



Orest Subtelny, circa 2010.

## OREST SUBTELNY AS HISTORIAN

### PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS AND PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

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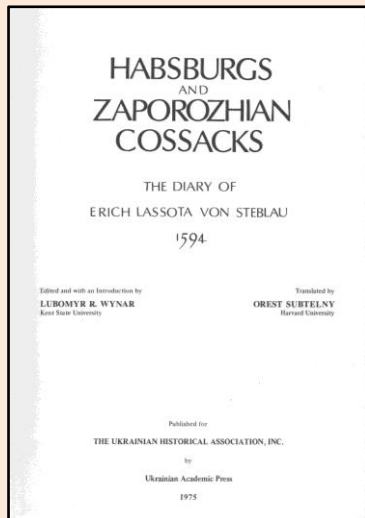
I do not recall my first meeting with Orest Subtelny, but it was some time in the late 1970s. I knew little about him, other than the fact that he had been a student at Harvard of Omeljan Pritsak, who was an Orientalist specializing in the history of the Turkic peoples of the steppe regions of Europe and Central Asia, and to a lesser extent of the Ottoman Empire. But Pritsak was also known for his expertise in Ukrainian history, and Subtelny, like myself, seemed to be more interested in Ukraine than in Central Asia. Moreover, prior to going to Harvard, Subtelny had studied in Pennsylvania with Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytsky, who was a specialist in political thought and modern Ukrainian history.<sup>1</sup>

By that time, I was already acquainted with Subtelny's first two books. Neither of them was a narrative history, and neither had anything to do with the Turks. But both revealed a serious interest in Ukrainian history and its sources, and both publicized previously little-known sources for the history of the Ukrainian Cossacks, which appeared to be his main interest. Moreover, both of these books revealed Subtelny as a master of a number of European languages in a way that was unusual in a young historian coming from the United States, where fluency in several languages is a rarity, even among scholars.

In fact, however, as I soon learned, Subtelny was not actually born in the USA, but rather had been born and spent his early years in Europe, first in Western Ukraine and Poland, and then in Germany, where he went to school and learned the German language. It was not long, though,

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<sup>1</sup> To date, the most extensive account of Subtelny as historian was by Volodymyr Kravchenko, a scholar at the University of Alberta specializing in Ukrainian historiography and culture: "Orest Subtelny (1941-2016)," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, LVIII, 4 (2016), 316-20, which is a brief obituary. Also see Ron Csillag, "Historian Orest Subtelny Gave Ukrainians their Own History," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), August 21, 2016; updated May 16, 2018, on-line at: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/historian-orest-subtelny-gave-ukrainians-their-own-history/article31483472/> This second obituary contains extracts from interviews with Subtelny's wife, Maria, and colleagues Jurij Darewych of York University in Toronto, who is a Ukrainian community activist, and historian Volodymyr Kravchenko. At this point, it is fitting to acknowledge the financial support of the Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre, Toronto, which made this study possible. Revised version, May, 2020.



that together with his parents, he emigrated from Germany to the USA, so that he received all of his higher education in American institutions and spoke English without any foreign accent.

The first of those two books that I knew about was titled *Habsburgs and Zaporozhian Cossacks: The Diary of Erich Lassota von Steblau 1594*, and it aroused my interest because in those days there were so very few books in English about the Ukrainian Cossacks. It was edited with an introduction by Lubomyr R. Wynar of the American-Based Ukrainian Historical Association (UHA), and translated from the original German by Subtelny. Lassota was the envoy of the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolph II, to the Zaporozhian Cossacks at their headquarters or *Sich* on an island in the Dnieper River in central Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> The envoy sought to recruit the Cossacks into imperial service to support his master's designs in the Polish-Lithuanian

Commonwealth (which then included most of today's Ukraine) and against Sweden, then a great power in northern Europe. In this journal, Lassota describes his travels across many different lands with borders that were to change many times over the next centuries, and in consequence, place names and the names of people and families tended to change with them. Indeed, even Lassota's family name itself was spelled several different ways in the sources, and straightening out this muddle was no easy philological task. But Subtelny did a good job in overcoming it to render a smooth and easily understood narrative, and upon publication, his product was acknowledged by Herbert Kaplan as being "coherently translated."<sup>3</sup>

Lassota was also of interest for other reasons. In his travel journal he gives a good description of Kyiv as it appeared in the later sixteenth century, and he also provides a fair amount of information about the nature of Cossack democracy and how the assembly of the Cossack Host or Army conducted its affairs and made its decisions. Kaplan's only criticism of the book was that Wynar's statement in the introduction that Lassota was the most important source on these matters was not backed up by a listing of what those other sources were.<sup>4</sup>

The second title with which I was acquainted was *On the Eve of Poltava: The Letters of Ivan Mazepa to Adam Sieniawski 1704-1708*. This work constituted a second source study for Cossack history. In this volume, Subtelny progressed from "mere translation" to the editing of a collection of documents, writing summaries of them, and providing his own introduction. The book was published by the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the USA in New York City (UVAN). The Ukrainian émigré historian, Oleksander Ohloblyn (1899-1992), who was well-known in Ukrainian academic circles, but little-known outside of them, wrote a brief complimentary preface for the volume, and he was probably decisive in the acceptance of the manuscript for publication by the UVAN.<sup>5</sup>

Like the Lassota volume, the Sieniawski-Mazepa correspondence presented some severe technical difficulties. Both figures, Sieniawski and Mazepa, were significant political actors of

<sup>2</sup> *Habsburgs and Zaporozhian Cossacks: The Diary of Erich Lassota von Steblau 1594*, ed. Lubomyr R. Wynar, trans. Orest Subtelny (Littleton, Colorado: Ukrainian Academic Press for the Ukrainian Historical Association, 1975). 144 pp. Illustrated.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert H. Kaplan, review in *Slavic Review*, XXXVI, 4 (1977), 697-99.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *On the Eve of Poltava: The Letters of Ivan Mazepa to Adam Sieniawski 1704-1708*, ed. Orest Subtelny (New York: Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the USA, 1975). 159 pp. Illustrated.



Undated photograph of Orest Subtelny as a young scholar. Credit: Wikipedia

their time, the former an important magnate in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the latter as “Hetman” or ruler of the polity called by historians “the Hetmanate.” This Ukrainian Cossack polity was located in eastern or Left Bank Ukraine and was dependent upon Moscow. During this period both Poles and Ukrainian Cossacks were faced with the interference of Sweden in east European affairs and the growing power of that Tsardom of Muscovy, this latter realm labelled “a rude and barbarous kingdom” by western observers of the time.<sup>6</sup>

The letters of Mazepa to Sieniawski seem polite, perfunctory, and innocent enough on the surface. But behind them lay uneasiness about Peter I’s Muscovy and its influence over the Cossack Hetmanate. This uneasiness, or “dissatisfaction” with the Tsar, as American historian Bickford O’Brian put it, is confirmed by Sieniawski’s envoy to Mazepa, one F. Grabia, who wrote a report for his employer as to affairs at the Hetman’s court at Baturyn. Subtelny printed this report as an appendix to his letter collection. The book was clearly aimed at a very specialist audience, but Subtelny obviously believed that its publication was valuable at a time when Soviet archives were severely restricted, and when western historians interested in Ukraine worked with a limited source base.

In general, *On the Eve of Poltava* was well received by these Ukrainian and other specialists. Stephen M. Horak thought the book provided further evidence for Ukraine’s “independence” desires of that time, and O’Brian’s review was generally positive. The chief problem with the book, as Horak noted, was that Subtelny left the letters in the original Polish, which was thickly interspersed with words, phrases, and entire sentences in early eighteenth century Latin. Only brief English summaries were given at the end. Since so few American scholars, especially those who specialized in Russian history, could read these languages, the volume’s use was severely limited, and it did not attract much scholarly attention.<sup>7</sup>

More generally, it is revealing that these two first publications by Subtelny had absolutely nothing to do with Turkey or Central Asia, Pritsak’s specialties. Rather they circumvented those specialties and concentrated upon Ukraine’s contacts with the West, namely the Holy Roman Empire, Austria, and Poland. Moreover, both books were published by émigré Ukrainian institutions in the USA that were completely independent of Harvard: the UVAN in New York, in which Ohloblyn was an important figure, and the Ukrainian Historical Association in Ohio, of which Ohloblyn was president and Wynar the most active member. In fact, Ohloblyn, with whom Subtelny had studied when that historian briefly lectured at Harvard, was significant enough in Subtelny’s intellectual formation that about that same time he interviewed him for *Suchasnist* (The Present), an important Ukrainian political and cultural journal in Munich.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Lloyd Eason Berry, *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth-century English Voyagers* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968).

