Borderlands of Faith: Reconsidering the Origins of a Ukrainian Tragedy

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In the summer of 1768, the bloody uprising called Koliivshchyna shook the Ukrainian borderlands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, ending in the massacre of tens of thousands of victims, including women and children.1 The most brutal episode occurred in the town of Uman’, where in one day cossack and peasant rebels hacked to death thousands of residents and refugees from nearby regions—many inside the churches and synagogue where they had sought safety. Estimates of the number of victims of Koliivshchyna have ranged as high as 200,000; while some historians have revised the final death toll down to “several tens of thousands,” the tragic impact of the uprising remains undeniable.2 An eyewitness described the aftermath as “a horrific scene of countless bodies and innocent blood poured out that left the earth and the walls stained.”3

Compared to other uprisings of the era in adjacent regions—the Confederation of Bar (1768–1772), which led to the first partitioning of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1772), and the massive Pugachev revolt (1773–1774), which wrought chaos in Catherine II’s Russia—Koliivshchyna receives scant historical attention. Moreover, the historical attention given to the event has so far only added to the topic’s isolation within the particular bounds of the Ukrainian national narrative. The violence of Koliivshchyna, however, provides a case study not just for the history of Ukraine but also for the broader discourse on the cultural and political vulnerability of borderlands and the intrinsic relationship between political and religious loyalties.

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1. The name Koliivshchyna is most frequently defined as deriving from the word for the primitive lances or pikes (kili, koli) with which many victims were gored to death. This was a common weapon for peasant uprisings of the era, however, and the use of it does not set this incident apart. Polish historian Władysław A. Serczyk promotes an alternative derivation based on a local word for cossack retinue in Koliszczyzna (Kraków, 1968), 7n1.

2. The higher figures of 200,000 total, with 20,000 killed in Uman’ alone, are cited, for example, in Norman Davies, God’s Playground: A History of Poland, 2 vols. (New York, 1982), 1:219. Historian Tadeusz Korzon estimates the victims in Uman’ alone at between 5,000 to 18,000 in Wewnętrzne dzieje Polski za Stanisława Augusta (1764–1794): Badania historyczne ze stanowiska ekonomicznego i administracyjnego, 6 vols. (Warsaw, 1897–99), 1:197–98. The total number killed in the uprising remains elusive, and most historians avoid presenting specific tallies. After painstaking research, Serczyk could uncover no more specific accounting than “several tens of thousands”; this remains the most careful assessment of the number of victims to date. Serczyk, Koliszczyzna, 167.

With the eighteenth century itself serving as a borderland between the age of religious wars and the age of nationalism, it should not surprise us that religious as well as political motivations lay behind the uprisings of this age in the region of the Commonwealth and the Russian empire. Too often, though, have historians stressed the secular thread in interpreting the events of this era of Enlightenment. Such has been the fate of Kolivshchyna. This was, after all, the age of anticlericalism, rationalism, and revolution, and we—as products of the more secular age that followed—find comfort in political and materialist causation. Accordingly, historians have tended to link the cossack-led massacre to ideals of a Ukrainian nationalist struggle against the Poles, in effect pushing the meaning of the uprising ahead of its time. Historical accounts have also stressed the socioeconomic tensions at the heart of the violence, explaining the uprising as a reaction to the increasing hardships of the Ukrainian peasants vis-à-vis the extraordinary wealth of their Polish landlords, with violence turned also against their Jewish arrendars.4

The intrinsic “us vs. them” perspective behind the nationalist and socioeconomic explanations both oversimplifies the tensions of the period and overlooks religious conflict as a key causal factor. Indeed, aside from killing the “other”—Poles and Jews—the Ukrainian rebels of Kolivshchyna were also killing Ukrainians. Most notably, Orthodox Ruthenians from Ukrainian provinces were killing Uniates who shared their ethnic identity and social status. More accurately, then, the victims of Kolivshchyna included Jews, Roman Catholics of both Polish and Ruthenian ethnic groups, and Ruthenian Uniates from peasant as well as clerical and noble social estates. The common denominator of the victims comprised

4. These perspectives have dominated Russian, Ukrainian, and western historiography on the topic. After a spate of studies released at the time of the 200th anniversary of the uprising, virtually no new scholarship on Kolivshchyna has appeared. The most balanced and well-researched study to date is Serczyk, Koliszczyzna. A recent version of the Ukrainian nationalist argument is Petro Mirchuk, Kolivshchyna: Haidamats'ke Povstannia 1768 r. (New York, 1973). The articles collected in Petro Tymofiyovych Tron'ko, ed., Kolivshchyna 1768: Materiały iwivlenoi naukovei sesii pryvwichenoi 200-riochiu povstannia (Kiev, 1970), typical of Soviet-era, Marxist-driven analysis, are heavily weighted toward socioeconomic issues, presenting the uprising as one of the many “anti-feudal” struggles of the age. For a discussion of historiography on Kolivshchyna, see Zenon E. Kohut, “Myths Old and New: The Haidamak Movement and the Kolivshchyna (1768) in Recent Historiography,” Harvard Ukrainian Studies 1, no. 3 (1977): 359–78; for a discussion of nineteenth and twentieth century historiography, see Grigorii Iakovlevich Sergienko, “Istoriografia Kolivshchyny” in Tron'ko, Kolivshchyna 1768, 118–33. Major nineteenth-century studies on the subject include Apollon Skal'kovskii, Naezdy gaidamak na Zapadnuiu Ukrainu v XVIII st., 1733–1768 (Odessa, 1845); Mikhail Aleksandrovich Maksimovich (Mikhailo Oleksandrovych Maksymovych), “Skazanie o Kolivshchine,” Russkii arkhiv, 1875, no. 5: 5–27; Iakov Shul'gin, Ocherk Kolivshchiny po neizdannym i izdannym dokumentam 1768 i blizhaishikh godov (Kiev, 1890). Generally, the 1768 uprising has been discussed within broader studies on the haidamak movement (cossack-led violence against estates in the Ukrainian provinces of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) for which a solid list of primary and secondary sources has been compiled by Jaroslaw Pelenski in “The Haidamak Insurrections and the Old Regimes in Eastern Europe,” in Jaroslaw Pelenski, ed., The American and European Revolutions, 1776–1848: Socio-political and Ideological Aspects (Iowa City, 1980), 242–244, notes 1 and 2.
neither ethnic nor social distinctions but religious identity, as all victims practiced non-Orthodox faiths. This phenomenon—especially at the level of Ukrainian on Ukrainian violence—cannot be explained within the secular confines of nationalist or socioeconomic paradigms.

The escalation of religious tension, then, must be given more credence among the causes for the violence of Kolivshchyna. Indeed, the moment of the massacre came when Ukrainians of the Uniate and Orthodox faiths in right-bank Ukraine were literally at arms, battling over the confessional loyalties of priests and parishioners. Furthermore, as Orthodox residents in the Commonwealth looked to representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church for assistance, cross-border influences complicated and intensified confessional tensions.

This article seeks to bring Kolivshchyna out of its particularist niche in Ukrainian national history and into current discourse on the role of religion as both a vital factor of identity and loyalty for eighteenth-century Europe (including Russia) and an instrument for gaining political control in Russia’s western borderlands. Recent scholarship in Russian and east European history has reflected an unprecedented explosion of interest in aspects of religious life among the inhabitants of the former Russian empire as well as in the cultural interactions on the borders of Russian political expansion. These studies implicitly challenge the status of national-

5. Nineteenth-century historians, while presenting a nationalist context, did tend to include in their analysis of Kolivshchyna some discussion of religious tensions presented by the rise of Orthodox missionary work in right-bank Ukraine, although with explicit biases towards one side or the other (see, for example, the anti-Orthodox explanation in Korzon, Wewnętrzne dzieje Polski, and the more pro-Orthodox version in Nikolai Ivanovich Kostomarov, Poslednye gody Rechii pospolitej (1787–1795) [St. Petersburg, 1868]). Among the more recent scholarship, Serczyk, in Koliszczyzna, also discusses the role of Orthodox religious fervor in promoting tensions, but he still confines his discussion of the role of religion within an overriding national and social argument. This perspective is manifest even when he specifically addresses Orthodox influences in his article “Melchizedek Żnaczko-Jaworski i klasztor motreninski przed wybuchem koliszczyzny,” Studia Historyczne 11, no. 3 (1968): 297–322.

6. In eighteenth-century Poland, “right-bank Ukraine” referred to the two easternmost Ukrainian palatinates (województwa) of Kiev and Bratslav, lying on the border with Russia’s Ukrainian lands of the Hetmanate and the Zaporozhian wilds, and to the south with the Moldavian principality that was a vassal of the Ottoman Porte (see Serczyk, Koliszczyzna, 23). Modern use of the term commonly includes the Podolia and Volhynia palatinates in the definition of “right-bank.” This article will, however, conform to the eighteenth-century usage, confining my discussion to the Kiev and Bratslav palatinates.

7. The scholarly literature on aspects of religious development in the Russian empire is vast. For representative collections of the new studies on religious identity and practices in the former Russian empire by leading scholars, see Stephen Batalden, ed., Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia (DeKalb, 1993), and Valerie A. Kivelson and Robert H. Greene, eds., Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice Under the Tsars (University Park, 2003). Vital contributions to the study of religious policy among minorities of the Russian empire include Paul Werth, At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia’s Volga-Kama Region, 1827–1905 (Ithaca, 2002), and the collection of articles in Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, eds., Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia (Ithaca, 2001). A valuable new addition to our understanding of Ukrainian religious developments is Serhii Plokhy, The Cossacks and Religion in Early Modern Ukraine (New York, 2001). For a specific focus on the interaction of Russian and Ukrainian cultures, see Andreas Kappeler,

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ism as the defining theoretical construct behind modern history in this area of the world, even as, in the wake of the collapsed communist system, the evolution of nationalism continues to garner attention. Outside our field, an innovative trend in postcolonial studies has made remarkable strides in critiquing secular nationalist theories by denying the epistemological division (made manifest during the age of Enlightenment) between religious and secular experience. Instead, this convincing new scholarship argues that the one cannot be so cleanly separated from the other, and that religious and political identity are closely intertwined. Such a premise (while developed through consideration of twentieth-century phenomena) is useful both as a framework for explaining the religious violence at the heart of Koliivshchyna and for promoting the uprising as a key event in the evolution of identity in the eighteenth-century borderlands of the Russian Empire.

