

JGO 73, 2025/1, 135–138

Eighteenth-Century Ukraine. New Perspectives on Social, Cultural, and Intellectual History

Ed. by Zenon E. Kohut, Volodymyr Sklokin, and Frank E. Sysyn, with Larysa Bilous, Toronto: CIUS, 2023. XXII, 648 S., 5 Ktn., 4 Abb., 14 Tab. = The Peter Jacyk Centre for Ukrainian Historical Research. Monograph Series, 13. ISBN: 78-0-2280-1699-1.

The anthology under review brings together 23 papers dealing with various aspects of Ukrainian historical experience in the long eighteenth century. Most of the articles in this volume appear in English for the first time, making this collection a unique window on the achievements of academic historians based in Ukraine.

This publication can be seen as a logical outcome of the work of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS), which has spanned decades. In 2021, CIUS completed the Hrushevsky Translation Project, making Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi's ten-volume synthesis of Ukrainian history available in a state-of-the-art, annotated, English-language edition. As sweeping and extensive as it is, Hrushevs'kyi's opus magnum remains unfinished: he had only managed to reach the late 1650s. For developments beyond this period, one needs to consult the work of other scholars.

Of course, there is no dearth of academic works dealing with twentieth-century Ukraine. Moreover, in the course of 2023, we were extremely lucky to see several high-quality books on the nineteenth century appear in close succession (Andriy Zayarnyuk / Ostap Sereda: *The Intellectual Foundations of Modern Ukraine. The Nineteenth Century*. London 2023; Serhiy Bilenky: *Laboratory of Modernity. Ukraine between Empire and Nation, 1772–1914*. Montreal 2023; Andrii Portnov: *Dnipro. An Entangled History of a European City*. Boston 2023; Martin Rohde: *Nationale Wissenschaft zwischen zwei Imperien. Die Ševcenko-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, 1892–1918*. Göttingen 2022). The eighteenth century, however, has been much less fortunate. Even academic historians, let alone interested laymen, may get the impression that there are two completely separate histories of Ukraine: one centered around the rise and decline of the early modern Cossack Hetmanate, the other starting in the 1830s with the emergence of the Romantic national movement. A gaping chasm separates those two epochs, situated in the very century that elsewhere is associated with the Age of Enlightenment.

Admittedly, this impression stems from the peculiar course of Ukrainian history, but this should not mean that we can nonchalantly skip the eighteenth century. On the contrary, it is precisely this narrative challenge that makes this period of Ukrainian history so promising, allowing us to question the “obvious” and push the boundaries of historical interpretations. Granted, the patria of say Meletii Smotryts'kyi or Samiilo Velychko is a long way from that of the Cyrillo-Methodians of the late 1840s, but recognizing their differences should not lead us to a simplistic denial of the specific local circumstances and dynamic political traditions. Only by studying the long eighteenth century in Ukraine will we be able to go beyond the shallow opposition of historical and nonhistorical nations and grasp how actors of all hues appropriated and transformed the available Cossack stories and symbols in accordance with their ever-changing needs.

The editors of *Eighteenth-Century Ukraine* are exceptionally well suited to tackle this daunting task: Zenon Kohut has authored classical studies dealing with the eighteenth-century transformation of elite identities in the region of Little Russia (*Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy*,

Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate, 1760s–1830s. Cambridge, MA 1988; *Making Ukraine. Studies on Political Culture, Historical Narrative and Identity*. Toronto, ON 2010; *Cossack Ukraine. Early-Modern Political Thought, Culture, and Identity Formation, 1569–1714*. Montreal 2024). Frank Sysyn is one of the most recognizable faces in Ukrainian studies as a whole, his expertise spanning the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries with occasional forays into other periods (*Between Poland and the Ukraine. The Dilemma of Adam Kysil, 1600–1653*. Cambridge, MA 1985; *Mykhailo Hrushevsky. Historian and National Awakener*. Saskatoon 2001; Frank Sysyn [ed.]: *Mykhailo Zubryts'kyi. Zibrani tvory i materialy u tr'okh tomakh*. Lviv 2013–2019). Volodymyr Sklokin is a younger but established historian specializing in the somewhat less known Cossack autonomy in the Sloboda Ukraine (*Rosii'ska imperiia i Slobids'ka Ukraina u druhii polovyni XVIII st. Prosvichenyi absoliutyzm, impers'ka intehtratsiia, lokal'ne suspil'stvo*. Lviv 2019). Larysa Bilous, a historian focusing on the Ukrainian Jewish community of the early twentieth century, is a CIUS research associate involved in many publication projects (*Jews in Wartime Urban Space. Ethnic Mobilization and the Formation of a New Community in Kyiv, 1914–1918*. Edmonton 2018; *Re-thinking the Revolution in Ukraine. The Jewish Experience, 1917–1921*, in: *Slavic Review* 78 [2019] 4, pp. 949–956).

This volume is a formidable achievement, introducing English-language readers to the work of some of the best Ukrainian historians in this field, such as NATALIA IAKOVENKO, MAKSYM IAREMENKO, and the late IHOR SKOCHYLIAS. The chapters are grouped into four sections. The first explores Cossack autonomy and its abolition in the second half of the eighteenth century; the second illustrates the flourishing of Ukrainian social history in the early twenty-first century; the third deals with church history, inevitably touching upon identity building and education; the fourth returns to the question of Cossack autonomy but with a stronger emphasis on political ideologies. Given the breadth and depth of the contributions under review here, I will not scrutinize each chapter separately, but rather try to offer a more general view of the whole collection.

Most importantly, the editors have succeeded in creating a critical mass of knowledge, laying bare both the specific perspective of Ukrainian historiography and the lively debates taking place within this academic environment. *Eighteenth-Century Ukraine* showcases a truth that should be obvious but, for all too long, has not been acknowledged: made-in-Ukraine research is of high quality and in touch with the methodological developments of the European academic world; as such, it constitutes an indispensable reference for any serious study of Ukraine's past. What is more, articles covering a wide array of topics (for example, early modern cartography, disease control, urban demography, college curricula, republicanism morphing into contractual monarchism) can easily be incorporated into syllabi that do not necessarily focus on Ukraine or even Eastern Europe. This should help to “normalize” Ukraine, that is to integrate the evidence emerging from this country into a broader panorama of the European past.

Such a desire for “normalization” is evident in this volume with its overrepresentation of studies dealing with autonomous or semi-independent Ukrainian polities of the early modern period, in particular the Cossack Hetmanate of Little Russia. The focus on this entity is meant to serve as a bridge between the modern national movement and its early modern Cossack roots, rendering Ukrainian development more similar to that of say Poland or Hungary. This is also the context within which we must read the editors' discussion of different chronological schemes for the interpretation of eighteenth-century Ukraine. The adoption of the short eighteenth century would produce a story of the inevitable dismantling of antiquated early modern “semi-states”, while the adoption of

the long eighteenth century allows for a more optimistic story of trial and resurrection, in which we can reconcile ruptures and continuities. Unsurprisingly, the chronological span of articles selected by the editors clearly indicates their predilection for the broader understanding of the eighteenth century. Those familiar with Ukrainian historiography will easily recognize here the influence of the so-called *derzhavnyk* school that insists on the importance of original Ukrainian statehood traditions allegedly rescued from the early modern period by the post-*starshyna* landowning elites. (*Derzhava* is the Ukrainian word for state, so *derzhavnyk* literally means “statist”, although elitist would be a better description of the kernel of this argument. V’iacheslav Lypyns’kyi (1882–1931) is usually credited as the founding father of this intellectual tradition.)

