

REPORT

of a member of the dissertation council
for the dissertation of
PROHORENKOV Igor Aleksandrovich
on the topic
“POLISH-LITHUANIAN ANTI-RUSSIAN LITERARY PROPAGANDA
DURING THE TIME OF TROUBLES”,
submitted for the degree of
Candidate of Sciences in History,
Scientific Specialty 5.6.2. General History

Igor Aleksandrovich Prohorenkov has produced an extraordinary work of original scholarship, synthetic analysis, bibliographical range, and historical imagination. The *Problematik* of this dissertation is, as he describes it, to examine “short literary compositions [малые литературные формы]” which were produced in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (*Rzeczpospolita*) during the Time of Troubles (1598–1613) and which “have rarely been studied by historians” (6). He uses these sources to peer into the evolving views of King Sigismund III, the great magnate families, the *szlachta* and gentry, and even the middle (merchant) classes on relations—and war—with Russia during the turbulent period between the extinction of the Daniilovich rulers (descendants of Prince Daniil of Moscow) and the rise of the Romanovs. He argues that the propagandistic texts composed in Poland-Lithuania reflected and helped to shape public opinion toward war (and peace) with Russia, and also shined light on internal political discourse inside the *Rzeczpospolita* over issues of war, the power of the nobility, and the dynastic policies of the Polish king. Prohorenkov employs a range of appropriate interdisciplinary methods, including close textual reading, discourse analysis, and a kind of hermeneutics (called *honology* in the text). The topic likewise calls for a substantial grounding in the fields of epistemology, literary studies, and propaganda studies, not to mention a highly competent command of the history of Russia and the Commonwealth from the mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries. Thus, this dissertation presents enormous challenges of analysis and writing: it is by no means a simple, one-dimensional topic. As I will explain below, Prohorenkov has met these challenges successfully and produced an impressive work of historical scholarship deserving of the academic degree he seeks.

While principally focused on the Time of Troubles, the dissertation's chronological range is in fact far broader, and for good reason. Prohorenkov seeks to identify the recurring relevant themes in his source base ("news sheets; poems composed for special occasions; funerary texts; political polemical works and commentary; and collections of epigrams, panegyrics, short ditties and holiday carols—p. 6), and trace these themes over time, starting with the Livonian War (1558–1583), then the First Dimitriada, and finally the invasion of Russia in 1609–1611. This chronological scope allows him to link with remarkable precision the appearance of new themes in this literature with the writers who were introducing or elaborating these themes. Key to Prohorenkov's argument here is his assertion that the different genres of texts containing anti-Russian propaganda constituted, in fact, a "single literary cycle" (единый литературный цикл) (120, 164, 180). He comes to that important conclusion by textual analysis—a close reading of the texts across genres, and the identification not only of repeated themes, but the apparent borrowing—one writer from another and across genres—of these themes. The borrowing of themes and narratives has also been shown in other kinds of sources: Marshall Poe has, for example, revealed the same thing in foreigners' accounts, so it is no great surprise to see it here, as well. But what Prohorenkov does additionally, and especially well, is dive into the texts themselves. The dissertation is peppered with numerous quotations from his sources, followed by a critical analysis of the propagandistic messaging down even to individual words. (Indeed, he could have done this even more!) It is in these moments when Prohorenkov walks the reader through his textual analysis that the interdisciplinarity of this research shines brightly.