Evolving Lines of Explanation

In the immediate aftermath of the 1768 uprising, religious causes dominated explanations of the tensions that led to the uprising. In the subsequent century, however, as the episode was memorialized by the descendants of those who experienced the tragedy, religious causes began to recede from consideration in favor of more political explanations. Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko dramatized the violence of Koliivshchyna in his epic poem, Haidamaky (1843), which portrayed the massacre of Poles and Jews as merciless violence, but nevertheless as serving a righteous cause against oppressors of the Ukrainian people. This interpretation


10. Shevchenko’s poem primarily condemns “Polish gentry” for Ukrainian resentments, portraying the leading grievance as socioeconomic. However, hostilities to “Catholics,” implying both Roman Catholics and Uniates, come through strongly, particularly as Shevchenko relates that the cossack leader Ivan Gonta slayed his two sons—students at the Basilian school in Uman’—for being born of their Catholic mother and raised as Catholics. Taras Shevchenko, *Vybrani poezii* (Kiev, 1977), 55–112.
brought the event into the mainstream of the Ukrainian national myth of the nineteenth century. In Polish literature, the uprising became either “an example of cossack barbarism against Polish civilization” or a painful memory of a failed relationship with the Ukrainian population in the Commonwealth.¹¹ For Poles, Koliivshchyna was another piece of evidence for discerning the causes of the demise of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the Jewish memory, the 1768 uprising gained a place alongside the anti-Jewish violence of the seventeenth-century cossack uprising led by Bohdan Khmel’nyts’kyi. Early twentieth-century Jewish historian Simon Dubnow condemned Koliivshchyna as a “miniature copy of the year 1648,” stemming from “national and caste antagonisms.”¹²

Historians further diluted the religious factor by underscoring perceived nationalist and socioeconomic causes. Consistently presenting the uprising within the context of haidamak disturbances—violent cossack-led brigandage directed against the Polish ruling class—historians linked Koliivshchyna to the pursuit of national aspirations for Ukraine.¹³ The binary assessment of Ukrainians attacking Poles, particularly in pursuit of the dream of a separate Ukrainian state, however, oversimplifies the history and relies on the wispy contours of myth. Khmel’nyts’kyi remained a hero in the popular Ukrainian imagination of the eighteenth century, but cossackdom—the key to greater political goals—had lost its broad base of power after the partitioning of Ukraine in 1667 and its removal as an independent institution within the Commonwealth. Certainly, participants in Koliivshchyna harbored antipathy toward the Polish regime. But they sought protection from Catherine II and the Russian empire, trusting in a better future linked to their eastern neighbor (ironically, given the empress’s subsequent dissolution of the Zaporozhian Sich and abolition of autonomy in the Hetmanate). In other words, the issue of Ukrainian subordination, not independence based on nationalist goals, was paramount.

Among possible secular causes of tensions leading to the uprising, socioeconomic causes hold the most validity. Historians have uncovered evidence that the decades leading up to the massacre saw a decline in status


¹³. This term (deriving from a Turkic word meaning robber or brigand) was first utilized in 1717 to describe bands of brigands in right-bank Ukraine. Vladimir Antonovich, “Predislovie” in Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossi, part 3, vol. 3, Akty o gaidamakakh, 1700–1768 (Kiev, 1876), 10.
for the peasants of right-bank Ukraine. After more than a half century of devastation and depopulation due to war (from the 1648 cossack uprising through the Great Northern War, 1700–1721), Polish landlords resettled right-bank Ukraine by luring peasants from the more crowded western parts of Commonwealth Ukraine, as well as from across the border of Hetmanate Ukraine, with obligation-free leases for up to twenty years. By the 1750s and 1760s, then, these leases were coming to an end, and the process of enserfment was beginning. Compared to their compatriots to the west, these peasants still had a much easier lot, and a substantial number of them had managed to avoid barshchina requirements by 1768. Nevertheless, increased work obligations to landlords were becoming more widespread, and this no doubt played a role in rallying the broader population to rising against their predominantly Polish landlords. Still, the general decline in status was consistent for all Ukrainian peasants in right-bank Ukraine, Orthodox and Uniate alike. Although the socioeconomic causes seem more viable, this line of argumentation goes no further than the nationalist argument in explaining the violence of Ukrainians against Ukrainians in the uprising.

Notably missing from the literary memorials and historical assessments over the past two centuries is the perspective of the Ukrainian Uniates as victims of the massacre. Their fate within the Russian empire stifled their story. The second partition of Poland-Lithuania in 1793 moved the Russian border westward to absorb right-bank Ukraine. In 1794, Catherine II mounted a massive effort to convert all Uniates in this region (and after the third partition of 1795, in all of Volhynia) to Russian Orthodoxy. Continued conversions by later tsars in 1839 and 1875 affected millions and formally eliminated the Uniate faith within the Russian empire. Under this policy of suppression, the Uniate voice was all but silenced within published documents and studies of the era of Koliivshchina. Bringing the Uniates back to the core of the story realigns the focal point of the violence to the religious tensions between Orthodox and Uniate Ukrainians. This realignment dispels arguments that rely on binary ethnic and social distinctions between “Poles” and “Ukrainians” and thereby undermines previous nationalist and socioeconomic explanations. In so doing, it is not my intent to suggest that religious causes were the sole factor behind the uprising. The causes were multilayered, with religious factors feeding into other existing grievances. A fresh look at the evidence, however, reveals confessional tensions, heightened by shifting political loyalties, to be the most critical cause of the 1768 uprising.

First, a focus on religious causes must recognize that the intense violence between Uniates and Orthodox at the heart of Koliivshchina was an anomaly in Ukrainian history. While Khmel’nyts’kyi’s campaign in the

15. This conversion effort is described in chapters 6–8 of my PhD dissertation, “The Empress and the Heretics: Catherine II’s Challenge to the Uniate Church, 1762–1796” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2001). By the time of her death in 1796, Catherine II could boast 1.5 million Uniate converts to Orthodoxy.
previous century endorsed powerful pro-Orthodox rhetoric that agitated against the spread of the Uniate faith to the Ruthenian population of the Commonwealth, the cossack rank-and-file nevertheless killed very few Uniates and did not harbor high anti-Uniate feelings, focusing their energies instead against Poles and Jews. Likewise, in the following century, cossack-led disruptions (haidamak attacks) in right-bank Ukraine and the large peasant uprisings of 1734 and 1750 there included Roman Catholic clergy among their victims, but Uniates were not targets. By 1768, however, the dynamic of Uniate-Orthodox relations had shifted, and the hostility of the cossack-led rebels against the Uniate Church was real enough to count Uniates among the mass victims of the uprising.

What exactly had changed at this time in the Polish-Russian borderland that allowed for the escalation of Uniate-Orthodox tensions to the point of bloodshed? And, more generally, how do these circumstances illustrate the integration of political and religious goals? The answer, I argue, lies in the strengthened Dnepr River border that became not only a political boundary but also a dividing-line for religious identities among the Ukrainians living on either side of it. Conflicting political and religious loyalties led to unprecedented hostilities that pitted Ukrainians against Ukrainians. From this nucleus of tension, which led to the largest massacre of Uniates in Ukraine, the uprising fed into long-standing socio-economic and political grievances against the more traditional “enemies” of Poles and Jews.

Any assessment of the Orthodox-Uniate conflict as a central aspect of understanding Koliivshchyna would optimally present a source base with balanced evidence from each side. Limitations in the available sources, however, present a challenge. Russian imperial historians in Ukraine collected and published documents detailing the Orthodox side of the situation, while documents from the Uniate side, both published and unpublished, are scarce. Scrutiny of archival collections of Uniate documents in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia, as well as archive-based studies, has

16. Plokhy, Cossacks and Religion, 189–90. According to Plokhy, cossack claims in 1648 that the Uniate Church persecuted the Orthodox faithful in the Commonwealth were more of a ploy to legitimize Muscovite intervention on the side of the cossacks than a reality.

Primary sources dealing with the religious content of Khmel’nyts’kyi’s campaign have recently been published in Lev Valentinovich Zaborovskii, Katoliki, pravoslavnye, uniaty: Problemy religii v russko-pol’sko-ukrainskikh otnosheniakh kontsa 40-kh–80-kh gg. XVII v.; Dokumenty, issledovaniia, vol. 1, Istochniki vremenii getmanstva B. M. Khmel’nitskogo (Moscow, 1998).

17. See documents describing the haidamak activity of these decades in Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossii, part 3, vol. 3.

18. The largest collection of primary documents related to Orthodoxy in right-bank Ukraine under Bishop Gervasii’s tenure is published in Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossii, part 1, vols. 2–3, Materiały dla istorii pravoslav’ia v Zapadnoi Ukraine v XVIII st. (Kiev, 1871).

The compilers of the documents detailing the Orthodox side recognized that their efforts revealed only one side of the story (see introduction to part 1, vol. 2, pp. vii–viii). The subsequent volume 4 (also 1871), Akty ob Unii i sostoianii pravoslavnoi tservi s poloviny XVII veka (1648–1798), also did not contain Uniate documents from the tensions leading up to Koliivshchyna. There are, as yet, no published compilations of documents that reveal the Uniate side in the matter.
yielded only a limited number of useful sources. Nevertheless, the Uniate sources found present a convincing perspective, especially as the more numerous documents from just several years later consistently refer to the year of 1768 as one of persecution.

The Setting: Reinforcing a Political and Religious Border

The seventeenth-century wars that followed the 1648 cossack uprising led to the partitioning of Ukraine between Muscovy and Poland-Lithuania along the Dnepr River, but the new border was not effectively reinforced until after the subsequent turmoil of the Great Northern War had ceased in the early eighteenth century. Instrumental in efforts to secure the new border were the instability and fears caused by the haidamak attacks that plagued right-bank Ukraine in the eighteenth century. Bands of roving cossacks, runaway peasants, and adventurers—including Zaporozhian cossacks and others from across the Russian and Turkish borders—repeatedly robbed and pillaged Polish estates. While paling in comparison to the massive Khmel’nyts’kyi uprising of the previous century, haidamak activity was the primary method of resistance by Ukrainian cossacks and peasants in the Commonwealth in the subsequent century.

