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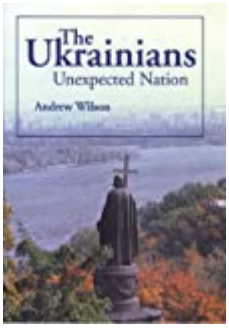

Andrew Wilson. *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000. xviii + 366 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-08355-2.

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Published on H-Russia (August, 2001)

At the Crossroads of East and West

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My parents emigrated to Canada from Galicia in 1930. They averred that the only positive thing to emerge from the barbarisms of World War II was the unification of western and eastern Ukrainian lands. Growing up as a Ukrainian-Canadian, I was given no reason to doubt that Ukrainians were a distinct nation. Only as a university student did I come to realize that many persons, especially Russians, disagreed. Virtually all books of Russian history still describe Kiev as "the mother of Russian cities" and, a la Kliuchevsky, celebrate the expansion of Muscovy in Europe as "the gathering of Russian lands." Much as Ukrainians in the old country and in the diaspora rejoiced in the events which culminated in the declaration of independence in 1991, many other people were clearly bewildered by or downright hostile to the newly independent state.

Andrew Wilson is a lecturer in Ukrainian studies at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at University College, London. He is mindful that all nations are cultural constructs rooted in a mythology. His book is a spirited and eminently learned investigation of who Ukrainians say that they are, how they came to be so, and how others view them. Ukraine has long been at a crossroads of cultural influence in Europe. However, for most of its recent history, its identity has had to be developed in other people's states. The first half of the book focuses on that development.

Wilson begins by comparing theories about the origins of the eastern Slavs. Many, probably most, historians assume a common heritage for Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians. On the other hand, Ukrainian nationalists and Ukrainophiles have tended to focus on ethnic differentiation. They emphasize differences in architecture, art, and political culture among the different groups. Various ones have distinguished between an allegedly authoritarian Muscovite church and society and more tolerant Kievan institutions. Some scholars have gone so far as to claim that Ukraine was the original homeland of the Indo-Europeans. Others trace its origins back to the Trypillian culture of the late neolithic period, suggesting that the ancestors of Ukrainians were the original agriculturalists. Like Russians, Ukrainian historians tend to reject the Normanist theory of the origins

of Rus civilization.

Whatever the merits of such speculations, Wilson emphasizes that Ukraine's position between western and eastern Europe has been critical to its civilization and identity. After the break-up of Rus, Muscovy created the myth of the third Rome while Kievan churchmen developed contacts with the Latin west. Their art, architecture and religion were influenced by the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. The Union of Brest in 1596 produced the Uniate church, a hybrid of Orthodox liturgy and Roman Catholic government. Early in the seventeenth century, the Kiev-Mohyla Academy undertook religious modernisation and an elite programme of cultural reform including historiographical projects.

The myths of the Cossacks are central to modern Ukrainian identity and Wilson devotes a chapter to them. These frontiersmen apparently enjoyed a measure of liberty absolutely at odds with oppressive tsarist autocracy. Following Bogdan Khmelnitskyi's revolt against Poland, the contentious Pereislavl Treaty of 1654 created an uneasy union between the Cossack hetmanate and Moscow. Western influence declined as Ukrainian lands were progressively absorbed into eastern empires. Ukrainian elites were russified, polonized or simply abolished. Serfdom was imposed on everyone else. Without acknowledgement, Russians especially subsumed Ukrainian history, art and music. In 1720, the Uniate Church was banned along with the publication of Ukrainian ecclesiastical works. Ukraine became a blindspot for the Russians. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was a backwater, sucked dry.

Nationalism took root in the 1830s and 1840s in Hapsburg lands. Ruthenians, as they tended to be known, created a whole civil society with cooperatives, land banks, political parties and reading rooms. They adopted the name "Ukrainian" in order to distinguish them from Russians.