<sup>7</sup> Bickford O’Brian, review in *Russian Review*, XXXVI, 2 (1977), 210-11; and Stephan M. Horak, in *Slavic Review*, XXXVI, 1 (1977), 137-38.

<sup>8</sup> See Orest Subtelny, “Oleksander Ohloblyn,” *Suchasnist*, no. 12 (1979), 34-42. On Ohloblyn more generally, see Subtelny’s later essay “Oleksander Petrovych Ohloblyn,” in *125 rokiv kyivskoi ukrainskoi akademichnoi tradytsii 1861-1896*, ed. Marko Antonovych (New York: UVAN, 1993), pp.539-52; and Liubomyr Vynar [Lubomyr R. Wynar], *Oleksander Petrovych Ohloblyn 1899-1992: Biografichna studiia* (New York-Toronto: Ukrainian Historical Association, 1994); on Wynar, see Alla Atamanenko, *Ukrainske istorychne tovarystvo: Idei postati*



Orest Subtelny with colleagues in 1986, in Ludlow, Massachusetts, near the home of Oleksander Ohloblyn. Lubomyr Wynar is on the far right; standing next to him is Omeljan Pritsak, in the middle Vasyl Omelchenko of the UVAN in New York, and next to Subtelny is his contemporary and bearded fellow student of Pritsak, Lubomyr Hajda. Credit: Alla Atamanenko, *Ukrainske istorychne tovarytstvo*, plate.

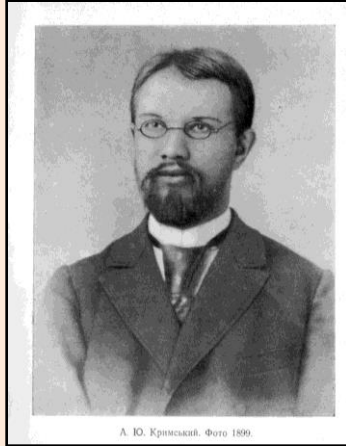
At this point, we might note that both Ohloblyn and Wynar had good relations with members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) in its two major forms. Ohloblyn had worked with the Melnyk faction of the OUN during the war, and the Bandera faction sponsored some of his academic publications in the 1950s, while Wynar worked equally closely with the Melnyk faction, several of whose members were quite active in his Association. This certainly put some distance between Ohloblyn and Wynar on the one hand, and Pritsak on the other. That was because Pritsak was an ideological supporter of the Hetmanite or conservative movement of that time; and he highly valued the historical conceptions of its primary ideologist, Viacheslav Lypynsky (1882-1931), who praised the role of the élite in Ukrainian history, and had a special interest in the Polish and polonized Ukrainian *szlachta* or nobility, from which he came. This led him to argue that it was Ukraine “as a territory” that should be the topic of Ukrainian history, and not (as his predecessor, Mykhailo Hrushevsky, had maintained) the history of the Ukrainian people, or “the popular masses,” as Hrushevsky had put it.

Pritsak was a passionate supporter of Lypynsky’s views and wrote a number of scathing attacks on Hrushevsky and his historical ideas. To some extent Ohloblyn went along with this view since he too greatly valued the élite, especially Mazepa himself, whom he thought was a great statesman and sincere Ukrainian patriot. But at the same time, he most certainly did not engage in the attacks on Hrushevsky to which Pritsak was prone during the Cold War. Moreover, Pritsak’s interest in the Turkish and Tatar roles in Ukrainian history went well with Lypynsky’s ideas about a “territorial,” not national, view of that history, while Ohloblyn and Wynar were interested in Ukrainian national history and nothing else. So Subtelny’s early writings, with their emphasis on Ukrainian Cossack history, seemed to be more in accord with the national views of Hrushevsky, Ohloblyn, and Wynar than with those “territorial” conceptions of Pritsak and Lypynsky.<sup>9</sup>

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*diiálnist* (Ostroh: UIT, 2010), which also contains some materials on Subtelny’s collaboration with the Association, including photographic materials. For a brief portrait of Pritsak, see my essay on “The Generation of 1919: Pritsak, Luckyj, and Rudnytsky,” on-line at: <https://www.slideshare.net/ThomasMPrymak/the-generation-of-1919>

<sup>9</sup> On Hrushevsky, see my *Mykhailo Hrushevsky: The Politics of National Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), and Serhii Plokhyy, *Unmaking Imperial Russia: Mykhailo Hrushevsky and the Writing of Ukrainian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005). Also see Ihor Hyrych, *Mykhailo Hrushevsky: Konstruktor ukrainskoi modernoi natsii* (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2016), and R. Ya. Pyryh and V. V. Telvak, *Mykhailo Hrushevsky: Biohrafichnyi narys* (Kyiv: Lybid, 2017). On Lypynsky, see Ivan Lysiak Rudnytsky, “Viacheslav Lypynsky:



Ahatanhel Krymsky (1871-1942) as a young man. Krymsky was of Crimean Tatar/Belarusan and Polish ancestry, but had been raised in Ukraine and was the leading Orientalist scholar in Ukraine during the 1920s. At the same time, he was a Ukrainian patriot, who wrote many works in the Ukrainian language. Omeljan Pritsak, Subtelny's supervisor at Harvard, considered himself to be an heir to Krymsky, under whom he had studied briefly during the War. But Subtelny left Oriental studies rather swiftly and spent most of his career in the field of Ukrainian national history. Credit: A. Yu. Krymsky, *Tvory v p'iaty tomakh* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1973), vol. III. Frontispiece.

However, during the next stage of his career, it became clear that Subtelny was also influenced by his thesis supervisor at Harvard, Pritsak. So in one of his first publications he reviewed a Ukrainian language study of Ahatanhel Krymsky, the most important of Ukrainian Orientalist scholars, who wrote on Arabic, Turkish, and Persian literature and history.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Pritsak had briefly studied under Krymsky during the War, and in some ways considered himself his heir. Moreover, despite Subtelny's call to study Europe and Ukraine, somehow Pritsak convinced Subtelny to go to Egypt to study the Arabic language. This Turkic specialist actually urged most of his young acolytes to study Oriental languages, even when in the beginning they had little interest in the Middle East.<sup>11</sup>

On a more personal note, Subtelny actually mentioned this study trip to Egypt to me a few years later. He was then moving to Canada to take up a position at York University in the Toronto area. He explained to me that it was useful when applying for such academic positions to have more than one specialty and, in his case, the second specialty was the history of the Middle East. This was a clear result of his studies under the Orientalist, Pritsak.<sup>12</sup>

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Statesman, Historian, and Political Thinker," in his *Essays in Modern Ukrainian History* (Edmonton: CIUS Press, 1987), pp. 437-446, and *idem*, "Lypynsky, Viacheslav," *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, vol. III (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 246-47.

<sup>10</sup> I refer here to Orest Subtelny's review of K. I. Hurnytsky, *Krymskyi iak istoryk*, in *Recenzija*, III, 2, (1973), 50-57, in which he compared Krymsky unfavourably with the Russian Orientalist of German ancestry, V. V. Barthold. Several years later, Subtelny returned to another partly-Oriental theme in his "Cossack Ukraine and the Turko-Islamic World," in *Rethinking Ukrainian History*, ed. Ivan L. Rudnytsky (Edmonton: CIUS, 1981), pp. 120-134.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, according to Paul Magocsi, also a student of Pritsak, that Orientalist scholar required all of his acolytes to study "oriental" languages. This included Magocsi himself, who informed me that in view of this he did a whole year of Turkish. He also told me that of all Pritsak's students, Frank Sysyn alone, who was not officially his student, refused to be thus directed away from Ukrainian into Oriental studies. Conversation of March 12, 2020, Toronto.

<sup>12</sup> Shortly before this, I was searching for a suitable PhD thesis topic of my own, and Subtelny, then visiting Toronto, advised me to choose a subject that would fit into both Russian and Ukrainian history, since there were no jobs available in Ukrainian history, and only by combining it with Russian history would I be able to actually land a suitable position. When I told him that I wanted to do a biography of some sort, he suggested that I take up Mykhailo Drahomanov (1841-1895), who was active in Russian liberalism, and was a "federalist" with a Ukrainian background and interests. Instead, I chose Mykhailo Hrushevsky, more clearly a Ukrainian rather than a Russian figure, but also a federalist, at least during the first parts of his public life.



Portrait of Ivan Mazepa, Hetman of the Zaporozhian Army (d. 1709), by the Ukrainian émigré painter, Myron Levytsky (1913-1994), who had studied at Lviv and Cracow before 1939, and worked in Winnipeg, Paris, and Toronto after 1945. Excoriated by Moscow, Mazepa became a Ukrainian national hero in the twentieth century. As, seemingly, no reliable portraits survived Peter the Great's calculated but incomplete destruction of Mazepa images in Ukraine, Levytsky, at least in part, had to use literary descriptions to reconstruct this handsome picture of him (c. 1959). Subtelny spent a good part of his career studying Mazepa and his heirs and immediate successors. Credit: Andrew Gregorovich, "Why is Mazeppa's Portrait a Puzzle?" *Forum: A Ukrainian Review*, no. 97 (Scranton, Penn., 1997), 15-25, especially, 24.

