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A Thousand Years of "Russianness"?

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Oleh S. Ihnytzkyj

A Thousand Years of “Russianness”?

Strange as it may seem, this book—a “wide-ranging study, designed for students of Russian literature, culture, and history”—tells us that it “explores aspects of *national identity* in Russian culture *from medieval times* to the present day.” The preface bizarrely declares that the questions “What is Russia? What is ‘Russianness’? Who are Russians?” “[f]or a thousand years... have preoccupied *Russian* writers, artists, critics, musicians, film-makers, politicians and ideologists, theologian and philosophers, intellectuals and demagogues... [Q]uestions of *national identity* permeate *Russian* cultural self-expression, from the very first native literary and artistic endeavours of the ‘Rus’ (ancestors of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians)... through to... the collapse of the Soviet Union...” (p. xi). “For as long as they have been able to write (*and possibly longer*),” states the co-editor, Simon Franklin, “*Russia’s cultural opinion-formers* have sought to define themselves and their status through control over the linear narratives, over the shaping and telling of time” (p. 11). The dust jacket also emphasizes *Russia’s* thousand-year-old “national identity” twice, but without bothering to mention Rus’ (all emphases added – OSI).

It would be tempting to end the review here and simply point out that any book that opens with such a primitive (in all meanings of the word) conceptual framework of Russian “national identity” does not deserve a place on the shelf of students or professors. A work that suggests from the onset that “*Russia’s cultural opinion-formers*” have been interrogating a *national* identity since before they were able to write is, frankly, an embarrassment, regardless of its other achievements (and it does have them). The image of ‘nationally’ conscious ‘Russians’ at the dawn of East Slavic civilization pursuing their “Russianness” around Kyiv (Kiev) would be laughable, if it were not designed to educate students. Even on the purely rhetorical level the book is a contradiction from the very start: If the Rus’ are ancestors of three East Slavic nations, then their writings are just as likely to be examples of “Ukrainian” or “Belarusan” “national” cultural self-expression as so-called “Russian”—and that in turn puts into question the grandiose and exclusive claims made in the name of “Russian” identity and culture. To be sure, the book will backtrack a bit from these initial sweeping generalizations and speak about the “earliest self-explanations of the Rus” and “Rus attempts to construct an identity for

* Review of Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, eds. *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004. xiii, 240 pp. Maps. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. USD \$75.00, cloth.

themselves" (p. 12), but on the whole, with its transposable use of "Rus" and "Russia," it creates the distinct impression that for a thousand years the 'national' texts and the 'national' opinion-formers on the East Slavic lands were "Russian." The terminological sloppiness discredits the entire analytical enterprise. Whether "self-expression" takes place in Kyiv or in Moscow, in the Empire or the Soviet Union, in the tenth or the twenty-first century, it always emanates "Russianness." A variety of discourses—dynastic, religious and class—are subsumed, rather unproblematically, under the heading of "national identity." One is hard pressed to find here admission of protonational, supranational, nascent, shared or hybrid identities/cultures. "Russianness" in its 'national' form reins supreme, acting as a stand-in for the social history of the Eastern Slavs, with "Russians" performing both in the role of generic Slavs and as a distinct nationality. Having shoehorned the diversity of East Slavic ethnicities and cultures into a "Russian" category, the book then asks the student to embrace the contradictions that this creates as a liberating presentation of Russian identity.

However, to condemn this book summarily would be to miscalculate the harm it inflicts, for it is obviously not a joke. This volume involves a prestigious publisher and a host of respected contributors who separately and individually cannot be accused of writing nonsense. It is the combination of the reasonable and the outrageous that turns this into a dangerous publication. The core difficulty is that in presenting "Russian habits of self-representation" (p. 2), the book uncritically replicates these self-depictions as its own underlying structure, endowing mythic ideas with scholarly authority. As is evident from the passages quoted above, the "imaginary" (p. 33) and "imagined" millennial Russian nation—"constructed," as most reasonable scholars would admit, by much later generations—is narrated as a factual story in the voice of Slavic scholarship. The book's haphazard terminology fails not only to differentiate Rus', Russia and the East Slavic lands consistently, but draws almost no 'national' significance from those differences. As a result, the critical distance between Russian self-representation and the academic presentation is eroded. Both on the level of national myth and on the level of historical inquiry, the East Slavic lands are passed off as "Russian" from their earliest recorded time. To appreciate the problem, we need to step back and examine some of the book's pivotal moments.

