

### **An Old-New Look at Cossacks and Jews in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century**

Mykhailo Hrushevsky, *History of Ukraine-Rus', The Cossack Age 1626 – 1650*, Volume eight, Translated by Marta Daria Olynyk, Edited by Frank E. Sysyn with the assistance of Myroslav Yurkevich, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, Edmonton/Toronto, 2002, 808 pp., Glossary + maps.

Hrushevsky's history of Ukraine-Rus' has a well-deserved reputation as the best multivolume study of the Ukrainian past. Hrushevsky himself was a fascinating personality. He graduated from the university in Kyiv and devoted himself to the history of Ukraine. The anti-Ukrainian policies of the tsarist regime led him to accept a position at the university of Lviv (then in the Austro Hungarian Empire). After the collapse of the Czarist Empire, he left the study of history in order to make history and for a short while he led the independent Ukrainian state. His worldwide renown led him to think he would be safe accepting a position at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences under the Bolshevik regime. This was a mistake. Despite all of the conditions in which Hrushevsky lived, he worked continuously on his history. Ultimately ten volumes were published. A manuscript existed of an eleventh volume but it apparently has been lost.

Given the role Hrushevsky played in studies of the Ukrainian past, his history can justifiably be considered a monument of Ukrainian historiography. This alone is a good enough reason to make this book worthy of serious attention. An additional reason is that since that time, nothing has been written that surpasses either the scope or the detail of this book in dealing with this crucial period in the seventeenth century. This was a critical period in the formation of the Ukrainian national ethos. It was also a time of great disruption and tragedy for the Jews of Ukraine because in 1648-1650 much of Ukrainian Jewry was destroyed in the course of the uprising of Khmelnytsky. This is by far the best book in Ukrainian on the period and of course, there nothing else in English that even comes near it.

However, this edition is far more than simply a translation of a classic study published in 1913-1922 even though there is great benefit in having a classic Ukrainian history available for English speaking readers. In addition to the editorial preface which discusses the complicated history of how this book came to be written, and the complex translation issue that came up - and was solved, there is also a long, detailed - and fascinating analysis, written by Frank Sysyn, of what Hrushevsky did in his book and the reactions of other historians to his work. But this is also not all. The text of the book, with Hrushevsky's footnotes, ends on p. 654. The editors devoted the next 60 pages to notes. These notes include detailed survey of all the source literature relevant to the topics Hrushevsky dealt with and subsequent historical writing on these topics. The editors are too modest to say so but what they have done in effect is to update Hrushevsky's study and taken into account historical writing up to about 1998. In other words, not only is this the most authoritative account of the events of 1626 - 1650, it is also the most up to date account.

This volume is essential reading for any study of the history of the Jews in the early modern period and it goes without saying that it belongs in every serious library that deals with the topic. Most readers interested in Jewish history will probably concentrate on Hrushevsky's discussion of the fate of the Jews during the Khmelnytsky uprising. As Joel Raba notes, (*Between Remembrance and Denial* [Boulder Colorado, 1995] p. 298] while Hrushevsky describes the killing of Jews and does not ignore the mass destruction, "there is no condemnation of these murders and atrocities, neither is there a justification for them." This is of course exactly what we would expect of a work of historical research as opposed to a political or moral tract. It should be remembered that in his public life, Hrushevsky did not ignore the question of the role of Jews in Ukraine. As Sysyn points out (on p. lxxv) "Hrushevsky had spoken out against the pogroms of the 1880's, called for the abolition of the Pale of Settlement and civil restrictions on Jews in 1906, denounced the Beilis blood-libel trial of 1913 and spoke out against anti-Semitism during the period of the Central Rada." He felt that with reform and enlightenment, popular anti-Semitism would wane. In his book, Hrushevsky cites Nathan of Hanover and Shabtai Cohen, along with Polish and Ukrainian sources. He devotes a detailed discussion (pp. 349-355) to the question as to whether Jews leased churches - a claim which at the time was a very sensitive one. Hrushevsky's conclusion is that there is no documentary evidence for this even though in his words this claim is "well established among the arguments of this historical anti-Semitism."

This is a book about which one can say, in the words of the old Yiddish joke, it is "fartaytcht un farbessert" – translated and improved. I think that Hrushevsky would have been pleased with this edition. His magnum opus has maintained its place for the last eighty years. This new updated English edition will probably be the standard work on the topic for at least as long.

*Shaul Stampfer*