



Canadian Slavonic Papers

Ukraine and Russia in their Historical Encounter

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Source: *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, Vol. 35, No. 3/4 (September-December 1993), pp. 335-344

Published by: [Canadian Association of Slavists](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40869517>

Accessed: 14/06/2014 07:42

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Serhii M. Plokhyy

Ukraine and Russia in their Historical Encounter

(Remarks on Mikhail Dmitriev's Review)

Professor Mikhail Dmitriev's review of *Ukraine and Russia in their Historical Encounter* (cf. *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. XXXV, Nos. 1–2, March–June, 1993, pp. 131–147) can be considered a response to Omeljan Pritsak's invitation in the foreword to begin a dialogue between Ukrainian and Russian historians. Dmitriev accepts this invitation and rightly states that, "Only now, following the colossal changes in the republics of the former USSR, are conditions developing for a truly free and productive dialogue between historians of Ukraine and Russia" (p. 147). It should be admitted here that "a truly free dialogue" is now only in its initial stage, and that the current state of relations between the two historiographies can be defined more in terms of confrontation than of dialogue.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the historical profession in Russia was left with only a few experts in Ukrainian history; those who study it are primarily specialists in the related fields of Russian and Soviet history. This situation is due in part to the way in which Soviet historiography was "planned and managed" by Soviet ideologists: national histories were studied at the Institutes of History of the republican Academies of Sciences, while all-Russian and all-Union topics were reserved for the Institute of History of the USSR in Moscow and Leningrad. This party policy eventually created an atmosphere in which those Russian historians who studied Ukrainian topics did so in an all-Russian or all-Union context. They now face serious difficulties in treating the histories of Russia and Ukraine as histories of separate nations.

Party policy and the availability of archival materials encouraged scholars in Ukraine to pursue their research predominantly in the field of Ukrainian history or, more precisely, the history of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The huge complement of historians of the CPSU in Ukraine was oriented toward the study of topics in local party history. Even though Ukrainian scholars in Ukraine were, generally speaking, as remote from the study of Russian topics as their colleagues in Russia were from Ukrainian subjects, the former appear by and large better prepared to initiate a dialogue, owing to the simple fact that they studied the history of Russia—labeled "History of the USSR" or "History of the

CPSU”—during their student years. Many of them taught these courses at Ukrainian universities and other institutions of higher learning, where there were virtually no chairs of Ukrainian history. On the negative side, Ukrainian historians remain hobbled by a tradition of scholarship developed in an atmosphere of deep provincialism and continual political surveillance by authorities intent on discovering any trace of nationalism, real or imagined.

Throughout the whole post-war period, Russian historians have been in touch with the imperial historiographic tradition, not least through the writings of Sergei Solov'ev and Vasilii Kliuchevskii, whose collected works were reprinted in the Soviet Union. During the same period, Ukrainian historians were effectively denied access to their own national historiographical tradition. Not only were the writings of Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi not reprinted in the USSR, but the very mention of his name in a positive context was strictly prohibited.

During the Soviet era, Russian historians from Moscow and St. Petersburg benefited from the advantages bestowed on them by the capital or a flourishing cultural centre. These included more contacts with the West and greater opportunities to write freely (political restrictions on historians in capital cities were never so strict as in the provinces). Historians in Moscow, for example, could readily quote Hrushevs'kyi in their writings; this was absolutely impossible in Ukraine after Petro Shelest, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine, was dismissed from his post in 1972 on charges of “idealizing” the Ukrainian past.

With the onset of perestroika and glasnost in the USSR, Ukrainian historians, like their Russian colleagues, gained greater opportunities to travel to the West. In general, they were very open to ideas expressed and developed in Western historiography. Through contacts with historians at Harvard, the University of Alberta and other North American universities where Ukrainian studies have been pursued, they managed both to re-establish their link with the Ukrainian historiographical tradition from which they were cut off by Stalin in 1930s, and to become acquainted with Western historiography.