A collective effort, *National Identity in Russian Culture* consists of a series of essays that offers both broad overviews of identity issues and more narrowly focused "case studies," which are limited thematically and chronologically (e.g., "Projecting Soviet Spaces," *lubki*, Anglo-Russian relations, Leskov's *The Enchanted Wanderer*, the film *Alexandr Nevskiy*). The contributors are: Humbertus F. Jahn ("Us': Russians on Russianness"), Anthony Cross ("Them': Russians on foreigners"), Marina Frolova-Walker ("Music of the soul?"), Boris Gasparov ("Identity in language?"), Catriona Kelly ("*Byt'*: identity and everyday life"), Lindsey Hughes ("Monuments and identity") and Stephanie Sandler ("Pushkin' and identity"). Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, the editors, start off the book

with a co-authored introductory chapter, bearing the title “‘All the Russias...’?”. In addition they contribute separate articles, respectively titled, “Russia in time” and “Russia in space.” Franklin also has a third paper, “Identity and religion.” The preface and afterword are unsigned, but presumably belong to the co-editors. On the whole there are eleven chapters. Except for the first, which stands apart, all are organized into four thematic sections—“Identities in Time and Space”; “Contrastive Identities: ‘Us’ and ‘Them’”; “‘Essential’ Identities”; “Symbols of Identity”—that serve, to quote the editors, as “points of orientation within the vast field of identity formation” (p. 6). “‘Essential’ Identities” is the largest, with four articles, in contrast to just two in each of the other sections. With no ambition or even ability to be exhaustive, the book aims at highlighting “key ideas” “around which discussion of identity has focused...” (p. 6). The book is weighted clearly toward post-Petrine issues and examples. References to Muscovy are relatively minor, but Kyivan (Kievan) Rus’ emerges as an important subject, anchoring the very idea of Russian identity and culture.

The editors espouse a poststructuralist approach to identity and embrace a postmodern sense of ambiguity, with its love for contradictions. Invoking Benedict Anderson and Homi Bhabha (but no other theoreticians), they characterize Russian identity as “imagined” and “constructed,” referring to the nation as a “system of cultural signification” (p. 2). As one might expect, therefore, Russian identity turns out to be fluid, fragmented and multiple. The central point of departure is “Russian cultural self-expression,” which “narrates” its identity through a variety of very broadly defined “texts” that occupy a millennial “Time” and all of East Slavic “Space,” as well as territories beyond. Thus, the nation is a text (p. 3) and “Russian” “producers of culture” (p. 3) write it: “These texts embody and make real the abstract ideas of Russia and ‘Russianness’, making the collective identity visible for those who reckon themselves part of it. As such... they *create* [italic in the original] identity. Or, more appropriately, they create *identities* [italic in the original], such that Russian and Russianness become constantly shifting and multiple forms” (p. 3). Because of its discursive nature, “National identity is therefore a process rather than a result...” (p. 2). Left unexplained is how Anderson’s emphasis on print-capitalism and the ‘nation’ as a late eighteenth century phenomenon fits the book’s millennial model of “Russianness.” There is no echo of Anderson’s description of the Soviet Union as a “legatee of the *prenational* dynastic states...” A student will also not learn about the limitations of Anderson’s approach, especially its tendency to de-emphasize the sociological aspects of the nation.

Even though the book begins as a series of rather specific questions (“Who are Russians?”) it shies away from offering definitive answers. Franklin and Widdis write: “A great deal of Russian culture is... self-referential, about Russia or indicative of ‘Russianness.’ But the ‘self’ turns out not to be a constant, clearly definable entity. Russian culture expresses a range of different types of ‘myths’ of Russia and Russianness... Hence, even as its *essence* [*nota bene* – OSI] is asserted,

Russia is continually represented as a question, a field of possibilities, a set of contradictions. This book does not seek to resolve the contradictions so as to explain what Russia and Russianness 'are'. Its purpose is to provide a guide to the many types of criteria and expression of Russia and Russianness. In a sense, Russian national identity lies not in the resolution but in the nature of the discussion and argument...." (p. 4). At the very end of the volume, the editors reiterate: "This book is not an introduction to Russian national identity 'as such' (whatever that may mean). It is an introduction to cultural discourse of Russian national identity. It is therefore an introduction to ways of 'reading' a particular theme in Russian culture, and hence an introduction to the range of things that there are to be 'read'; and hence, ultimately, it cannot help but reflect and introduce something of the rich diversity of Russian culture itself" (p. 218).