19. Careful examination of the collections dealing with the Uniate Church—in the Czartoryski Archive in Kraków, Poland (hereafter referred to as Czart.), especially sygnatury 707, 738, and 754; in the Ukrainian State Historical Archive in Kiev (TsDIA), especially its massive Fond 127 of Kiev consistory documents; and in the Russian State Historical Archive in St. Petersburg (RGIA) where the former Uniate Metropolitan archives are housed in Fond 823 (Kantseliariia mitropolitov greko-uniatskoi tserkvi)—reveal, in general, much less systematic documentation from the Uniate side of the conflict than from the Orthodox side.

20. Hundreds of Uniate grievances against subsequent aggressive actions by Russian troops and Orthodox priests in 1772–73 have been preserved in RGIA, f. 823, op. 2, d. 2116. While dealing with the immediate situation of danger in that year, the grievances make reference to their similar troubles from “persecution” by Orthodox representatives in 1768.

21. The movement of the border was agreed within the Andrusovo Treaty of 1667 and confirmed in the “Eternal Treaty” of 1686, but not ratified by the Poles until 1710. A Kiev Russian-Polish Border Commission that met from 1730 to the 1770s continued to refine the definition of the border, especially the area to the west of Kiev (on the right bank) governed by Russia. Borders to the south had also shifted at this time as Poland regained territory (the Bratslav, Podolian, and southern Kiev palatinates) lost to the Ottoman Porte and ruled by the Turks from 1672 to 1699. For a careful assessment of shifts in the Russian-Polish border from 1686 through the eighteenth century, see Mykola Krykun, Administratyveno-territorial’niy ustrii Pravoberezhnoi Ukrainy v XV-XVIII st.: Kordoni voevodstvo u sviti dzherel (Kiev, 1993), 147–55.

22. As the result of the seventeenth-century treaties, cossacks in service of the Hetmanate and Zaporozhians were forced to remove themselves from inside the Polish-Lithuanian borders. The “cossacks” remaining in right-bank Ukraine were for the most part Ukrainian peasants raised to cossack status (their families freed from serf obligations) by their service in the personal militias of the Polish landlords and officials. Often enough, however, Zaporozhians or Hetmanate cossacks—even after being caught as haidamak offenders—would enter into such service to Polish landlords who respected their military expertise, as long as the cossacks swore an oath of allegiance. These forces were often sympathetic to the haidamaky and not effective in policing against haidamak activity. See Antonovich, “Predislovie,” 74–85.
ties increased as the century progressed and three times escalated into
full-scale uprising as the peasant masses joined their cause, culminating in
the 1768 uprising.23

With the haidamaky most often rallying their forces on the Russian
side of the border and then crossing into Polish territory in their destruc-
tive rampages, Polish officials appealed to the Russian government for
tighter controls on the Dnepr border crossing. This led in 1735 to the cre-
ation of border courts (pogranichnye sudy), with policing and prosecuting
powers, as well as increased organization and supervision of the Russian
border posts or forposty. The commanders of the forposty were required to
send weekly reports to the Kiev Governor-General regarding haidamak
activity and arrests made.24 The Russians implemented a rudimentary
passport system for those traveling into and out of the Russian empire,
and careful records were kept of each peasant, priest, merchant, monk, or
other person making a legal crossing.25

The Ukrainian lands along the Dnepr in the right bank, formerly well
inside the Commonwealth, had now become a borderland. The forposty
were far from an impregnable border; in 1765, the average distance was
three to four verst between border posts, each with three to four men on
guard.26 Nevertheless, the regular presence of the Russian border posts
and their more stringent methods of control in the eighteenth century
made the Dnepr River for the first time a tangible border of the Russian
empire in the consciousness of those residing on either side.

The new and increasingly solidified Russian-Polish border had pro-
found repercussions in the religious life of right-bank Ukraine. In es-
sence, this new border provided the conditions for a return of tensions be-
tween Uniate and Orthodox believers. After the initial turmoil following
the establishment of the Uniate Church in 1596, Ukraine had become the
life center of a revived Orthodoxy in the Commonwealth under the lead-
ership of Kievan Metropolitan Peter Mohyla. Russian acquisition of left-
bank Ukraine and the city of Kiev in 1667, however, left the Orthodox

23. By mid-century, Ukrainian peasants became the majority of the participants in
the haidamak attacks. Aside from theft and pillage of livestock and material goods, haida-
mak attacks on this broader scale with peasant involvement threatened violence toward
the mostly Polish landlords, their staff and families, their Jewish administrators, and Ro-
man Catholic clergy. For analysis of the composition and goals of haidamaky, see An-
tonovich, “Predislovie,” and Kohut, “Myths Old and New.” For sources on their attacks up
to 1768, see the documents in Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossii, part 3, vol. 3. The more recent
document collection Haidamats’kyi rukh na Ukraini v XVIII st.: Zbirnyk dokumentiv, ed. Ivan
Butich and Fedir Shevchenko (Kiev, 1970) adds some new material to the published doc-
ument bank.

developed was the Russian border court in the town of Motovilovka on the Kiev palatinate
border, which remained in session until 1785.

25. TsDIA, f. 59 (Kievskiaa gubernskaa kantseliariia), op. 1 holds reports from the
border posts. The volume of reports by mid-century (the period 1754 to 1768 alone is re-
presented in well over 4,000 files of up to 75 pages apiece) reveals the attention given to
monitoring Russia’s Ukrainian border.

26. These averages are drawn from a report on the border posts along the 370 verst
stretch of the Kiev guberniia’s western border in TsDIA, f. 59, op. 1, d. 4707. The troops
on guard were dragoons and left-bank cossacks in Russian military service.
community in right-bank Ukraine without a resident bishop; the loss of Kiev left an administrative, cultural, and educational vacuum. Furthermore, by 1710, continued conversions of other Orthodox bishops in the Commonwealth to the Uniate faith left only one Orthodox hierarch, the Bishop of Mohylew [Mogilev] in Belarus, in the entire Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.27

While the right bank remained formally under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan of Kiev, this hierarch offered little pastoral assistance to the region and ordained very few priests for it. The devastation and population losses from the wars of the seventeenth century and the Great Northern War led to the decline and abandonment of parishes. Gradually the organizational structures broke down, and the Orthodox Church in this region became desperately impoverished and understaffed, especially when the area began to be resettled in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. Becoming in 1685 subordinate to the Russian patriarch (rather than to Constantinople), the Kievan Metropolitan’s attention was now focused eastward, on Kiev’s new role as the Orthodox cultural and educational center in the Muscovite state, not to the impoverished parishes across the Polish border. The Orthodox population there had no sense of belonging to a diocese at all, and their religious life was in shambles.28

Most commonly, vagrant priests and monks ordained in Moldavia came into the right-bank parishes. They were poorly educated and barely capable of administering parishes. The commissar of the Jablonowski estates complained of beglye popy (fugitive priests), ordained by Moldavian hierarchs, that were “sorely lacking in any kind of organization or effort” in their parish duties.29

Meanwhile, the Uniate Church in the Commonwealth began a process of self-strengthening, particularly following its Council of Zamość in 1720 that prescribed more regulated parish and diocesan administration and better training for priests reminiscent of the Catholic Church’s Council of Trent. Uniate priests were required to learn the moral theology of the Roman Catholic tradition, with its inherent emphasis on legal and individual rights. Latin practices infiltrated into the services, with implements such as the ciborium (an altar vessel holding the consecrated particles for communion) and altar bells now standard in Uniate churches.30

27. It should also be noted that in accordance with the treaty of 1686, Mohylew bishops were from this time to be elected by the Russian Holy Synod, bringing these bishops into close association with the Russian Orthodox Church for the first time.
In its closer alignment to Roman Catholic theology and practices, the Uniate culture became more differentiated from Orthodoxy than had been the case in the previous century.

As right-bank Ukraine was resettled in the early eighteenth century, landlords ensured that functioning parishes met the religious needs of the peasantry. The landlord not only helped with the funding for the church (though here the community also had a crucial role) and designated the plot of land that would sustain the parish priest but also had the final word on the selection of the parish priest. For a peasantry that followed Eastern Rite Christianity, the landlord could approve either a Uniate or Orthodox priest. In the face of ineffective Orthodox Church organization in the eastern palatinates at this time, Polish landlords resettling the area for the most part installed Uniate priests brought from adjacent Uniate dioceses and built Uniate churches, resulting in the gradual conversion of the peasantry in right-bank Ukraine to the Uniate faith.

In just a few decades, then, the Uniate Church made dramatic progress in expanding its jurisdiction eastward until the eastern border of the Uniate faith essentially coincided with the new Dnepr River border between the Commonwealth and the Russian Empire. Official church registers reveal that the number of Uniate parishes in right-bank Ukraine increased from about 150 in 1730 to nearly 1900 by 1764, while at the same time the number of Orthodox parishes shrank to several dozen.31 Significantly, there is little evidence of tensions connected with these eighteenth-century conversions to the Uniate faith in the right-bank palatinates. Tensions began only when renewed support for Orthodox parishes in the Commonwealth came from across the border.

Religious Tensions and Political Loyalties in the 1760s

In the late 1750s, two dynamic Ukrainian clergymen from the left bank, ardent in their service to the Russian Orthodox Church, began to reinvigorate the Orthodox community in Commonwealth Ukraine in a small band of land along the west bank of the Dnepr River. The first was Gervasii Lintsevskii, who became in 1757 Bishop of Pereiaslav, the eparchy bordering the Dnepr south of Kiev in Hetmanate Ukraine.32 Pro-


32. The full title was Bishop of Pereiaslav and Borispol’ and coadjutor to the Metropolitan of Kiev. (A coadjutor is recognized as capable of fulfilling the ecclesiastical duties of the Metropolitan should the need arise.) An ancient bishopric of Kievan times, this was never a church administrative center within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Russian imperial church administration created it as a vicariate, with a coadjutor bishop subordinate to the Metropolitan of Kiev, several decades after left-bank Ukraine was acquired by Russia in 1699 (the first bishop was in place in 1701), during the reign of Peter I. In 1733, it became an independent eparchy subordinate to the Holy Synod (Smolich gives the date of 1731). Oleh Kryzhans’kyi and Serhii Plokhii, Istoriia tsarstvuy ta religinoi
vious Pereiaslav bishops had been weak figures and unconcerned about the situation of the Orthodox parishes across the Dnepr in the Commonwealth, but Bishop Gervasii harbored an intense interest in assisting the remaining Orthodox population there.\textsuperscript{35} Having served ten years in the Russian Orthodox mission in China, Gervasii brought missionary zeal to his appointment.\textsuperscript{34} The second figure instrumental in revitalizing the Orthodox Church across the Dnepr was the monk Melkhizedek Znachko-Iavorskii, a native of left-bank Ukraine and graduate of the Kiev Academy, who crossed the border to head up the Motronyn monastery in the southeastern corner of Commonwealth Ukraine. Attracting followers and assisting in the revival of other Orthodox monasteries in this region, Melkhizedek was a talented and dedicated clergyman, influential in his preaching and pastoral work, and continually in close contact with Bishop Gervasii concerning efforts to revive Orthodoxy in this part of the Commonwealth. By offering services and rites to the Orthodox population in this region as well as assisting administratively and pastorally with the establishment of new parishes here, these monasteries on the periphery of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth under the leadership of Melkhizedek became the new center of Orthodoxy in right-bank Ukraine. Historians have highlighted Melkhizedek’s role in increasing the religious fervor for Orthodoxy in this region by 1768, but his work would have been much less effective, and perhaps insignificant, without the firm backing of Bishop Gervasii.\textsuperscript{35}

The first vital shift under Bishop Gervasii’s tenure was to incorporate Orthodox parishes in right-bank Ukraine for the first time into the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church, a shift that had taken place in left-bank Ukraine in 1685 after it had become part of the Muscovite state. Previously in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Orthodox Church was subordinate to the Constantinople patriarch and had its separate development and identity from the Orthodox Church of Muscovy. Now residents of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth—subjects of the Polish king—became parishioners of the Russian state church, a designation with obvious political connotations and implied loyalties.

At first, Gervasii’s efforts centered on creating new Orthodox parishes in the Polish estates bordering the Pereiaslav eparchy and building their loyalties to the Russian church and state. The peasants working on

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\textsuperscript{33} Lebedintsev, “Arkhimandrit Melkhizedek Znachko-Iavorskii,” lxxiii.

\textsuperscript{34} “Lintsevskii (Gervasii),” Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’, pub. Brokgauz-Efron (St. Petersburg, 1891–1904). 34:715. He was in China from 1745 to 1755.

\textsuperscript{35} The published documents related to the Orthodox revival in right-bank Ukraine in Arkihiu iugo-zapadnoi Rossii, part 1, vols. 2–3, primarily consist of letters directed to and signed by the Pereiaslav bishop and his consistory. A survey of these documents reveals that Melkhizedek acted as a mediator to the Bishop in a number of cases, but the actual permissions for building churches, installing Orthodox priests, and other parish necessities came from Bishop Gervasii himself. For a study on the critical role of Bishop Gervasii, see S. Ivanitskii, Pereiaslavskii episkop Gervasii Lintsevskii i nachalo vossoedinenia uniatov v zapadnoi ili pol’skoi Ukraine (1735–1769) (Kamenets-Podol’sk, 1904).
Jabłonowski estates in the Czyhyryn (Czechryń) starosta, for example, obtained consent in 1758 to send their candidate for their new parish to Pereiaslav for ordination by Bishop Gervasii. After training the candidate according to the Russian Orthodox standards, the bishop procured a written promise from the prospective parish priest to fulfill three requirements: (1) to take an oath of loyalty and obedience to the Empress Elizabeth and to the heir of the Russian imperial throne, Peter Fedorovich; (2) to promise "to cling to the Eastern Orthodox Greek-Russian Confession [vostochnopravoslavnoe grekorossiiskoe ispovedanie] without hypocrisy and to the end of my life, and never under any circumstances to convert to any other confession or religion"; and finally, (3) to fulfill all the necessary duties to the parish. In other words, loyalty to the Russian state and to the Russian Orthodox faith was the leading matter of priority.

In this fashion, the number of Orthodox parishes in this corner of the Commonwealth under Bishop Gervasii’s jurisdiction gradually expanded, and Melkhizedek was charged by Pereiaslav with duties of managing these parishes. The pastoral concern evidenced by Melkhizedek and his monks encouraged Orthodox priests of already existing parishes in this district to start asking Bishop Gervasii for stronger spiritual ties to his see, for “adoption” (usynovlenie) into the Pereiaslav eparchy. As with the newly installed priests, Bishop Gervasii accepted these “adopted” priests into his eparchy together with their parishes on the understanding that their “duty” was “to support firmly the Orthodox faith, and, in times of persecution, not forsaking life and not straying into non-Orthodox faith [inoverie].”

With these statements of allegiance, the ecclesiastical border between Russia and Poland had shifted westward. Bishop Gervasii and Ukrainian

36. Koialovich concludes that Melkhizedek helped the estate’s commissar M. Potocki write a letter to Bishop Gervasii with this request and that Potocki did so in fear of the history of haidamak violence in the region and potential unrest if the people’s demands were not met. Koialovich, Istoria v vossoedinenia, 15.


38. Koialovich accounts for 50 parishes in the Chhyryn (Czechryń) starosta (Jabłonowski estates) and 6 in the region of Smila (Lubomirski estates) by 1763. Koialovich, Istoria v vossoedinenia, 25. According to existing published documents, the priests were those that the parish had selected and Melkhizedek had approved. Of interest, indicating a continued lack of Orthodox episcopal leadership in the right bank, the majority of candidates had been ordained in Moldavia but were then required to undergo Russian Orthodox training and certification. For each parish, Bishop Gervasii usually received requests from the candidate for priest, the parishioners, Melkhizedek, and from either the landlord’s commissars or from local officials. Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossi, part 1, vol. 2, documents I–XV, XVIII–XIX, XXII–XXIII, XXXI–XXXIV, pp. 1–42, 50–56, 61–65, 94–105. On Melkhizedek’s duties, see Koialovich, Istoria v vossoedinenia, 15.

39. Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossi, part 1, vol. 2, document XLIV, pp. 146–48, contains Melkhizedek’s report that twenty-two priests of the Chhyryn district wanted to join (postupit’ v vedomstvo) the Pereiaslav eparchy, dated 23 September 1762. Document XXIV, pp. 66–69, for example, is a request for a priest who had been ordained by the Metropolitan of Kiev to change eparchies and join that of Pereiaslav (24 August 1764).

40. Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossi, part 1, vol. 2, document XXVI, pp. 73–76, presents Bishop Gervasii’s granota accepting priest Dmitrii Lozenskii and the parish of the Uspenskii church in the village of Medvedovki into the Pereiaslav see (October 1764).
monks such as Melkhizedek had from the beginning referred to the Orthodox monasteries and parishes in right-bank Ukraine as the zagranichnye (beyond-the-border) parishes of the Pereiaslav see, revealing that there was never a question from their side of Pereiaslav’s jurisdiction and authority within the civil borders of the Polish-Lithuanian state. Furthermore, given the oaths of allegiance to the Russian state taken by the new Orthodox priests in this region—the same oaths to the Russian ruler taken by all Orthodox priests in Russia at this time—adoption into the Pereiaslav eparchy had undeniable political significance. In other words, not only had the ecclesiastical border moved westward, but the political border became blurred as well.

In 1764, the Orthodox movement took on a new dimension with the first cases of conversions of Uniate parishes to Orthodoxy in this region, transforming the spread of Orthodoxy here from a revival effort to an offensive strike against the Uniate Church. The timing coincided with the election of Russian-backed King Stanislaw August Poniatowski to the Polish-Lithuanian throne and Catherine II’s campaign to promote rights equal with Catholics for confessional dissidents in the Commonwealth, as prompted by Belarusian Bishop Georgii Konisskii (Jerzy Koniski). Konisskii had sharpened the rhetoric of the previous century that appealed to the Russian Orthodox ruler to protect Commonwealth Orthodox communities against “persecution” by Roman Catholics and Uniates, and this language filtered through Bishop Gervasii and Melkhizedek’s monks into the new parishes in the Commonwealth. The converting parishioners submitted appeals (assisted by Melkhizedek’s monks) that became increasingly tendentious, portraying the Orthodox community as victim to Uniate and Catholic persecution. On behalf of all the members of their village, illiterate village representatives signed with a cross dramatic oaths to protect Orthodoxy and oppose the Uniate Church. Representatives of the villages of Ositniczy and Telepina, for example, swore the following:

41. Russian Orthodox priests followed the standard formula of the oath to the Russian state instituted at the time of the adoption of the Spiritual Regulation under Peter I. This standard oath was published in pocket-size catechisms issued in Kiev. A copy of a pocket catechism from 1784 with the oaths for priests, deacons, and sextons can be found in Czart., sygn. 934 (Pisma r6zne wzgl6dem religii grecko-dyzunitskiey), s. 234.

42. The first case documented is the village of Adamovka, which removed its Uniate priest from his position, replaced him with a Moldavian-ordained Orthodox priest, and appealed to Bishop Gervasii for acceptance into the Pereiaslav eparchy. Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossii, part 1, vol. 2, documents XX–XXI, pp. 57–60.

43. See I. Grigorovich, ed., Sobranie sochinenii Georgiia Koniskago, archiepiskopa Belorusskago, parts 1 and 2 (St. Petersburg, 1835), passim. A clause in the 1686 Polish-Russian peace treaty against oppression and forced conversions to the Roman or Uniate faiths among the Orthodox communities in the Commonwealth had led to repeated appeals from Russian representatives to the Polish king to this effect, usually in response to the residing Belarusian bishops, who compiled lists of grievances. See, for example, the grievances filed by Empress Elizabeth’s resident minister in Warsaw Piotr Gołębiowski [Golembevskii] about acts of “persecution” carried out by Uniates and Catholics, including a list of 158 Orthodox churches and monasteries “forcefully taken and converted to Union” between 1734 and 1743. Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossii, Part 1, vol. 4 (Kiev, 1871), 195–98, 444–57 (written 1743–44).
“We who are signing below have taken upon ourselves this obligation to the Pereiaslav episcopal consistory, that we and our descendants shall eternally and without fail preserve the Greek-Russian faith, oppose with every means the Roman Uniate faith [inoslavie], and not forsake our lives in times of persecution; and should we and our descendants be inclined to the Roman Uniate faith and separate ourselves from the [Pereiaslav] bishop’s care, we shall submit ourselves to the unforgiving last judgement and to eternal damnation.” In this way, the Bishop of Pereiaslav and the followers of Melkhizedek instilled the residents of this corner of right-bank Ukraine with words of entrenchment for a battle against their Uniate neighbors. Presenting the “Greek-Russian” faith as diametrically opposed to the “Roman Uniate” faith—both phrases in common use at this time—underlined differences rather than similarities in the two religious traditions and thereby encouraged hostility. The use of the word inoslavie to refer to the Uniate faith underscored the Orthodox perception of Uniates as upholding a non-Orthodox, incorrect dogma derived from ties to Polish Catholicism.

