

# Leonid Heretz, translator. History of Ukraine-Rus': Economic, Cultural, and National Life in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries. By Mykhailo Hrushevsky

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**Leonid Heretz, translator. *History of Ukraine-Rus': Economic, Cultural, and National Life in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries.*** By Mykhailo Hrushevsky, Myron M. Kapral, consulting editor and with an introduction, Frank E. Sysyn, editor-in-chief, with the assistance of Uliana M. Pasicznyk, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies P, 2012. Vol. 6 of *History of Ukraine-Rus'*, 10 vols. in 12 bks., 1997–2021. lxxii, 624 pp. Illustrations. Glossary. Maps. Additions to the Notes. Bibliography. Appendices. Tables of Hetmans and Rulers. Translations Consulted. Index. \$119.95, cloth.

**V**olume 6 of Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi's (Hrushevsky's) monumental *History of Ukraine-Rus'* is the concluding tome of a three-volume series (volumes 4, 5, and 6) dedicated to the Lithuanian-Polish epoch of the history of the Ukrainian people. Volumes 1 to 3 of Hrushevs'kyi's *History*, together, address the period ending with the fall of Kyivan Rus' and the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia, while the tomes after volume 6 deal with the early stages of the Cossack period and the (re-)establishment of Ukrainian sovereignty in the form of the Cossack Hetmanate. Hrushevs'kyi's conceptualization of the "history of the Ukrainian people" can be seen as one of his most important contributions to Eastern European historiography. In his work, we encounter the study of the Ukrainian people as a whole—as opposed to the study of various distinct entities located within a number of neighbouring states (Poland; the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; Hungary and then Austria-Hungary; Muscovy and then Russia; and so on). Hrushevs'kyi conceived of a fundamental unity permeating the history of the Ukrainian people from the time of Rus' all the way to the goal and apogee of the historian-cum-politician—the re-establishment of a unified and independent Ukraine in the twentieth century (a project that Hrushevs'kyi himself took part in, both in its glorious beginnings and in its heartbreaking failures).

In setting down a thesis on the continuity of the history of the Ukrainian people, Hrushevs'kyi provided subsequent generations of students of Ukrainian history with an essentially anti-statist methodological framework that allowed them to explore a subject area not merely reduced to a political history of a state with precisely delineated political borders. Such theoretical innovation and foresight have secured Hrushevs'kyi's high stature in the field of history—and especially in the study of Ukrainian cultural history. Mention should also be made of Hrushevs'kyi's importance in the study of the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (PLC) as a whole. By creating a model that includes the dwellers of the Brest and Pinsk regions of what is now Belarus within a definition of the Ukrainian people and that thoroughly documents them, Hrushevs'kyi has indirectly given us a paradigm for conducting cross-cultural and cross-national research that aims to

reconstruct the histories and cultures of early modern polities that no longer exist (such as the PLC).

I would be cautious about ascribing too many prophetic ideas to Hrushevs'kyi, and I do not wish to sound as though I am writing a panegyric rather than a review. At the same time, the structurally and methodologically innovative ideas that Hrushevs'kyi introduced and propagated have over the past century provided us with a way of writing not only histories of Ukraine but, in the wake of the Holodomor and the exile of Ukrainians worldwide, also truly global histories of the Ukrainian people and diaspora that are not constrained by issues of politics or state. In this respect, the publication of the complete English-language translation of *History of Ukraine-Rus'* is both a welcome event and, even more, a timely necessity, given that global histories are in great demand.

Leonid Heretz has crafted a lucid translation of Hrushevs'kyi's rather complex prose. His own research deals with popular religion in the Eastern European countryside, and this is a significant fact. The translator's knowledge of peasant culture and economy has definitely made him sensitive to the content of this tome, which has many complexities and nuances that could be easily missed in an English rendering. The book has also benefited greatly from the editorial work of both the consulting editor, Myron M. Kapral, and the editor-in-chief, Frank E. Sysyn, as well as from the skilful editorial assistance of Uliana M. Pasicznyk. It is impractical within the space of this short review to mention everyone who contributed to the success of the volume. The editorial preface to the volume (xix-xxvi) provides such acknowledgement (see xxvi). Furthermore, it reminds us that these types of undertakings resemble the making of a movie—with many moving parts assigned to various specialists. Like a well-made film, the text proceeds clearly and uniformly. And ultimately, it conforms to Hrushevs'kyi's overarching theoretical vision for his work, which is unfurled throughout ten volumes.

