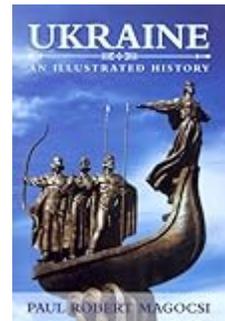


Paul Robert Magocsi. *Ukraine: An Illustrated History*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007. 336 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-98723-1.



Reviewed by Kerstin S. Jobst (University of Salzburg (Austria))

Published on H-HistGeog (July, 2008)

Universities in the United States of America and Canada like Harvard, Toronto, and Edmonton have been for many years—thanks to a well-to-do North-American-based Ukrainian diaspora—the centers of historical Ukrainian studies. Up to now, many historians with Ukrainian roots have enriched the historical research on the Ukrainian territories with countless contributions. In many aspects they are more influential than their colleagues from the “old homeland,” Ukraine. Chief among these is Paul Robert Magocsi, professor of history and political science at the University of Toronto, and so not only in terms of quality but also in quantity: He is the author of numerous useful works essential for the research in this field.[1] Of seminal importance is his *A History of Ukraine* (1996). Unlike most other monographs on this subject, Magocsi takes into account that ethnically the Ukrainian territories never were purely Ukrainian. Therefore, the author devotes much of his attention to the non-Ukrainian groups, e.g., Russians, Poles, Tatars, Jews, Germans, and especially the Rusyns. Some persons among these East Slavic inhabitants of the Subcarpathian region (the present-day Transcarpathian oblast’ of Ukraine, which for centuries was part of the Hungarian kingdom) believe that they are not Ukrainians but rather a distinct Rusyn nationality, sharing their roots with people in the Preshov region (Slovakia), the Lemko region (Poland), Maramorosh (Rumania), and sev-

eral villages in northeastern Hungary. Undoubtedly the “awakening” of a Rusyn nationality is a thorn in the side of many Ukrainian nationalists. However, thanks also to Magocsi, who became the main and most influential propagandist of a Rusyn nationality outside its anticipated homeland, nowadays the “Rusyn case” is much more popular than ever before. He published several books on this subject[2] and made his contribution to the codification of the Rusyn language in Slovakia a couple of years ago.[3]

Why is this important for a review on Magocsi’s *Ukraine: An Illustrated History*? Because in some respects his enthusiasm for the “Rusyn case”—one can like it or not—prevents the author from the very typical nationalistic pattern of a Ukrainian master narrative so often found in historical research, especially from Ukraine itself. This master narrative ignores the profound non-Ukrainian impact on the Ukrainian nation, first and foremost the Russian and Polish. It stresses the tragic sides of the Ukrainian history (and there are many!), emphasizes the role of the Ukrainians as eternal victims, and dates the development of a distinct Ukrainian nation at least back to the early Middle Ages. Not much of this is found in most of Magocsi’s books. Maybe this is due to the rather popular character of this publication, addressing not so much an academic readership as a broad

public (often, it seems, with a Ukrainian background and its specific requirements), but this book differs from his older ones. On the one hand, as usual, Magocsi emphasizes the multicultural nature of Ukraine throughout its history; on the other hand, he is closer to cherished collective Ukrainian mythologies. He does not follow the Ukrainian polyhistor Mychajlo Hrushevskij (1866-1934) and his canonical interpretation of the Kievan Rus as the proto-Ukrainian (not Russian) state, but is convinced that the heritage of the Rus' was preserved mainly in the principality of Galicia-Volhynia and thus on (later) Ukrainian land. All in all, he does not repeat the classical Ukrainian myth of the Cossacks, which stresses the national character of this group, and neither does he emphasize its social nature. Therefore, the events of 1648, closely connected with the name of the Ukrainian national hero Bohdan Khmelnytskyi, are for Magocsi (as for most Western historians, too) an "uprising" (and not a "national revolution") against the Polish king for the restoration of traditional Cossack privileges. Nonetheless the result of this revolt is the emergence of a Cossack statehood. According to most Western specialists on the history of the Zaporoshian Cossacks this interpretation is not convincing. They prefer the word "autonomy" for describing the uprising's result, not only because of the failure of the Zboriv agreement.[4] Incidentally, the fact that under the leadership of the hetman Khmelnytskyi the Cossacks committed one of the most disastrous anti-Jewish pogroms in East Europe before the twentieth century is not mentioned in the chapter about the uprising itself, but only in a later one.