Meanwhile, the Uniate Church’s strengthened presence in right-bank Ukraine added to the Orthodox community’s agitation. In 1765, Kievan palatine (kijowski wojewoda) Franciszek Salez Potocki laid the groundwork to found a sizable Basilian (Uniate) monastery 150 kilometers to the west of the Dnepr region in the Bratslav trading center and military fortress Uman’ (Humani). The monastery soon housed a large public school (with about 400 students) and served as a mission center in right-bank Ukraine to reinforce religious practices and training in the region. Ultimately, Uniate missionaries clashed with Orthodox priests and monks, and the tensions filtered down to the villagers with sporadic outbreaks of violence.

44. Dokumenty, obiasniaiushchie istoriiu zapadno-russkago kraia i ego otnoshenia k Rossii i k Pol’she (St. Petersburg, 1865), 440. The same phrasing continued to be used in subsequent years up to the time of the Koliivshchyna massacre. For example, the oath taken by the village of Kononchi on 20 January 1768 is nearly identical. Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossi, part 1, vol. 3, document LXXXI, pp. 523-24.

45. This was the terminology for the Orthodox Church utilized by Bishop Konisskii from the start of his tenure in the Belarusian eparchy in an effort to stress the ties of the Orthodox in the Commonwealth to those in the Russian Empire. See Sobranie sochinenii Georgiia Koniskago, passim.

46. The 1765 document from Franciszek Potocki authorizing and funding the monastery with its stated educational and mission goals is reproduced in J. M. Giiycki, “Baziliani w Humanii,” Przewodnik naukowy i literacki 27 (1899): 661-64. Serczyk, Koliszczyzna, 94, notes that the school housed 400 students in 1768. Basilian schools offered the same curriculum as Jesuit schools, with additional training in the Slavonic liturgy.

47. Dokumenty, obiasniaiushchie istoriiu zapadno-russkago kraia, 444–48, describes the attack on Uniate missionary Lubinskii and his group of Uniates in the village of Telepin that had converted in December 1765. Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossi, part 1, vol. 2, document XLIII, pp. 137–45, contains the list of offenses committed by “Poles and Uniates” towards the Orthodox Ukrainian clergy and parishioners as presented by Melkhizedek to King Stanislaw in January 1766. The majority of the offenses involved attacks and robberies of Motronyn monks and the monastery; the offenses against parishes included beatings of priests and the leaders of the Orthodox communities (kistory), confiscation and theft of property, threats, desecration of altars.
These conflicts added to growing daily Russian pressure on Polish King Stanisław August to support legislation that would guarantee traditional rights and privileges for religious dissidents.48 In January 1766, the king ordered the Uniate clergy to cease any “acts of persecution” against the Orthodox population, especially forcing any conversions to the Uniate faith, and issued a decree confirming rights and privileges for the Orthodox residents of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.49 Bending to external political pressures from Russia, Stanisław August did not seem to recognize the internal political implications of guaranteeing rights to the Orthodox in this corner of his realm. In effect, the king had given the Bishop of Pereiaslav a free hand to continue extending his jurisdiction into the lands of the Commonwealth and to nurture loyalties to the Russian monarch.

Accordingly, Bishop Gervasii praised the “most merciful” and “most glorious” Russian empress in his pastoral letters to the Orthodox residents of the Commonwealth. Moreover, he used rhetoric that was pointedly anti-Catholic, and thereby anti-Polish, advancing the concept that the Orthodox population in the Commonwealth had been victims of the “cruel and violent behavior” of the Catholic Church, “being daily and violently forced into union with the Roman Church.”50 The Pereiaslav bishop asked his parishioners to thank God, Catherine II, and the King and officials of the Commonwealth, in that order, appealing to them to “have eternal gratitude to the most Orthodox Monarch of All Russia, who has so actively and with such effort helped you” (in her promotion of rights for the Orthodox).51 This emphasis on Catherine II’s support for Orthodox rights in effect made the Orthodox communities in the right bank comfortable with political loyalties that rejected the Commonwealth.

In the years leading up to 1768, the Uniate-Orthodox conflict intensified. Orthodox representatives became increasingly aggressive in their goals of moving back the frontlines of the Uniate faith, recruiting cossacks to help them violently seize churches, beating and driving away the Uniate priests in the process. In late 1765, Uniate Metropolitan Felicjan Wolodkowicz issued desperate complaints to Warsaw, blaming Bishop Gervasii outright for the ensuing violence.

48. *Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossii*, part 1, vol. 2, document XL, pp. 128–29, contains Catherine II’s memorandum of 30 October 1765 to Russian envoy Nikolai Repnin to pressure the king to address the situation in Ukraine in particular.


50. “Okruzhnoe poslanie . . . k pravoslavnym zhiteliam oblastei korolevstva Pol’skago . . .” Kievskiiia eparkhial’nyia viedomosti, 1862, no. 12: 705–12 (quote, 706), written in late 1767 or early 1768. The editor’s commentary following the text of the letter suggests it was likely based on similar letter written by Bishop Konisskii; however Bishop Gervasii appropriately altered it to fit his rhetorical style. The letter is also published in Polish in *Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossii*, part 1, vol. 3, document LXVI, pp. 436–45.

The Bishop of Pereiaslav comes with a force of cossacks and monks through the villages of the hereditary landlords and in the starostas, such as Czehryń, Czerkass, and Mościski Klucz, forcing the gromady [village communities] and my priests of the Uniate faith to renounce Union and the Roman Church. Those [priests] who refuse are chased from the village. Their livestock and property are confiscated.

... By [this] means eighty churches have been taken and the Uniate priests driven away, and so Dysunia\textsuperscript{52} becomes more and more widespread and my Uniate priests are not allowed to pass through their villages.\textsuperscript{53}

The guarantee of privileges from the king, intended to quell the violence, nevertheless had the effect of further emboldening the Orthodox contingent. Melkhizedek rallied the peasants to help convert more Uniate parishes to Orthodoxy, declaring their previous conversion to Union an act of persecution. The resulting attacks against Uniate priests and parishes were described by the Uniates as a peasant \textit{bunt} or revolt against them. A report from officials of the Cherkasy and Zhabotyn regions stated:

\begin{quote}
We are in a great state of unrest from the revolt [\textit{bunt}] of peasants stirred up by the monks of the Orthodox Motronyn monastery... They forced some priests to join the rebellion and chased others out of their parishes, seizing their churches and property, and in their place installed schismatic [Orthodox] priests, without permission and even against the will of their landlords. Lacking all respect for Uniate clergy, they raised their hand against the priests and beat some so severely that they nearly died. ... Schismatic monks are spreading the rebellion, running from village to town. They convince the people to accept schism, condoning bigamy, murder, theft, plunder, etc. The fanaticism is so great that it must be reined in, in order to avert extremely dangerous consequences.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

The frantic tone of this missive illustrates that Uniate hostility toward the Orthodox aggressors—seen as wreaking social as well as religious havoc—balanced on the edge of desperation.

In response, the Uniate Metropolitan’s chief official, Grzegorz Mokrzycki, with his own retinue of cossack troops, began terrorizing the new

\textsuperscript{52} This terminology reflects the Uniate myth that the Uniates had preserved the unity of the Christian Church by restoring union with Rome. From this perspective, the Uniates saw the Orthodox faithful as continuing to leave the church in disunion or schism, referring to them as \textit{dysunity} or “schismatics.”

\textsuperscript{53} Czart., sygn. 754 (Zbiór pism należących do interesu spora między Grekami Uniami y Nie Unitami tudzien y do Sprawy między Wieleb. Koninskim y Wołodkowiczem), s. 227, 29 December 1765. (Copy also on s. 225, and copy in French on s. 233.) Wołodkowicz was at the time in an ongoing debate with Belarusian Orthodox Bishop Konisskii to dispute the latter’s claims that the Uniate Church had used violence against the Orthodox Church. Additionally, Wołodkowicz was in the midst of a legal dispute with Konisskii over property claims by the Uniate Metropolitanate, so tensions between hierarchs were running high.

\textsuperscript{54} M. Cecylia Łubiń ska, \textit{Sprawa Dysydencka 1764–1766} (Kraków, 1911), 74–5. The quotation is from a report presented to Warsaw on 31 March 1766. It is also quoted with slight variation in Władysław Serczyk, \textit{Hajdamacy} (Kraków, 1972), 276–77. For an explanation of the term “schismatic,” see note 52.
Orthodox parishes and forcing them to convert to Union. Mokrzycki took on the role of "ruthless inquisitor," punishing severely anyone—clerical or secular—whom he suspected of connections to the Russian Orthodox Bishop Gervasii and the Motronyn monks. According to Orthodox accounts, Mokrzycki and his men threatened and beat Orthodox clergy, some to death, organized Polish border guards to capture and interrogate all priests and people traveling to and from Pereiaslav, destroyed church and monastery property, desecrated altars, stole grain and livestock, and looted houses. Relying on assistance from Polish troops and officials in the area, Mokrzycki's followers not only perpetrated physical aggression but also interfered with religious rituals by prohibiting religious baptisms by Orthodox priests or marriages in Orthodox families, and forcing congregations to hear Uniate services. Moreover, due to the Orthodox community's contacts with Zaporozhian cossacks and the presence of cossack retinues from the Hetmanate accompanying Orthodox priests and communities in their violence against Uniate parishes, fears of a possible large-scale haidamak uprising prompted the Polish government to send one thousand additional troops into the area in the summer of 1766, who also participated in intimidation of the Orthodox population.

