic. (Another six were operated by the Polish Roman Catholics). According to Iaroslav Isaievych, there are twenty two known to have existed in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania between the period of 1569 and 1648, but here is where things become unclear. Isaievych claims that eleven of these were Orthodox, one was Uniate, and four were Roman catholic. It seems rather unbelievable that in period when so many Churches and high-ranking church clerics had converted to the Uniate rite that there would be such a dearth of printing

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10 Ibid. 221.
presses owned by them, and so many owned by the Orthodox church. However, for the purposes of this paper, David Frick’s account of the debates between members of the Uniate Church and Meletij Smotryc’kyj corroborate Isaievych’s account. Frick mentions only one Uniate printing press repeatedly in his account: The Uniate Holy Trinity Monastery, which was across the street from the Orthodox Brotherhood Monastery of the Holy Spirit, where Smotryc’kyj and other anti-Uniate polemicists published their works. (In any case, this is certainly an area that requires more attention from historians so that we can better understand how and when presses were commandeered from different confessional groups over time.)

What is certain, is that the printing press made the work of publishing much faster. Gutenberg’s invention combined oil-based ink, adjustable molds, mechanical moving type, and a wooden press mechanism to make the first printing press capable of mass production.\(^\text{11}\) Compared with the few pages a scribe could hand-copy a day, or the roughly forty pages possible by carved wooden blocks, the press could produce as many as 3600 a day depending on the staff of the press.\(^\text{12}\) The number was probably smaller in the Ukrainian lands where presses tended to be small and staffed by itinerant craftsmen. The largest print shops, including the Kyivan Caves Monastery, could have twelve to fifteen men on staff, but most just had two or three.\(^\text{13}\)

\[^{13}\text{Isaiэvych, Voluntary Brotherhood. 222.}\]
Vilnius was a significant center for printing activity. The city’s presses were responsible for 75% of all titles printed in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania between 1553 and 1660. This paper focuses on the discussions that sprang up during this period, in this region, and of course, mostly in print.

**Meletij Smotryč'kyi**

Born in 1577, Meletij Smotryč'kyi’s life unfolded in the wake of the Treaty of Lublin and Union of Brest. Smotryč'kyj had many roles: Orthodox monk, Archbishop of Polotsk, writer, and Ruthenian linguist. Smotryč'kyi, who knew both Ruthenian and Polish, was well-poised to enter the polemics surrounding the Union of Brest. Smotryč'kyi cuts a complex figure: his father Herasym Smotryč'kyi worked as a translator for the production of the Ostroh Bible (the first complete Bible printed in Old Church Slavonic) and as a teacher at Ostroh Academy—two projects commissioned by Prince Konstantyn Ostroz'kyi as part of his efforts to revive and preserve Orthodox culture. It is hardly surprising then that Meletij Smotryč'kyi would enter the debate on the side of the Orthodox church in light of his upbringing. What is surprising is that by the end of his life, Smotryč'kyi left the Orthodox church for the Uniate church. For this reason, Smotryč'kyi perfectly represents the kind of person caught in the struggle for hearts and minds between the Orthodox and Uniate church in this period. It is his work advocating for the Orthodox church that is most relevant to this paper. Smotryč'kyi not only masterfully debated his
opponents, but also articulated increasingly clear definitions of the Ruthenian identity.

**Polemics**

Smotryc'kyi’s opening salvo against the Uniates was called, *Threnos, That is, The Lament of the One, Holy, Universal, Apostolic, Eastern Church* and was printed in 1610 by the Orthodox Brotherhood in Vilnius.\(^ {14} \) This is considered to be one of Smotryc'kyi’s most audacious works because in it, Smotryc'kyi, writing under the pseudonym of “Theophil Orthologue”, narrates the work as a female embodiment of Orthodoxy. Boldly, Smotryc'kyi regards apostasy from Orthodoxy (including acceptance of the Union) as the abandonment of the Ruthenian nation:

