

Paul Robert Magosci and Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews and Ukrainians: A Millennium of Co-existence*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. 320 pp.

The publication of this book about Jews and Ukrainians is part of a more general rise in interest in history and its blind spots in contemporary Ukraine. This volume's promise to cover "a millennium of co-existence" differentiates this text from many others written on both the Ukrainian and the Jewish sides, which tend to cover shorter periods. In aspects of both structure and content, this book is not a typical academic volume; it is rather a tool for raising awareness in both nations with the help of academic sources.

The main idea behind this text, in my interpretation, comes from the desire to raise awareness about the similarities of these two neighboring nations, bound not only to live side by side for centuries, but also to share a similar, oppressed and stateless, fate. This idea is supported in the book by the repeated comparison of Jews and Ukrainians, the combined effect of which is to create a kind of symphony of peace and affinity. This approach makes for an excellent introduction to the subject, even if a reader with a substantive background in history might find it somewhat lacking in detail at times.

Each of the book's twelve chapters deals with a different aspect of life: from general historical background and economic life, through to culture, religion, art, and language, and reflections on diaspora and on contemporary Ukraine. There is much here to be praised. In this review, I shall focus on those aspects that I found particularly advantageous.

First of all, the book succeeds admirably in finding innovative ways of attracting and engaging the reader. In this respect the book's aesthetically pleasing design deserves especially high praise. The book features 29 useful maps, and numerous pictures and photographs supplement the narrative. An introductory comparative table on pp. 2-3 lays the groundwork for critical thinking about stereotypes, perceptions, and misperceptions. Secondly, the volume provides valuable critical analysis of

stereotypical views on a number of paradigmatic topics, such as the notion of Jews as Communists and administrators (p. 28), or the image of Ukrainians as collaborators during World War II (pp. 76-77).

Moreover, the book offers outstanding examples of so-called “literary cross-fertilization” across the two nations (pp. 178-79), as in the cases of the Jewish-Ukrainian poets Leonid Pervomaiskyi and Ivan Kulyk (pseudonyms). Likewise, it presents some interesting details, such as the fact that Ukrainian writer Yuri Smolych, usually remembered today as a socialist realist writer, was also a founder of science fiction in Ukraine (p. 169). I also found the chapter on the diaspora especially worthwhile for its thorough comparisons of Jewish Israelis and Americans, along with Ukrainian Canadians and Americans (pp. 248-52).

This is a certain asymmetry in the coverage of the book’s two subjects. In some chapters (for example, “Economic life,” “Traditional Culture,” “Religion”) the coverage of Jewish life seems more saturated than that of its Ukrainian counterpart. Perhaps this asymmetry reflects in part the relative newness of the opportunities for Jewish self-reflection in academic space and, possibly, the quite limited state of knowledge about Jews in the non-Jewish world. In a similar vein, the authors’ style sometimes seems to differ when it comes to presenting the two nations: while the sections on Jews are often filled with personal examples, quotations, and jokes drawn from everyday life, the Ukrainian parts are generally more formal. Some issues may have required further clarification for a non-specialist readership, for example, the differentiation between Ruthenians/Ukrainians (p. 232).

The chapters covering literature, art, and other cultural issues, including the chapter on the impact of the diaspora in the contemporary world, are presented in a much more engaging way than the longest chapter in the book, “The Historical Past.” Yet the latter chapter deserves special attention, since it contains some of the most substantial interpretations offered in the book. Not all of these are set out clearly, however. Consider, for instance, the authors’ handling of the results of the well-known 17th-century Cossack uprising: we are first told that “the impact of these

upheavals on the cultural and religious imagination of eastern Europe's Jews was long lasting" (pp. 29-30), but the authors then go on to assert that: "Despite the subsequent rhetoric on both sides, the devastating impact of the 1648-1649 Catastrophe proved to be temporary" (p. 31). Perhaps a distinction is being drawn here between the history and the memory of these events, but if so, this distinction needed to be drawn more clearly. I was also left wondering why the authors omitted to explain the reasons why Metropolitan Sheptytskyi was rejected as a "Righteous of the World" for saving Jews during World War II (p. 269). This is a significant omission given the heated debates about this issue in both the Ukrainian and Jewish historical communities. The Yad Vashem official website provides several explanations for this rejection, including Sheptytskyi's "support of the German army as the savior of the Ukrainians from the Soviets."¹²

The topic of the Holocaust in Ukraine is treated with attention to detail and a fine sense of balance between the historical facts and the search for truth. However, the authors have apparently tried to avoid certain sensitive topics and controversial names by employing generalizations and refraining from providing concrete names or supporting references. To give one example: "It is only recently that some specialists who study Ukraine... have started to address this topic [the collaboration by Ukrainian nationalist organizations with the military forces of Germany—AM] in a scholarly manner" (p. 271). A footnote with specific examples would have been useful here.

In some cases, the history of Ukraine is narrated in a rather romanticized way. This is especially vivid in the rhetoric and imagery employed in the chapters regarding contemporary Ukraine and its "revolutions," as in the following example: "Would, therefore, the populace slip again into civic lethargy and accept the burden of their country's centuries-long authoritarian past and the apparent impossibility of lasting political and social change?" (p. 266) One effect of this romanticization of Ukrainian history is the division of the Ukrainian people into "activists and passivists" (p. 279) based on

¹² http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206020.pdf.

their language (Ukrainian or Russian)—a division which is contradicted by sociological findings and which also runs counter to the book's inclusive aim.

Many numbers, statistics, and indices are presented without direct references, despite the existence of a voluminous bibliography at the end of the volume. This may be explained by the authors' intentions to adhere to an unobtrusive style of presentation. At the same time, some of the facts presented in the book are somewhat out-of-date—for instance, the claim that most Hasidic pilgrims in Uman rent apartments from local residents (p. 275) was true in the past, but this situation has changed drastically along with the logistics and infrastructure of the pilgrimage in the 2010s.

Summing up, the aftertaste left by this volume corresponds to its initial promise. Despite some omissions when it comes to controversial topics, this book represents an important step forward in creating a historical narrative that might serve as a bridge connecting Jews and Ukrainians, who still live side by side. It is also a valuable guide for anyone interested in Ukraine's rich multicultural legacy.

Alla Marchenko

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology
Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw