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***A Discipline without a Past: Medieval Studies in Ukraine***

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## **A DISCIPLINE WITHOUT A PAST: MEDIEVAL STUDIES IN UKRAINE**

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The task of writing about the current trends and future of a scholarly discipline always involves the necessity to situate such an assessment against the historical background of its past achievements and shortcomings. This is especially true for medieval studies, a discipline with long, rich, and diverse traditions of scholarship. Looking back at the road medieval scholarship has carved during the last two decades one can find common as well as unique traits in its development in different countries. The uniqueness of the Ukrainian case is that medieval studies in Ukraine are in a certain sense an academic discipline without a past. It would not be an exaggeration to say that there was no such thing as medieval studies in the period around 1991-1993. At that time there were only a small number of people who studied the medieval history of Ukraine and only a few interested in general medieval history and culture. Until quite recently, one also could hardly speak of any lasting traditions of scholarship, special professional institutions, established scholarly schools, or journals dealing with medieval history. These features of the academic field contrast with quite a strong Ukrainian academic and educational background with a wide network of large universities and the National Academy of Science, including numerous history, philology, and philosophy departments and institutes.

There were many causes for such a deplorable academic situation. Some of the crucial causes were of an external political and not academic nature, that is, the Stalinist terror against the Ukrainian intelligentsia, including the extermination of almost all historians, in the 1930s or the situation of the “internal colonialism” of Ukraine’s experience within the Soviet Union, which resulted in deep provincialization of the humanities and social sciences in the period from the 1950s to the 1980s. I have no intention, however, of focusing here on these aspects of the development of the humanities in Ukraine. What I would like to do is to highlight some of the inherent features and structures of Ukrainian medieval history that have had profound impacts on how, on the one hand, Ukrainian medievalists have come to understand and conceptualize their medieval past, and, on the other hand, how these peculiarities have influenced the development of medieval studies in the last two decades.

The first point I would like to make is that Ukrainian historians have always encountered serious problems with rediscovering their “national” Middle Ages. Today it is common knowledge that the emergence of professional historical scholarship during the nineteenth century was strongly interdependent with the rise of the modern nation-state and nationalism. History as an academic discipline with its own research agenda, epistemological premises, and professional ethos originated and was understood primarily as “national.” For such a “national” historiography to study the medieval past meant to investigate first of all a history of “national” medieval statehood, to trace and legitimize the roots of the national consciousness and national aspirations through the rediscovery of the idea of “national statehood” in the medieval, or, even better, in the early medieval period.<sup>1</sup>

This is what Ukrainian “national” history has always found hard to boast. No medieval state and no ethnic group with such a name are known to have existed during the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period. The political and cultural reality of the Ukrainian medieval past – unstable political and cultural borders, political fragmentation and frequent divisions of “Ukrainian space” among neighboring medieval states – was rather the opposite of the present-day idea of a politically and culturally unified Ukrainian state and nation, which came into existence only during the last century. Therefore, it is no surprise that modern Ukrainian historical consciousness and the historical scholarship that was shaped by it have always had problems with legitimating their claims to the medieval past of what is today called Ukraine.<sup>2</sup>

This medieval past has often been seen as a sort of historical battlefield for competing historical narratives elaborated in the Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian

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<sup>1</sup> For the role of medieval history and medievalists in the process of forging modern nationalist ideologies, see Patrick Geary, *The Myth of Nations. The Medieval Origins of Europe*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), esp. 15-40.

<sup>2</sup> These troubles with the legitimacy of the historical concept of the Ukrainian “national” Middle Ages understood primarily in terms of its “ethnic” statehood and nation can be seen as a part of the wider problem that has been recently raised in the scholarly discussions on how one has to understand and conceptualize the history of Ukraine in general. See, for example Mark von Hagen, “Does Ukraine have a History?” *Slavic Review* 54, No. 3 (1995): 658-673. Consider also the insightful remark by John-Paul Himka on how problematic it is to relate the pre-modern cultural artifacts from the territory of present-day Ukraine to the national paradigm of Ukrainian history, in his “What Constitutes a Ukrainian Cultural Artifact?” in Giovanna Brogi Berkoff and Giulia Lami ed., *Ukraine’s Reintegration into Europe: A Historical, Historiographical, and Political Urgent Issue* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2005), esp. 227-8 (hereafter: Himka, “What Constitutes a Ukrainian Cultural Artifact?”).

