

## Book Reviews

Mykhailo Hrushevsky. *History of Ukraine-Rus'*. Vol. 7. *The Cossack Age to 1625*. Translated by Bohdan Strumiński. Edited by Frank E. Sysyn and Serhii Plokyh with the assistance of Uliana M. Pasicznyk. Introduction by Serhii Plokyh. Edmonton and Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1999. lxvi, 548 pp.

Mykhailo Hrushevsky was, without a doubt, one of the most important Ukrainians of the twentieth century. Not only was he the foremost leader of the pre-revolutionary Ukrainian national movement and the first president of the briefly lived Ukrainian state of 1917-18, but he was also Ukraine's outstanding historian and organizer of scholarship. His ten-volume *History of Ukraine-Rus'*, which charted Ukrainian history from ancient times to the mid-seventeenth century, remains a landmark of modern Ukrainian national consciousness. With its clear conceptualization of the Ukrainian national historical process that extended across the centuries, its wealth of detail, and its critical analysis of the sources on almost every one of its thousands of pages, the work remains an unsurpassed monument of historical scholarship a century and more after the author first put pen to paper.

The specific volume under review, *The Cossack Age to 1625*, is particularly significant in so far as it initiates a kind of sub-series within the general framework; this sub-series is devoted to the history of Ukrainian national life during the Cossack age, which began at the close of the fifteenth century and extended into the eighteenth century, past the end of Hrushevsky's narrative, which broke off in the mid-seventeenth century. Hrushevsky saw the Cossack age as the third period of Ukrainian national history, being preceded by the periods of Kyivan Rus' and the Lithuanian ascendancy. He wished to continue his narrative further into modern times, but the stormy political climate of his day took a heavy toll upon both his academic and personal life; his contribution to the historiography of these latter times was limited to survey histories and specialist studies of individual topics, although these were very abundant indeed.

The topics addressed in volume seven include the origin of the Ukrainian Cossacks, the struggle between the Cossacks and the Turks and Tatars to the south of settled Ukraine, the first Cossack revolts or wars against the gentry-centred political and social system of the Polish-Lithuanian state (translated in this volume somewhat awkwardly, for some unknown reason, as the "nobiliary system"), the Cossacks' alliance with the Orthodox Church and its subsequent influence upon Ukrainian national life, and, finally, the Cossacks' role in relations between the Polish-Lithuanian state (called the "Commonwealth" after 1569) and the Ottoman Empire and its dependent states.

With regard to Cossack origins, Hrushevsky took a boldly independent position, rejecting earlier theories that traced their roots to either Kyivan Rus' or to foreign, primarily Circassian or Tatar, influences. Instead Hrushevsky saw the Cossacks as a somewhat unique Ukrainian phenomenon that had its origins in the existence of the frontier zone, the no man's land between Christian Poland-Lithuania and the lands of Islam represented by the Ottoman Empire and its client Crimean Khanate. Indeed, this frontier zone, it is generally believed, is the origin of the very name "Ukraina" (borderland).

To this frontier fled thousands of poor, oppressed Ukrainian peasants (and sometimes townfolk and noblemen) from the more heavily populated lands of what is today western and northern Ukraine. Hrushevsky rejected the thesis that certain Polish nobles had sponsored the first organization of this settlement to the east, and he preferred to think of it as being primarily a spontaneous popular development to which certain Ukrainian princely families contributed only occasionally. The nobleman to whom Hrushevsky gave most attention was Prince Dmytro Vyshnevetsky (1516-63), who enjoyed a high reputation in Ukrainian historiography as being a precursor or even early founder of the Zaporozhian Cossack Sich, the fortified headquarters on the lower Dniro River. Since Hrushevsky's time, new Ottoman documents describing Vyshnevetsky's death have been discovered; they clarify somewhat his political activities and strengthen his association with the famous "Baida" Vyshnevetsky of Ukrainian Cossack legend.

The first Cossack revolts against the Polish-Lithuanian authorities were traditionally seen in both Polish and Ukrainian historiography as a reflection of an age-old religious conflict—the confrontation of Orthodox Rus' and Catholic Poland. Hrushevsky, however, clearly demonstrated that these first revolts were not against Catholic domination, but rather against the gentry- or prince-dominated social system of the Commonwealth. Indeed, the first revolt, which was led by the Cossack adventurer Krystof Kosynsky (d. 1593), was directed against a pillar of Ukrainian Orthodoxy, the mighty Prince Kostiantyn Ostrozky (c.1526-1608), who owned vast estates in the important Ukrainian province of Volynia.