Although Subtelny did not seem to take Egypt very seriously, and returned to his Ukrainian studies at Harvard rather quickly, Pritsak's influence again became clear in his choice of a topic for his doctoral dissertation. That topic concerned a group of Ukrainian émigrés, who after the revolt of Hetman Mazepa against Peter the Great, and after Peter defeated the Swedish King, Charles XII, at the Battle of Poltava in 1709, fled to the Ottoman Empire. Mazepa had, of course, gone over to the Swedes in 1708, and his knowledge of Steppe Ukraine was helpful to Charles in his escape from Russian capture. It was he, in fact, who engineered the flight across the open steppe to the Moldavian town of Bender in the Ottoman Empire, which bordered Right Bank Ukraine. Mazepa died shortly afterwards, but his Cossacks and Charles carried on their struggle from that base in European Turkey. In this way, Subtelny managed to find a topic that was pivotal in Ukrainian history, yet at the same time had an "oriental" or Turkish element to it.

In his dissertation and the book that followed, Subtelny described the emigration of Mazepa's followers to Turkey, and then later on, to Western Europe. He concentrated on the careers of Pylyp Orlyk, Mazepa's successor as Hetman-in-exile, Andrii Voinarovsky, Mazepa's nephew, who was kidnapped by Peter's agents in Germany, returned to the Russian Empire, and then exiled to Siberia, where many years later he died, and Hryhor Orlyk, Pylyp's son, who had a long and mostly successful career in French military service. But what is particularly striking about this topic for the student of Subtelny's career is that the emphasis here was quickly shifting from the Ottoman Empire and its relations with Peter's Russia and the Ukrainian Cossacks, to Ukrainian émigré politics in Western Europe. The fates of all three of these principal characters in the book, which Subtelny called *The Mazepists*, is given much attention, and they are varied: Pylyp died isolated in Thessalonica attempting to get an amnesty from Peter and return to his homeland, Voinarovsky, as mentioned, worked against Peter in Germany but was kidnapped to die many years later in Siberia, and Hryhor carried on the struggle into the next generation, while at the same time rendering valuable service to the French Monarchy; his descendants still live in France.<sup>13</sup>

Again, Subtelny's knowledge of European languages was put to good use in this study. Not only did it require knowledge of sources in Latin, German, and French, but also older forms of Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish. Again, many Polish documents were written in that peculiar mix of Polish and Latin that intimidates so many modern Russian historians in North America. And again, Subtelny showed his mastery of the sources by translating some of them and adding them as an appendix to his book. Among these, Pylyp Orlyk's "Letter to Stefan Yavorsky" stands out. That lengthy document explains the reasons for Mazepa's revolt from the viewpoint

<sup>13</sup> Orest Subtelny, *The Mazepists: Ukrainian Separatism in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 1981). 280 pp.

of the Hetman's right hand man, who now wished to return home and was appealing to the Orthodox cleric Yavorsky for help in getting an amnesty from Peter. This "letter" (which is actually a substantial essay) is simply unrivalled as a source for the politics of the revolt, and it throws much light on Mazepa's original intentions and motivations. When used with discernment, and care for the context, the letter gives a valuable picture of the character of Mazepa himself, who remained somewhat of an enigma to most of his contemporaries and almost all of his successors.



Passport photo of Ilko Borshchak, a prominent Ukrainian historian working in France between 1919, when as a Ukrainian delegate he attended the Paris Peace Conference, and his death in 1959. Borshchak was a specialist in Ukraine's relations with Western Europe, especially France, and discovered many new documents on this subject in the French archives. He wrote entire biographies of both Ivan Mazepa and Hryhor Orlyk, and so was an important predecessor of both Oleksander Ohloblyn and Orest Subtelny. But upon investigation, much of his most spectacular research turned out to be unreliable. Credit: Batchinsky Collection. Special Collections. Carleton University Archives, Ottawa.

Of course, Subtelny was not the first historian to tackle these questions. Orlyk's letter was known as early as the 1880s, when the Ukrainian historian Mykola Kostomarov (1817-1885) had used it in his biography of Mazepa. And during the Interwar period, the careers of both Mazepa, and Pylyp and Hryhor Orlyk, had been the subjects of biographies by the Ukrainian historian in France, Ilko Borshchak (1892-1959). Indeed, in the 1920s, Borshchak was a pioneer in this field, using French archives extensively, and even penning a brief essay on Voltaire and his views on Mazepa and the Cossack revolt. But Subtelny soon discovered that Borshchak's published work was filled with errors, and as he explained to me one time "every single document and claim made by Borshchak had to be checked out against the original archives or publications." This venture even led Subtelny to Orlyk's chateau in France in the search for new documents. Later work on Borshchak by another scholar came to the conclusion that he wrote about what he wanted to see in the archives and not what he actually found. To what degree this is true or not, that is, whether some unknown editors systematically amended his work for publication, remains unknown. What is incontrovertible, however, is that because of its centrality to Ukraine's relations with the outside world, especially Western Europe, Borshchak's histories and biographies are always of interest, and Subtelny obviously found them fascinating and useful, at least as a lead.<sup>14</sup>

Subtelny also disagreed in one fundamental way with his partial mentor, Oleksander Ohloblyn. That émigré historian painted a very positive picture of Mazepa and thought of him as a selfless martyr for Ukrainian liberty, who always had full Ukrainian independence in mind. While he too seemed to admire Mazepa, Subtelny disagreed with this "maximalist" approach taken by Ohloblyn. (That historian had probably written thus in reaction to the severe Soviet and

<sup>14</sup> On the question of Borshchak's reliability, see Vadym Adadurov, "Konstruiuvannia Ilkom Broshchakom mifolohichnoho obrazu spryiniattia Ukrainy u Frantsii," in *Ukraina na istoriografichnii mapi mizhvoiennoi Ievropy/Ukraine on the Historiographic Map of Interwar Europe*, ed. Yaroslav Melnyk and others (Kyiv: Ukrainian Free University, 2014), pp. 109-132. More generally see my "Voltaire on Mazepa and Early Eighteenth-Century Ukraine," *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire*, XLVII, 2 (2012), 259-84.

Russian condemnations of the Hetman, which included many scurrilous *ad hominem* attacks.) Rather, Subtelny saw Mazepa as a typical Ukrainian “autonomist” of that time, who merely carried on the autonomist traditions of his predecessors. A loose overlordship of some distant monarch, ideally the Swedish king, was his goal, seemingly not sovereignty or complete independence. A generation later, the best Russian historian writing on the question broke with her rather shrill predecessors and agreed that Mazepa did not revolt for personal gain and at the same time aimed at simple autonomy, not complete independence, thus supporting Subtelny’s position.<sup>15</sup>

The scholarly reviews of *The Mazepists* too were generally good, some of them even glowing. John Armstrong (1922-2010) praised Subtelny’s immersion in the sources and his analysis of contemporary names and terms, a subject that he was then developing in his general work on the older symbolic origins of modern nationalism; for example, Armstrong listed Subtelny’s shifting use of the terms “Ruthenian,” “Little Russian,” and “Ukraine” by the Cossacks themselves.<sup>16</sup> James Cracraft, a historian of the Petrine Reforms, though no sympathizer of Ukrainian independence, also welcomed the book; at the same time he criticized Subtelny for several small slips, especially with regard to the number of Cossacks and Ukrainians that Peter had “slaughtered” in his suppression of the Mazepa revolt. (Cracraft believed that Subtelny had exaggerated these atrocities.) Cracraft also thought *The Mazepists* (and seemingly Ukrainian history in general), to be “alternative history,” that is, the history of the losers, “of the vanquished,” a view which clearly dates his analysis to the Cold War era, when Ukraine was still firmly within the Russian-dominated USSR sphere of influence and not yet independent.<sup>17</sup>

Strikingly, however, it was the premier Russian historian working in the USA that rendered Subtelny his most glowing review. Nicholas Riasanovsky (1923-2011) was the author of the most widely used Russian history textbook in North America, and he generally took a very dim view of Ukrainian “separatism.” But he too thought Subtelny’s *Mazepists* to be good: an “excellent historical monograph” and “remarkably objective.” Riasanovsky thought that Subtelny was especially useful on providing the international context of Mazepa’s revolt, and he suggested that Subtelny should go on and boldly tackle other big questions of Ukrainian-Russian relations and also the historical influence of the Crimean Tatars and the Turks, “which,” as that Russian historian wrote, “[Subtelny] recognised so perceptively in the present volume.” Riasanovsky’s suggestion turned out to be prophetic.<sup>18</sup>

Around this same time, Subtelny also published a number of smaller research articles dealing with the conflict between Peter and Mazepa. For example, in one article he argued that the epithet “traitor,” with which Russian publicists and historians had repeatedly labeled the Hetman, was entirely off the mark. “Treason,” he argued, was a concept that only arose in Europe with the rise of the national state, and since neither Muscovy (which was a pre-national patrimony) nor the Hetmanate (which was a feudal-style dependency) were national states,

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<sup>15</sup> That historian was Tatiana Tairova-Yakovleva who wrote extensively on this question. See, for example, her *Mazepa* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2007), or her *Ivan Mazepa i rossiiskaia imperiia: Istoriia ‘predatelstva’* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2011), and my English-language summaries in the *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, XXXVII (2012), 194-97. The second title listed here is scheduled to be published shortly (2020) in English translation by McGill-Queen’s University Press in Montreal, Quebec.