The combination of historical-critical and literary-analytical methods allows Prohorenkov to isolate key shifts in the focus of the propaganda he is analyzing. Sometimes, the shifts are stark and stunning reversals. He identifies that, early on, the writers of these propagandistic texts together favored a generally defensive attitude about the Muscovites. The Poles and Lithuanians were defending their own lands from an eastern aggressor, and so their wars were just and necessary because they were being attacked. The Livonian War provided all the proof the propagandists needed—it is hard, after all, to see the war as anything but a war of conquest by Ivan IV the Terrible. But a critical shift took place with the First False Dmitrii, when all of a sudden the unification of Poland-Lithuania and Russia seemed to appear as a real possibility for some of these writers (though this theme has older roots, as Prohorenkov shows). With the First False Dmitrii victorious and sitting on the Russian throne, the prospect of a solution to Poland-

Lithuania's "eastern problem" was in sight. Thus, as Prohorenkov argues, it was not just the affrontery of the murders, arrests, and indignities that occurred around the time of the First False Dmitrii's wedding that angered so many in Warsaw, Cracow, and Vilnius, it was the loss of the dream of a vast polity stretching from the Vistula to the Volga. That anger shifted yet again in 1609, when the King decided to take that bottled up anger and invade. All three "periods" (and more than three, depending on how one counts them) are reflected, justified, and announced in the propagandistic literature Prohorenkov examines. It is a compelling and original argument.

In all three periods, however, there is agreement about one thing in the literature that Prohorenkov examines: the Muscovites are portrayed as barbarians. They are barbarians that must be fended off (the Livonian War), barbarians that must be annexed and converted (the Dimitriada), barbarians that must be conquered and ruled over (Sigismund III's invasion and the siege of Smolensk). Looking at the snippets of text Prohorenkov includes in his final chapter, one can see that the quality of writing of these Polish-Lithuanian propagandists had diminished in proportion to the increase in ethnic hatred exhibited in their texts. Analyzed in this interdisciplinary way, these sources provide, as Prohorenkov suggests (implicitly and explicitly), a new window for looking at the roles of ethnic division, religious rivalry, and internal politics throughout this space and in these decades.

Finally, and perhaps most unexpectedly, Prohorenkov's study of Polish-Lithuanian propagandist literature of the Times of Troubles—texts precisely about Russia—actually turns out to be an original and rich analysis of the internal politics of the Rzeczpospolita. It is in the final chapter that Prohorenkov really is the historian as much as he is the interdisciplinary textual scholar. In a chapter that is particularly elegantly and convincingly written, Prohorenkov links the literature to the events going on inside the Rzeczpospolita: the divisions among the nobility (and between sections of the nobility and the king), the fiscal and tax policy of the Sejm and the Sejm's own contest with royal power in Poland, the regional revolts that reverberated back to the capitals, the religious and ethnic divisions inside the Rzeczpospolita itself, and the king's unpopular dynastic policy, which many thought (rightly) was violating the customs of the joint realm. Having started as a dissertation about anti-Russian propaganda, it ends as a dissertation about internal politics in Poland-Lithuania. Yet this is not a forced or unnatural "pivot" in the argument, but rather the natural conclusion to the original *Problematik*, which centered on the

sources. In effect, Prohorenkov let the sources decide when he was going to begin and end, and what he was going to talk about on the pages of this dissertation. As was right to do.

As a result, this is a dissertation that will be of interest and beneficial for a range of scholars of early seventeenth-century Russia **and** Poland-Lithuania, for textual scholars, diplomatic and military historians, and specialists on the Russian Time of Troubles. It is to be hoped that it will be edited soon into a monograph and published.

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Considering all of the above, I believe that PROHORENKOV Igor Aleksandrovich's dissertation on the topic «POLISH-LITHUANIAN ANTI-RUSSIAN LITERARY PROPAGANDA DURING THE TIME OF TROUBLES» **meets the requirements** of Scientific Specialty 5.6.2. General History.


The dissertation is a scientific qualification work that resolves a scientific problem important for the development of the relevant field of science.

No violations of paragraphs 9 and 11 of Order No. 11181/1 of November 19, 2021, "On the Procedure for Awarding Academic Degrees at St. Petersburg State University", have been detected.

The dissertation **meets the criteria** of dissertations for the academic degree of candidate of sciences, established by the Order referenced above. The dissertation is **recommended for defense** at St. Petersburg State University.

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