At this point, the sides were clearly drawn in religious as well as political terms. While the finer points of doctrinal differences were likely not well understood by the general population, the religious conflict was very real. Both sides denigrated the beliefs of the other side as corrupted, and their sacraments as invalid. The Orthodox referred to the Uniate beliefs as a deviation from the pure Orthodox faith of the Ruthenian people; the Uniates referred to the Orthodox as "non-Uniates" or "schismatics," who destroyed the union of the Christian faith. Once either side had taken over a church of its opponents, the first action was to remove the symbols...

55. Lubienska, Sprawa Dysydencka, 76. Mokrzycki arrested Melkhizedek himself in August 1766, adding to the panic among the Orthodox population. After several months in prison, the monk escaped to Pereiaslav and continued to assist the Orthodox cause from there.


of sanctity of the altar.58 Both Uniate and Orthodox representatives removed the antimension59 that was blessed by the bishops of the opposing faith and sewn with holy relics, and the Orthodox removed from Uniate Churches the sacred container (ciborium) in which the consecrated Host was stored.60 In an additional act of sacrilege against the Orthodox faith, the Uniates routinely shaved the hair and beards of the Orthodox priests.61

The conflict also reflected a deepening schism in political loyalties. The Orthodox complaints consistently referred to offenses committed by the “Poles and Uniates,” aligning the Uniates with the governing elite of the Commonwealth.62 Portraying the Polish-Lithuanian state and Catholic and Uniate citizens as having violated the rights and privileges of the Orthodox community, Orthodox leaders produced accusations that became increasingly vindictive.63 The campaign led by Mokrzycki reinforced perceptions among the Orthodox parishioners that the Polish state opposed their faith, as local Polish officials and troops (whether ethnic Poles or otherwise) assisted in the acts of violence and intimidation against the Orthodox believers. The Orthodox community openly turned to the Bishop of Pereiaslav and his connections to St. Petersburg for assistance against the treatment of the “Poles and Uniates.”64 Orthodox community

58. For commentary on the force of religious symbols to the practitioners of a faith, I refer to Talal Asad, Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Baltimore, 1993), particularly his critique of Clifford Geertz’s interpretation of symbols as undervaluing the power of symbolism in chapter 1, 27–56.

59. A square of cloth with representations of the crucifixion and burial of Christ, and in one corner of which relics are inserted, that is placed on the altar for the mass. It is consecrated by the Bishop in a rite similar to that for consecrating the altar itself and it may be used in place of the altar on an ordinary table, though common practice was to place the antimension on the consecrated altar. See Richard Lloyd Langford-James, A Dictionary of the Eastern Orthodox Church (New York, 1923), 8. Proving the antimension’s importance in the late eighteenth century, Uniate visitations always noted the presence of the antimension in parish churches and which Bishop consecrated it. Likewise, the records of Melkhizedek and Bishop Gervasii demonstrate the critical importance of the antimension to the Orthodox Church, as the distribution of antimensions was essential for the consecration of a new church or the conversion of Uniate churches (see Orthodox requests for antimensions in Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossi, part 1, vol. 2, documents XXXIV, LXIX, CVI, pp. 104–5, 213–14, 411–13).


62. These are the terms used consistently and repeatedly by Melkhizedek, Bishop Gervasii, and members of the Orthodox community from 1765 to 1768 in the sources published in Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossi, vol. 1, parts 2–3, for example vol. 1, part 3, documents XV–XVII, XXIV, XIV, LXIX, pp. 85–119, 202–5, 330–34, 460–64.

63. See, for example, the strident complaints from Melkhizedek and Bishop Gervasii against the Uniates under Mokrzycki from July 1766 in Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossi, part 1, vol. 2, documents LXXXI and LXXXIII, pp. 259–69, 272–88.

64. In response, Bishop Gervasii sent an appeal on behalf of the Orthodox population in the Commonwealth to the Holy Synod for support and protection. Arkhiv iugo-zapadnoi Rossi, part 1, vol. 2, document XCIII, pp. 311–33.
leaders from the Smila district declared themselves ready to abandon their Polish homeland for Russia. They told Bishop Gervasii that they could not tolerate being forced to observe the Uniate rite in baptism, marriage, and mass, and would cross the border to live in Russia if they could not observe their own Orthodox rite in peace in the Commonwealth.65

The Uniate side, on the other hand, overtly associated the Orthodox community in right-bank Ukraine with “foreign” Russian authorities. Uniate official Mokrzycki sought out anyone under suspicion of relations with “foreign powers” (władzy zagraniczne).66 This political concern appeared to be motivating him, and the Polish officials who supported him, as much or more than opposition to the Orthodox Church. Indeed, the perception that members of the Orthodox community were “foreign” or under “foreign” influence was in part based on reality, given the open allegiances to the Bishop of Pereiaslav, the number of Orthodox clergymen trained and ordained in either Moldavia or Pereiaslav, and that a contingent of the parishioners was originally from Russian-ruled Ukraine across the Dnepr. This view of the Orthodox community as loyal to the Russian state combined with resentment towards Russia for its promotion of dissident rights in the Commonwealth to push Uniates even further apart politically from their Orthodox neighbors.

Koliivshchyna in the Context of Uniate-Orthodox Conflict

The tensions caused by the combination of political and religious identities created a tinderbox that needed only a spark to set off wholesale violence. The spark came in the form of the pro-Catholic and anti-Russian Confederation of Bar, a massive rebellion led by Polish nobility that erupted in February 1768 in response to Russia’s unrelenting pressure on the Polish Sejm to confirm full political rights to confessional dissidents.67 Rising first in Podolia and other Ukrainian regions, the confederation claimed some 150,000 participants and eventually spread to a majority of provinces in the Commonwealth.68 Religious grievances spurred the Poles

66. Łubieńska, Sprawa Dysydencja, 76.
67. The catalyst for the rebellion was the 1768 “Treaty of Eternal Peace” that Russia forced the Commonwealth to sign. This document reshaped Poland-Lithuania’s 1764 constitution to fit Russia’s political designs in the Commonwealth, including a substantial increase in the political and religious rights of the dissidents, such as lifting of restrictions on public worship and granting the right to hold high administrative, judicial, and legislative seats in the government. A complete copy of the 1768 Treaty (“Traktat Wieczysty Miedzy Rzeczpospolitą Polską y Imperium calej Rossyi”) can be found in Volumina Legum: przedruk zboru praw staraniem XX. Pijarów w Warszawie od roku 1732 do roku 1782 wydanego, 10 vols. (St. Petersburg, Kraków, and Poznań, 1859–1952), 7:250–85.
68. Russian troops headed the fight to quell the rebellion, but its ability to rise again, Phoenix-like, in new regions after being suppressed in others, combined with Russia’s simultaneous preoccupation with its war with the Ottoman empire (1768–1774), led to a drawn-out four-year civil war in the Commonwealth (1768–1772).
into action. Perceiving the Russian-backed promotion of dissident rights as an attack on the dominant Roman Catholic faith, members of the confederation took an oath “to defend the Holy Catholic faith with our life and blood,” and a leading contingent vowed to “cleanse the country of Moscow and heretics.”

By late spring, the confederation had made inroads into the Dnepr region of right-bank Ukraine and threatened the Motronyn monastery. The confederation’s pro-Catholic agenda struck terror into the newly converted Orthodox population of the Dnepr region, who appealed to Bishop Gervasii to bring their requests for protection to the highest Russian officials. In the name of defending the Orthodox faith, a group comprised mostly of private estate militia and several cossacks from the Zaporozhian Sich—led by Zaporozhian colonel Maksym Zalizniak, who was in the service of the Motronyn monks—routed the Confederate troops from the region of the monastery.

This first attack led to a spontaneous wave of violence against the non-Orthodox population headed up by Zalizniak’s cossack contingent and joined by peasants roused to the cause by Orthodox clergy, as well as estate military retinues who refused to join the general levée for the Confederation of Bar. Within days, the movement attracted thousands of peasants and service cossack retinues from the landed estates in the region, as well as cossacks from beyond the border, and continued to draw supporters as Zalizniak led the uprising on a bloody route through major towns in right-bank Ukraine, from Zhabotyn to Smila, then to Cherkasy, Korsun’, Bohuslav, Lyshankya, Zvenigorodka, and finally Uman’ in the culminating slaughter of the campaign.

With religious concerns at the core of the violence, this pro-Orthodox uprising fed into and built upon other grievances underlying the emotions that led to the frenzied bloodbath known as Kolivshchyna. Certainly, the socioeconomic situation continued to fortify peasants’ resentments towards their landlords in this region of Ukraine. The increasing hardship of the peasants, with the termination of their obligation-free leases and encroaching serfdom, presented an ever-present threat of declining status that heightened hostile feelings towards Polish or Polonized


70. Arkhiv ugro-zapadnoi Rossii, part 1, vol. 3, documents CXV–CXVII, pp. 679–86, for example, contain an appeal from the residents of Zhabotyn to Bishop Gervasii, who then appealed on their behalf to the Kiev Governor-General F. M. Voelkov; the latter, in return, suggested that the appeal be made to the Holy Synod and the Russian College of Foreign Affairs (3–12 May 1768). Documents CXVIII–CXXI, pp. 687–709, include descriptions of persecution by members of the Confederation of Bar toward the Orthodox community, including an attack on the Motronyn monastery. Document CIX, pp. 640–42 (10 April 1768), shows that Bishop Konisskii from inside the Commonwealth kept Pereiaslav Bishop Gervasii informed of the developments regarding the Confederation.

71. See Serczyk, Koliszczyzna, 83–115, for a carefully documented account of the action. While Korzon estimates that by this time, the armed followers of the uprising numbered about 30,000, this number is likely exaggerated. Pelenski presents a more conservative estimate of some 500–600 cossacks and 4,000–5,000 peasants. Korzon, Wewnętrzne dzieje Polski, 1:197–98. Pelenski, “The Haidamak Insurrections,” 233.
Ruthenian landlords and their Jewish leaseholders and administrators. The socioeconomic causes cannot, however, be completely disengaged from the religious grievances. Perception of oppression infused both. The image of Poles (and Polonized Ukrainians) as oppressive landlords thus linked to that of Poles as Catholic oppressors of Orthodoxy. The Jews were swept into the equation as the landlords’ cohorts in economic oppression, but the popular image of the Jews was also inextricably tied to religious aversion. Notably, the first half of the eighteenth century in the Commonwealth had witnessed renewed emphasis on the myth that Jews used Christian blood in their religious ritual, and a new wave of accusations led to widely publicized trials of Jews for ritual murder.72 These tragic misconceptions fired the imagination of a population already agitated by religious tensions.

