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The Origins of Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus by Serhii Plokhyy

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is transcended, it will be impossible to probe beneath the “official” version of the history of the 1956 Revolution presented by Hungary’s postsocialist state and reveal the historical roots of the tensions that lie behind the more divisive and ambiguous popular memory of the revolution among the population—a memory that was on display in the protests, and reaction to them, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of 1956 in 2006.

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R. J. CRAMPTON. *Bulgaria*. (Oxford History of Modern Europe.) New York: Oxford University Press. 2007. Pp. xxi, 507. £35.00.

R. J. Crampton is the foremost English-language scholar in the field of Bulgarian history. After meandering from Bulgarian history to produce several surveys of East European and Balkan history, he has come back to his field of origin to write a definitive survey of Bulgarian history. Crampton’s book is nothing short of a gift to scholars interested in Bulgaria, offering the most comprehensive and detailed survey to date of Bulgarian history in the English language. This volume is much more than an elaboration of Crampton’s earlier *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria* (1987). It is almost twice the length of the former and it engages much of the literature on Bulgaria that has been produced since 1987, including new avenues of analysis, and a broad and thoughtful bibliographic essay that guides the reader where to go for further reading, primarily in Bulgarian and English.

The book’s greatest strength by far is in the realm of political history. Like no other English-language source, this volume navigates the complexity of Bulgarian political history in a detailed and analytical fashion. Crampton introduces the readers to all of the most important personages and political parties in Bulgarian history, while clarifying their relations to each other, to foreign states, and to various domestic issues. Crampton ably connects politics to economic and social history as various interests and actors come into contact and conflict with political policy. Issues surrounding Bulgarian economic development, the plight of peasant and worker, and the broader field of diplomatic relations and Great Power patronage are all well developed in the course of the book. In addition, Crampton manages to give at least cursory treatment to women in Bulgaria, with a more elaborated discussion of Muslims and other minorities.

The scope and constraints of the project—to delineate all of modern Bulgarian history in some 400-plus pages—inevitably give rise to certain weaknesses. Crampton’s strategic choices in this regard tend to favor politics and secondarily economics, with a paucity of culture and broader conceptualization. I think that readers would be better enlightened with greater attention and interpretation of various larger issues: for example, the meanings and machinations of liberalism, nationalism, consumerism, and backwardness in the

Bulgarian context. Apropos to all of these questions, I would recommend a greater exploration of the Bulgarian perceptual place between East and West, beyond the rather perfunctory four-page epilogue. Broader interpretive strokes would be more useful and memorable than the exhaustive detail provided, which often requires that readers sift, analyze, and construct a bigger picture on their own.

Other pitfalls are connected with Crampton’s own empirical focus on certain issues and periods at the expense of others. The period from 1878 to 1945 represents his greatest strength, having been central to his research and writing for much of his career. Crampton’s treatment of other periods, though also satisfactory, tends to lack the same level of nuance and detail. At the risk of sounding Ottoman nostalgic, his negative view of Bulgaria’s “high price to pay” for Ottoman stability seems rather simplistic. More specifically the notions that there was an “immediate destruction of nobility” at the time of conquest and “forced conversion of Bulgarians” in the late seventeenth century are controversial, if not historically inaccurate. Most of the Bulgarian nobility survived a whole century of Ottoman rule before their total destruction. As for “forced conversions” of the late seventeenth century, the documents that “proved” such conversions have been long shown to be nineteenth-century forgeries, although there is still some controversy within Bulgarian academia on this point. The communist period, though lacking such problems, does not seem to engage many of the more interesting cultural questions that have recently enriched our understanding of that complex era. In addition to the above issues, I found a general paucity of footnotes in the text, at times frustrating when more information or analysis of a given point is sought. This of course, might have more to do with editorial restriction than Crampton’s own preference.

In spite of such reflections, in many ways as much of a wish list as critique, Crampton’s book is undoubtedly an important addition to the Anglo-American literature on Bulgarian history. In fact, of all the books in this sparse field, I would say it is the most important volume to date.

MARY NEUBURGER
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SERHII PLOKHY. *The Origins of Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2006. Pp. xix, 379. \$90.00.

In the tsarist empire and, subsequently, in the Soviet Union, it was common practice for mainstream historians to consider the East Slavs—Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians—to constitute a single, Russian-defined whole. As one might expect, Russian historians were especially persistent in propagating this view, and Western specialists in the field usually followed their lead. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and rise of independent successor states, this approach was fundamentally altered. Especially among Ukrainian histo-

rians the tendency appeared to emphasize the national and historical distinctions among the East Slavs, particularly among Ukrainians and Russians. It is a classic case of historiography adjusting to political change.

