

REVIEWS

Serhii Plokhyy, *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. New York: Basic Books, 2015. 395 pp.

The Gates of Europe is an overview of Ukrainian history. The book's publication was a reaction to the international audience's rather low level of general understanding of what is happening in Ukraine, what Ukraine is, and how to interpret all the events occurring there since the end of 2013. The book is partly based on the author's lectures delivered at Harvard, where he is the Mykhailo Hrushevsky professor of Ukrainian history. The author's collection of rich material combined with the urgent need to improve the quality of the discussion on Ukraine hastened his decision to expedite the writing and publication process. The resulting book not only introduces the basics of Ukrainian historical periodization, but also provides a dynamic vision of the past. In addition, this is a book that helps us to understand the complex transformation of multiple identities in historical perspective.

The author embraces a thousand-year period. He starts with the nomadic age, before moving on to focus on the Vikings as the founders of the Rus. The Vikings not only established their rule, but also succeeded in consolidating economic and cultural relations with Constantinople, the distant southern neighbor of the Rus. Christianization also had an impact on these relations. The book also covers relations with the Byzantine Empire, and the period of Mongol invasion. The next chapters make an excursus into the era of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Russian imperial period, the Soviet era, and the period of Ukrainian Independence. The final chapter examines the Maidan, the annexation of Crimea, and the Russian-Ukrainian War in the Donbass region.

Serhii Plokhyy constructs his narration using three major categories: geography, culture, and ecology. This combination represents a new approach in Ukrainian studies. Compared to two other grand narratives on Ukrainian history, Orest Subtelny's *Ukraine: A History* (1988) and Paul Robert Magocsi's *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its People* (1996), Plokhyy's

approach is rather different and novel. Subtelny's *Ukraine* is ethnic-centered, while Magocsi focuses more on the territory and its minorities. Plokyh, in turn, introduces culture as a new side of the triangle that makes it possible to unite both territories and peoples.

This focus on cultural relations, combined with reflections on identities, plays an important role in this book, and this is another aspect of the novelty of the author's approach. Plokyh's handling of identity allows us to go beyond ascribing people to particular areas and historical periods through ethnic identity markers, and it also introduces the question of more complex types of identities, which are not necessarily always opposed to one another. Thus, for instance, rather than continuing to ask together with another renowned historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky whether the inhabitants of Rus were ancestors of "Ukrainians" or "Russians," Plokyh suggests that we reflect on who they themselves considered they were.

Plokyh demonstrates how perceptions of Ukraine have been constructed by the influence of the cultural frontiers dividing Western and Eastern Christianity. He also includes the North-South division that compares the influence of settled and steppe areas with their different forms of development. The Ukrainian experience has been one of immanent flux, of permanent transformations and consequently, of complexities of choice and self-identification. Imperial, cultural, and religious borders were constantly moving, and Plokyh demonstrates how they generated spaces and areas of collectively shared values that later on would become the Ukrainian regions. Simultaneously he demonstrates the similarities between these regions by investigating how the same trends (industrialization, for instance) developed in the multiple loci of those territories.

At the same time, the author also explores the past through the faces and brief biographies of individuals whom he considers important representatives of their time. Each of the personalities examined in the book represents a particular cultural context, and illustrates the rich historical heritage and the multiplicity and immense complexity of identities, from Viking princess Helga who became known as Olha in the Ukrainian historical tradition, to her son Sviatoslav or Sveinald, through to Bohdan Solchanyk, the young

historian, sociologist, and poet who was killed on the Maidan and became one of the “Heavenly Hundred.”

Constraints of space necessarily means that certain topics are somewhat neglected. For instance, it could have been beneficial to focus more on the World War II period, on the complexity of the pre-war ethnic relations in Western Ukraine, massacres and ethnic cleansings. However, it is obviously impossible to avoid historical simplification in an overview that covers one thousand years. In general, the book provides a well-balanced vision of the process of Ukraine’s development. It narrates well-known historical aspects in a clear and professional way, and at the same time it introduces new orientation markers and enriches the factual knowledge with a novel cultural approach. The author has succeeded in creating a concise story oriented towards an English-speaking audience. The book is highly recommended as an introductory text for students dealing with Ukrainian studies, and for all general readers seeking to understand the background of the present conflict in Ukraine.

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Raz Segal, *Genocide in the Carpathians: War, Social Breakdown, and Mass Violence, 1914-1945*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016. 232 pp.

The history of the Holocaust in the border territories of Central and Eastern Europe remains an especially dynamic field of study. A case in point is this monograph by Israeli historian Raz Segal, Assistant Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Stockton University. This ambitious study examines events in the territory of what is now the Zakarpats’ka oblast’ in Ukraine, with a focus on the relations between the different ethnic and religious groups residing in that region before the end of World War II. At the center of Segal’s study are the relations between Jews and non-Jews—Ukrainians (Rusyns) and Hungarians. He also discusses the tragic fate of the Roma population of Subcarpathian Rus’ (Carpatho-Ukraine, Zakarpattia in