Addressing my oration of those of you, glorious Ruthenian nation, who have not yet abandoned me, your mother, and have not blemished yourselves with blot of apostasy, I ask why you are silent at such great and unheard of calumnies?\(^ {15} \)

Smotryc'kyi also constructs an elaborate metaphor to describe the loss of Ruthenian noble families, treating them as precious stones in her crown and rich garment. In doing so, Smotryc'kyi defines the Ruthenian nation as the sum of its noble families, and thus argues that without them, the nation is decimated. Smotryc'kyi produces a long list of names of the families that are considered “lost”—a tactic David Frick

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\(^{14}\) All translations of Smotryc'kyi by David Frick in *Rus’ Restored: Selected Writings of Meletij Smotryc’kyi 1610-1630*, 2005.

observes as one hoping to attract noble apostates back to the Orthodox Church and to the national cause. The work, in short, was a balm for the members of the Orthodox community of Poland-Lithuania who felt abandoned by the religious and political elite, and a serious charge against Ruthenians who had gone over to the Uniate side.

Despite King Sigismund III’s mandate that private citizens should not buy or collect printings of *Threnos* but should actually collect them and burn them, the work quickly became a best seller. Therefore it was necessary for the Uniate church to issue a rebuttal. Piotr Skarga, one of the leading supporters of the Union, was given this task and in that same year published *A Warning to the Rus’ of the Greek Rite against the Threnodies and Lament of Theophil Orthologue* in Cracow. In it, he describes Ruthenians as divided between those who stand with the “Holy Universal Church” (the Uniate church) and those who remain, “with a certain church that is called that of Nalyvajko.” The term ‘Nalyvako’ refers to the leader of the 1594-1596 Cossack revolt, Severyn Nalyvayko. Frick notes that this name worked rhetorically on two levels: it worked as a derogatory name for the Ruthenian people and their faith, as well as a shorthand link between Orthodoxy and treason. Skarga not only had little regard for the idea of a Ruthenian nation, but seems to have viewed the persistence of a Ruthenian identity after the Treaty of Lublin and Union of Brest as pesky and troublesome.

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16 Ibid. xxii.
17 Ibid. xxiv.
A second rebuttal to Smotryc'kyi was published two years later—a sign that the popularity of *Threnos* extended beyond its initial print run. This rebuttal came from the powerful royal secretary and future Uniate bishop of Volodymyr and Brest, Illja Moroxovs’kyj and was titled, *A Consolation or, Relief from the Acrimonious Lament of the Supposed Holy Eastern Church by the Invented Theophil Orthologue.* Moroxovs’kyj stuck to attacking the authority and authenticity of the work rather than attacking the Ruthenian Orthodox community as Skarga had done—a signal that Skarga's approach may not have been successful in persuading many Orthodox believers.

When Smotryc'kyi printed a *Grammar of Church Slavonic* in 1618 and 1619 at the Vilnius Brotherhood Press in Vievis, he challenged the status of the Church Slavonic language in the Polish Kingdom. In his Ruthenian-language preface to the *Grammar,* Smotryc'kyi outlines standards for Ruthenian Orthodox schools, including that, “the Slavonic dialect will be maintained in usual school conversation among the pupils under threat of punishment.” This was a bold move by Smotryc'kyi to not only attempt to preserve the Slavonic language, but to also deem it equal to the other languages associated with a good education: Greek, Latin, and Polish. It was also a defiant response to Piotr Skarga, who 40 years prior had argued in his pro-Union manifesto, *On the Unity of God's Church under One Pastor and on the Greek Apostasy from that Unity* (with reprints in 1590 and 1610) that Slavonic was not a language for learning:

\[\text{18} \text{ Ibid. xxxi.}\]
...the Greeks greatly cheated you, O Ruthenian nation, that in giving you the holy faith, they did not give you their Greek language... so that you might never attain true understanding and learning...For only these two, Greek and Latin, are languages by means of which the holy faith has been propagated and disseminated throughout the whole world, without which no one can attain complete competence in any field of learning, least of all in the spiritual doctrine of the holy faith...other languages change continuously and are unable to be stable within their framework of human usage (for they do not have their grammars and lexicons; only those two are always the same and never change)...No one can ever become learned through the Slavonic tongue. 19