Unfortunately, those readers who are not well versed in Ukrainian historiographical debates may have some difficulty identifying the stakes of several papers included in the collection. The relevance of certain points made in some of the articles dealing with rather specific topics is no longer self-evident once they have been extracted from the debates in which they originated. The volume is, in fact, an ambitious exercise in cultural translation, a process that goes far beyond an accurate rendering of a written text in another language, and the succinct introduction provided by the editors does not offer enough guidance to those unfamiliar with the context. Ihor Skochyliias’s paper on the fluid identity of the Uniate Church in the Commonwealth-ruled Right-Bank Ukraine is a positive counterexample. Written specifically for this volume, it starts with a historiographical section that lays out the positions present in the literature and their polemical significance. This enables Skochyliias’s readers to better appreciate the value of his contribution. It is understandable that other articles, written in completely different circumstances, cannot always include such a component, but the editors could have helped by adding short introductory essays to each of the four sections.

The collection is quite representative of the present state of the Ukrainian historical discipline. Thus, it is very instructive to identify what is missing, as this allows us to grasp the horizons of contemporary Ukrainian historians. The first notable feature is that they are almost exclusively focused on the Ukrainian experience in the Russian Empire. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth retained control over large swathes of Ukrainian territory until 1793 (the palatinates of Bratslav, Kyiv, Podilia, and Volhynia, along with scraps of Belz and Red Rus’), yet it plays a rather marginal role in the collection. Still, it fares better than the Austrian Monarchy and the Crimean Khanate, which are entirely absent. This is not a neglectful omission on the part of the editors, but rather an accurate reflection of the historiographical situation in today’s Ukraine.

When it comes to Galicia and the Carpathian Rus’, the withdrawal of Ukrainian scholars is to some extent alleviated by the legacy of the great interwar historians and the recent work of Habsburgists who are slowly but steadily learning to appreciate the Ruthenian aspects of their history. The inclusion of the Crimean Khanate seems a much more pressing task, both politically and academically. For better or worse, Tatar-ruled Crimea was one of the crucial factors shaping Ukraine’s fate throughout the early modern period. (Cf. Omeljan Pritsak’s 1980 plea to redefine the Turkic Cumans and Tatars as “our ancestors” on a par with the Zaporozhians, reprinted in Omeljan Pritsak: *Shcho take istoriia Ukrainy?*, in: *Ukrains’kyi istorychnyi zhurnal* [2015] 1, pp. 177–210, here p. 195, as well as Orest Subtelny: *Cossack Ukraine and the Turco-Islamic World*, in: *Rethinking Ukrainian History*. Ed. by Ivan L. Rudnytsky with the assistance of John-Paul Himka. Edmonton 1981, pp. 120–134.) It was also destroyed by the Russian Empire at approximately the same time as the Ukrainian Cossack autonomous polities, inviting comparative reflections (Alan W. Fisher: *The Russian An-*

nexation of the Crimea 1772–1783. Cambridge 1970). At the same time, Muslim actors' memories are bound to become an important question in future Ukraine: first, because of the Russian occupation and oppression of the present-day Crimean Tatars, and second, because all over Europe, Muslim communities are becoming more and more numerous, visible, and self-assured. There is no reason to believe that Ukraine will not participate in this broader European trend.

The place of Turkic-Islamic communities in Ukrainian history brings us to two related questions of fundamental significance: 1) the extent to which we can conceptualize eighteenth-century Ukraine not only as a topic in Eastern European history but as an element of European history as a whole; and 2) whether we can and should attempt to integrate Ukraine's past into one smooth narrative, glossing over the very profound differences between the trajectories of say Galicia, Little Russia, and Crimea. I personally have no valid answers to these questions, but a volume focused on eighteenth-century Ukraine seems one of the most fitting places to pose them.

My critical remarks must not obscure the basic fact that *Eighteenth-Century Ukraine* is a pioneering collection that brings an important *derzhavnyk* corrective to the dominant understanding of Ukrainians as a "small Eastern European people" (Andreas Kappeler). As such it will help to reintegrate Ukraine into the European panorama of the "Age of Lights". There can be no doubt that it is an extremely valuable resource for both research and teaching.

TOMASZ HEN-KONARSKI

Warszawa