

Gente Rutheni, Nazione Poloni: The Ruthenians of Polish Nationality in Habsburg Galicia. By Adam Świątek. Translated by Guy Russell Torr. Peter Jacyk Centre for Ukrainian Historical Research Monograph Series, volume 9. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2019. Pp. 634. \$39.95.

In the nineteenth century, submerged nations began to emerge. Czech speakers began to differentiate themselves from German speakers in Bohemia. Slovaks appeared and codified their language in Hungary. The peripheral nations of the British Isles began to invent their traditions and rediscover their ancient tongues. Among the emerging submerged was a Slavic-speaking people split between two empires, the Habsburg monarchy and tsarist Russia. Those in Austria were officially categorized as “Ruthenians,” while those in Russia were designated “Little Russians.” By the turn of the twentieth century, most activists of this nationality were confident that they were Ukrainians.

Before the Ukrainians became Ukrainians (and not all of them did), there was considerable vacillation. The book under review treats Ukrainians/Ruthenians in the Austrian crown land of Galicia who considered themselves Poles by nationality. And there is a book coming out from Cornell University Press by Fabian Baumann that explores Ukrainians, based in Kyiv, who chose to become Russian nationalists.

There were social conditions that help explain these outcomes. Before the spread of universal education, which was initiated in Austrian Galicia in the late 1860s and was never fully realized in imperial Russia, and before the consolidation of a Ukrainian national culture and national movement, which happened much faster in Galicia than in Russia, Ukrainians who received a higher education could only function intellectually and publicly in the languages in which they were educated—German and Polish in the case of Galicians and Russian in the case of Ukrainians under Russian rule. Most Ukrainians were peasants, in fact serfs until the mid-nineteenth century, but some Ukrainians were representatives of the elite—landowners, officials, artists and writers, and clergy. This elite necessarily functioned in the Austro-German, Polish, and Russian cultural and social spheres. Indicatively, many of the Ruthenians of the Habsburg monarchy found it difficult to imagine that they could have their own fully developed literary language and therefore chose to write in a language based on Russian.

Another factor that led to the assimilation of Ukrainians to other national cultures was urbanization. If they settled in Vienna, they became Austro-Germans. Lviv, the capital of Galicia, was Polish speaking; Kyiv spoke Polish and Russian; Odesa and Kharkiv spoke Russian. Moving to the city meant shedding, to a greater or lesser degree, one’s original way of speaking as well as many customs more suited to the countryside than to the city.

The topic of Adam Świątek’s monograph is ethnic Ukrainians in Galicia who retained a consciousness of their Ukrainian ethnicity but considered themselves to be members of the Polish nation. These are the *gente Rutheni, nazione Poloni* of the title (hereafter GRNP). After an introduction that carefully explains the chronological and geographical parameters, terminology, the volume’s structure, the source base, and the secondary literature, the book proceeds through eight chapters: (1) the definition and formation of the GRNP, (2) the place of Rus’ (the territory where Ruthenians lived) in Polish historical consciousness, (3) the impact of the Romantic movement, (4) the revolutions of 1848, (5) the absolutist period following the revolution, (6) the Polish “January uprising” of 1863–64, (7) the period of Galician autonomy, which began in the late 1860s and put the GRNP “in power,” and (8) the series of public commemorations in which the presence of the GRNP was prominent, including the funerals of the GRNP. There follow conclusions, a bibliography, and indexes.

A feature of the narrative are the many well-chosen quotations from diaries, literature, and other texts that convey the feeling of the epoch. Throughout are valuable insights, such as that the disappearance of the Polish state at the end of the eighteenth century “resulted in a situation whereby the question of nationality ceased to be an obvious one” (59). Now state and nationality were separate concepts, and the GRNP were one of the groups trying to navigate this new sea. The historical demise of the GRNP was a result of the development of a Ruthenian/Ukrainian national movement. With that, the space for a division between ethnicity and national loyalty began to close. The heyday of the GRNP was the 1830s–70s. Then it was all downhill. The appearance of political conflict between Poles and Ruthenians, first heralded in 1848 and accelerating after the 1860s, made it almost impossible for the ethnic Ukrainian elite to consider themselves both Ukrainians and Poles at the same time. Świątek suggests that the end of life of the GRNP movement came with the death of one of its foremost representatives, the poet Platon Kostecki, in 1908 (536). Kostecki is only one of the truly illustrious figures among the GRNP that are profiled in this book. Another is Paulin Świecicki, who, like Kostecki, succeeded in making significant contributions to both Ukrainian and Polish culture (402–6).

Sometimes the historiography on Ukraine and Ukrainians has started from the premise of primordiality, that the Ukrainian nation as it was codified in the late nineteenth century had always existed and therefore its history can be read backward to earliest times. This is essentially a defensive position, because once the empires collapsed in 1917–18 there were intense conflicts with Poles and Russians, sometimes resulting in horrific bloodshed. This view sees the Ukrainian nation as always in struggle to assert itself against Polish and Russian domination. According to Świątek “such thinking is in line with the spirit of historical determinism” (21). The determinist view is not universal among historians of the Ukrainians. A number of them have explored past loyalties to the Polish or Russian nation or state. They include Frank E. Sysyn, who wrote the preface to this book and himself wrote a book on an early modern representative of the GRNP, as well as Paul R. Magocsi, Marian Mudryi, Ostap Sereda, Anna Veronika Wendland, and the undersigned. But Świątek’s book on the GRNP is really new. What used to look like a marginal group, worth a few sentences now and then, at present has a detailed monograph behind it that reveals a history as unknown as it is complex and fascinating.

This is definitely an excellent book. But what book is without its shortcomings? In my opinion, the most significant of these is the failure to place the GRNP within Habsburg history and historiography. Galicia was in the Habsburg monarchy. One of the hallmarks of modern Habsburg historiography, especially in North America, is that it has been constantly undermining the kind of national determinism that Świątek himself opposes. I think of the work especially of Jeremy King, but also of Gary B. Cohen, Pieter Judson, and Tara Zahra.

There is also a strange moment in the text when Świątek presents Teofil Merunowicz, a leading spokesman of the GRNP movement, as rather philosemitic (456–57). But other historians, including Yaroslav Hrytsak, Maciej Janowski, Theodore R. Weeks, and Andrzej Żbikowski, consider him a programmatic antisemite. Certainly his treatise *Żydzi* (Jews), published in Lviv in 1879, confirms the view of the latter historians. Another minor error concerns the organization Rus’ka Besida. This was a largely urban phenomenon, with its main center in Lviv, and therefore not—as written on page 90—an influence on the peasantry. Świątek probably had in mind another organization: Prosvita.

The book is clearly narrated, making for a pleasant read. The translation is readable, though not flawless.

Overall, this is a book to be recommended to historians of East Central Europe and Ukraine. It is a study that enriches Ukrainian historiography, especially the historiography

available to readers of English. There is nothing simple about Ukrainian history, and this monograph is yet another proof of that fact.

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