<sup>16</sup> John Armstrong in the *American Historical Review*, LXXXVII, 5 (1982), 1429.

<sup>17</sup> James Cracraft, in *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, XXIV, 2 (1982), 204-205. In general, this review was balanced but unsympathetic.

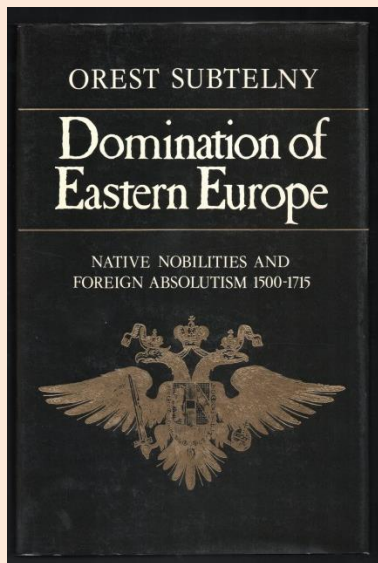
<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Riasanovsky, in the *Russian Review*, XL, 3 (1982), 324.



Mazepa could not commit national treason against either of them. In his revolt, he was just defending traditional Cossack “rights and liberties.”<sup>19</sup>

In a second article, he repeated that Cossack Ukraine, like other East European autonomous entities of the time, was a kind of “military fraternity,” Muscovy more “a patrimony” than a state. Moscow did not coordinate its politics completely with the Hetmanate, did not have much coercive power over it, and could not enforce extractions of money, material, or manpower from it without the cooperation and consent of the Ukrainian Cossacks and their Hetman. It was Peter, after his victory at Poltava, who changed all of this, and transformed Ukraine “from the logic of vassalage” to “the logic of the state.” Finally, Subtelny examined the legend of Peter I’s “testament” which predicted Russian expansion south, west, and north at the expense of its neighbours, and found it to be just that: a legend, but with uncannily prophetic qualities.<sup>20</sup>

With the publication of *The Mazepists* Subtelny was on a roll, and he knew it. His next book therefore continued the theme that he had first examined in his dissertation many years before and responded to the suggestions of Riasanovsky and others to expand upon it. So in *The Domination of Eastern Europe: Native Nobilities and Foreign Absolutism 1500-1715*, he



compared the situation of the Cossack officer class or *starshyna* with that of the Polish nobility or *szlachta*, the Baltic knighthood or *Ritterschaft*, and the Moldavian *boyars* and others. In this book, his thesis was that all of these aristocracies, or proto-aristocracies, formed the kind of military fraternities that he had previously discussed with regard to Ukraine. Their leaders, such as Mazepa in Ukraine, J. R. Patkul in the Baltic, and Demetrius Cantemir in Moldavia, all resisted the encroachments of the absolutist polities around them. But all were unsuccessful, and by the end of the Great Northern War in the 1720s, all had been vanquished, and the region was subdued by the absolutist centralizing monarchies surrounding them. These monarchies by then all had large militaries and the administrative bureaucracies to support them. In other words, once again, Subtelny was putting Mazepa, the Orlyks, and the Ukrainian Cossacks in a wider historical context. In writing a book like this, treating an entire

region rather than simply one country, Subtelny was somewhat stepping out of his element, but he certainly thought that his argument made sense.<sup>21</sup>

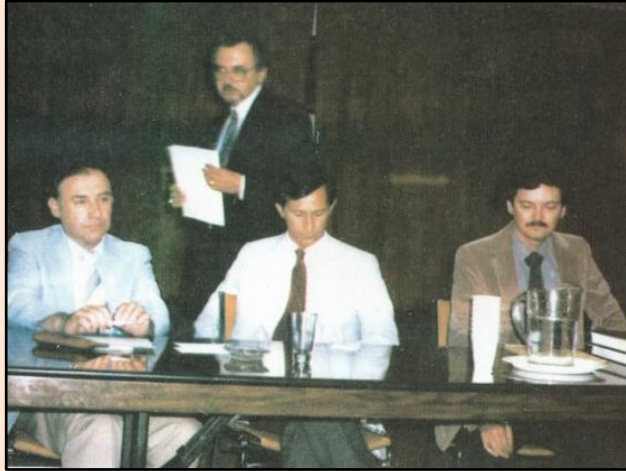
His reviewers did not completely agree. For example, Charles Ingrao, a historian of early modern Europe, thought the book made some good points, but believed that Subtelny had missed the fact that the Great Northern War, which had pit Mazepa with Charles against Peter, and against Poland, Saxony, and Denmark, was more a continuation or “sequel” to the “Crisis of the Seventeenth Century” and the “Thirty Years War” in Western Europe than anything that followed.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Keith Hitchens, Peter Suger, Daniel Stone, and Claus Scharf all thought

<sup>19</sup> Orest Subtelny, “Mazepa, Peter I, and the Question of Treason,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, II, 2 (1978), 158-83.

<sup>20</sup> See Orest Subtelny, “Russia and the Ukraine: The Difference Peter I Made,” *Russian Review*, XXXIX, 1 (1980), 1ff.; and also his article titled: “Peter I’s Testament: A Reassessment,” *Slavic Review*, XXXIII, 4 (1974), 663-78.

<sup>21</sup> Orest Subtelny, *Domination of Eastern Europe: Native Nobilities and Foreign Absolutisms 1500-1715* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University press, 1986). xii + 270 pp.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Ingrao, in the *International History Review*, IX, 3 (1987), 496-98.



Seated from the left: Wsevolod Isajiw, Orest Subtelny, and Thomas M. Prymak. Lubomyr Wynar is standing behind Subtelny. Isajiw is a prominent sociologist who specializes in the study of social thought and North American ethnic groups, and is a relative by marriage of Subtelny. This picture was taken at a conference of the Ukrainian Historical Association held in Toronto in 1984. Credit: Atamanenko, *Ukrainske istorychne tovarystvo*, plate.

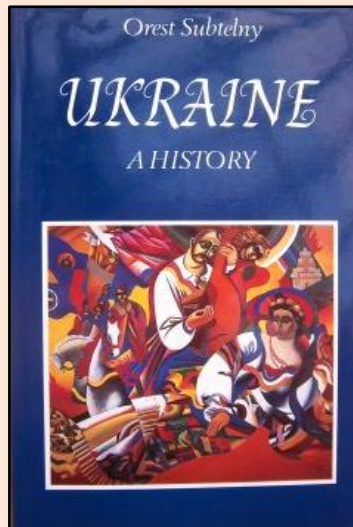
that Subtelny's lumping of all these nobilities and their leaders together was at least a partial error. They neither faced exactly the same challenges, nor experienced the same fates. The Moldavian *boyars* were never completely subdued like the Cossack *starshyna*, the Baltic *Ritterschaft* retained much power into modern times, and the Polish *szlachta* was not conquered by Peter and his immediate successors, but rather lived on to resist Russian aggression well into the nineteenth century. Some of these reviewers thought Subtelny's knowledge of Ukrainian and Polish history good, but his knowledge of the other countries weaker, while others noted the loose organization of his book, which made for a more difficult read than *The Mazepists*.<sup>23</sup>

On a more personal note, I agreed with these later critics on the matter of organization of the material. This book was, I thought, a magnificent attempt to put Mazepa's Cossacks in the wider context of eastern Europe, but when I perused the book and looked it over, found it to be read with difficulty and hammering away at a point that in ways already seemed to be obvious to anyone with expertise in the field.