Serhii Plokhy's study of premodern East Slavic identities—that is, of the medieval roots of modern sovereignty—reflects this new historiographical trend. One should use the term “new” advisedly, however; a century ago, Mykhailo Hrushevsky set the process of distinguishing Ukrainian and Russian history in motion, but Soviet rule repressed this development. Plokhy begins by addressing the vexing question of the ethnic composition of Kyiv Rus: did it consist of one common Old Rus ethnicity, as Soviet historians argued, or of three distinct proto-Russian, proto-Ukrainian, and proto-Belarusian ethnicities? His conclusion is that in view of the fluctuating ethno-cultural identities in Kyivan Rus, attempting to establish the existence of a single Old Rus identity or three proto-national identities is no longer justified. Indeed, applying nation-based concepts to this period does more harm than good. After discussing the dissemination or translation of the Rus heritage to such geographically and culturally distant and disparate polities as Galicia-Volhynia in the west and, later, Suzdal-Vladimir in the northeast, emphasizing in the process the importance of local identity, the author concentrates on the differences that existed between those who claimed Rus identity in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and in the Grand Principality of Moscow. Plokhy argues that in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries the term Rus served as a kind of “floating identity” that was utilized by such different entities as Galicia-Volhynia, the Rus of Smolensk, and emergent Muscovy.

In dealing with the development of the Muscovite “identity-building project,” Plokhy rightly notes the relative unimportance of ethnic identity. It would, nonetheless, have been useful to attempt at least some measure of its significance during this period. He implies that centuries of Mongol domination were more important in the formation of Muscovite identity than the “rediscovery” in the fifteenth century of ties to the Kyivan heritage. This renewed interest in Kyiv was primarily a reflection of Moscow's growing power and of its need to construct a legitimizing past. It should be seen in connection with the concurrent Muscovite attempts to search for links to Byzantium and to Rome. Interestingly, Plokhy points out that it was actually the Russian historian Paul Miliukov who preceded Hrushevsky in arguing that Russians should seek their origins in the Muscovite northeast, not in Kyivan Rus.

As a distinct Ruthenian identity developed among the East Slavs under Lithuanian and Polish rule, it also drew on the Kyivan heritage. But the religious and cultural confrontation between Ruthenians and Poles meant that in terms of form and content the Ruthenian identity would be markedly different from that of the Muscovites. Indeed, when Ruthenians and Muscovites came into close contact after 1654, it was as two very distinct nationalities that had primarily Orthodoxy in

common. The inclusion of Ukrainians and Belarusians into the Russian empire led to the need to develop a “reunification paradigm,” one in whose formulation Kyivan literati played, at least at the outset, a leading role. This resulted in the redefinition of Ukraine as Little Russia and Ruthenians/Ukrainians into Little Russians. From being a distinct ethnicity, Ukrainians and Belarusians were transformed into a variant of Great Russians. Plokhy concludes his study by rejecting “primordialist” attempts to nationalize the medieval past. He does, however, hope that his study will serve to identify the premodern roots of the differences that exist among Ukrainians, Russians, and Belarusians today.

Well written and logically organized, this is a calmly but persuasively argued study. It demonstrates the author's familiarity with the traditional and the modern Western, Ukrainian, and Russian historiographies on an important topic. Moreover, Plokhy is adept, when need be, at utilizing the relevant primary sources. One might wish that in terms of methodology he had paid some attention to John Armstrong's work on nations before nationalism. And perhaps he could have been more venturesome by making some comparisons between the malleability of the Kyivan identity and that of imperial Rome in Western Europe and Byzantium. Nonetheless, this is a timely treatment of a complex and contentious topic, one that contributes greatly to our understanding of both the past and the present.

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ALEXANDER BITIS. *Russia and the Eastern Question: Army, Government, and Society, 1815–1833*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2006. Pp. xv, 542. \$120.00.

Studies of Russia's relations with the Ottoman Empire and Iran tend to focus on diplomacy, while others examine Russia's military doctrine and wartime performance. Alexander Bitis succeeds in integrating both sets of concerns into a single narrative. The period covered here saw consequential developments, including wars between Russia and both of its southern neighbors as well as the Russo-Ottoman Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi (1833), which caused exaggerated alarm in Europe, especially Britain, about Russian expansionism. Although the main interpretations presented in this book are largely in keeping with the scholarship of the past generation, the author's research in Russian as well as British archives enables him to present fresh evidence to buttress his points.

One of the book's strengths is its examination of debates among high-ranking Russian military officers about how to fight the Ottomans. The prevailing view at the highest levels was that there are rationally derived laws of warfare that apply in all settings, at all times. In contrast, some officers in Russia's Second Army, based in the southern part of the country, argued for the importance of the particular, the need to know not only specifics of geography but also the way a foe's