The latter parts of the volume under review deal with the re-establishment of the formerly suppressed Orthodox hierarchy under the protection of Hetman Petro Sahaidachny (d. 1622) and with the ambiguous and unstable position of the Cossacks as the unrewarded occasional defenders of the Commonwealth against the Turks and Tatars. The re-establishment of the Orthodox hierarchy and the protection of the Orthodox Church by the Cossacks made possible the flowering of Ruthenian Orthodox culture, which Hrushevsky interpreted as being one manifestation of a much longer Ukrainian national tradition. Cossack military aid with Sahaidachny in the lead made possible the defeat of a great Turkish invasion force at Khotyn in 1621. This victory symbolized the military success of the Commonwealth during the first half of the seventeenth century. But the Cossacks got little reward for their effort and the problem of their unrecognized social and political status grew steadily more serious until the final outbreak of the Khmelnytsky revolt of 1648.

Perhaps one of the most revealing parts of the book is Hrushevsky's citation and discussion of the "Protestation" of the Orthodox bishops to the Polish government in 1621. In this document the hierarchy rejected the claim of some Poles that the Orthodox clergy had incited the Cossacks to disobedience. The bishops stressed the innate Christian

origins of the Cossacks, their old Ukrainian lineage, and their honourable role in the defence of Christendom from the Turks and Tatars. So interesting and so important did Hrushevsky find this "Protestation," which drew parallels between the ancient Varangian attacks on Byzantium and the contemporary Cossack raids on Istanbul and stressed the liberation of Christian slaves (especially galley slaves) in the Islamic world, that he quoted part of it as a kind of extended epigraph to the entire volume. Indeed, this quotation seems to underline and embody the general continuity of Ukrainian national history from Kyivan Rus' through the Cossack period, which is Hrushevsky's general thesis. We can do no better than to quote it again here:

As for the Cossacks, we know that these military men are our own kin, our brothers, and Christians of the true faith.... For this is the tribe of the glorious Ruthenian nation, born of Japheth's seed, that campaigned against the Greek Empire across the sea and overland. It is the best of the generation that under Oleh [Oleg], the monarch of Rus', traveled in its dugouts overland [putting boats on wheels—M.H.] and sea and stormed Constantinople. It was they who, under Volodymyr, the holy monarch of Rus', campaigned against Greece, Macedonia, and Illyria. It was their ancestors who were baptized together with Volodymyr and accepted the Christian faith from the Church of Constantinople, and are born and baptized and live their lives in that faith today. They live not as pagans, but as Christians.... When they go to sea, they first pray, stating that they are going against the infidel for the Christian faith. They set the liberation of prisoners as their second goal.... To save their souls they redeem prisoners.... It is certain that no one in the world, except God, renders as much benefit to enslaved Christianity as do the Greeks with their ransoms, the Spanish king with his strong fleet, and the Zaporozhian Host with its courage and victories.... It is God who placed the Tatars on earth like lightning bolts and thunder to afflict and punish the Christians with them. Similarly He has placed the Cossacks of the Lower Dnipro region, the Zaporozhian Cossacks and the Don Cossacks, like the other lightning bolts and thunder on sea and land, to frighten and rout the infidel Turks and Tatars with them. (pp. 305–7)

Could there possibly be a more succinct characterization of the early period of Ukrainian Cossack history than this? The identification of the Cossacks with the Ukrainian past and with Orthodox Christianity, and the struggle between Christianity and Islam, between Cossack and Tatar, are all there. Even the internal tensions of the Commonwealth are alluded to in the purpose of this protestation. Only the social conflicts are passed over in silence. Hrushevsky examined them in detail in his preceding and subsequent analytic discussions of the early history of the Ukrainian Cossacks, and, it should be emphasized, in these same discussions he qualified, limited, and further explained both the religious questions and the general continuities of Ukrainian history from Kyivan Rus' to Cossack times. As mentioned above, in spite of his general continuity thesis, Hrushevsky basically saw the Cossack phenomenon as a *sui generis* process.

Indeed, the great value of Hrushevsky's history lies in this critical analysis of events, sources, and literature. Although weak as a narrator, Hrushevsky shines as an analyst, carefully picking apart the most complex and potentially misleading sources and interpretations, even the important one quoted at length here. Add to this the critical

discussions of the work of previous historians in his lengthy appendices, and we have a true masterpiece of Ukrainian historical literature.

With regard to the translation and the editing of the volume, it can be said that the present English-language edition improves considerably over the Ukrainian original. So far as I can tell (and here I admit that I am not a native speaker of the Ukrainian language), this translation reads more smoothly and more easily than the difficult original. Where necessary, the notes and appendices have been expanded to take account of the secondary literature and the few sources published since Hrushevsky's time, and a full bibliography of sources and studies used by Hrushevsky has been added. The volume also includes a very useful and well-informed introduction by Serhii Plokhly and a full index. The dust jacket is attractive, and the general design is solid and respectable. Only a series of historical illustrations with captions emphasizing some of the more important points made in the text (as, for example, was done in Bury's illustrated edition of Gibbon, or W.H. McNeill's world history) is missing. But this, it must be admitted, is a counsel of perfection. The translator, publisher, and editors can be justly proud of their achievement thus far, and seem to be doing justice to "the *magnum opus* of a great scholar."

Thomas M. Prymak  
Toronto