At this point, it seems Subtelny had had his fill of Mazepa and his times, and began to turn his talents to other subjects. At this very time, I ran into him in the offices of the University of Toronto Press at the centre of the university campus. My political biography of the Ukrainian historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky had just been published to some fanfare and I came in on some matter or other to do with marketing. Subtelny seemed put off by something and simply would not tell me what he was doing at the press. So a few months later when his big history, a real *magnum opus*, his *Ukraine: A History* came out, I was just as surprised and stunned as anyone else. I was pleased, however, when at the book launch held near the university on November 7, 1988, I was able to buy a copy, which Orest cordially signed: "To Tom and Yassy Prymak – close colleagues in [a] common field of labor. Orest Subtelny," (Yassy being my wife).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Keith Hitchens in *Russian Review*, XLVII, 1 (1988), 100-101; Peter F. Sugar in *Slavic Review*, XLV, 3 (1986), 573; Daniel Stone in *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, XXVIII, 3 (1986), 314-15; Claus Scharf in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, XXXVI, 1 (1988), 94-97. Scharf's review was the most extensive.

<sup>24</sup> Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988). xii + 666 pp. Illustrations. Maps. I might add here that Orest's wife, Maria, is a Persian history, literature, and language scholar, and my wife, Yassaman, is of Iranian background, born in Tehran of Kurdish ancestry.



Dust jacket of the first edition of Orest Subtelny's *magnum opus* (1988), which was published just as the USSR was beginning to fall apart. The jacket illustration is a modernist interpretation of "The Bandurist" by Feodosii Humeniuk (b. 1941). This painting (1979), by a major dissident artist in the USSR, was to stand in clear contrast to the cover illustration of Paul Robert Magocsi's alternate *History of Ukraine* (1996), which was to feature Ilya Repin's painting of "The Zaporozhian Cossacks Writing a Satirical Letter to the Turkish Sultan," (1891). That earlier painting was a much more traditional creation, and was both popular among Ukrainians, and more acceptable to the Soviet authorities, who deemed it "realist." Today, we can clearly see how this contrast served to emphasize Subtelny's admiration for modernity in Ukrainian culture and his opposition to imposed Soviet Ukrainian norms.

The publication of Subtelny's book was an important event in the history of Cold War scholarship on Ukraine. It was especially important for Ukrainian historiography, and was immediately recognised as such. Indeed, had there been in it no new ideas at all about Ukrainian history, it would still have been important as an update on all that had transpired in Ukraine since 1975, when the last revised and expanded edition of Dmytro Doroshenko's history of Ukraine was published in Winnipeg, with new chapters on the events from the 1930s to the 1970s by Oleh Gerus of the University of Manitoba.<sup>25</sup> In fact, in some ways it was even more important than that update (which had an emphasis on Cossack struggles for statehood and followed Lypynsky's ideas about the importance of the élite) since Subtelny's book took an approach that clearly reflected that of Hrushevsky, with its stress on "the people" and popular movements, and not just the political élite. And Hrushevsky's approach had last appeared in English, a full half century previously.<sup>26</sup>

In general, Subtelny's approach was a synthesis of both Hrushevsky, with his stress on the popular masses, and Doroshenko's with his stress on the élite. On the one hand, this may have reflected Subtelny's own reading of Hrushevsky who saw the matter as a history of a people through the centuries beginning with ancient times and Kyivan Rus'. Consequently, Subtelny too traced this people through the centuries, and even across the ocean into immigration to the Americas, and, like Hrushevsky, he throughout used the term "Ukrainian" to refer to this people, even when the sources used other terms such as "Ruthenian," "Cossack," or "Little Russian." Indeed, Subtelny even spoke of the ancient Persian Emperor Darius the Great invading "Ukraine." This was a clearly anachronistic use of that term (a little like saying Julius Caesar

<sup>25</sup> Dmytro Doroshenko, *A Survey of Ukrainian History*, ed. Oleh Gerus (Winnipeg: Trident Press, 1975). 873 pp.

<sup>26</sup> The translators used Hrushevsky's *Iliustrovana istoriia Ukrainy* (Illustrated History of Ukraine) in the second revised edition, Winnipeg, c. 1919, with an update to 1919 written by Hrushevsky himself: M[ykhailo] Hrushevsky, *History of Ukraine*, ed. O. J. Frederiksen (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Ukrainian National Association, 1941). 600 pp. + xvi. Maps. This edition was, however, not an exact but rather a paraphrasing translation. I discuss this in the chapter on "General Histories of Ukraine published in English during the Second World War: Canada, the United States, and Britain," in my *Gathering a Heritage: Ukrainian, Slavonic, and Ethnic Canada and the USA* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), pp. 100-118.

invaded “England”), which I pointed out in a review of his book at that time. I would have said that he had invaded “Scythia.”<sup>27</sup>

But the influence of Hrushevsky’s rival, Viacheslav Lypynsky, and his follower, Dmytro Doroshenko, was also clear in Subtelny’s book. For Subtelny clearly stressed Cossack history, did not avoid the negative sides to popular revolts of various kinds, and saw the wisdom of various Ukrainian leaders across the centuries. So his portraits of the princes of old Kyiv, the Cossack leader Khmelnytsky, of Mazepa, and even of Hrushevsky himself are not all negative but rather quite balanced. Moreover, his book is dispassionate and factual about both Ukrainian Communism and Ukrainian nationalism in the twentieth century, though it was also dedicated to “those who had to leave their homeland but never forgot it.” This dedication was a plain reference to the anti-Communist Ukrainian Displaced Persons (DPs), who fled west before the advance of the Soviet armies in 1943-45 and wound up at war’s end in refugee camps in western Germany, as did Subtelny’s own family and so many others of his milieu.

But at the same time, this dedication could be interpreted as a reference to the older, less political Ukrainian immigrants to the Americas, who had moved west between the 1880s and 1939. Indeed, the fact that Subtelny’s last two chapters were devoted to the history of this “Ukrainian diaspora,” as he called it, reinforces this second interpretation. In other words, Subtelny’s history was a history of the Ukrainian people itself, wherever they lived, in the European homeland itself, in North America, or elsewhere. It was not so much a history of the Ukrainian state, or rather quasi-states, or even attempts to found one, or even the Ukrainian national “territory” or region. As well, it ignored the many other peoples who had lived on Ukrainian territory over the centuries; so neither Jews, nor Germans, nor Poles, nor others, were given much space in his account. This stood in clear contrast to the ideology of Lypynsky and his followers, including Omeljan Pritsak (much less so of Doroshenko, who accepted Lypynsky’s focus on the élite but also ignored the national minorities). So Subtelny’s position stood somewhere in between those of Hrushevsky and Lypynsky, but leaning more towards Hrushevsky.

However, another important point should be made about Subtelny’s history. Again, to some degree it concerns Hrushevsky’s influence. For just as Hrushevsky stressed popular revolts and the fate of the oppressed Ukrainian people, so too Subtelny turned in this direction, though in more modern terms. So his was also a general story about the “victimization” of the Ukrainian people across the centuries right through to modern times. Subtelny is once said to have remarked that it was a real miracle that Ukraine survived across those centuries of oppression and persecution.<sup>28</sup> And in his book, this theme was not only applied to Ukraine under the Poles and Muscovites, but also more importantly to Ukraine under the Communists. For example, Subtelny described the horrors of Communist rule such as the Great Famine of 1932-33, which he saw as no result of any natural catastrophe, or even a mistake of the collectivization policy, but rather as a direct result of Stalin’s orders to confiscate the grain and other food stuffs of the Ukrainian peasantry. Had this order not been given, Subtelny implies, the famine would never have occurred and several million lives would have been saved. Subtelny’s treatment of the famine was certainly welcome to those Ukrainians surviving in the West who had lived through it, like some of his fellow DPs, but more importantly for historical purposes, it contrasted to various authors of previous general histories of Ukraine, like Ivan Krypiakevych and others in

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<sup>27</sup> In *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, XVIII, 1-2 (1991), 259-60.

