

## **RESEARCH REPORT IREX STG**

**Grantee: Dr. Barbara Skinner**

**Grant Year: 2002**

**1. Topic of research:** Conversion and Cultural Identity of Ukrainian Uniates in the Russian Empire, 1793-1800

**Countries visited:** Ukraine

### **2. Relevance and contribution to field:**

After the Russian Empire acquired central Belarus and Right-bank Ukraine with the second partition of Poland (1793), about 1.5 million of the Empire's 3 million Uniates converted, largely by force, to Russian Orthodoxy. Whereas the majority of the Ukrainian and Belarusian population incorporated into Russia during the Polish partitions were Uniate, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, all Uniate parishes officially converted to Russian Orthodoxy, eliminating the Uniate Church from the Russian Empire.

This change in religion for the Belarusian and Ukrainian population in the Russian Empire was more than a change of confession. The evidence attests to the profound role of religion in shaping cultural identity and consciousness in an era that predates the emergence of modern nationalism. The sources also raise meaningful questions about the criteria behind imperial policies that decided which identities would or would not be tolerated. The loss of the Uniate culture for the Ukrainian and Belarusian population in Russia forms an important case study for the impact of Russian imperial power on religious and cultural identity in its western borderlands, as well as the political implications of the policy of forced conversion.

The Ukrainian case that was the focus of my short-term grant confronts a largely unknown aspect of Ukrainian history that historians of all nationalities were prohibited from researching during the years of Soviet control over the region. Furthermore, historical studies prior to 1917 were also limited. Russian imperial historians presented this case in pointedly positive, pro-Orthodox terms that dismissed any negative impact of the policy of conversion. On the other hand, Polish and West European historians before World War I presented pointedly negative critiques of the Russian policy, but without access to archival materials remaining in Russia and the former Russian Empire. After World War I and the Russian Revolution, this topic receded from the attention of historians. Additionally serving to restrict the topic of the Uniates within Russia over the past century, Ukrainian historians themselves have focused -- and continue to focus -- on the fate of the Uniate church where it survived as the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Galicia under Austrian rule.

My research makes a contribution to the field in three important ways. First, it revives -- after a century of hiatus -- the discussion of Uniates under Russian imperial rule, utilizing archival sources that were not accessible by scholars during the Soviet regime. Secondly, it strives to correct historiographical biases of the accounts of this history written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by presenting balanced research based on archival materials from all the major holdings in Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian archives. Finally, my research opens this significant event of the conversion of Uniates within the early Russian empire to the ongoing discussion of cultural and ethnic consciousness, and structures of identity prior to the rise of modern nationalism.

### **3. A concise summary of your approach and research methodology, including a list of research sites.**

I conducted primary document research for insights into the culture of the Uniate Church at the time of swift conversion to Orthodoxy in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and evidence about resistance or compliance to the conversion on the part of parish priests and parishioners into the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. First, in order to gain a greater understanding of the Uniate Church culture, I studied descriptive reports on parishes, parish priests, and churches (including parish visitations, reports filed by priests, official information on religious communities, information on parish priest education and background, etc.). Secondly, in order to understand the process of conversion and the immediate response by those converted, I consulted reports and directives issued by church and government officials (government sources were both civil and military), as well as court cases that dealt specifically with grievances deriving from the conversion process.

Within the tenure of a short-term grant, I focused on the Uniate community in the Volyn province, which produced the most active open resistance to conversion, and in the Bratslav (now Vinnytsia) province, which experienced the most rapid conversion process, but where indirect resistance plagued the newly installed Orthodox Church.

I conducted research in the following archives:

- 1) Volyn Oblast State Archive in Lutsk (Volynskiyi oblasnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv, m. Lutsk): Fond 382: Lutsk Uniate General Spiritual Consistory – a large collection of documents concerning the Uniate Church as it survived after the conversion campaigns of 1793-1797.
- 2) Vinnytsk Oblast State Archive in Vynnytsia (Vinnytskyi oblasnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv, m. Vinnytsia): *Fondy* 798, 799, 604, and 513 -- these are smaller collections of documents of the Podolsk Spiritual Consistory, the Orthodox administration created in 1795 for the churches that rapidly converted to Orthodoxy in 1794-6.
- 3) Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine in Kyiv (Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi istorychyi arkhiv Ukraini, m. Kyiv) – primarily fond 127, the Kiev Spiritual Consistory, containing reports and directives of the Kyiv Orthodox metropolitan concerning policy on conversion of Uniates.
- 4) Manuscript Division of the National Library of Ukraine named for V.I. Vernadsky (Rukopisny fond, Natsionl'na biblioteka Ukraini im. V.I. Vernadskogo) – various documents from the Holy Synod and from church collections that discuss the Uniate conversions.

