

## **The Future of the Past: New Perspectives on Ukrainian History (2016)**

Editor: Serhii Plokhy

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*The Future of the Past* reads like an implicit assessment of the current impact of the post-colonial condition on Ukrainian historiography. It acts both as a point of reference for understanding the *zeitgeist* in the study of Ukraine and also as the latest in the genre of collections tussling with Ukrainian historiography, which are always an outstanding barometer of the societal and political context of their writing. In this collection published in December 2016, almost three years since the fall of the Yanukovych government and Russia's subsequent invasion, twenty-one historians articulate interweaving modes of engagement with Ukrainian history.

The articles range from those highly-engaged with this difficult subject and methodology to some which are more cursory or less self-reflexive. Editor Serhii Plokhy pointedly quotes Edward Brown from his 1672 English translation of a French book regarding 'the Cossacks' and how relatable they will feel to his English audience, thereby neatly characterising the outsider view, and implicitly framing contributions to the field from more distant colleagues (p. 4).

Plokhy makes assured connections in his introduction but sorts the articles ostensibly according to the currently conventional themes (in Ukrainian historiography) of narrative, transnationalism, regionalism, and theory of representation. The articles are equally susceptible to alternative categorisations.

In addressing the objective of a successful national historiography in post-colonial circumstances, Georgiy Kasianov and Oleksii Tolochko explain how a multi-volume 'Cambridge-style' history of Ukraine, incorporating different paradigms and perspectives, can paint a robust picture which properly invites various interpretations. Volodymyr Kravchenko, conversely, argues for the modernisation paradigm as a way of addressing popular history and conflicting strands of historical memory. Also in the realm of deliberately accessible

approaches, contextualised biographies of historical figures buttress a post-colonial history while obviating the blind spots created by a political-institutional focus. Mark von Hagen's examination of Pavlo Khrystiuk, Heather Coleman's study of Petro Lebedyntsev, and Steven Seegel's study of Stepan Rudnyts'kyi exemplify this.

Others address earlier questions in scholarship in the field. Serhii Plokyh identifies a 'spatial turn' in Ukrainian historiography and sets out ambiguous and complex new regional data on the Holodomor. His harnessing of geography in the service of academic history contrasts, perhaps intentionally, with Steven Seegel's portrayal of the geographer Rudnyts'kyi and his archetypal manipulation by the political forces of his time. Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern and Iryna Vushko confront what were previously sometimes seen in post-imperial terms as discomfiting narrative gaps. Vushko shows how access to archives abroad in German, Latin, and French can transform understanding of eighteenth-century Ukraine, while Petrovsky-Shtern defines 'unknown-unknowns' in our knowledge of Karaite and Khazar Jewish history.

Articles about areas of the field in relative stasis, for example, Zenon Kohut assessing research on Cossack elites, and Tatiana Tairova-Yakovleva analysing the limiting imaginative boundaries in Russian academic historiography on Ukraine, act as yardsticks by which to measure methodological dynamism elsewhere.

Non-Ukrainians write always in the acutely sensitive context of centuries of fluctuating imperial interference. Alfred Rieber and Andrea Graziosi advocate studying Ukraine comparatively within European and world history. Rieber notes the relevance of new investigations of 'accommodation' between coloniser and colonised in post-imperial and post-colonial historiography. Graziosi recalls, provocatively but appositely, Lenin's use of the concept of *mnogoukladnost'* - 'multi-structuredness,' to describe Ukraine: it was, perhaps, key to his understanding of how to control the Russian empire, and is an equally important methodological key for researchers today (p. 103).

Hiroaki Kuromiya and Larry Wolff explore the value of distance. Kuromiya shows a connection between Japanese pressure on Stalin from the east and Stalin's consequent destructive anxiety to consolidate identities and borders to his west. Wolff examines nineteenth century Viennese doubts about Ukrainian national historiography that were, according to Vienna, tainted by Russianness, thereby exemplifying the limitations of relative distance informed by imperial context.

Ukrainian historiography in today's fraught post-colonial circumstances imposes challenges of rigorous reflexivity for outsiders, and challenges of leadership for insiders. The editorship of these articles implicitly defines those challenges and allows us to infer how each contribution measures up in a way which is intellectually engaging, provocative, and carries significant momentum.

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