Smotryc’kyi’s Grammar was, necessarily, much more than an instructional book for Ruthenian instructors and their pupils. The Grammar was a refutation that the Ruthenian nation had been “cheated,” out of a “stable” language that lent itself to learning. By establishing grammatical categories and models, Smotryc’kyi established Slavonic as a language with a navigable yet unchanging system. Thus, the Grammar became an indispensable tool in the Orthodox cultural revival and in the development of a Ruthenian identity.

Two years later, Smotryc’kyi was promoted within the Orthodox hierarchy to archimandrite of the Vilnius Brotherhood Monastery, the second most important position in the newly established hierarchy. He and other elites in the Orthodox church came under fire for occupying non-consecrated positions; or rather, for allowing Theophanes to consecrate their positions while the Commonwealth was at war with Constantinople. Smotryc’kyi and the new Orthodox metropolitan of Kiev, Jov Borec’kyj, were accused of treason; Smotryc’kyi was excommunicated by the Uniate Metropolitan Josyf Rutsk’kyj in the spring in 1621, and several Orthodox city

19 Ibid. xxxii.
officials and burghers were arrested on charges of treason for supporting Smotryc'kyi and the new Orthodox hierarchy. Smotryc'kyi devoted his next works to defending himself and the other accused Orthodox elites. The first of these was *Verification of Innocence, and a Christian Removal of the Erroneous Accounts Sown throughout All of Lithuania and Belarus, Which Were Aimed at Causing the Demise of the Life and Honor of the Noble Ruthenian Nation*, published in two editions in Vilnius in April and June of 1621. As the title suggests, Smotryc'kyi equates his honor with that of the Ruthenian nation’s, which “innocently bears and suffers a blot that strikes, stifles, and destroys simultaneously its health and honor.” In other words, the Ruthenian nation suffers because Smotryc'kyi and his fellow Orthodox elites suffer. Smotryc'kyi also mounts an impressive argument with which to cast off the “nalyvajko” name from the Ruthenian community:

> We would certainly run out of paper before we could present the daily, unbearable, and acrimonious vexations that we suffer from our apostates. For with every third word they revile and shames us calling us schismatics unto the abomination of our immaculate faith and calling us Nalyvayjkos unto the shame of the pure honor of our nation...

> But deign to consider, Kind and Gracious Reader, whether the name of Nalyvajko does not also properly suit them. For not having kept faith with their proper lord in the Spirit, that is, the patriarch of Constantinople (whom the authorities of our Ruthenian Church are obliged by both canon and temporal law to recognize as their lord in the Spirit and pastor), they broke their oath against all proper reason, not to mention against all law; they withdrew their spiritual obedience; they rendered obedience to another lord in the Spirit; and having declared war against the first, they oppress, tax, impoverish, and persecute unto death in every manner his subjects in the Spirit; and they revile, shame, and deny honor and faith to their former,

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natural lord himself. Does not the name of Nalyvajko suit rather such people? By what right are we reviled with this name, we who remain with our customary lord in the Spirit and pastor, whom our ancestors acquired when they received Christianity and whom their descendants passed on to us?²²

This is an interesting move by Smotryc'kyi to rid the Ruthenian identity of its treasonous associations and untrustworthy reputation (constructed, in no small part, by Piotr Skarga). Here, Smotryc'kyi does not just defend the Ruthenian community against these accusations, but rather, masterfully transfers the term ‘nalyvajko’ and its associations on to his opponents in the Uniate and Catholic Churches. In doing so, Smotryc'kyi helps to construct an identity Ruthenians can be proud of: one that he characterizes as loyal and honorable.

