

HISTORY OF UKRAINE (REVIEW)

by Johanna Granville

Source: Review written by Johanna Granville of Paul Kubicek. *The History of Ukraine* (Greenwood Press, 2008), published in Canadian Slavonic Papers, vol. 52, no. 3, (2010): 435-436.

In *The History of Ukraine*, Paul Kubicek takes on the daunting task of covering roughly thirteen centuries of Ukrainian history in just 180 pages. The book contains ten concise chapters, as well as a chronology, bibliographical essay, and biographical sketches of key leaders. The book is part of the Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations series, the goal of which is to publish succinct national histories that reflect the momentous changes in the world since the 1960s, when the last series of this kind was published. Kubicek is a professor of political science at Oakland University in Michigan and a former lecturer with the Civic Education Project in Lviv in 1992-1993. Chapters one and two describe Kievan Rus and the Polish-Lithuanian period respectively. Chapters four and five discuss Ukraine under the Russian Empire and Western Ukraine under the Habsburg Empire. The next three chapters trace the rise of Ukrainian nationalism after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, industrial transformation during the Soviet period, and the drive for Ukrainian independence spawned by Mikhail Gorbachev's reform program in the late 1980s. The final two chapters outline the political and economic struggles in post-Soviet Ukraine under Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma (1991-2004) and the Orange Revolution led by Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko.

One key theme in the book is the long absence, and then slow development of, national consciousness in Ukraine (a word meaning "on the edge" or "borderland"). Historically caught between empires - the Russian Empire, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Austro-Hungarian Empire - the inhabitants of this territory did not even refer to

themselves as "Ukrainians" until the 1800s. Instead they were "Little Russians," "Ruthenians," or "Rusyns" (p. xi). Overwhelmingly uneducated peasants living in rural villages, the Ukrainians were for centuries denied access to political or economic power. In western Ukraine, primary education was wholly in Polish until 1818, and higher education available only in Polish or German. In eastern Ukraine, Russian was compulsory; in fact, in 1876 all literature published in Ukrainian was banned within the Russian Empire (p. 67). While the end of World War I helped create independent states for the Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks, President Woodrow Wilson's principle of national self-determination was not applied to Ukrainian lands. Nevertheless, the collapse of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires in 1917-1918 stimulated the creation of several political groups that aspired toward Ukrainian independence. On March 17, 1917, Ukrainian activists formed the Central Rada ("council" in Ukrainian), which fought with Bolsheviks in Kiev against the noncommunist Provisional Government (p. 82). Having won, they formed the Ukrainian People's Republic on November 20, as an autonomous unit within a future communist federation of nationalities (p. 83). Likewise in Vienna in 1929 the militant Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) was formed. However, as Kubicek explains, it failed to gain the support of the Greek Catholic Church because of its use of violence against Polish officials (p. 95). When Nikita Khrushchev became Soviet First Secretary in 1953 - he had also been chief of the Ukrainian communist party in 1938 - Ukrainian intellectuals (later known as the *shestdesiatnyky* or "sixtiers") called for less party control over the creative professions and greater reverence for Ukrainian culture. The poet Ivan Drach deemed the atmosphere in Ukraine even more repressive than in Russia: "In Moscow they clip your nails, but in Kiev they cut your fingers off" (p. 124). The intelligentsia also condemned the lack of Ukrainian-language schools and publications. As Kubicek points out, a common joke at the time was: "You could teach a Jew to speak Ukrainian in no time, a Russian in two or three years. But for an ambitious Ukrainian, it

would take forever" (p. 124). By the early 1980s, however, Ukrainians were the "largest ethnic group among all Soviet political prisoners, including the Russians" (p. 115). Finally, in 1990, the Ukrainians issued a declaration of sovereignty and the following August 24, 1991 declared their independence.

A second theme Kubicek emphasizes throughout the book is the polarization between western and eastern Ukraine, which he argues stems from historical realities. Much of western Ukraine was formerly part of Poland (Galicia) and the Habsburg Empire (Transcarpathia, Bukovyna). These territories were added to the rest of Soviet Ukraine only as a result of World War II. "Having avoided Russian and later Soviet rule, its residents were more prone to develop a distinct Ukrainian identity," he writes. Austrian authorities were more lenient, having recognized literary Ukrainian in 1893. While in Kiev and areas east of the Dnieper River, Ukrainian publications were banned, Galicia had "more than 2,500 Ukrainian-language elementary schools" and seventy Ukrainian-language journals (p. 71). Kubicek notes that this polarization has persisted even in the post-Soviet period, where most of the national-democratic activity has centered in western Ukraine and in the capital, Kiev. Citizens there tend to favor economic reforms and closer relations with the West. In the 1994 presidential elections, for example, while Kuchma won 75.2% on the western bank of the Dnieper, Kravchuk won 70.3% of the vote on the eastern bank (p. 155).

While Kubicek has succeeded in his goal of "detailing the main contours of Ukrainian history," he covers some areas better than others. Just three paragraphs are devoted to the 1950s and four paragraphs to the 1960s, for example. Although he acknowledges the ethnic Russians in the east - Ukraine's largest minority - he neglects other minorities like the Roma, Crimean Tartars, and Hungarians in the Transcarpathian oblast. Moreover, while the Habsburg rulers might have been "more lenient" toward its minorities - including the Ruthenians (Ukrainians) - than the Russian tsars, these minorities were still unhappy.

Emigration statistics at the turn of the twentieth century show that most of those who fled the Habsburg Empire were the non-Hungarian minorities like the Ruthenians, Slovaks, and so on (J. Puskás, 1990). The author also relies solely on English-language secondary sources. In short, the book provides a basic introduction to Ukrainian history and politics, but researchers should also consult the definitive studies by historians like Paul Magocsi and Orest Subtelny, as well as recent historiographical inquiries like *A Laboratory of Transnational History* (2009), edited by Georgiy Kasianov and Philipp Ther.

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