The theoretical ideas of Chapter 1, which are very lightly sketched in, do not overtly inform the essays that follow, but they justify the volume's heterogeneity and give it a sense of unity. Anderson's influence might be adduced by the emphasis on representation, i.e., on things like symbols and monuments, notions of time, and mapping of space; Bhabha's with the focus on the Other. For better or worse, the book lives up to its declared elusiveness in the sense that students do not get clear-cut answers and/or a sharp "adjudication" of the various possible approaches to "Russianness." (Essentialist theories seem to be just as useful as constructivist). Students are asked to embrace texts from the tenth to twenty-first century with the expectation that the "multiplicity of imagined and often competing Russias" (p. 217) will actually tell them what "precisely" Russia "is" (p. 217)—an intellectual feat that may be difficult to accomplish even for seasoned professors.

To put it plainly, most of the individual essays are quite informative and serve their introductory function well. I particularly liked those of Jahn, Cross, and Frolova-Walker. As one might expect, Franklin writes about Kyivan Rus' and religion with insight. If there are shortcomings, it is the dizzying chronological sweep and conciseness, which sometimes borders on superficiality, a weakness for which some authors try to make excuses. As stand-alone works on discreet and chronologically bounded issues, especially those that touch on the modern periods, the chapters sometimes evoke quibbles but no serious objections. But the real problem of the volume, as I have already indicated, is that these generally good essays are asked to function in an uncritical millennial framework, which then moulds the individual parts into a paradigm of Russian identity that is unsustainable from the point of view of scholarship and logic.

For a book with a purportedly open approach to identity, it operates within an amazingly rigid structure, one it refuses to subject to serious query: Russian identity is a thousand years old; all of the East Slavic lands are essentially a "Russian" cultural and geo-political space (Ukrainians and Belarusians seem to appear only after 1991 despite their "ancestry" in Rus'); the provenance of texts, as well as their creators, are "Russian" and, if there is the rare uncertainty about their actual "nationality," then the question is papered over by semantic fudging (e.g., Rus' is

not modern Russia [p. 12], but using the two as synonyms is a general tendency). The Russian 'self', as we saw above, may "not to be a constant, clearly definable entity," but its "essence" permeates a virtually limitless chronological and social space. Even though identity is a process, *Russian* 'national' identity and culture are not, really, formed or made over time; they do not seem to experience any crises; they just have a permanent existence in texts. Says the afterword: "These 'texts', after all, constitute the tangible, visible, audible reality. Without them to articulate it, no Russia exists" (p. 218). Sometimes, as here, texts seem to do the job of expressing Russianness all by themselves. "Russianness" is not a meaning that a reader (say, a modern-day Russian or contemporary scholar) fills in; it appears to be indisputably inscribed in the text.

The unarticulated assumption of the book is that "cultural opinion-formers" like Monomakh, Avvakum, Gogol', Pushkin—including cultural 'texts' like Russian *byt* and Soviet monuments—represent a naturally occurring 'Russian' set that harbours a basic 'national' sameness ("essence"), requiring no explanation or further discrimination. These are the "range of things to be read" (p. 218) for their self-expressive Russianness. But the 'Russian' status of the 'things' is never really established or explored on the basis of some empirical or comparative criteria. The editors explain "the somewhat pointed title of this book: national identity *in* Russian culture" by saying that "There is no separate 'reality' behind the cultural expressions of identity (xii)." True enough. But how do the readers of this book know for sure—given a whole millennium and a vast geographical space—that a text they are asked to consider as expressing "Russianness" is at any given historical stage actually "in" Russian culture and not somewhere else (say, in Rus' or in a multiethnic empire)? How does one know that the author doing the narrating (e.g., a Kyiv chronicler) is "Russian"? The editors do ask, "Who writes the text of national identity?" (p. 3), but their answer only dwells on classes and types of producers (e.g., historians, musicians), not their 'nationality,' which is assumed to be Russian by default, rather than by reasoned explanation. The whole notion of Russian identity thus carries a kind of circular and *a priori* character ("A great deal of Russian culture is... self-referential, about Russia or indicative of 'Russianness.'"). The book neither offers nor seeks parameters outside 'Russian culture' (for example, "in" scholarship) to evaluate how this identity has self-constructed. "There is no need..." say Franklin and Widdis, "to adjudicate between *contested* notions of *true Russianness* (emphasis added)... (p. xii)" "The multiple cultural expression and constructs are the identity, or the identities. Their *reality*, or their *truth*, is in their own existence as *facts of culture*, not in the extent to which they *accurately* reflect a set of *external facts*" (p. xii; emphasis added). In this book, which does not really recognize an independent East Slavic space, contestation of true Russianness is almost invariably intramural (within "Russian culture"). With Russianness its own definition and not subject to assessment by competing East Slavic societies or

empirical data—the book, on the level of grand narrative, becomes little more than a reaffirmation of Russian myths.