historiographies.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the best known example of how political and national issues framed the scholarly interpretations of the Ukrainian past concerns the history of the Rurikid polity of the eleventh to thirteenth century, which is generally known today under the name of Kyivan Rus'. When Ukrainian historiography emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, it had to counter a potent, well-established and rich tradition in Russian scholarship that laid exclusive claim to the history of Kyivan Rus'. One could say that Ukrainian historians arrived too late; the Kyivan Rus' past had already been cultivated and fully appropriated into the Russian historical narrative.<sup>4</sup> The history of Kyivan Rus' became a founding historical myth in Russian historical consciousness and there was no place in it for Ukrainians as a separate people. In fact, this Russian historical narrative operated as a sort of imperialist historical teleology by claiming the existence of one single people populating the vast territories of Kyivan Rus' and interpreting the subsequent history of different parts of this realm as a natural and inevitable process of the unification of a once-divided nation under Russian imperial rule. Ukrainian national/nationalist historians have usually countered this imperialist narrative without success by claiming their exclusive national rights to the legacy of the Kyivan Rus' past. There is, however, one striking similarity in the arguments of otherwise antagonistic interpretations of Russian and Ukrainian historians. Both modern national historiographies accepted and followed uncritically the point of view of medieval historical narratives with their emphasis on the continuity and uninterrupted *translatio* of the idea of the statehood in East Slavic history.<sup>5</sup> The major

<sup>3</sup> For various historical representations of the Ukrainian past in Polish, Russian and Ukrainian historiographies, see Stephan Velychenko, *National History as Cultural Process. A Survey of the Interpretations of Ukraine's Past in Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian Historical Writing from the Earliest Times to 1914* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> The close interrelation between Russian imperial expansion, travel literature, and Russian historical scholarship in the process of the discursive appropriation of the Kyivan Rus' past has been brilliantly analyzed by Olexiji Toločko. The author has also emphasized the difficulties Russian scholarship faced in situating the Cossak, Malorussian episode of the Ukrainian past in their concept of continuity between the Kyivan Rus' and the modern, imperial period of Russian history; see, his "Kyjevoruska spadščyna v ukrainskij istoryčnij dumci na počatku XIX stolittia" [The Legacy of Kyivan Rus' in the Ukrainian Historical Thought on the beginning of the Nineteenth Century] in Vladyslav Verstiuk, Viktor Horobets' and Olexij Toločko, *Ukrainski Proekty v Rosijskij Imperii* (Ukrainian Projects the in Russian Empire) (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 2004), 250-331.

<sup>5</sup> Consult important remarks by Olexij Toločko about the myth of continuity in Ukrainian historiography and its medieval chronicles' underpinnings in *Formuvannia Ukrainkoj natsii: istoria ta interpretatsii* (The Formation of the Ukrainian Nation: A History and Interpretations) (Materials of the historians' roundtable) (Lviv: Naukove Tovarystro im. Ševčenko, 1995), 53-4.

point where Russian and Ukrainian historians have really diverged in opinion was on which line of historical succession established by medieval historians to choose: either Kyivan Rus – Valdimir-Suzdal Principality – Moscovian/Russian state or Kyivan Rus’ – Halyč-Volynian Principality – The Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

It is also important that attempts to create an image of Ukrainian medieval history as the coherent and uninterrupted existence of a medieval nation and statehood and put it at the center of the national historical narrative were also challenged from within Ukrainian historical scholarship. The Ukrainian historical consciousness and national memory, as it emerged in the course of the nineteenth century, was mostly grounded on historical traditions of the Cossak era, especially those of the Khmelnytsky uprising of the middle of the seventeenth century – an event which in itself symbolized a deep and radical rupture with the previous stages of Ukrainian history.

From the present-day scholarly perspective, the impossibility of establishing an autonomous, national medieval past, making it an exclusive and privileged possession of Ukrainian “national” historiography, has a double and ambiguous effect. On the one hand, it resulted in the rise of new and the revival of old rude nationalistic mythologies in medieval history writing that have sought to trace the existence of Ukrainians and their state back into primordial times.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, this situation has its own advantages. First of all, it makes some Ukrainian historians more methodologically reflexive in their approaches to the “national” and “nation” in the Middle Ages. These attempts at reconsidering the role of the national in East European medieval history are connected with the larger context of recent debates by Ukrainian historians on the emergence of the modern Ukrainian nation. An important implication of these debates was an appreciation of the “constructivist” approaches to the problem of the formation of nations and the interpretation of the present-day Ukrainian nation as a product of the social and cultural processes of modern times, primarily the rise of modern nationalism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> An example of useful criticism of such conceptions is provided by Olena Rusyna, “Arkheologia neznannia” (Archeology of Ignorance), *Krytyka* 9, No. 9 (95) (2005): 24-26; for the origin and comparative context of such popular national mythologies and mystifications, see also Hryhorii Hrabovyč, “Slidamy nacionalnyh mistyfikacij” (In the Footsteps of National Mystifications), *Krytyka* 5, No. 6 (44) (2001): 14-23.