Demonstrating the overlapping religious and political causes for violence, the Orthodox population responded to a forged ukaz from Catherine II commanding the peasants to rise with the cossacks against their Catholic and Jewish oppressors. Zalizniak brandished the manifesto, lettered in gold, to attract followers as he passed through villages. Although no original copies of this “Golden Decree” survived, contemporary accounts of the uprising consistently mention it. Memoirists and historians have attempted to reconstruct the decree’s probable content, though the emphasis of the existing versions shifts depending on the argument being made.73 The version which holds truest to the religious tensions presaging the uprising provides a stirring appeal by Catherine II for the peasants to revenge “the defenders of our Greek religion” who “are persecuted, oppressed, and punished by death,” and for Zalizniak and his followers “to enter the lands of Poland . . . and slay, with the aid of God, all the Polish and Jewish blasphemers of our holy religion.”74 One Uniate eyewitness asserted that the decree imparted to the rebels “that if they kill the Poles, Jews, and Ruthenians in Union [Rus w unii], then they would be free of their servitude to Poles, and, joining the Russian state, would live in eter-

73. A favorite version of nineteenth-century historians, corresponding with conventional national and social explanations of the violence, presents the decree as a call for the Ukrainian peasants to rise against the economic oppression of their Polish landlords: “. . . to rise from your enslavement, to free yourselves from the yoke and the burden that you have suffered to this day from your landlords [pany]! . . . The time has come to demand an accounting from your ruling powers for all the offenses, suffering, for all the inexpressible abuse. We send you leaders. Trust them and follow them with whatever weapons you can! Leave your homes, wives, and beloved children. . . . God will grant us victory, and you will all become free pany, when you have slain the serpent monsters of your landlords who have been sucking your blood to this day!” As cited in Kostomarov, Posled-nye gody, 102. It is unlikely, however, that the motivating factor of the uprising deviated so wildly from the original purpose of protecting the Orthodox population against Confederate forces. The rhetoric could not have so easily changed from one of intense dedication to the faith to one of destroying the landlord-peasant socioeconomic relationship.
74. As cited in Mirchuk, Kolivshchyna, 133–34. The words cannot be held to be authentic, of course, as discussed by Mirchuk on pages 135–37. Whatever the words, Serczyk convincingly disputes the claim that Melkhizedek himself wrote the false manifesto; see Koliszczynza, 148–49.
nal freedom." This version relays the victims' perception, first, that their aggressors had more loyalty to Russia than to Poland and, secondly, that they condemned Uniates fully as much as Catholic "Poles" (including Ruthenian converts to Catholicism) and Jews.

Indeed, the decree's role in motivating the participants in the uprising is testimony to the promotion of loyalties to the Russian state that accompanied the Orthodox revival in this corner of the Commonwealth. Without the previous efforts of Bishop Gervasii and Melkhizedek to promote the empress's protection of the Orthodox in the Commonwealth and to condemn the "persecution" of the Poles and Uniates—their de facto movement of the Russian ecclesiastical border westward—such a decree would have been of limited worth. The utility of the forged decree indicates to what extent the local population accepted the strengthened Russian presence on the Dnepr border as a source of natural alliance for the Orthodox population. Koliivshchyna, in fact, occurred when Russian troops were in the area to quell the Confederation of Bar, and the haidamak rebels no doubt drew confidence from their presence, especially as several Russian soldiers and officers joined in the uprising.

An uprising in the name of Catherine II was, moreover, highly unusual for a period in which currents of unrest among cossacks in the Russian empire tended to reject Catherine II in favor of a miraculously rejuvenated Peter III. No fewer than ten such pretenders had proclaimed themselves between 1764 and 1772 prior to the mass rebellion in 1773–74 of Emel'ian Pugachev, the most successful of the pretenders. As the revolts under Peter III pretenders lashed out explicitly against serfdom, Koliivshchyna's alternative proclamations for Catherine II argue against socioeconomic causes being the paramount concern for this uprising. The "freedom" promised in the Golden Decree—ostensibly from encroaching serfdom and exploitation by landlords—seems more utopian than realistic, as the situation for peasants across the Russian border in Hetmanate Ukraine was no better, and perhaps worse, than that of the right bank by the 1760s. "Freedom" makes sense, however, in the religious sphere, as Catherine II promoted the rights and privileges for the Orthodox faith in the Commonwealth.

76. I agree with Kohut that the rebels were likely seeking protection rather than a formal union with Russia. Kohut, "Myths Old and New," 373.
78. Isabel de Madariaga, Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great (New Haven, 1981), 240–41. For a study of the phenomenon of Peter III pretenders that extended well beyond the borders of the Russian Empire, see Aleksandr Sergeevich Myl'nikov, Iskushenie chudom: "Russkii prints," ego prototipi i dvoiniki-samozvantsy (Leningrad, 1991). I credit Gary Marker for bringing my attention to this issue in light of the events described here and for pointing me to Myl'nikov's study.
80. Catherine's campaign to secularize monastery lands (carried out in European Russia in 1764) was not applied to left-bank Ukraine until the 1780s, so her image as religious patroness in Ukraine remained untainted at the time of Koliivshchyna. See Zenon E.
Accordingly, the actions of the 1768 rebels demonstrate a presiding concern with religious loyalties. First, a symbolic gesture early in the uprising revealed deep-seated enmities based on religious rather than social identity. In the yard of a Franciscan church, the haidamaky hanged on the same gallows a Catholic priest, a Jew, and a dog, with the inscription “liakh, zhid, ta sobaka, vse vira odnaka” (Pole, Jew and dog: all have the same faith).81 Faith was the rallying cry. “Pole” here, in reference to the priest’s corpse, was the general designator for those of the Catholic faith, regardless of their ethnic background. The recent years of rhetoric against “Catholic persecutors” and oaths to defend the Orthodox faith against the “Poles and Uniates” wrapped Ruthenian Uniates into the enmity towards Catholic “Poles.” That next to the Pole hung a Jew, viewed in the popular mind as the killers of Christ and ritual murderers of Christians, suggests that the rebels viewed both as defilers of the Christian faith.

While the Jews and the predominantly Roman Catholic nobility and clergy had always suffered extraordinary violence in previous haidamak activity, the suffering of the Uniate population at the hands of Zalizniak’s rebels was a new phenomenon, connected firmly with the Orthodox-Uniate tensions of the preceding decade. The Uniate clergy were particularly targeted. Some three hundred Uniate priests from right-bank Ukraine testified in December 1768 to the violence carried out against them by Zalizniak’s men. Fear of brutal beatings and death drove many of them to convert to Orthodoxy under the authority of the Bishop of Pereiaslav simply to save their lives during the uprising, though they recanted, reconverted, and swore again their dedication to the Union with Rome and to the Commonwealth as soon as it was safe again to do so. The fates of those not so fortunate tell a tale of agony: Father Tomasz Piskunowski of the Kościański parish in the Kaniv region was beaten with sticks by the haidamaky, then taken from town and shot by the cossack headman; the Zawadowski parish priest of the Smila district and his son were captured by the haidamaky, paraded through the town of Korsun with ropes tied around their necks, shown to Maksym Zalizniak, escorted to the market, and publicly shot and stabbed to death. Many more such accounts of beatings, maimings, and death permeate the testimony of the priests. Haidamak leaders publicly announced to the Uniate clergy: “Go to Pereiaslav, renounce your Uniate faith, and you will live.”82 Among the few extant documents drawn up personally by Zalizniak and his subordinate commanders are a passport (signed by Zalizniak) for an Orthodox priest to go to Pereiaslav unharmed, a petition from a village (wishing to remain unharmed by the approaching cossacks) stating that they have no complaints against their priest, and a response from the local cossack commander that the priest in question had indeed foresworn Union—that he had previously been forced into Union and was now Orthodox by choice.


81. Serczyk, Koliszczyzna, 89.

(and therefore merits no harm). These are small details, but they lend evidence that Zalizniak and his followers continued a conscious fight against the Uniate faith among the Ukrainian population.

Once the uprising reached the key trading post and fortress of Uman’ (Humani), it had reached the new center of the Uniate faith in right-bank Ukraine. The Potocki family here had not only funded the important new Basilian monastery, mission center, and school, but had also been staunch in their efforts to install Uniate priests in local parishes. While strategic and practical reasons no doubt played a role in Zalizniak’s decision to attack Uman’ despite the threat of strong opposition from local cossack militias, another factor urging the haidamaky on to this town could well have been the chance to damage this Uniate stronghold. In a stroke of luck for Zalizniak, the commander (sotnik) of Potocki’s private cossack forces, Ivan Gonta, made the decision to bring his men into the fray on the side of the haidamaky. Thus, this town, now full of terrified refugees from the Kiev and Bratslav palatinates, had no remaining defensive militia. The slaughter commenced: “People stabbed and hacked to death, killed in the streets and houses, with no attention paid to the cries or pleas or persons, bodies thrown into the air, infants speared and thrown onto roofs... Sobs, screams, pleas filled the air, and the horrible wail of mothers cut open to destroy their wombs.”

With the Roman Catholics and Jews, Uniates here also suffered pain, death, and indignity. The haidamaky slayed the rector of the Basilian school and most of its four hundred students. They pulled the remaining Basilian monks from the chapel and stripped them, “beating [them] on the head, face, and shoulders with chains and sticks, stabbing them one by one with pikes, with abuses and sneers paraded them naked and barely alive around the town hall.” Finally, upon the insistence of a local Orthodox priest, the monks were killed, their bodies placed on pikes near the Orthodox church to be further humiliated. Aside from the human victims, the sacred objects and sacraments of the Uniate churches were also targets of attack. According to a Polish eyewitness: “In the church and chapel of the Basilian fathers, they threw down the altar and the images, shooting them and spearing them with pikes, dashed the ciborium with...”

83. Czart., sygn. 752 (Zbior Roznych Pism nalezących do Interessu Dyssydentow w Polszcze), s. 177–81. A scribble at the bottom of these pages notes that there were more such documents from Zalizniak, but that they were not sent to the Czartoryski files due to postage fees.