If the stated goal of the book had been to demonstrate how *East Slavic* texts *could be* (or *have been*) “read” (i.e., “imagined and represented,” p. 218) by Russians, *as Russian*, then there would be no problem. If the book had clearly stated, “questions of *national identity* permeate *East Slavic* cultural self-expression,” and then zeroed in on the “Russian” identity as a specific instance, then, again, there would be no problem. If the preface had clearly stated that Russians *in the modern era* have been imagining themselves *as* being a thousand-years old, then that too would not be a problem. Perhaps, if this was a book entitled *Russian National Identity in East Slavic Culture* it could have really explained the unique ability of the Russian ‘national’ identity to see itself across all of East Slavic space. But, instead of giving students an understanding of the construction of Russianness, this book turns a diverse and multi-ethnic *East Slavic* cultural process into a *Russian* one.

In the course of reading this book, I was reminded of a question a Russian MA student once asked me about so-called “Old Russian” literature: “When Russians were writing these great things in Kiev, where were the Ukrainians and what were they doing?” This student, like many Russian majors—trained on Zenkovsky’s anthology, Mirsky’s history, and similar books—considered East Slavic culture (especially its earliest manifestations) as basically Russian national culture; she had no concept of how Ukrainians and Belarusians fit into this geopolitical and cultural space. The student’s question betrayed the extent to which Rus’ and early Slavic history have been naturalized as a “Russian national” space and culture, largely because Western scholars often fail to use discriminating terminology and definitions. Since this particular book is oriented toward students at a time when the map of Central and Eastern Europe is entirely remade, one would have expected that the first order of business of a work appearing in October 2004 would be to explain Russia’s identity in relationship to its East Slavic neighbours, especially Ukraine, since, after all, this country has been a ‘key’ issue in Russian identity for at least two hundred years (cf. Belinsky, Gogol, Struve, Trubetzkoy, Solzhenitsyn and Likhachev). Unfortunately, rather than positioning the problem of Russian culture and identity within a comparative East Slavic setting, the book equivocates and prevaricates with terminological vagaries (e.g., phrases like “All the Russias”) or by substituting rhetorical questions for what should have been careful analysis, as in this statement by Emma Widdis: “Kiev, Moscow, St Petersburg: all three cities offer different symbolic narratives, different strategies of national self-identification. One of them – Kiev – is now the capital of Ukraine, not even part of modern-day Russia, yet it is Vladimir’s capital, the site of the official conversion to Christianity, and as such a founding space in one of the principal narratives of Russianness. Where, then is the symbolic locus of Russian identity?” (pp. 37-38). Even a rudimentary attempt to explore (if not answer) this wonderful question would have forced the editors to rewrite their preface. But sometimes even the questions seem inappropriate. As

Widdis is about to launch into an explanation of what is obviously Rus' and the *East Slavic* space on the eve of Christianization (pp. 33-35), she asks: "What then, is the Russian 'space'?" (p. 33). Note that the quotation marks appear around the word 'space' rather than 'Russian.' A few lines later this geographic area is linked to "diverse local identities, none of them initially 'Russian'" [sic] (p. 34). A page and half later we are already into "Moscow's expansion in the fifteenth century" (p. 35), at which point the following summary statement appears: "In its origins, then, Russia was a space fought for and contested" (p. 35). With the East Slavic lands thus and similarly totalized as 'Russian,' there is, of course, no discussion of the three "Russian" nations, i.e., "Great," "Little," and "White," nor the role this old terminology played in creating "all-Russians" (*obshcherusskii*) and then—just plain "Russians." In other words, the complex and critical interrelationship among East Slavic societies (including their texts and their elites) is erased by the overused and undifferentiating term "Russia."