<sup>28</sup> Kravchenko, “Orest Subtelny,” pp. 318-19.

their *Velyka istoriia Ukrainy* (Great History of Ukraine), who never even mentioned it, and Doroshenko, whose *Narys istorii Ukrainy* (Survey of Ukrainian History) in the first edition of its English translation dismissed it in a single sentence, and in its second edition in little more than a single paragraph.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, Subtelny described the horrors of the Second World War and the crimes of both Nazi and Communist rule. This more or less equal treatment of Ukraine's two greatest oppressors was remarkable for western scholarship of that time, but was a common attitude among the post-1945 Ukrainian refugees in the West. In this way, Subtelny challenged the predominant "Allied Interpretation" of the history of the Second World War, which hypothesized that Soviet rule was less onerous and less evil than Nazi rule, and the defeat of Germany in 1945 was wrapped up by the "liberation" of Eastern Europe. For Subtelny, Nazi oppression was both preceded and followed by a Communist oppression which lasted through the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years to his own time. This was "victimization" through and through, and could hardly have been otherwise for a child of the post-1945 DP emigration such as Subtelny.<sup>30</sup>

It was several years before Subtelny's interpretation and approach found any competitor. But it did: firstly, a German-speaking author friendly to Subtelny, who turned a bit more toward "territorial" rather than "national" history, and secondly by a Toronto colleague of Subtelny who did the same thing, but even more sharply; both were impressive books.<sup>31</sup> However, given the timeliness of Subtelny's history, which came out just as Communism was collapsing in eastern Europe and the USSR was falling apart, with Ukraine breaking free of Moscow control and declaring both its sovereignty and national independence, *Ukraine: A History* was enormously popular, and these major points made by Subtelny, especially the victimization narrative, which pointed to the illegitimacy of Soviet rule, were widely applauded by his reviewers.<sup>32</sup>

Other points made by Subtelny were received with recognition, but with less enthusiasm and less universally. The first of these was the fact of Ukrainian "statelessness" through the centuries. Beginning with historians like Doroshenko, Ivan Krypiakievych, and Ohloblyn, historians had been extrapolating Lypynsky's views to argue that various Ukrainian leaders had been constantly searching for ways to establish some form of "statehood." This effort was ascribed not only to Khmelnytsky and Mazepa, but also to the Cossack leader, Petro Doroshenko, a distant relative of Dmytro. By contrast, Subtelny argued that the very fact of statelessness itself endured for so long that it became a major determining factor of Ukrainian history; the search for statehood less so.

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<sup>29</sup> Ivan Krypiakievych, Dmytro Doroshenko, and Yaroslav Pasternak, *Velyka istoriia Ukrainy* (Lviv-Winnipeg: Ivan Tyktor, 1948); Dmytro Doroshenko, *Narys istorii Ukrainy*, 2 vols. in one (Munich: Dnirova khvyliia, 1966), which was originally published in the 1930s in Poland, only went as far as the revolutionary period. The English translation published in Edmonton by the Hrushevsky Institute in 1939, and edited by George Simpson, similarly did not fully cover the Interwar period, but Simpson managed to add that single sentence on the famine (p. 648), while Oleh Gerus's 1975 Winnipeg edition added an update to the 1970s, and included that entire paragraph on the famine (p. 698).

<sup>30</sup> For a critical discussion of this "Allied Interpretation," see the first chapters of Norman Davies, *Europe at War 1939-1945: No Simple Victory* (London: Macmillan, 2006). Davies was a specialist in the history of Poland and also the author of a major history of Europe.

<sup>31</sup> See Andreas Kappeler, *Kleine Geschichte der Ukraine* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1994); Paul Robert Magocsi, *History of Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> In particular, Arthur Levin, writing in *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, XXIV, 1 (1992), 166, plainly stated that the "legitimate" nature of the Soviet regime "can now be regarded as far-fetched."



The second original point made by Subtelny logically followed from this. If statelessness was the normal Ukrainian condition over the centuries, then it was the foreign states and rulers who controlled Ukrainian territory that pushed for change and pushed the country into modernity; these were firstly Poland, then later Russia and Austria, and finally the USSR. Consequently, Ukrainian culture largely remained stuck in traditional forms and gave Ukrainian society a certain kind of conservative content.

(Indeed, disparagement of Ukrainian culture as a lower, peasant-based phenomenon continued right past the collapse of the USSR into the early years of the independence era, and has not completely disappeared even today.) No one before had ever stated the matter quite in this way, and it seems to have made an impression, though, surprisingly, was seldom the main point noted in reviews of Subtelny's book.<sup>33</sup>

In general, however, the reviews were positive, some of them even enthusiastic. Perhaps the most important among them was by the elder statesman of Ukrainian history in the USA, Basil Dmytryshyn, who, writing in *Canadian Slavonic Papers* considered Subtelny's work to be well-researched, of good literary quality, and "very solid." He also thought it "the best one-volume history of Ukraine in any language."<sup>34</sup> Oleh W. Gerus, writing in *Russian History* and Edward D. Wynot in the *American Historical Review* concurred, the former considering it "authoritative" and the latter "now the standard history."<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile a Polish reviewer devoted several pages to outlining Subtelny's story in *The Polish Review*, though he was cautious about making any judgments about it.<sup>36</sup> Finally, Andreas Kappeler, after noting how very old the various available treatments of Ukrainian history were, recommended it "without hesitation" (*ohne Einschränkung*), though he also noted Subtelny's pessimistic tone, which in the light of the events of 1985-89 seemed to be uncalled for.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps the most negative review (if it can be called that) came from an author who was quite familiar with Subtelny's milieu and background. That author was Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak (a fellow student of Lysiak-Rudnytsky), who was known for her study of the Ukrainians in Galicia in 1848. Though she admitted that the work was "a must for classrooms," with a good text, up-to-date, with good maps and illustrations, she criticized Subtelny for providing little analysis and a misplaced emphasis on statelessness, which she thought hardly useful in 1991, when a Ukrainian national state was emerging from the skeleton of the Ukrainian SSR. She saw too much stress on Western Ukraine and, very importantly, thought that "his description of Nazi rule in Ukraine lacks a sense of the tragedy of the people." Though she did not expressly state it, this last point fit well with Subtelny's implication about the nearly equal evils of Communism and Nazism. Moreover, Bohachevsky-Chomiak thought the final chapters

<sup>33</sup> Almost alone among reviewers, James Mace, writing in the journal *Soviet Studies*, XLII, 2 (1990), 391-91, noted that Subtelny saw the two themes of "statelessness" and "modernization" as "paramount in Ukrainian history."

<sup>34</sup> In *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, XXXI, 1 (1989), 92-93.

<sup>35</sup> Oleh Gerus in *Russian History*, XVII, 1(1990), 109-10; Edward D. Wynot in the *American Historical Review*, XC, 1 (1991), 209-10.

<sup>36</sup> John Switalski in *The Polish Review*, XXXV, 3-4 (1990), 276-80.

<sup>37</sup> Andreas Kappeler in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, XXXVIII, 3 (1990), 429-30.

on the “diaspora” to be “the most erratic and least comprehensible part of the volume.” Though she believed that this part would be of some interest to younger people of Ukrainian background or ancestry in North America, she did not seem to see how closely these chapters logically followed Hrushevsky’s principles about the history of the people, and not the country.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, the USSR had collapsed and the Ukrainian SSR declared its independence; and with this, came freedom of speech, of assembly, and the complete collapse of the censorship. Subtelny visited Ukraine during this period and arranged for both Ukrainian and Russian language translations of his book to appear, and very shortly they did so to great acclaim. Simultaneously, Subtelny arranged for a cogent summary of his earlier work on the eighteenth century to be published in the foremost (soon to be) formerly Soviet Ukrainian historical periodical, *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal* (The Ukrainian Historical Journal).<sup>39</sup> Looking back on those days, both the Ukrainian historian Volodymyr Kravchenko and the Ukrainian essayist Mykola Riabchuk recalled the profound effect that *Ukraine: A History* had upon their generation, its superiority to previous histories being obvious in virtually every way.<sup>40</sup> In general, Subtelny’s publications of that time immediately began to fill the great gap that the unexpected collapse of the USSR had revealed in American “Soviet Studies.”

In fact, the rise of the national question and the disintegration of both Communism and the USSR because of that national question constituted the most pressing historical problem of that time, and it was a question that had hitherto been almost completely ignored by western Moscow-centric Kremlinologists and Sovietologists. So when only a couple of years later, Subtelny’s close colleague, Andreas Kappeler, bravely stepped in to answer this question with a general account of the multi-national nature of Russia and the USSR, Subtelny greeted his book as “a *tour de force*,” which was able to describe things from “the centre” as had almost everyone else in Soviet Studies, but also, more importantly, from the “peripheries,” as Ukrainian and other non-Russians had long wished, and now most certainly had to be done by others.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, the nationalism of the non-Russian peoples of the USSR was little studied during the Cold War. But the Cold War then seemed to have ended, and at this time, Subtelny provided a detailed analysis of just how great a “blunder,” as he called it, this “marginalization” of the

<sup>38</sup> M. Bohachevsky-Chomiak in *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, XXV, 1-4 (1991), 382-84.

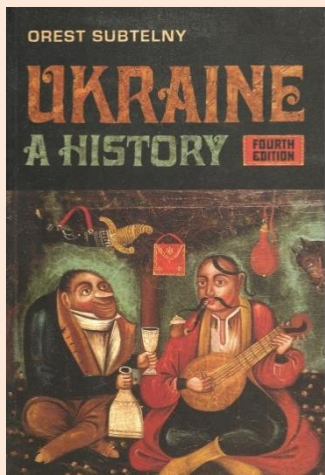
<sup>39</sup> Orest Subtelny, “Porivnialnyi pidkhid u doslidzhenni postati Mazepy,” *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, no. 2 (1991), 125-29. This article appeared in the very issue which followed my own contribution on the “Konstytutsiynyi proekt M. Hrushevskoho z 1905 r.” *ibid.*, no. 1 (1991), 127-36.

