
The essays gathered in this volume honour Zenon E. Kohut (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 1975) on his sixtieth birthday in 2004. A renowned specialist on the history of Ukraine in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and on Ukrainian-Russian relations, he currently serves as the Director of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.


Throughout his career, he investigated Russian imperial integrationist policies, concluding that the “evolution of the Russian Empire on Western absolutist patterns may be a key to explaining the change in Russia’s policies toward Cossack Ukraine” (cited on p. 9). In his works, he traced the Russian Empire’s successful co-optation of the Ukrainian Cossack elite and this elite’s splintering into assimilationist and traditionalist camps. The latter group sought to reconcile their local interests with imperial ones, as Mark Von Hagen’s excellent assessment of the Pavlo Skoropadsky’s career demonstrates.

Most of the contributors to this volume are historians, hailing from Austria, Canada, Poland, Ukraine, and the United States. Most deal with the early modern and modern periods of Ukrainian history. Of the twenty-three essays in this volume, only eight treat periods before the nineteenth century, Dr. Kohut’s period of expertise. The techniques the authors adopted vary enormously, ranging from short narratives of familiar and unfamiliar events to long interpretative essays. Volodymyr Kravchenko’s perceptive assessment of Kohut’s intellectual biography and Taras Kurylo’s thorough bibliography of his works round out this collection.

For some unexplained reason, however, the editors organized the essays in this collection in alphabetical order by author. Had they placed them in chronological or thematic order, readers might have perceived them as part of a seamless whole. Despite this organizational problem, the overall standard in this volume remains very high.
Although it is difficult to assess each contribution separately in this short review, a small number possess a common theme, the issue of unintended consequences. First systematized by the sociologist Robert K. Merton in 1936, this theory asserts that people and governments often initiate purposeful actions, which produce unanticipated and often undesirable results.

Not surprisingly, the most interesting essays dealing with the issue of unplanned aftereffects (written by Olga Andriewsky, Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, Volodymyr Kravchenko, Orest Pelech, Alfred J. Rieber, and David Saunders) encompass the nineteenth century. In this critically-important century, the predominantly rural-based Ukrainians encountered modern and industrial environments, which demanded standardization and homogeneity. But the cities and universities—the most radical agents of change—engendered the very opposite, which encouraged the younger generation of Ukrainians to experiment with new identities, leading many to separate themselves from the Poles and Russians.

Andriewsky’s article, for example, traced the evolution of a distinct Ukrainian youth culture at the end of the nineteenth century as an unintentional consequence of the Russian government’s expansion of institutions of higher education during a major demographic explosion in the Ukrainian countryside. Despite the government’s efforts to educate and to integrate these students into a single, imperial ethos, they failed. These alienated students from “Little Russia” became radicalized, helped undermine the unity of the Russian Empire, and formed the leadership of the Ukrainian revolutionary movement in 1917.

Bohachevsky-Chomiak’s short article, based on tsarist police records in Polish archives, discussed how a small number of peasants at the end of the nineteenth century expressed their critical views of the tsar, experienced arrest, subsequent interrogation, isolation and punishment. This repressive process, however, did not stamp out critical thinking. Instead, the “more vigilant the police, the quicker the politicization of their charges,” she concludes (p. 45).

Pelech analyzed the history of the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius within the framework of its members’ professional careers and Russia’s internal politics in the 1840s. He convincingly argued that S. S. Uvarov, the Minister of Popular Enlightenment, created the University of Kyiv in 1834 in order to limit Polish influence in Right-Bank Ukraine. Enthused by this project, two of Uvarov’s hand-picked professors, Panteleimon Kulish and Mykola Kostomarov, discovered an alternative to the master narrative of Russian history. After their arrests in 1847 and release in 1858, Kulish and especially Kostomarov pursued this alternative paradigm of East Slavic history for the rest of their lives. Imprisonment, exile, harassment, and censorship did not suppress this alternative master narrative of Ukraine (p. 344), which became the cornerstone of the modern Ukrainian identity.

Rieber’s contribution focused on the controversy over the construction of a southern railroad that would link the central black-earth agricultural region, the main cities of Ukraine, and the economic regions of Little Russia and New Russia with the ports on the Black Sea. The author skillfully traced and examined the evolution, in the early 1860s, of the public debate over the issue of how to finance this railway and where to build it. Although both antagonists sought to integrate the Ukrainian provinces more closely to the Russian Empire, over the long run the ineptly managed railroads could not maintain the critical links between the empire’s grain-producing and grain-consuming areas, especially during the strain of the First World War. Intended to consolidate the empire’s far-flung regions, this railroad contributed to its collapse in March 1917.
In his assessment of Russia's Ukrainian policies from the middle of the nineteenth century to the Second World War, David Saunders clarified tsarist and Soviet long-term hostility toward nationally-conscious Ukrainians by concentrating on a tsarist memorandum written on the eve of the anti-Ukrainian edict of 1876. This document pointed out that "the Little Russians" made up 17.5 percent of the Imperial Russian population, second only to the Russian population. According to Saunders, official Russian hostility to Ukrainian culture in the late nineteenth century expressed the tsarist fears that Ukrainian native-language primary education would turn the populous "Little Russians" against the Russians and that this antagonism would undermine the stability of the tsarist order (p. 410). The Ukrainians maintained their demographic weight throughout the Soviet period as well and Stalin and his successors, aware of their demographic size, sought to discourage a greater Ukrainian self-awareness or assertiveness.

The population explosion at the end of the nineteenth century (which Andriewsky first described) produced unintended consequences over the long run. On the one hand, it strengthened the demographic weight of the Ukrainians in the Ukrainian provinces and within the Russian Empire/USSR and encouraged a mass Ukrainian national movement (as she implied in her essay). On the other hand, this demographic upsurge brought severe reprisals.

These five excellent essays dealing with the issue of unintended consequences represent only a small part of this intellectually stimulating festschrift, which contains many more thought-provoking essays. Successfully organized and edited by Serhii Plokhy and Frank Sysyn, this collection describes and analyzes the paradoxes of change, the elliptical nature of history, and the role of historical accidents and human contingency in the history of Ukraine in a masterful way.

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