Franklin and Widdis motivate their presentation of East Slavic culture and identities to students in terms of "Russianness" ("All the Russias") not because they believe that Ukraine and Belarus are "really" part of Russia" (p. 3) or because they are firmly convinced in a sequential millennial existence of Russian political states on East Slavic territory ("the construct is questionable as 'fact' [p. 4]," they say). They stick to this model of cultural and political "inclusiveness" (p. 3) because, in their words, it corresponds to the "the historical limits of Russian cultural self-representation..." And as such, they insist, "...neither the modern political map, nor our or anybody else's preferred notion of what Russia should be or should have been, can impinge" (pp. 3-4). This absolute and uncritical deferral to Russian mythological readings of the East Slavic space is at the heart of the book's problems.

If we look at their statement carefully, we will note, first, that Franklin and Widdis say nothing about *when* "the historical limits of Russian cultural self-representation..." were established—doubtlessly a crucial question. The book, with its fixation on a chronological presentation of Russian identity as a seamless development from the tenth century, implies that these limits are located in Kyivan Rus', where pre-existing "Russians" were already writing about "Russianness." However, if we accept the position of scholars like Edward Keenan that Muscovy developed an interest in Kyiv as late as the seventeenth century (cf. "On Certain Mythical Beliefs and Russian Behaviors," in S. Frederick Starr, editor, *The Legacy of History in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* [1994], pp. 21-25), then the historical limits of Russian cultural self-representation might have been established actually several hundred years later in Moscow. In other words, students should have been apprised of the possibility that we are not dealing with an evolution of "Russian identity" from Kyiv on the basis of "Russian" texts (the millennial model), but with a retrospective form of identification with the Kyivan heritage. The really interesting question then is how and when Russian identity and culture internalized

the legacy of Rus', a topic that is not treated in the book at all. This pivotal problem is reduced by Franklin to the notion that Moscow "inherited" (p. 15) the story of the "'historical' identity" of the Rus', an idea which is considerably undermined by Widdis's more tentative formulation that "Moscow subsequently *claimed to inherit* the status and authority of Kiev, despite being in a quite different place, a long way to the northeast" (p. 37; emphasis added). Clearly the concept of an inherited *story* of an "'historical'" identity warranted detailed elaboration in light of the editors' promotion of a Russian "essence."

Also quite unpersuasive is the editors' admonition that nothing can impinge on "the historical limits of Russian cultural self-representation." Well, what about the facts? Historical research? Other national histories? Reading between the lines of this book, it seems doubtful that the editors would be prepared to make such generous allowances for, say, Ukrainians or Belarusians, if either nationality were to claim a thousand-year old identity. Franklin's and Widdis's position is even more puzzling given that they parenthetically acknowledge that the facts do create a problem for Russian self-representations. But rather than going into details, they side-step this important point by disingenuously reducing it to a simple matter of 'preferred notions.' The cultural background for Russian hegemonic claims to all of the East Slavic space are thus left unexplained.

Franklin and Widdis appear more reasonable when they go on to argue that Russian self-representations are a cultural reality, and, as such, regardless of their factual validity, they are "a proper topic of cultural discussion in the present context (p. 4)." And indeed they are. But there is no reason why Russian cultural myths cannot be presented to students along with historical facts and in a comparative perspective. The editors suggest that what they are doing—"discussion"—is superior to 'impingement.' Unfortunately, the book contains no actual "discussion" (i.e., analysis) of the millennial myth or the concept of sequential "Russian" states. Not only are these myths not "impinged on" (examined), the editors actually canonize them through the scholarly structure they adopt for their book. Moreover, the editors' deference toward these myths is rather uncharacteristic given that in several essays we find a variety of Russian myths debunked, and Franklin himself calls some Russian forms of self-perception as "utter claptrap" (p. 11). A student may wonder why some myths are subject to such harsh criticism and others serve as a foundation for the scholarly discourse.

In *The Emergence of Rus, 750-1200* (Longman, 1996), which Franklin co-authored with Jonathan Shepard, it was said that "Only in *nationalist fantasy* can the word 'Russia' stand for a kind of Platonic form, immanent even when invisible, constant in *essence* [*nota bene* – OSI] though variable in its historical embodiments" (p. xvii). To avoid confusion, Franklin and Shepard wisely chose not to refer to Rus' as Russia. In this book, on the other hand, the nationalist fantasy permeates the entire scholarly construction and the words Rus' and Russia are used haphazardly. One is therefore tempted to speculate that the mystery of the Russian identity may lie not so much in its inherent complexity as in the inadequacy of the

methodology, which is incapable of defining and using clearly its central categories (“Russia,” “Russian culture” “Russian national identity”). While Russian identity indeed makes no distinction between Rus’ and Russia, the scholarly narrative is hardly obliged to follow suit.