<sup>40</sup> Kravchenko, “Orest Subtelny;” pp. 318-19; Mykola Riabchuk, “Mnozhyhnist istorii: Orest Subtelnyi,” in his *Kaminnia i Sizif: Literaturni esei* (Kyiv: Akta, 2016), pp. 204-12. I might add here that the Kyiv edition of Subtelny’s history was not only timely, but also diplomatic. So, at the time that he was preparing the Ukrainian edition of his history (that is, shortly before 1991), he told me that he would not use the photograph of Ukrainian peasants cheerfully welcoming the *Wehrmacht* in the summer of 1941, as he had done in the English language edition. He said that the Soviet Ukrainian public was not yet ready for such a shock, and might misinterpret his intention.

<sup>41</sup> Orest Subtelny, review of Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvölkerreich*, in the *American Historical Review*, XCIX, 4 (1994), 1361. About this same time, Kappeler was visiting Canada and Subtelny introduced me to him in his Toronto home. I recall two points in our conversation together. The first turned on whether general histories or specialist studies brought a scholar more prestige. I said that it was my impression that in North America general histories were more important, while Kappeler said that in Germany it was the specialist studies that made a scholar’s reputation. (To my surprise, his own *Kleine Geschichte der Ukraine*, an excellent general history, was published only a few years later.) The second concerned the prolific Lviv historian Yaroslav Dashkevych (1926-2010), who had been persecuted by the Soviet authorities, but was then becoming more prominent and important. Subtelny expressed the opinion that Dashkevych was “a nationalist,” from which I gathered that he did not identify with him all that closely, though of course, he must have been critical of the harsh Soviet treatment of him.

nationality issue was for American sociology, and he pointed out that this “gross neglect” was now embarrassingly evident. So, he wrote, out of the 900 American theses in Soviet topics done between 1970 and 1980, a mere thirty treated the non-Russians, who then made up about half of the population of the USSR. In other words, for most western scholars, the USSR was Russia and nothing else.

But why was this so for American historians, who should have known better? Subtelny answered this question by pointing out that they had almost all been trained by Russian émigrés with a clearly Russo-centric view of the non-Russian nationalities. These included Michael Karpovich at Harvard, Michael Florinsky at Columbia, and even George Vernadsky at Yale (though all three traced their ancestry to the western borderlands of Russia, Karpovich to Belarus’ and Florinsky and Vernadsky to Ukraine). Subtelny admitted that in the 1920s some German historians were interested in the nationality problems of the USSR, but he argued that



this did not carry over to the post-1945 USA. Following this, he also argued, Americans were deeply affected by the “pacifism” and “relativism” of the Vietnam War era, and then later on, charmed by the sparkling figures of Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov. Even the Soviet dissident, Andrei Amalrik, who asked “Will the Soviet Union Survive to 1984,” and was not far off the mark, missed the main point by looking to China, and not the national question, as the cause of that predicted collapse!

Finally, the few western experts who did address the national question, like Richard Pipes at Harvard (who was ignored) and Hélène Carrière d’Encausse (who thought the real action in Central Asia) were unsuccessful in moving the historical profession much forward in this regard. And even Pipes abandoned the national question after his first book, while d’Encausse never actually predicted the fall of the USSR. So “centrist thinking” prevailed throughout the long Cold War.<sup>42</sup>

The final phase of Subtelny’s career saw a further shift in the topics covered in his writings. These changed from the history of Ukraine in Europe to the history of Ukrainians in North America. This was clearly a logical conclusion from his general approach to national history, which followed Hrushevsky, rather than the territorial history of Lypynsky. That is, he treated Ukrainians in North America as an integral part of the Ukrainian people, whose history should be treated as a constituent part of the larger nation.

This was the basic thesis of his next book titled *Ukrainians in North America*. In a way, this North American approach (rather than a more narrowly Canadian or American approach) seems to have been a logical choice for Subtelny, who was, in fact, like so many others among the Harvard-educated group of “Pritsak” scholars, an American transplanted to Canada.<sup>43</sup> That is,

<sup>42</sup> Orest Subtelny, “American Sovietology’s Great Blunder: The Marginalization of the National Issue,” *Nationality Papers*, XXII, 1 (1994), 141ff.

<sup>43</sup> The migration of the “Pritsak School of Harvard” to Canada, where its members quickly came to occupy important positions in both Eastern and Western parts of the country, is a startling fact that has not yet been discussed in the literature. This “American takeover” of Canadian academic institutions began with Orest Subtelny and Paul Robert Magocsi in Toronto, continued with Frank Sysyn and Zenon Kohut at the University of Alberta, and trailed into the following years with Olha Andriewsky at Trent and Victor Ostapchuk in Toronto. Of all these scholars, only Orest Subtelny and Paul Robert Magocsi displayed any interest in and contributed to the Canadian multicultural movement of that time, with Subtelny writing his history of *Ukrainians in North America* and Magocsi editing his *Encyclopedia of Canada’s Peoples*. This led Canadian scholars such as Manoly Lupul, who was deeply



while *Ukrainians in North America* was a contribution to Canadian “multiculturalism” and Canadian ethnic history (then experiencing a real explosion in the country), very importantly, it simultaneously took account of the author’s close ties to Europe and education in the United States. The book covered all three of the major “waves” of immigration to North America from the pioneers of the first wave (who arrived from the 1880s to 1914), through the second or Interwar Wave (which was mostly to Canada rather than to the United States, and occurred primarily in the 1920s), to the final pre-1991 wave, the so-called DP wave, fleeing Communist rule in its homeland and coming to North America beginning in 1949, after a couple of years of life in the DP camps in Western Germany. Most of this last wave went to the USA rather than Canada, and made an indelible imprint upon Ukrainian culture in that country.

The first wave had been overwhelmingly economic in nature and was equally intense to both Canada and the USA. At the same time, it was proportionately greater to the general population in Canada, which was quite small, and only in absolute numbers greater to the States, where it was only a tiny drop in the East European bucket. By contrast, the Interwar Wave was much greater in both ways to Canada than to the USA. That was because of the severe immigration restrictions imposed by American “nativist” thinking politicians in that country after the First World War.

The Third Wave, as mentioned above, was much greater in absolute terms to the USA than to Canada, had a profound influence upon Ukrainian American life, and had only a somewhat less profound effect in Canada. Subtelny outlines these three waves quite well. There is some mention of socio-economic situations and transformations across the whole period from the 1880s right through to the 1990s and the book ends on an optimistic note with regard to events in Ukraine itself.<sup>44</sup>

But the emphasis in the book is on the organizational life of Ukrainian groups and institutions in the two countries. Secular organizations take precedence; but ecclesiastical developments are also given some space. There is much attention paid to the politics of the emigration and the views of various groups toward Communist rule in Europe and the idea of national liberation and the future establishment of a Ukrainian national state. In general, therefore, the non-Communist “nationalist” organizations are given much more attention than the “progressive” or pro-Communist groups, and there is much use of pejorative Cold War epithets such as “front organizations.”

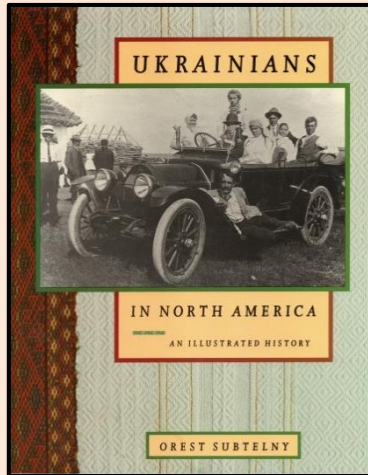
With regard to the establishment of major immigrant communities in Canada in particular, Subtelny writes of his adopted home in Toronto that this booming city was of special significance:

[By the end of this last period...] in some cities, most notably Toronto, [in contrast to the American situation] vibrant urban growth provided many Ukrainians with the incentive to remain in the inner city....Because many Ukrainians profited from Toronto’s remarkable economic upsurge, its Ukrainian community became known as not only one of the largest, but also the most active and wealthiest in North America. Indeed, by the 1980s, it laid claim to being the informal capital of the Ukrainian diaspora. (p. 140.)

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aware of the great contribution of Ukrainian Canadians to the establishment of the official Canadian government policy of “multiculturalism,” which by 1982 was even placed in the new Canadian constitution, to bemoan this American invasion, which he blamed for the decline in Ukrainian academic contributions to this movement, at least at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta. Indeed, even Subtelny’s emphasis upon “diaspora” rather than Canadian context, was novel and foreign to many Ukrainian Canadians, including myself.