There is an ongoing and fierce debate about the Ukrainian anti-Semitism in general but especially about the Ukrainian collaboration with the German occupying forces in World War II. John-Paul Himka, a historian also with Ukrainian roots, has called this "a blank spot in the collective memory of the Ukrainian Diaspora." [5] He states that this group does not so much ignore the Holocaust of the Ukrainian Jews, but denies the participation of Ukrainians in this crime against humanity. Obviously with Magocsi this historical fact is a "blank spot," too. In the chapters about the Ukrainian lands in World War II the atrocities against "all undesirable groups, which in Ukrainian lands meant communists, the Polish intelligentsia, eventually Ukrainian nationalists, and, especially, Jews" (p. 281) were exclusively committed by the German military and so-called Einsatzgruppen (special extermination forces). The shooting of more than 30,000 Jews in September 1941 in the ravine of Babyi Iar near Kiev is mentioned (pp. 281-282); the "help" of Ukraini-

ans in organizing this crime is not. Not in every aspect does Magocsi follow the uncritical veneration—at least in the Western territories of Ukraine, the former East Galicia—of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), fighting sometimes with, sometimes against the Germans. He mentions, for example, the crimes of Ukrainian nationalists against Polish villages in Volhynia in 1943-44: "The victims were more often than not innocent civilians, as entire villages inhabited by Poles were destroyed by the UPA" (p. 287). At the same time, he diminishes the extent of collaboration of the political arm of the UPA, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), with the German occupation forces. It is definitely not true that after the failed proclamation of a sovereign Ukrainian state in June 1942 in Lviv the Germans were unwilling to work with these Ukrainian groups, as Magocsi claims. OUN troops, for example, followed the Wehrmacht in the summer and autumn of 1941 into the Soviet Union. For the German side it was clear that without the collaboration with nationalistic organizations such as the OUN the intended war of destruction (*Vernichtungskrieg*) in the East would not have been possible.

So my impressions of this book are very mixed. But despite the above-mentioned objections most chapters are clearly not written from a Ukrainian nationalistic perspective. And undoubtedly with its splendid presentation and huge number of pictures, maps, illustrations, and tables it will be valuable also to an academic readership.

Notes

[1]. See, e.g., Paul Robert Magocsi, *Galicia: A Historical Survey and Bibliographic Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), *Ukraine: A Historical Atlas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), and *The Shaping of a National Identity: Subcarpathian Rus', 1848-1948* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

[2]. See, e.g., Paul Robert Magocsi, *Carpatho-Rusyn Studies: An Annotated Bibliography*, 2 vols. (New York: Garland, 1988). The author's intention is to publish series of decennial "national bibliographies" in Carpatho-Rusyn studies. See also Paul Robert Magocsi and Ivan Pop, eds., *Encyclopedia of Rusyn History and Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002).

[3]. Paul Robert Magocsi, ed., *A New Slavic Language is Born: The Rusyn Literary Language of Slovakia*, with an introduction by Nikita I. Tolstoj (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1996).

- [4]. See, e.g., Carsten Kumke, "Zwischen polnischer Adelsrepublik und Russischem Reich," in *Geschichte der Ukraine*, ed. Frank Golczewski (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 56-91, esp. 87-88.
- [5]. John-Paul Himka, "War Criminality: A Blank Spot in the Collective Memory of the Ukrainian Diaspora," in *Spaces of Identity* 5, no. 1 (2005): 9-24. See also Johan Dietsch, *Making Sense of Suffering: Holocaust and Holodomor in Ukrainian Historical Culture* (Lund: Media Tryck, Lund University, 2006).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-histgeog>

Citation: Kerstin S. Jobst. Review of Magocsi, Paul Robert, *Ukraine: An Illustrated History*. H-HistGeog, H-Net Reviews. July, 2008.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14704>

Copyright © 2008 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.