The reaction of many Russian historians on “encountering the West” was significantly different. In general, they have been more reluctant to embrace views of Russian history developed in the West. They have also been strong critics of Western ideas elaborated in the field of Russian imperial history and the history of the non-Russian peoples of the former empire.

These, briefly, are the characteristics, in my view, of the two groups of historians who sooner or later will engage in a “truly free” dialogue.

In many respects, Mikhail Dmitriev represents those Russian historians who became interested in Ukrainian topics primarily through their studies in Russian history. During the last four years he has not only promoted the study

of Ukrainian history in Russia (he is the founding director of the Centre for Ukrainian and Belarusian Studies at Moscow University's Department of History), but has strongly supported the idea of Ukrainian-Russian dialogue in the field of historical studies.

Dmitriev's comments on *Russia and Ukraine in their Historical Encounter* can be divided roughly into two basic groups: appraisals of articles about medieval and early modern history—fields in which he is a specialist—and assessments of articles concerning nineteenth- and twentieth-century history. It is obvious to the present writer that Dmitriev's observations on the first group are better presented and more persuasive than those on the second. In regard to the latter articles, especially those on Soviet history, Dmitriev writes as an avowed "non-specialist and... a Russian, who has nevertheless known ordinary Soviet reality in its primitive and modest daily manifestations from the inside..." (p. 143).

Jaroslav Pelenski's article on the role of the "Kievan inheritance" in the formation of the Russian and Ukrainian nations is singled out for particular attention. Dmitriev sees Pelenski's study as yet another attempt to divide Kievan Rus' between the two proto-nations, Ukrainians and Russians, and to prove that Galicia-Volhynia has a greater right to be considered the heir of Kiev than does the Suzdal-Vladimir principality. Dmitriev concentrates his attention on Pelenski's concluding remarks, in which he states that "...on the basis of the religious evidence exclusively, or on combination of that and some aspects of dynastic politics, the principality of Suzdal-Vladimir would have to be credited with having a serious claim. If, on the other hand all the other factors, such as territorial continuity, ethnic identity, common social and institutional traditions, dynastic politics and religious or cultural evidence are added in, the Galician-Volhynian competitor emerges as the more legitimate successor" (*Ukraine and Russia...*, p. 15).

One must agree with Dmitriev that there is no reason to reserve "common social and institutional traditions" only to Galicia-Volhynia. It is also unclear how religious tradition and dynastic politics, which, according to Pelenski, support Suzdal-Vladimir's claim to the Kievan inheritance, can make Galicia-Volhynia a "more legitimate successor." At the same time, it should be noted that, despite its concluding remarks, Pelenski's article does not set out to solve the problem of which claim to the Kievan inheritance—the Galician or the Suzdal-Vladimirian—is the more justified. The article sheds new light on the history of the competition between the two principalities over the Kievan political, religious and cultural heritage and shows how that competition is connected with disputes over the same problem in modern historiography.

Pelenski identifies three principal schools of historical interpretation concerning the question of the Kievan inheritance. The first, represented by nineteenth-century Russian scholars, tended to see the Suzdal-Vladimir principality and, later, Muscovy as the only legitimate heir of Kievan Rus'. The second school, associated primarily with the writings of Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi, claimed exclusive rights to the Kievan heritage for Ukraine. The third interpretation, developed by Soviet historians in the 1930s–50s, takes as its point of departure the idea of one indivisible Old Rus' nationality and considers Kievan Rus' the common inheritance of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians.

It is difficult to avoid the impression that while Pelenski attempts to support the claims of the Ukrainian historiographic tradition, Dmitriev openly defends the Soviet paradigm of the indivisibility of the Kievan inheritance.

The next article that evokes strong criticism on Dmitriev's part is Edward Keenan's "Muscovite Perceptions of Other East Slavs before 1654—An Agenda for Historians." Keenan argues that "...the period between the middle of the sixteenth century and the middle of the seventeenth was the time of greatest differences between Muscovy and other East Slavic societies as regards social and political structures" (*Ukraine and Russia...*, p. 23). He offers historical data to support the thesis that Muscovite elites of the second half of the sixteenth century were poorly informed about cultural developments in Ukrainian and Belarusian lands and that it was mostly Ukrainians and Belarusians who reintroduced the awareness of the unity of the Eastern Slavs to Muscovy.

