

***Ukraine, the Middle East, and the West.*** By Thomas M. Prymak. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 2021. xxxi, 306 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Plates. Photographs. \$130.00 hard bound; \$44.95 paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.191

*Ukraine, the Middle East, and the West* offers a series of loosely-connected essays on the cultural and social history of pre-twentieth century Ukraine as a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual space. Some chapters present vignettes about individuals while other sections offer encyclopedia-like lists of historical actors or discourses on statistics. Other than the notion of establishing connections between Ukraine on the one hand, and European or World history on the other, no overriding concern connects the various essays, and none of the chapters, with one possible exception, advance any discernable arguments. Rather, Thomas M. Prymak provides an overview or description of the subject and summarizes the scholarly debates around each particular topic. One might think of this volume as a kind of reference work, a contemporary iteration of eighteenth-century *miscellanea* literature, which could assist students undertaking research projects on Ukrainian history. The first section deals with “Middle Eastern” encounters, including travelers, orientalists, and Crimean Tatar slaves. Chapters 1 and 2 enumerate every notable traveler from Ukraine to “the East” from the medieval period to World War I. Chapter 3 discusses the slave trade in both numbers and lived experience, though the author’s highlighting of the unique case of Roxolonia serves somewhat quixotically to suggest that captivity and slavery in the Ottoman empire could be a benign experience. In fact, one of the weakness of the work’s encyclopedic and comprehensive character is that mistakes and oversimplifications appear. In Chapter 2, the author mentions Michał Czajkowski’s role in the establishment of a Polish émigré colony in Ottoman Turkey, Adampol, which he claims “flourished during the nineteenth century and still exists” (42). I would point out that Czajkowski’s own description of Adampol hardly presents a picture of a flourishing colony, while to suggest the contemporary Polonezsköy remains a Polish village somewhat distorts reality.

The second part of the work discusses Ukrainian Romantic nationalism and focuses on Mykhailo Makymovych’s historical works and Taras Shevchenko’s poem, *Kavkaz*, which the author describes as an anti-imperial work with sympathy for anti-Russian fighters unusual in works about the Caucasus in Russian. Interestingly, Shevchenko himself never served in the Caucasus and his primary experience of the East was his term of exile on the Caspian Sea near present-day Aktau in Kazakhstan. Part three concerns the interconnection between two French writers—Honoré de Balzac and Prosper Mérimée—with Ukraine and Ukrainian themes. Finally, the fourth part delves into art history, investigating the possible Ukrainian (again, broadly understood) origins of Rembrandt’s painting, *The Polish Rider* (1655), as well as the events surrounding Ilya Repin’s composition of his famous painting *Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks* (1880-81) writing to Sultan Mehmet IV. Three appendices, including one on each Persian, Arabic, and Turkish loan words in Slavic languages, conclude this kaleidoscopic tour.

One of the book’s more glaring problems concerns the use of the very words Ukraine and Ukrainian. In the Introduction, the author addresses the dilemma of whether to emphasize the Ukrainian people or Ukraine the place in a historical work, but he never outlines the specific criteria guiding his choice. Prymak insists that not only ethnic Ukrainians but also Polish and Jewish speaking inhabitants of Ukraine, such as the nineteenth-century travelers Waclaw Rzewuski and Aleksandr Chodźko, deserve inclusion in a study of Ukraine, and this seems fair enough. Later, though, the author includes in his list of Ukrainian travelers certain Ruthenian inhabitants of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, meaning modern-day Belarus and Lithuania. I appreciate

the impulse to transcend nationalistic categories, and the author's continual return to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a common point of reference for Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Poles aims to further undermine the all-Russian school of Russian and Soviet History that has characterized much Russian thinking about Ukraine since the nineteenth century. Indeed, the author's ecumenical idea of Ukraine and the Polish-Lithuanian heritage in some senses anticipates a discourse about Ukraine among Ukrainian historians that has only become more pronounced since the invasion of 2022. At the same time, though, Prymak does at various times acknowledge a boundary between Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians living in the contemporary borders of Ukraine. Crimean Tatars, for example, appear as part of "The Middle East," but the Tatar scholar Ahatanhel Krymsky, who "accepted Ukrainian national identity" figures as a Ukrainian. Meanwhile Jan Potocki appears as a Ukrainian because he owned an estate in Ukraine, even though his family played a key role in suppressing the Ukrainian *hajdamak* uprising and Potocki identified himself exclusively with Polish and French culture. By refusing to offer clear limits to his subject, Prymak creates the impression that a Ukrainian is any person whom he chooses.

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***Life and Death in Revolutionary Ukraine: Living Conditions, Violence, and Demographic Catastrophe, 1917–1923.*** By Stephen Velychenko. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021. 314 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Tables. \$95.00, hard bound.  
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Stephen Velychenko's latest work falls into two genres and, for this reason, might well be divided into two distinct parts. Its first three chapters investigate—to borrow the title of Igor Narskii's study—*zhizn' v katastrofe* (life amid catastrophe, 2001). It opens with a general survey of public health in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century Russian empire, focusing on state authorities' efforts to ameliorate its subjects' living conditions. The author then explores the consequences of the war-driven degradation and subsequent collapse of the state for the daily life of denizens of the Ukrainian provinces, exposed to the metaphorical and literal decay of the dead empire. This tableau—replete with images of infrastructural collapse, uncontrolled epidemics of typhus, cholera and venereal diseases, recurrent famine, and, finally, Babylonian towers of unattended waste and excrement—is best described as Stygian. The well-documented account of the breakdown of conditions and mores serves to emphasize the centrality of material existence in analyzing political, diplomatic, and military developments of "Russia's continuum of crisis" (Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution*, 2002).

The second part represents an exploration of violence or, more precisely, violence committed against civilians by the combatants. Chapter 4 enumerates various practices of terror under the Bolshevik government. Dealing with the Cheka, "international brigades," and others, the chapter appears to adopt an ethnic lens, interpreting Bolshevik measures as an attempt to suppress the resistance of the Ukrainians as *Ukrainians*. Entitled "Violence against Civilians: Ukrainian and Polish Government," Chapter 5 contains very little on the activities of the Poles, but discusses at length the origins and meaning of modern antisemitism. Somewhat at odds with the rest of the narrative, this demarche functions to bolster the historian's major point: namely, that ideology, including that of antisemitism, played only a secondary