In fact, it is precisely the name-calling (of not just ‘nalyvajko’, but also, he alleges, “bears, basilisks, lizards, crocodiles...spies, Turkish secretaries”) that leads Smotryc'kyj to provide a more comprehensive definition of the Ruthenian identity, as one that significantly extends beyond confession:

> Our honor is our life; and whoever snatches at it, snatches our soul from our breasts. Our honor, wounded by the shame of treason, hurts us and will not cease to hurt us until cleansed of that shame, it will be healed of its injury. If they are truly Rus’, as they ought to be and must be (for whoever changes his faith does not immediately also degenerate from his blood’ whoever from the Ruthenian nation becomes of the Roman faith does not become immediately a Spaniard or an Italian by birth; rather he remains a noble Ruthenian as before; for it is not the faith that makes a Ruthenian a Ruthenian, a Pole a Pole, or a Lithuanian a Lithuanian, but Ruthenian, Polish, and Lithuanian blood and birth...most noble Ruthenian blood excels in these times in the spiritual and temporal Lithuanian senate...)O most noble Ruthenian blood: let this pain you; let this move you. What do you have more valuable than honor? What dearer than glory?²³

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²² Ibid. 188-189
Here Smotryc’kyj advances the Ruthenian identity beyond Orthodox faith. As Ruthenian noble families steadily joined Roman Catholic and Uniate churches, this appeal to the identity of one’s “blood” may have been a strategic tactic on Smotryc’kyj’s part. In short, he argues that even if a Ruthenian noble converts to another faith, he remains a Ruthenian and is complicit in the honor and glory of (or the degradation of) the Ruthenian community. Thus, *Verification* stands out as a seminal work amongst the early 17th century polemical treatises for its new approach to the Ruthenian identity.

*Verification* provoked several responses that were printed in quick succession, demonstrating the increasingly rapid capabilities of the press in the Ukrainian lands in the 17th century. Indeed, it is the works printed in 1621 by Smotryc’kyj and his respondents more than any others which reveal the pivotal role the press played in allowing authors from all over the commonwealth to read and respond to the same texts within a short period of time, and in doing so, advance the discussion at a more rapid pace than seen previously.

The first response to *Verification* came out in June in Vilnius and was called *Twofold Guilt*. Though it was signed by the “Fathers of the Vilnius Monastery of the Holy Trinity,” some suspected Metropolitan Ruts’kyj of actually authoring the work. The title refers to the works’ main argument, which is that if a person sins, and continues to not only remain in sin, but also goes to great lengths to defend the sin

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24 ibid. xxxvii.
and prove that it is not a sin, that person is actually guilty of a “twofold guilt.” This work left the topic of Ruthenian identity alone.

In the second edition of *Verification*, Smotryc'kyi dedicated the preface (somewhat cheekily) to four prominent Ruthenian Uniate noblemen: Janusz Skumin Tyszkiewicz, Adam Chreptowicz, Mikolaj Tryzna, and Jerzy Mieleszko. These same four noblemen fired back a response that same year in *Letter to the Monks of the Vilnius Monastery of the Church of the Holy Spirit*, also printed in Vilnius. Tyszkiewicz, Chreptowicz, Tryzna, and Mieleszko pointedly went after Smotryc'kyj’s conception of the Ruthenian identity:

...where is there any mention of the Ruthenian nation? Only of Smotryc'kyj and Borec'kyj and of their own treason do they write and to the letters and universals of His Majesty the King Speak...Why should the noble Ruthenian nation be at fault on account of the evil actions of your volunteers for ecclesiastical office?...And what are Smotryc'kyj and Borec'kyj in the Ruthenian nation – the dregs of the populace and the refuse of the plebs. **How can there be a reflection upon the Ruthenian nation from these people?**

In short, the four Ruthenian noblemen shrewdly accept Smotryc'kyj’s definition of the Ruthenian nation, but accuse him and Borec'kyj of self-aggrandizing their importance to the Ruthenian nation. Moreover, their language suggests they conceive of the Ruthenian nation as a community of Ruthenian nobles. Thus, even if any wrongdoing had befell Smotryc'kyj and Borec'kyj, it didn’t make any difference to the Ruthenian nation because they were not considered part of the nobility. Smotryc'kyj went to great lengths later to prove his “noble birth,” but there doesn’t seem to be any evidence that he or others engaged in the Uniate polemics were

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capable of imaging a Ruthenian nation that extended beyond the nobility. This is where the Ruthenian identity reached its outer limits.