The editors are not unaware of the national and social diversity in the East Slavic lands—they simply have trouble acknowledging and dealing with this fact forthrightly without resorting to the word “Russian.” I have already cited Widdis above as an example of the missed opportunities to problematize the Russian identity within this broader context. I would note further that Belarus has no place in this book, except as an occasional toponym. The situation with Ukraine is significantly better, but not without its own problems. For example, in the section on “Contrastive Identities: ‘us’ and ‘them’” Ukrainians do not make it into either category: there is no discussion of them as ‘imagined Russians’ and there is no instance of them as ‘foreigners’ (e.g., Mazepists, ‘nationalists,’ etc.) within Russian society and the imperial state.

Boris Gasparov (“Identity in language?”) is both refreshing on the East Slavic point and frustrating on the Ukrainian one. There is no “Old Russian language” in his text and he speaks in the plural of Slavic peoples, vernaculars and Orthodox lands when referring to “the medieval cultural situation” (p. 134)—a form of expression that the volume could have imitated more consistently to its advantage. Where Gasparov can be faulted is his failure to bring in Ukrainians when the opportunity arose in order to place into bolder relief the problem of Russian identity. His notion of “the culture of early Rus” spans “six centuries of... development before its radical transformation around the time of Peter the Great” (p. 137). Monomakh, Avvakum, and Epifanii the Wise appear as figures of the same cultural order, with all apparently comparable for the purpose of exploring the “notion of language as a reflection of—or as a factor in the creation of—[Russian] national identity” (p. 94). Speaking of Church Slavonic grammars, Gasparov writes: “...in the *north*, the first Church Slavonic grammar appeared much later, in 1596” (p. 135; italics added). This nameless ‘north,’ it turns out, is not Russia (a conclusion the student might draw) but the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This fact, however, emerges only obliquely in a footnote on page 225 and makes sense only if the student already has some background in the political geography of this period and recognizes the place of the grammar’s publication (Wilno) as Vilnius. The footnote reference to a 1980 German edition of Lavrentii Zyzanii’s (*Zyzanii’s Hrammatika slovenska*) is not accompanied by an explanation that Zyzanii was Ukrainian (or, perhaps, “Ruthenian”) nor is there any hint of the cultural renaissance at the end of the sixteenth century on Ukrainian lands that gave birth to the grammar. Such information could have served as an ideal occasion to differentiate and problematize Russian national development. Although this article makes no outrageous claims comparable to the preface, it does conclude by sweeping all its examples under the single concept “Russian culture.” The last sentence states:

“Russian culture retains an enduring tradition of perceiving and manipulating the very forms of language as bearers or markers of ideology and identity” (p. 148).

Franklin has an extended and very good essay demonstrating how both Soviets (here equivalent to Russians) and Ukrainians used the medieval past during the 1980s and 1990s to construct modern identities. Entitled “Signs of the Times,” it appears as a subsection in the chapter “Russia in time,” which itself is an eight-page survey that starts with the “self-explanations” of the early Rus’ and ends with “late Soviet identity.” This, in fact, is the only instance where the book permits ‘others’ in the East Slavic space to impinge on Russia’s cultural self-expression, showing Rus’ as a contested space rather than a “Russian” one. The principles at work here, nicely expressed at the end of the article (pp. 28-29), would have been an excellent starting point for the preface and chapter 1. Unfortunately, they appear after the millennial model of Russia has already been established and therefore lose much of their effectiveness. The impression the student may get is that, in terms of identity, “Russia” was unchallenged until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the parity of Ukrainian and Russians claims to Rus’ are constrained by Franklin’s characterization of the Ukrainian narrative on this subject as “polemical,” a “programme of appropriation”—words generally missing when the editors narrate the millennial story of “Russia.” Obviously, ‘inheriting’ an identity and ‘appropriating’ it suggests different levels of legitimacy. Perhaps most troubling is the intellectual contortions through which Franklin must go to even link Ukraine with Rus’, as evidenced by these sentences:

The second ‘text’ is a set of Ukrainian banknotes... This selection may appear perverse in a study of aspects of Russian national identity: Ukraine is no longer part of the Russian Empire, no longer part of the Russia-dominated Soviet Union. However, narratives of identity extend beyond the current map. Ukraine is not Russia, but in a sense it is at least partly *Russia* [italics in the original] in the old Latin sense, since part of Ukraine, like part of Russia, fills part of the space once covered by the Lands of the Rus. Thus, as we shall see, a story of Ukraine in time overlaps with – and in some versions directly challenges – a story of Russia in time, and in their interrelationships something of the nature of each is clarified” (p. 24; all emphases added).