Dmitriev declares almost all of Keenan's hypotheses groundless: "...there is virtually not a single assertion here that would not evoke the most serious objection" (p. 135). He argues that the Muscovite elites knew about religious developments in the Ukrainian-Belarusian lands and that there was constant interest in the writings of Maksim Grek among the upper echelons of Muscovite society throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century.

The data adduced here by Dmitriev do not contradict Keenan's principal argument about the lack of awareness of East Slavic unity among the Muscovite political elite of the period. Dmitriev's statement that "behind the change of Ivan III's system of titling (the introduction into the title of the expression "Sovereign or Tsar of All-Rus'" was a vivid awareness of what was "All-Rus'" and how its separate parts were historically connected" (p. 135) is not convincing. Unfortunately, one can only guess how Ivan III and his contemporaries understood the title. Was it a dynastic claim to the heritage of the Kievan princes? Did it include the territories inhabited by non-Slavs and non-Orthodox? No clear answer is available to us on any of these questions.

Evidence from the middle of the seventeenth century shows that when in 1654 the tsar's official title was changed from "Sovereign of all Rus'" to

“Sovereign of Great and Little Russia,” Muscovite politicians considered Little Russia to include only the lands of the Kiev, Chernihiv and Pereiaslav principalities. The Land Assembly of 1653, that decided on the issue of Muscovite-Cossack union did not employ dynastic or ethnic/national arguments to justify its war with Poland. Instead, errors made by the Poles in citing the tsar’s title and the idea of religious unity were chosen as the main legal justifications of the war. Even the idea of religious unity was not popular among Muscovite politicians prior to the 1640s.

Keenan assumes that Isaiah of Kamianets was imprisoned in Muscovy partly for religious reasons. Defending himself against the accusations of the Muscovite authorities, Isaiah stated that he had not come “to raise questions about belief.” If in the case of Isaiah one can only guess about the way in which his Orthodoxy was viewed by the Muscovite authorities, in the case of Lavrentii Zyzanii, who visited Moscow in 1626-27, it is known with certainty that he and his catechism were considered heretical in Moscow. The Moscow Patriarch, Filaret Romanov, even issued an order to rebaptize those Ukrainians and Belarusians who wanted to settle in Russia. Dmitriev writes that his list of objections to Keenan could be extended. The same would appear to be true about arguments in support of Keenan. In this sense, Keenan’s article corresponds precisely to its title, “an agenda for historians,” and the ideas expressed in it should be studied and analyzed, not rejected out of hand.

One can only agree with Dmitriev’s positive appraisal of Hans-Joachim Torke’s article on Muscovite-Ukrainian relations in seventeenth century, as well as with his statement that “Torke’s analysis exemplifies a balanced and objective approach, which is what Ukrainian and Russian researches now require most...” Dmitriev stresses that according to Torke there are no grounds to speak about Russian imperialism in relations with Ukraine prior to Peter I “...nor about Russia’s interest in control over Ukraine, inasmuch as this led toward an inevitable conflict with Poland and the Ottoman Empire...” (p. 136).

There is little doubt that Hans-Joachim Torke’s article represents a major breakthrough in the conceptualization of Muscovite-Ukrainian relations prior to the eighteenth century. It challenges both the traditional Ukrainian interpretation of those relations as a series of Russian imperialist moves against Ukraine and the Russian/Soviet approach to the problem, which explained Pereiaslav in terms of the Russian liberation of either a fraternal Orthodox or a fraternal East Slavic people. The article offers evidence to support the view that a common East Slavic consciousness, if it existed at all in seventeenth-century Muscovy, played no role in the formulation of Muscovite policy toward Ukraine. In this sense, Torke’s article supports Keenan’s hypothesis and seriously undermines Dmitriev’s critique of the latter.