Wilson argues that the formation of modern Ukraine was completed in the twentieth century in the wake of a fluctuating balance of power in Eastern Europe. As national consciousness grew, artistic and intellectual talent exploded. He outlines the various attempts to establish a Ukrainian state between 1917 and 1920. Then came the great famines of 1920-21, 1932-33 and 1946 and the purges which hit Ukraine particularly hard. They destroyed the social and cultural reservoir of Ukrainian identity in the countryside and accelerated the move to the cities. In the late 1940s, hundreds of thousands of western Ukrainians were killed or deported. Their institutions, including the Uniate church, were suppressed. Finally, soviet pressures caused a hemorrhage of the brightest and best to Moscow and Leningrad.

By the 1960s, there was a real fear that the Ukrainian language and culture were in final retreat. However, in the autumn of 1989, the first Rukh Congress was held. In January 1990, a million people formed a human chain stretching from Lviv to Kiev. The Ukrainian parliament's overwhelming vote for independence in August 1991 was confirmed by a 90.3 percent popular vote in December. Many former Communists discovered that they were nationalists, including the former ideology secretary Leonid Kravchuk who became Ukraine's first president.

The initial euphoria faded as Ukrainians undertook to undo the savage consequences of soviet economic and cultural policies. Wilson devotes the second half of his book to the past decade. He outlines the complex interactions between Ukraine's nationalists who are strongest in Galicia, the deeply divided left, the Russian nationalists who are strongest in Crimea and the lingering nostalgia of eastern cities. He explains the nature of the informal coalition which has governed the country since 1991. For supporting nationalism, the Communist *nomenklatura* was allowed to stay in power and plunder state assets. The Communist party has been a massively destructive force. Its various successor parties control about 40 percent of the seats in parliament forming an effective block at any attempts of reform.

The author abhors the current government of Leonid Kuchma who was elected in 1994 on a platform of opposing Kravchuk's nationalizing policies. Supported by business interests and linked to organized crime, his election was virtually a corporate takeover of the state. His primary interest is in retaining power which he does by suppressing the media, destroying his critics and harassing opponents. Although the book was published before the eruption of the current scandal stemming from the murder of the journalist Heorhij Gongadze, Wilson is unlikely to be exceedingly surprised by these developments.

Wilson looks at how people see Ukraine today. A 1997 survey found 41 percent of Ukrainians to be Ukrainophone and 44 percent Russophone. Many of the eleven million Russians who reside there are nostalgic for the USSR and favour pan-Slavic notions of ethnic unity. Some of them even claim that it is the Galicians who are historically and ethnically different from the inhabitants of the former Russian empire. Attitudes range across the spectrum from extreme Russophobia in the west to extreme Russophilism in Crimea. The divisions are exacer-

bated by religion. The Uniate church was reestablished in 1989. Orthodox Christians are divided between supporters of the Moscow patriarchate, the Kievan one and a tiny autocephalous church. Meanwhile, minority religions flourish freely.

The economy remains a black hole. In 1998, the USA Congress declared Ukraine to be one of the most corrupt countries in the world in which to do business. Industry is not competitive, the bureaucracy is massive and taxes are too high. Laws are complex and largely not enforced. Private property is not widespread. The IMF has pumped $2.61 billion into the country since 1991 with little to show for it. Most business groups are private circles for the appropriation of public goods. Wilson gives many examples of new corporate capitalist scams. Energy imports from Russia account for 56 percent of the national debt.

In summary, from the seventeenth century, Ukraine was Russia's real window on the west. Its recent emergence as a country was a major event, the world's best guarantee against a reimperialized Russia. Wilson wishes it well!

It is a comprehensive work incorporating a most impressive amount of data and analysis. Wilson skilfully uses the sweep of the past to make sense of present circumstances. It is not really a smooth narrative, almost as though it needed another layer of editing. But it packs in a great deal of deftly evaluated information. If you read only one book of Ukraine, this should probably be it.