### **4. A summary of research findings and preliminary conclusions.**

The documents studied on this trip led to the following findings and conclusions:

- Enforcing the conversions from the Uniate faith to Orthodoxy in Ukraine was the responsibility of the highest powers of the Ministry of Interior and the Governor-General of Kiev, Volyn, and Bratslav gubernia. A number of documents on issues of Uniate churches and chapels that did not convert, remaining Uniate priests, and converted parishioners continuing to attend Uniate services were written to the attention of the highest offices of these administrative institutions, including to the Minister of Interior and the Governor-General themselves from the time of the conversions (1794) through the final liquidation of the Uniate church in Russia in 1839.
- The Uniate faithful in the province of Volyn exerted much energy resisting the conversion efforts begun under Catherine II. A series of petitions from parishioners found in the Volyn oblast archive, for example, demonstrates that even when their churches had

been forcefully converted and the only choice for them was to receive sacraments from an Orthodox priest, they were steadfast in their refusal to submit to the Orthodox faith. This meant that babies went unbaptized and the dead without last rites or a proper funeral, but the parishioners nevertheless stated their undying devotion to the Uniate faith. I had not found such petitions in any of the archives I had previously worked in (Russia, Poland, or Kyiv), so my work in the Volyn archive on this trip provided powerful new evidence of resistance to Orthodoxy and the cultural and identity attachment to the Uniate church.

- After the first conversion effort in the 1790s, the Russian government became more accepting of its failure to convert believers in Volyn and allowed the Uniate Church to exist there more or less normally by the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, yielding Uniate administrative documents evidencing ordinations of priests, visitations of parishes, and concerns for schools run by the Uniates. Nevertheless, court documents attest to a particular sensitivity on the part of the Russian state to any evidence of Uniate priests attracting parishioners from churches that had converted in the 1790s. Numerous such cases went to trial and to exile for the accused Uniate priests. The Russian government also issued commands to segregate the clerical population: if any Uniate priests remained in areas that had converted to Orthodoxy, they were to be removed to a Uniate region, regardless of home or family ties. Research from neither Russian or Polish archives had provided the on-the-scene evidence found to describe the health of the Uniate church in this region until its liquidation in 1839.
- The conversion efforts in Podolia (Bratslav province) had been more thorough than I had previously assumed from the evidence provided in published primary documents and Russian archival holdings. The Podolsk Spiritual Consistory documents in the Vinnytsia oblast archive demonstrated that there were more conflicts with the Roman Catholic Church in that region than with remaining Uniates in the decades immediately following the Uniate conversions. The very absence of documents dealing with any remaining Uniates was in itself an important find. Nevertheless, this archive yielded important evidence on the rebuilding and restyling of interiors of the churches from the more open Uniate style to the closed Orthodox iconostasis, proving the effort applied in removing any external vestiges of the Uniate culture and introducing Russian Orthodox cultural elements in their place. This area had been most accessible to Russian troops and immediate installation of Russian administration after the second partition of Poland. The effective church conversions apparently went hand-in-hand with imposing imperial administration.

## **6. Any recommendations of the US Policy Community.**

Policymakers should be aware that while political imperialism from Russian/Soviet regime has ended in Ukraine, religious imperialism has continued. The Moscow Patriarchate continues to send massive support in terms of funding and clerical personnel into Orthodox churches and monasteries under its control in all parts of Ukraine, suppressing the Ukrainian autocephalous Orthodox church and inhibiting the spread of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. Most disturbing, the abundant booklets and publications distributed by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) propagates stridently against the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian denominations (termed “sekty”), promoting closed-mindedness and intolerance in the spiritual realm. My own particular concern is that the literature of the Moscow Patriarchate continues to present the Russian perspective that the Uniate church (Ukrainian

Catholic) was a negative cultural phenomenon for the Ukrainian people in its history, thus continuing the historical distortions that began with the propaganda of the Russian empire as it spread westward in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.