Let’s first note the excellent last sentence and observe that it posits a problem that the preface and other parts of the book should have addressed squarely. As it stands, the book offers very little insight into Russian-Ukrainian ‘interrelationships.’ Second, let’s leave aside the initial sentence, i.e., the question of “perversity,” and what that might imply about Slavic Studies (who are the people who think this way and why?). Franklin, thankfully, sees nothing perverse in trying to consider Russian identity in connection with Ukraine, but he does feel compelled to justify the exercise for the student by turning Ukraine into Russia—at least partially and terminologically. As he did in other places (pp. 12, 28), he now again introduces the Latin name of Rus’ as if this had some real significance in terms of identity. Obviously, regardless of the word, Rus’ was Rus’—and not Russia, so why confuse the student? His game of verbal association (which would not have worked as well

had he decided to use the Greek form “Rhosia”) serves to establish Ukraine as a part of a ‘Latin Russia’ (by analogy to the Empire and the Soviet Union), thus projecting into the past Ukraine’s modern subordination. Had Franklin resorted to less obfuscating writing, students would have perhaps understood that he is saying something potentially important and subversive of the Russian myths: “Ukraine is not Russia, but in a sense it is at least partly *Rus*’, since part of Ukraine, like part of Russia, fills part of the space once covered by the Lands of the Rus.” Without the Latinized *Rus*’, it is abundantly clear that Ukraine is not *even partly* Russia, and, equally important, that *Russia is not Rus*’, but a component *part* in that polity. The revised sentence I propose recognizes *Rus*’ as the only true historical category and makes *both* ‘Ukraine’ and ‘Russia’ contingent—and structurally *equal* in relationship to *Rus*’.

Even if we make some allowance for viewing the nation in terms favoured by Liah Greenfeld and Adrian Hastings, Franklin remains on shaky ground when he projects early modern and modern national concepts into the Kyivan medieval past. This, of course, is routinely done for Russia and the volume simply endorses this perspective unconditionally. What is relatively unique in Franklin’s case is that he permits Ukraine a grudging presence in the past as well, albeit in a “Russified” form. As a result there is an unanswered question looming in Franklin’s presentation: If ‘Russia’ was a subordinate *part* of *Rus*’ (and not the whole of *Rus*’), then, for the purpose of Russian ‘national’ identity and culture, it would be crucial to know *which* part of *Rus*’ was ‘Russia’: the central or the peripheral? Russia’s ideological domination of the East Slavic discourse during the modern era (reinforced by this volume) would suggest the former. However, as we know, and as Widdis reminds us (p. 34), *Rus*’, in the narrow sense, referred to Kyiv, Pereiaslav and Chernihiv, all core ‘Ukrainian’ spaces; ‘Russian’ areas were clearly a *part* of *Rus*’, but not central to its identity or power. Therefore, taking Franklin’s game a little further, we might be able to say that ‘Russia’ was a part of ‘Ukraine’—not the other way around. Students, if they are following Franklin’s argument carefully, might now conclude that the word ‘appropriation’ applies more aptly to Russia than Ukraine.

Slavic Studies needs to debate whether Franklin’s method is best for explaining national identity on the East Slavic lands. However, this book is hopelessly entangled in contradictions of its own making. Rather than leading the student toward clarity, it confirms a nationalistic and hackneyed reading of Russian identity, without providing adequate critical perspective. I feel sorry for the contributors whose good efforts on narrow, self-contained issues, modern times, and, more or less, obviously Russian ‘spaces’ are undercut by a millennial paradigm and misleading terminology. Students in the West do deserve help in understanding Russian myths of self and the cultural impact of *Rus*’ on Russian culture. But there can be no excuse for doing so by depicting the East Slavic lands solely on the basis

of Russian nationalist fantasies, which turn centuries of culturally and socially diverse material into an undifferentiated “national” “Russia.”

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