84. M. A. Maksimovich, “Skazanie o Kolivshchine,” Russkii arkhiv, 1875, no. 2:14, also notes this as a reason for the importance of Uman’ in the massacre.

85. For background on Gonta and his decision to betray Potocki, see V. Antonovich, “Umanskii sotnik Ivan Gonta (1768g),” Kievskaia starina, Nov. 1882, 250–76. Antonovich works Gonta into his nationalist interpretation of the uprising, arguing that the cossack commander decided consciously to fight “on the side of his people, [for] their rights, faith, and nationality [narodnost’]” against the Polish overlords, but the research on Gonta’s background and career are solid.

86. “Opis krótki rzezi,” 300.

87. Serczyk, Koliszczyzna, 98. The students were both Polish Catholics and Ukrainian Uniates.

the holy sacrament to the ground, trampled on the image of the Savior on the cross, speared it with pikes, shot it through, and finally hung it by the head; and they tore off this crucifix head and commanded women to breastfeed the head of Christ. It is difficult to describe and terrible to remember how they defiled the images of God, as not even Muslims would do." The desecration of the sacred altar in this manner indicates more than the random escalation of frenzied violence beyond control. This was a conscious effort not only to defile the altars but to humiliate the symbol of the crucifix that watched over Uniate services. After the carnage, the haidamaky staged a demonstrative rebaptism of survivors in the Orthodox tradition. Three who refused to be baptized again in this fashion were killed. The Uniates, then, had become for the haidamak rebels no less an enemy than the Roman Catholics.

In this way, signs of religious hostilities stemming specifically from increased Uniate-Orthodox tensions were present not only in the prelude to Koliivshchyna but also during its bloody course through right-bank Ukraine. Other grievances, such as increased economic hardship, fed into the enmities that ignited mass participation but did not subsume the religious goals, evidenced in the conscious violence against Uniate clergy and churches in Uman'.

Ironically, while the beginning of the violence stemmed from efforts by Bishop Gervasii to support an Orthodox revival across the Russian border, the uprising came to a swift end due to the potential damaging impact on Catherine’s own goals to bolster Russian influence in the Commonwealth. The uncontrolled violence went counter to her plans to acquire political support in the Commonwealth through peaceful patronage of the dissident cause. While she had not interfered in the Orthodox revival orchestrated by Melkhizedek and Gervasii and had openly supported their complaints against the Uniates, she had not foreseen the volatile combination of political and religious loyalties that would fuel the kind of violence elicited by the haidamaky. Furthermore, Catherine II was outraged at the abuse of her name in the manifesto that led to the spontaneous violence of Koliivshchyna. The empress ordered more troops to the region (in addition to those assigned to quell the Confederation of Bar) to help put down the uprising, even though the Turks were becoming more and more incensed at the quantity of Russian troops massing north of its borders in the Commonwealth. After a month of rampage, the haidamak leaders and peasant supporters were eventually either captured, executed, or disbanded; both Russian and Polish troops dealt

89. “Pis’mo pana Iakova Kuzalkevicha k russkomu polkovniku Chorbe,” 11 July 1768, in “Materiały dla istorii Koliivshchiny ili rezi 1768 g.” Kievskaia starina, July 1882, 305.
90. “Opis krótki rzezi,” 301. The Orthodox baptized by immersion, while the Uniates used the Roman tradition of sprinkling or pouring water. The debate on whether those baptized in the western fashion should be rebaptized had a long history among Orthodox theologians.
91. Historians have discussed whether Catherine might have staged the entire affair, especially with the ukaz wielded by Zalizniak that bore her name, but the sources support her innocence in the affair. See Korzon, Wewnętrzne dzieje Polski, 1:199.
harshly with those identified as participants, summarily hanging them or exiling them to hard labor in Siberia.  

Influential Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian contemporaries in the immediate aftermath of Koliivshchyna pointed to confessional conflict as the central cause of the tensions leading up to the violence of Koliivshchyna. One line of explanation led to specific culprits. Catherine II accused both Bishop Gervasii and Melkhizedek of overzealousness in their cause to promote Orthodoxy in the Commonwealth and promptly removed them to Kiev. Uniate priests in the right bank also blamed these Ukrainian clergymen for instigating the hatred that led to the violent haidamak uprising. Contemporaries ranging from Uniate survivors to the King of Poland condemned the Confederation of Bar for stirring up religious hostilities among the Orthodox population, and the Uniates placed additional blame on Catherine II’s promotion of dissident rights for causing tension. Ukrainian nobility from Volhynia, on the other hand, blamed Uniate Metropolitan Wołodykowicz for inadequate management and lack of supervision of parishes in the right bank; more scrupulous oversight might have spared Uniate parishes from falling into Orthodox hands and hence into the hands of the cossacks rousing the peasants to the uprising.  

Others argued that not specific events or persons but the increasingly ardent religious feelings among the general population in the region was the critical cause. Russia’s General Petr Rumiantsev (then governor-general of Hetmanate Ukraine), who assisted in the efforts to quell the uprising, observed: “Simple zeal for the Orthodox faith and hostility toward it from the Roman [Catholic] clergy, spread with vicious inhumanity, have undoubtedly been the two extremes inciting the peasants in Poland to rebellion.” He handed blame to both sides of the conflict, condemning the effort of Melkhizedek on the one hand and the “cruel actions against the Orthodox faith” by Uniate deputy Mokrzycki on the

92. Koialovich notes that Repnin, Generals Mikhail Krechetnikov and Petr Rumiantsev, and governor Voeikov of the Kiev guberniia had already decided to act independently to curtail the violence before Catherine II ordered them to do so on 9 July, since they deemed the uprising potentially dangerous to Russian security along its western border with the Commonwealth. Catherine II acted as soon as some of the haidamak participants had been chased into Turkish territory, threatening already brittle relations with the Porte to the brink of war. The punishment extended to Zalizniak was exile in Siberia; Ivan Gonta suffered death by quartering. Koialovich, Istoriia vossoedinenia, 99.

93. Russian foreign minister Nikita Panin issued a stern reprimand to Bishop Gervasii for allowing Orthodox clergy into Poland who were “not humble” but who promoted unrest, including the monk Melkhizedek. Arkhiv Vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii, Moscow, f. 79, op. 79/6, d. 438, 2 September 1768. The document is also published in Sergei Mikhailovich Soló’ev, Istoriia Rossi si drevneishikh vremen, 29 vols. (Moscow, 1959–66), 27:263–64. Serczyk’s research on the monk Znachko-Iavorskii, in his article, “Melchizedek Znaczko-Iavorski,” dispelled previous Polish accusations that the monk was personally involved in the massacre (as argued by Korzon, for example).

94. “Wypis z Xiag grodzich.”


96. Czart., sygn. 752, s. 251.
other. In a similar vein, King Stanislaw August portrayed the uprising as the result of dangerous religious “fanaticism,” though he faulted the Uniates above all. In his view,

Several fanatics started threatening the peasants of our Ukraine with all possible disasters if they did not stop being Orthodox (Greki-neuniaty) and start being Uniates (Greki-uniaty), in other words if they would not stop explaining the Trinity as they do in St. Petersburg and start explaining it in the Roman way. Do you think that the unfortunate peasants could understand anything of this? But this was enough to incite them [to violence], and an uprising of these people is no laughing matter! They are numerous, armed, and fierce when provoked. They are now killing their landlords, with their wives and children, Catholic priests, and Jews. There have already been thousands killed.

In addition to religious causes, the king also noted the social grievances of the peasants as a key to the hostilities, but he either failed or refused to recognize the political connotations of the religious conflict as fueling the hostility of the Orthodox rebels. He appeared unaware or unconcerned that the extension of the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Pereiaslav had involved not only religious allegiance but also expressions of loyalty to the Russian regime. Portraying the religious conflict as a matter of creeds and doctrine and the uprising as a matter of social injustices combined with religious fanaticism, he disregarded perhaps the most destabilizing element of the conflict in terms of the security of his state—the loss of political allegiance.

In justifying the violence of Koliivshchyna within existing confessional tensions, the contemporaries of the uprising correctly identified the core cause of the ensuing massacre. Only the context of increased Uniate-Orthodox hostility provides sufficient explanation for the violence of Ukrainians against Ukrainians in 1768. Yet complete comprehension of the event also requires an awareness of overlapping religious and political identities that could not easily be separated one from the other. Indeed, a careful reading of the sources from the era of Koliivshchyna demonstrates the constant presence of political connotations permeating religious identity, and the force of the violence indicates the compounding power of these combined allegiances. The new Dnepr River border that divided Ukrainians from Ukrainians had become by the mid-eighteenth century a confessional border carrying political and cultural ramifications. The Uniate Church in the Commonwealth promoted allegiances to Polish legal and political traditions, while the Orthodox faithful were now loyal to the Russian Orthodox Church and promoted allegiances to the Russian state. For the participants in the uprising, the two dominant sides were at once—and inseparably—political and religious: Russian/Ortho-

97. See Rumiantsev’s letter of 24 August 1768, Kievskaia starina, October 1882, 101–2. I am grateful to Jaroslaw Pelenski for citing this reference in his article “The Haidamak Insurrections,” 240, 247n52.

dox or Polish/Catholic/Uniate. The political issue at stake in 1768 was not a nationalist striving for independence but a question of where the Ruthenian-Ukrainians fit among the competing identities in the Russian-Polish borderlands. Ruthenians in Ukraine were at this moment in a situation of dividing themselves and submerging their own identity within one of two sides of a greater struggle. When Uniate-Orthodox violence erupted, the fight for faith had become a fight for political and cultural allegiances in the new borderlands. It had become an issue of where the border between Russia and Poland lay.

More than another sequence in cossack-led disturbances in Ukraine, then, the 1768 uprising eloquently demonstrates the extraordinary power of religious conviction as a political motivator. It also attests to both the vulnerability of identity and allegiances in borderland regions and the active role that the peoples of borderland regions have played in aligning identity to one side or the other. When local haidamak activity flared up in response to the pro-Catholic Confederation of Bar, it fed into the mentality of religious conflict that had developed around the new Dnepr River border with volatile effect. The cossack haidamaky can be viewed as vital actors of Koliivshchyna, but without the context of confessional tensions heightened by the political implications of the new Russian-Polish border, would the 1768 uprising have occurred as a tragedy of such massive proportions?