It’s worth briefly noting that one last response to Verification was printed before the end of the year: Proof of the Unheard-of Audacity of the Monks and of the Like-Minded of the Vilnius Brotherhood by Tymoteusz Symanowicz. Zamość. In this work, Zamość identifies Smotryc'kyj as the author of Threnos, which only reinforced the accusations of treason mounting against him.

In the wake of Verification and its rebuttals, Smotryc'kyj wrote three more works. In the fall of 1621, he published A Defense of the Verification in Vilnius. Before the close of the year a response was written and published anonymously in Vilnius called An Examination of the “Defense”; That is, A Reply to the Writing Called “Defense of the 'Verification.'” A few months later in February of 1622, Smotryc'kyj shot back with A Refutation of Acrimonious Writings. In response, Antonij Seljava of the neighboring Uniate Holy Trinity Monastery in Vilnius wrote, Counter Refutation, That is, A Reply to the Acrimonious Writings of the Monks of the Apostate Church of the Holy Spirit (in which Seljava accuses Smotryc'kyn of knowing, “dialectics like a pig knows pepper”).26 The back-and-forth in these works mostly revolve around the inconsistencies in Smotryc'kyj's faith and in mounting the accusation that Smotryc'kyj had previously considered converting to the Uniate church, a claim that would, necessarily, significantly undermine his work. The concept of the Ruthenian identity takes a backseat to the heated religious polemics.

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26 Smotryc'kyj, Rus'Restored. xlix.
In summary, in the wake of the Treaty of Lublin and the Union of Brest, the Ruthenian identity was thrust into the cultural and intellectual zeitgeist of the early 17th century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the aftermath of the church union, elites were united regardless of their local political and cultural loyalties and instead became united by their Ruthenian identity. Defining and understanding the Ruthenian identity played out in the polemics surrounding the union. As Serkhii Plokhy explains,

The princes of Volhynia and Belarus, church hierarchs, clergy and monks of the whole Kyiv Metropolitanate, the Ruthenian nobility of the kingdom of Poland, and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Burghers of Lviv and Vilnius and, finally, the Cossacks of the Dnipro region all participated in one great debate that ultimately gave them a sense of common belonging and identity. That socially inclusive character of the religious discourse helped promote a model of early modern identity based on the nation as a linguistic and cultural entity.

Indeed, there were many who contributed to the development of the Ruthenian identity through the polemics of the day that are not mentioned in this paper. But even by training our eye on Smotryc’kyj we can see how a rich exchange of spiritual and intellectual ideas unfolded. Figure 1 in the appendix provides a visual map of opening salvos and responses with dates of publication so the reader can get a more concrete sense for how rapidly these treatises were deployed.

The press played no small role in strengthening this identity.

**The Press as a Missing Link**

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How can we be sure that the press was a crucial factor in the development of a Ruthenian identity? A skeptic might point out that the political circumstances surrounding the Treaty of Lublin and the Union of Brest were ripe for the emergence of a Ruthenian identity and thus, would have surfaced with or without the press. While these two events unquestionably played a huge role in consolidating a Ruthenian identity, I argue that their effects were amplified by the work of the printing press. The following example can help place the role of the press in context.