Marc Raeff's article on intellectual and political encounters between Russia and Ukraine from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century and Edgar Hosch's paper on Paul I and Ukraine evoke little, if any, criticism on Dmitriev's part. Raeff's study deals primarily with the problem of the integration of Ukrainian elites into imperial Russian society during the eighteenth century. According to Dmitriev, Raeff "...demonstrates that the examination of the history of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the prism of the process of social and cultural integration, is more productive than conceptualizing it in terms of a conflict between the two nations and cultures" (p. 137). In fact, Raeff states no such thing, and the conclusion Dmitriev draws from the article appears to be more a reflection of his own ideas than those of Marc Raeff. It seems quite obvious that no preference can be given to either of these approaches—integrationist or conflictologist—in the study of Russian-Ukrainian relations of the period. There is also little reason to believe that the integrationist approach would be more productive in the study of the activities of hetmans Ivan Vyhovskyi and Petro Doroshenko, or in the examination of Ivan Mazepa's revolt against the tsar.

Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak's article on Ukrainian and Russian women, their distinct characteristics and cooperation at the turn of the twentieth century falls into the second group of articles mentioned at the outset of this review—those dealing with the period in which Dmitriev is an avowed non-specialist. He raises strong objections to every major idea expressed in the article and states that "the examples which are given to substantiate these assertions remain precisely that—examples; they do not convince..." (p. 138). Although his criticism of Bohachevsky-Chomiak's brief account of the differences in the fate of Russian and Ukrainian women before the nineteenth century should be accepted (the account is based on outdated and one-sided studies of the issue), one can hardly ignore the differences that did exist in the status of women in Ukraine and Russia between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. Tatar rule over Muscovy and the circumstances of frontier life in Cossack Ukraine can be listed among the factors responsible for those differences.

Dmitriev rejects Bohachevsky-Chomiak's arguments concerning the differences between women's movements in Ukraine and Russia at the turn of the twentieth century, and raises the broader question: "Is it possible, in principle, to divide the social movements of the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century in Russia into strictly Ukrainian and Russian movements, or at least to catch certain essential differences in the nature of these movements and societal moods?" Dmitriev apparently believes that this is scarcely possible, and reminds the reader about the danger of reading twentieth-century antagonisms back into the past. He admits an exception only in the case

of Galicia and of those organizations in Eastern Ukraine “that completely devoted their activity to the idea of Ukraine’s national isolation from Russia” (p. 139).

Although one may well share Dmitriev’s doubts about the validity of differentiating forms of social life in Russia and Eastern Ukraine, it is difficult to accept his definition of the Ukrainian national movement as an isolationist one. It should also be pointed out that Bohachevsky-Chomiak does not differentiate forms of social life in Ukraine and Russia. Instead, she states that “there is no way to distinguish Russian and Ukrainian female participants in the two great revolutionary currents of the nineteenth century, populism and Marxism” (*Ukraine and Russia...*, p. 106).

In her article, Bohachevsky-Chomiak concentrates mainly on the activities and attitudes of Ukrainian women involved in the “Ukrainophile” movement. Because “Ukrainophilism” was tantamount to revolution in the eyes of the authorities those Ukrainian women who took part in it encountered much greater difficulties in pursuing their cultural activities than did Russian women. The evidence of this offered by Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak does not consist of mere anecdotal “examples,” as Dmitriev puts it. Equally sound is another idea expressed in Bohachevsky-Chomiak’s article: Russian women apparently played a more important symbolic role in the revolutionary movement in the Russian Empire than did Ukrainian women in the Ukrainian movement. Bohachevsky-Chomiak sees the explanation of this phenomenon in the fact that Ukrainian organizations which considered themselves radical were in fact liberal in character, and were not prepared to allow women to play a significant role. This fact, along with Soviet hostility toward the Ukrainian national movement, probably contributed to the low profile of Ukrainian women in the Communist Party of Ukraine during the 1920s.