<sup>44</sup> Orest Subtelny, *Ukrainians in North America: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991). 283 pp. + xii. Profusely illustrated.



Subtelny also mentioned the Ukrainian leadership in Canada's multicultural movement and the appointment of Ray Hnatyshyn as Governor-general of Canada, the official Canadian Head of State and representative of Her Majesty, the Queen. He could find no such parallel achievements for the Ukrainians in the USA.

In general, the reviews were good, with Manoly Lupul praising his volume as a "good coffee table book," and Jean Burnett saying that it constituted a useful comparison of the Ukrainian Canadians and the Ukrainian Americans. She also noted that Subtelny used the word "ethnic" in a positive sense, unlike Canadian scholars such as Stella Hryniuk and Lubomyr Luciuk, who generally used it in a negative way. Neither of these reviewers seemed to notice how slipshod Subtelny's

labelling of his many illustrations were (with many minor and some major gaffs) or the fact that they were printed without any credits whatsoever, a serious criticism for a book so reliant upon pictures, graphics, and photos for conveying much of its message.<sup>45</sup>

After 1991, although he was still relatively young, Subtelny's publishing activities seemed to steadily wind down. He published no further books during his lifetime and became involved in some other, less academic pursuits. Foremost among these was his managing of a Canadian development project aimed at helping to train Ukrainian diplomats, parliamentarians, and other professionals, who would be needed by the new Ukrainian state.<sup>46</sup> But this did not mean that he had given up on scholarship as a historian, and I believe that it was about 2005 that I asked him what exactly he was currently working on. He replied that he was occupied with the general question of "imperialism." He died in 2016, and shortly later, a book did come out, but this book dealt with the second great interest of his last years, the history of the Ukrainian scouting organization "Plast," of which he was an enthusiastic devotee.

*Plast: Ukrainian Scouting, A Unique Story* had been researched primarily by Subtelny, but several chapters were written or completed by three of his close collaborators, Orest Dzulynsky, Tanya Dzulynsky, and Oksana Zakydalsky. It was a general history of the



Orest Subtelny, who was active in Plast as a youth, remained an enthusiast for the outdoors throughout his life. This image shows him in later life in Plast uniform.  
Credit: Wikipedia.

organization from its founding in Austrian Galicia in 1912 through the Interwar, World War Two, and the Cold War (when it existed only in emigration) to its re-establishment in

<sup>45</sup> Manoly Lupul in *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, XXVII, 2 (1995), 214-15; Jean Burnett in the *Canadian Historical Review*, LXXIV, 4 (1994), 646-49.

<sup>46</sup> As Maria Subtelny wrote to me in an e-mail of April 20, 2020, in this way, Orest "put his historical expertise into practice."

independent Ukraine after 1991. Again, this was a richly illustrated book with a relatively easily read text.<sup>47</sup> Although modeled on the scouting spirit of Lord Baden-Powell in England, Plast also reflected the specifics of the political and social situation of western Ukrainians under the Austrians. Powell had designed his organization to use scouting, hiking in the countryside, and outdoor skills “to build character.” The English organization was established in the wake of the Boer War in South Africa and its uniforms and spirit combined these activities with quasi-military values such as loyalty, obedience, good health concerns, and dedication to one’s country; it also strove to promote moral qualities such as honesty, cheerfulness, and courage. The Ukrainian organization imitated these even to the extent of adopting the English uniform with Boer hats, scarves, shorts, knee socks, and a hiking staff. Indeed, the entire scouting movement with its uniforms, outdoor exercises, and drills can be seen as just one more aspect of that “Dance and Drill in Human History” that W. H. McNeill thought marked the rise of modern armies, the modern state, modern nationalism, and more thoroughly regimented societies, which in ways came to replace the extended family and other institutions of earlier times.<sup>48</sup>

This uniformed Ukrainian organization was, in fact, partly established to provide able-bodied and skilled recruits for a Ukrainian army that was supposed to emerge after the outbreak of an international war in Europe, and when this happened in 1914, Plast members did join some Ukrainian military units. During the Interwar period, the organization was re-established in the Polish Republic but was persecuted and suppressed by the authorities. Despite its quasi-military spirit, it was still supported by the Greek Catholic Metropolitan of Lviv, Archbishop Andrei Sheptytsky, who certainly saw it as less dangerous than the underground Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which tried to attract its members, and during the 1930s, carried out acts of political violence against the Polish authorities and against those Ukrainians that it considered to be Polish “collaborators.”

The Second World War caused some interruption in the activities of the organization, but it was re-established in the DP Camps in West Germany and transferred to Canada, the USA, and Australia during the post-war period. During this period, however, it was not the underground OUN, but rather the youth organization of the Bandera wing of the OUN, called by its acronym SUM, that was its main competitor, and outflanked it on the right. Also, despite the fact that Plast operated in territories and countries with established Ukrainian communities from older times, such as on the Canadian Prairies, it was unsuccessful in expanding beyond its narrow DP base. The children and grandchildren of the older emigration either remained indifferent to scouting or preferred to join the native Canadian scouting organization.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Orest Subtelny and others, *Plast: Ukrainian Scouting, A Unique Story* (Toronto: Plast Publishing, 2016). 440 pp. + xx. Profusely illustrated. Maps.

<sup>48</sup> W. H. McNeill, *Keeping together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995). This replacement of the extended family was particularly important for the DPs, who in their hurried flight west in 1943-45 often left without parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, and the group spirit, outdoor life together, and fun activities of an organization like Plast, to some degree, could make up for the lost warmth and support of the biological extended family. This was a factor that the children and grandchildren of earlier generations of Ukrainian immigrants in North America simply did not share, at least to the same extent, and consequently to recent times the organization seemed strange and foreign to most of them.

<sup>49</sup> This seems to have also been true during the Interwar era. For example, Johnny Yuzyk (no relation to the Canadian senator of the same surname), a Canadian veteran of the Canadian Army in wartime Britain, whom I interviewed in 1984 in Winnipeg while doing research on my *Maple Leaf and Trident: The Ukrainian Canadians during the Second World War* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1988), explained to me that even then young Ukrainian Canadians preferred to join the Canadian organization, which even had some branches that were almost completely Ukrainian in origin and displayed some Ukrainian spirit.

This last, posthumous effort that bore Subtelny's name, and which was completed by others after his death, forms what Ukrainian Canadian historian Peter Melnycky calls "an encyclopaedic official history of the movement." The product of a group rather than an individual, according to Melnycky it is understandable that it reads somewhat unevenly.<sup>50</sup> The most interesting chapters are those on the origins of the organization and its uncomfortable place in history during the Interwar era, but formed its "Golden Age" according to the authors. In sum, the book clearly reflects the enthusiasm and spirit that Subtelny himself once displayed for its ideals, and so constitutes a final monument to his work. The word "Plast" we may conclude, comes from a root referring to the military scouts of the Kuban Cossacks in service to the Russian Empire, and so a Cossack connection is clear from Subtelny's very first historical work to his very last.

More generally, we can also clearly see that Ukrainian patriotism was a primary principle behind all of Subtelny's historical work. He wrote about Cossacks, but only Ukrainian and not Russian Cossacks; he translated German language materials concerning these Cossacks and edited Polish materials about them as well. He passed on to write a general history of Ukraine to his own time, once again, in a patriotic spirit that portrayed his ancestral homeland as a perpetual victim of others. In some ways, he was a most loyal continuator of the great Ukrainian historian, Mykhailo Hrushevsky, though, being a child of the mid-twentieth century (that "ravaged century," as Robert Conquest reflectively called it<sup>51</sup>), most of the time he breathed a more pessimistic spirit than that famous Ukrainian predecessor, that great founder of modern Ukrainian historiography. His books on the *Ukrainians in North America* and *Plast* also reflected Hrushevsky's views about the history of the people, not the state, as being the true subject of Ukrainian history.

But in light of the events of 1991, he became more optimistic. Indeed, I recall that in the summer of 1991, when Ukrainians were inexorably moving towards full independence, thoroughly American that he still was, Orest was simply delighted that the American public television broadcaster, PBS, in its evening News Hour, used Hollywood's 1962 version of *Taras Bulba*, starring Yul Brynner and Tony Curtis, to explain to its American viewers that a Ukrainian people actually existed, and who they were. As I knew him, however, Orest Subtelny was generally soft-spoken, reserved, quiet, private, even a bit secretive, usually cautious in both word and pen, and with this in mind, perhaps, we can only speculate that twenty-five years later, he died a happy man, as well as an accomplished historian.



Orest Subtelny at his summer cottage near Grafton, Ontario, about two years prior to his death in 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Melnycky in *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, V, 2 (2018), 223-25.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Conquest, *Reflections on a Ravaged Century* (London: John Murray, 1999).