An earlier period in Ukraine’s history witnessed a similar imbalance of between Orthodox nobles and their Polish and Lithuanian counterparts. This happened in the late 14th and early 15th century with the Unions of Kreva and Horodlo. As a result of the Union of Kreva in 1385, un-baptized Lithuanian nobles were required to join the Roman Catholic church. While those who already identified as Orthodox refused to convert, the Orthodox church immediately lost a source of potential converts. The situation was made worse under the Union of Horodlo in 1413 which promised Lithuanian nobles a broader range of rights and privileges if they agreed to become Catholic. (The main achievement of the Union was greater unification and integration of the Polish Kingdom and the Grandy Duchy of Lithuanian.) Of course these privileges were not offered to the Orthodox princely or noble class.28 Among the privileges offered was the right to adopt a coat of arms. While the Polish szlachta had long held this right, the new arrangement would put

28 Ibid. 115 -116.
Lithuanian nobles on a more even footing with their Polish counterparts. This was an attractive offer to leverage in exchange for conversion of faith, and many Lithuanian nobles agreed to convert.²⁹

The Union of Horodlo thus constructed what Serkhii Plokhy describes as a “legal barrier” that left the Poles and Lithuanians on one side and the Rus’ nobility on the other. Here, just as in the wake of the Union of Brest, Ruthenians from different regions shed their local identities and were united by their confession into a larger community — one that was distinguished from Lithuanians. This was a monumental moment for Ruthenians: once culturally dominant, the Union of Horodlo marked the beginning of the decline of the Rus’ cultural tradition and put it on the defense. This presents a likely moment from which a Ruthenian identity could have emerged. The Ruthenian noble classes did not have to wait long before they were given the opportunity to demonstrate their displeasure over the discrimination. In 1430, the Polish and the Lithuanians were clashing over which territory deserved control over Podilia. In his efforts to keep Podilia in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Prince Švitrigaila appealed to the Ruthenian nobles, whom Serkhii Plokhy writes, “he provided with a legitimate means of challenging the political and cultural status quo.” In other words, they were provided weaponry with which to defend Podilia and rise up against their oppressors.

Despite these consequential events which led Ruthenian nobles to actually take up arms — a Ruthenian identity did not take form until several centuries later. This brief scene from early Rus’ history strongly suggests that a key factor was missing: access to the printing press. Had the Ruthenians been able to discuss the political and religious changes shaping their communities, perhaps we would see an earlier conception of a Ruthenian identity take shape. Smotryc’kyj bemoaned the sufferings of the Ruthenian nobles who were not treated as fairly as their Polish-Lithuanian counterparts, and made arguments for the worthiness and honor of the Ruthenian nation in a plea for the same rights to be extended to them. One can similarly imagine such a treatise being written in the wake of the Union of Horodlo, though even if such a treatise exists, it would have been written painstakingly as a manuscript by a scribe.

**Conclusion**

[Remains to be seen.]
Appendix

Figure 1: Timeline of Polemics: Smotry'ckyj and his Respondents. 1610-1622

- **Threnos. Meletij Smotry'ckyj, 1610. Vilnius.**
- **A Warning to the Rais of the Greek Rite against the Theresedes and Lament of Theophil Orthologues. Piotr Skarga, 1610. Cracow.**
- **A Consolation or, Relief from the Acrimonious Lament of the Supposed Holy Eastern Church by the Invented Theophil Orthologues. Ilija Murovskyj, 1612. Vilnius.**

- **On the Unity of God's Church under One Pastor and on the Unity of God's Church...Piotr Skarga, 1610. Vilnius.**
- **Grammar of Church Scripture. Meletij Smotry'ckyj, 1610-1619. Wroclaw.**
- **Proof of the Unheard of Audacity of the Monks and of the Like-Minded of the Vilnius Brotherhood. Tymoteusz Symonowicz, ~August, 1621. Zamoz.**

- **Verification of Innocence. Meletij Smotry'ckyj, April, 1621. Vilnius.**
- **Twofold Guilt. Anonymous, ~June, 1621. Vilnius.**
- **Defense of the Verification. Meletij Smotry'ckyj, ~Late Summer, 1621. Vilnius.**
- **An Examination of the "Defense"; That is, a Reply to the Writing Called "Defense of the Verification." Anonymous, ~End of 1621. Vilnius.**

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