John A. Armstrong’s article on the role played by Cossack mythology in the shaping of Ukrainian national consciousness is singled out for high praise by Dmitriev. One can only agree with such an evaluation of this pioneering article by a renowned scholar of Ukrainian history and Ukrainian nationalism, although some of the conclusions Dmitriev draws from Armstrong’s work are difficult to understand. It is not easy to accept Dmitriev’s statement that the article “demonstrates that the actual development of ethnic and national consciousness more often than not takes a different course than does the development of myths about past history created by intellectuals” when in the next sentence Dmitriev writes: “It is precisely myths—not language or historical knowledge—that shape concepts of national identity” (p. 139).

John S. Reshetar’s article on Ukrainian and Russian perceptions of the Ukrainian revolution is the object of even greater criticism than Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak’s study. Dmitriev questions Reshetar’s very right to use

the term “Ukrainian revolution.” “Whatever side we take,” writes Dmitriev, “whatever aspects of the ‘Ukrainian Revolution’ we choose, we will see in everything not only a continuation, but even a facet of what occurred throughout all of Russia—in Moscow as well as in the regions” (p. 140). This interpretation of the revolution has much in common with the views of the representatives of the “all-Russian” revolutionary parties, including the Bolsheviks. This interpretation became dominant in Soviet historiography and served as the basis for the voluminous Soviet writings on the history of the “Great October.”

The “Russian only” approach probably does work if one studies events in Moscow and in Siberia, where independent governments were formed at various points, but it certainly fails in the case of Finland, Poland or Baltic states. There is little doubt that those countries had revolutions of their own and that the revolutionary process was dominated in each of them not by the all-Russian parties but by local national ones whose ultimate goal was the political independence of their respective nations. Revolutionary events in Ukraine can by no means be interpreted as part of the Russian revolution, owing to the simple fact that not all of Ukraine belonged to the Russian Empire in 1917. Dmitriev’s approach is no more productive than one which views revolutionary events in Ukraine exclusively as part of the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy. There can be little doubt that the revolutionary process in Eastern Ukraine was significantly influenced by events in Russia and the national movement in Galicia by events in Austria-Hungary, but only from the perspective of the Ukrainian revolution can one understand the dynamic of national and social struggle in the whole of Ukraine.

Dmitriev questions the legitimacy of Reshetar’s statements that as a result of the imperial system Russians were accustomed to refer to Ukraine as “Little Russia,” the “South,” “South Russia” or “Southwestern Rus”; that the term “Mazepinstvo” in official imperial terminology was used to symbolize Ukrainian “separatism”; that the first Soviet occupation of Ukraine in 1918 “was openly hostile to everything Ukrainian,” etc. He demands proof, stating that these remarks “are neither the result of preceding analyses nor of specialized research of the author himself; they rely on absolutely a priori, generalized assertions...” (p. 141). Such objections make it perfectly obvious that Dmitriev has not had an opportunity to familiarize himself with the Western literature on the Ukrainian revolution, including monographs by John Reshetar himself, Yaroslav Bilinsky, Jurij Borys, Taras Hunczak, or Richard Pipes’s *The Formation of the Soviet Union*.

In many ways Dmitriev’s comments on Yaroslav Bilinsky’s article about political relations between Russians and Ukrainians in the 1970s and early 80s

are no less critical than those on Reshetar's article. Some of his critique is quite sound, as are Dmitriev's remarks on the limited data available to Sovietologists in the West and on Bilinsky's questionable attempt to find a hidden meaning in the fact that Brezhnev delivered his speech on the fiftieth anniversary of the USSR not on December 30 but a week earlier, i.e., on Stalin's birthday. Other critiques relate not so much to Bilinsky's arguments per se as to the general approach of Western political science to the national question in the USSR. In this connection Dmitriev poses a number of questions: Could Moscow's policy in the national republics be identified with Russian or pro-Russian policy? Could the Russians be considered the ruling nation in the USSR? Could the Soviet Union be called an empire?