Hrushevs'kyi has divided volume 6 into six chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 explore economic issues—see “Economic Life: Trade and Urban Manufacture” (1–108) and “The Rural Economy” (109–84). It is important to keep in mind that while Hrushevs'kyi the politician may have had little sympathy for the pre-Cossack period of Ukrainian history, Hrushevs'kyi the historian—the one subscribing to positivist and, to some extent, Marxist readings of history—saw political, economic, and cultural developments during this period as absolute determinants setting Ukraine on a path that required rectification through a corresponding set of specific actions in these areas—with the independence of the country being the requisite and immediate priority. In this sense, *History of Ukraine-Rus'* is a preface to the political action that drove the larger *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Hrushevs'kyi's life.

This volume's two chapters on economy form a highly eloquent and well-documented critique of Polish historians' claims that the incorporation of Ukrainian lands provided these territories with access to the Western markets (or made them equal participants in, and beneficiaries of, Western cultural and religious life). Hrushevs'kyi's findings suggest that the exploitation of natural resources was accompanied by policies restricting the direct access of the Ukrainian economy to the markets—a scenario that is familiar to scholars in post-colonial studies. (We read, for example, how restrictions caused by a system of compulsory roads and stations “reduced traffic to a minimum, choking the spirit of free competition that could give life to industry and trade” [56]). The resultant economic stagnation prompted a shift from urban to rural life, which affected the Ukrainian cultural context in ways that were still very much in effect when Hrushevs'kyi wrote volume 6 of his *History*. (The same pattern has been observed in the former territories of the PLC that were incorporated into the Russian Empire. The Belarusian, Lithuanian, and Latvian lands each experienced a similar dichotomy of rural versus urban society, and they each knew differing levels of representation within these two spheres). Furthermore, Hrushevs'kyi's emphasis on the specifics of the rural economy reflects the basic nature of Austro-Hungarian economic and cultural policies of his day. These policies affected Galicia and other areas of the Dual Monarchy—this state heavily favoured the (industrial) development of its multi-ethnic society and not the propagation of rural crafts-and-trade economies, which tended to support ethnocentric and nationalist politics that drove the country apart. Thus, Hrushevs'kyi was not only assembling a history of the Ukrainian people of the past but also constructing an argument for socio-political solutions for the present day and for the future.

The four subsequent chapters in this volume closely examine various social consequences of the economic environment of early modern Ukraine under Polish-Lithuanian rule—see chapter 3, “Cultural and National Relations: The Population's National Composition and National Elements” (185–230); chapter 4, “Everyday Life and Culture” (231–320); chapter 5, “The Cultural and Religio-National Movement in Ukraine in the Sixteenth Century” (321–416); and chapter 6, “The Struggle for and against the Union after Its Declaration—in Life and in Literature” (417–64). In these chapters, Hrushevs'kyi continues his narrative with a methodical dissection, careful assessment, and occasional condemnation of each of the policies that led to the weakening or outright ruination of cultural life, economy, and the Ukrainian ethnic presence either in parts of the country (such as in urban society) or within entire classes (for instance, among the nobility). Hrushevs'kyi is very aware of the regional specificities of these processes, and so these chapters avoid presenting sweeping, generalized discussions of

such phenomena within the PLC. The historian carefully handles the particularities that set the region of western Ukraine (Galicia) apart from other Ukrainian lands and the Belarusian territories in the state.

The reader could become overwhelmed by the exhaustive nature and sheer volume of research offered and generated by Hrushevs'kyi within the relatively short space of these six chapters. But Kapral's succinct and simply superb introduction to volume 6 (see "The 'Transitional Period': Hrushevsky's Interpretation of the Lithuanian-Polish Era in Ukrainian History" [xxvii–lix]) outlines and explains the subject matter in a way that allows anyone (student or scholar) to make sense of the dense chapters. Also, the editorial additions following each of Hrushevs'ky's original bibliographic end essays (see "Notes" [465–508]) are essential and very helpful: they provide information about the scholarship that came out on the respective topics after the publication of the original volume in 1907.

From an overall and specialized perspective, the Hrushevsky Translation Project, and volume 6 in particular, have great value, as they introduce English-speaking readers to information and materials that for decades would have been accessible to them only if they had attained a high degree of proficiency in the Ukrainian language (a rare occurrence even today in the West). The importance of Hrushevs'kyi's work not only for the study of Ukrainian history but also for historiography overall necessitated making the historian's magnum opus accessible to readers not possessing such language skills. With Hrushevs'kyi's *History of Ukraine-Rus'* set now available to a wider audience (especially to scholars at the start of their academic careers), the material that it contains carries tremendous potential for interdisciplinary studies—in keeping with the multifarious and diversified environment of contemporary scholarship.

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#### Work Cited

Hrushevsky, Mykhailo. *History of Ukraine-Rus'*. Frank E. Sysyn, editor-in-chief, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies P, 1997–2021. 10 vols. in 12 bks.