Dmitriev tends to give negative answers to all of these questions. He strongly opposes the use of term "empire" in relation to the USSR, preferring to see in the Soviet Union "something quite unique, a phenomenon *sui generis*, whose experience, correspondingly, can hardly be forced into the scheme of traditional, so to speak, normal development, the model of which might provisionally be considered the history of the Western world" (p. 143). According to Dmitriev, neither the term "empire" nor "colonialism" can be used in relation to the USSR, because there is a significant difference between the Soviet empire (Dmitriev accepts the term here in order to make his idea more explicit) and those of Austria-Hungary and Britain. One can only observe in this respect that the differences between Austria-Hungary and the USSR were probably no greater than those between Austria-Hungary and British Empire, but this does not make the term illegitimate in relation to both of them.

Dmitriev's attempt to interpret the history of the USSR as a "phenomenon *sui generis*" reminds one of Slavophile efforts to view Russia and its empire as something completely unique. This approach was expressed most profoundly by the nineteenth-century Russian poet Tiutchev: "Not by intellect can Russia be understood, Not by a common yardstick can she be measured; She has a unique dimension—One can only believe in her." Dmitriev apparently believes in the uniqueness of the Soviet experience and even expresses the following hope in this regard: "Perhaps, indeed, the Kremlin ideologists were correct in speaking about the international character of the USSR and the 'Soviet people'?" (p. 143)

If the "Kremlin ideologists" were indeed right, then one would expect Dmitriev to account for the unexpected dissolution of the USSR, but he makes no attempt to do so. According to Dmitriev, in the eyes of the Russians and most Ukrainians "the distance between the two peoples, increasing at present, seems to be a certain historical misunderstanding" (p. 145).

The articles by James Cracraft, George Grabowicz, Bohdan Bociurkiw, Ralph Clem and Peter Woroby receive relatively little attention. Dmitriev

praises Cracraft for a “timely” “caution against exaggeration” of the Ukrainian role in the development of the baroque in Russia, and Grabowicz for describing relations between Ukrainian and Russian literature in the nineteenth century not as an encounter, but as “an historical and indissoluble embrace.” Dmitriev finds “extremely interesting” Grabowicz’s statement on the role of the Ems Ukaz as one that helped “to shift Ukrainian literature out of the provincial mode.” He praises Bohdan Bociurkiw’s article on Russian-Ukrainian church relations during the revolution and states that in the terms of religious radicalization the autocephalists in Ukraine repeated the experience of the Russian renovationists. As in the case of Dmitriev’s comments on Reshetar’s and Bilinsky’s articles, this remark shows that he has not acquainted himself with Western literature on the problem: Bociurkiw has devoted an article to the history of the renovationist movement in Ukraine.

At the beginning of these notes I divided Dmitriev’s comments into two major groups: those concerning periods on which he considers himself a specialist and those concerning which he makes no such claim. The quality of the first group of comments differs quite substantially from that of the second, but they all convey the impression that many of Dmitriev’s judgments are inspired to a great extent by his political beliefs. Fundamental to these beliefs is the idea of the “indivisibility” and common destiny of Ukraine and Russia: Dmitriev praises everything in the articles that supports this belief and argues against any statement that contradicts it. As evidenced by his concept of *Kievan Rus'*, his idea of a single Russian revolution and his view of the USSR as a unique state inhabited by the unified Soviet people, Dmitriev appears to be loyal to the conceptual schemes elaborated by Soviet historiography. His belief in the uniqueness of the Soviet experience vis-a-vis the West, his tendency to ignore Galicia when discussing social and political movements in Ukraine are also characteristic of his historical views, which have much in common with neo-Slavophile concepts and the writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. It is difficult to judge exactly how much Dmitriev’s approach to the history of Russian-Ukrainian relations—which reflects both the influence of Soviet historiography and neo-Slavophile beliefs—is representative of contemporary Russian historiography as a whole.

In his review Dmitriev supports and promotes the idea of dialogue between Russian and Ukrainian historians. He considers his review of *Ukraine and Russia...* to be a good opportunity “to understand the possible starting positions” for the dialogue to come. By presenting the views now current in the Russian historical profession he appears to have contributed to that task.