<sup>7</sup> The most representative for these discussions is materials from the roundtable held in L’viv in 1995, see *Formuvannia Ukrainської natsii*. For a recent successful attempt to reconsider the problem of “national identity” in East European medieval history that bore a clear mark of “constructivist” approaches, see: Serhii Plokyh, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations. Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge:

In the field of the medieval studies this emphasis on rupture and discontinuity in Ukrainian history has raised a challenge to the established disciplinary regimes of history writing in two ways. First, it has stimulated interest in research of what may be called the intellectual genealogy of some influential historiographic concepts and interpretations of the ethnic history of medieval Eastern Europe in general, and of Ukraine in particular. Several works, for instance, have highlighted how the origin of the concepts and categories of historical analysis (this is especially true in the case of the concept of so-called *drevnerusskaja narodnost'* [the ancient Russian people]) that still dominate medieval history writing in Ukraine were strongly dependent upon the political and cultural contexts of the Stalinist epoch with its tense intellectual climate of anti-Western xenophobia and Soviet nationalism.<sup>8</sup> The second type of revisionism is equally ambitious, since it has sought to question the authenticity of some of the most significant and simultaneously most problematic texts which have exerted an enduring influence on historians' perception of the Eastern Slavonic medieval past. Such studies are indeed bold attempts, because they have tried to introduce some doubt into what has long been believed to be beyond any doubt.<sup>9</sup> One would say that some of these texts have taken on a sort of semi-sacral status in medieval scholarship, fostering a sense of national megalomania, being a source for continual historical myth-making and reflecting the distribution of power within academia.

As I already mentioned above, the Ukrainian medieval past basically lacked social, political, and cultural institutions and processes able to sustain the idea of the political and "national" unity of its geographical space during the Middle Ages. The questionable character of the continuity in the Ukrainian medieval past opens room for recognition of contingency in its history, especially in its relation to the broader context of East European medieval history.<sup>10</sup> The first aspect of this contingency is that the Ukrainian Middle Ages appear primarily as regional or local in the context of the neighbors' "national" medieval histories. Furthermore,

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Cambridge University Press, 2006), e.g., 3-5.

<sup>8</sup> See Natalia Jusova, *'Davnioruška narodnist': zarozhzhennia i stanovlennia koncepciji v radianskij istoričnij nauči (1930 – perša polovyna 1940-kih rr)* ('Old Russian Nationality': The Origin and Formation of the Concept in the Soviet Historical Scholarship, 1930s – the first half of 1940s) (Kyiv: Stylos, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Edward L. Keenan, *Josef Dobrovsky and the Origins of the Igor' Tale* (Cambridge: Harvard Series in Ukrainian Studies, 2003); Alexei Toločko, *"Istoria Rossijskaja" Vasilija Tatischeva: istočniki i izvestia* (The "Russian History" of Vasilij Tatischev: Sources and Evidence) (Moscow/Kyiv: NLO/Krytyka, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> For the role of contingency in Ukrainian medieval history, see Himka, "What Constitutes a Ukrainian Cultural Artifact?:" 228.

it is legitimate to argue that localism is an inherent feature of Ukrainian medieval history. The primacy of the local perspective is an important asset for understanding Ukrainian medieval times in two ways. First, it reveals the persistence of some medieval modes of political organization and patterns of political local culture in the post-medieval period of Ukrainian history. This is especially relevant for the case of the Ukrainian lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which allows speculation about possible Rus' roots of such political institutions. It has been possible to bring to light a process of gradual transformation and decline of the old forms of social and political life in the post-medieval period in the new context of the innovative trends of Early Modern times.<sup>11</sup> In this way, Ukrainian medieval and post-medieval local history can make a new and highly interesting contribution to Jacques Le Goff's "long Middle Ages."<sup>12</sup> Second, it tends to problematize the relations between the local medieval past and the modern national historical narratives based on it. The case of the Ukrainian Middle Ages makes it especially visible how the national history of Middle Ages works to "nationalize" some aspects of the local past and to silence others.

To illustrate some aspects of the interrelations between the local and national perspectives let me say a few words *pro domo sua*, that is, about the scholarship on late medieval Galicia. I would like to focus briefly on the late medieval Galician past by stressing in particular how the local evidence resists attempts at reductionism to national history. For the general historical context it is important to know that from the 1340s Galicia was under the control of the kings of the Piast, Anjou, and Jagiellonian dynasties. The incorporation of Galicia into the kingdoms of Hungary and Poland stimulated rapid changes in the cultural, ethnic, and social landscape of the region. The process of intensive cultural and social transformations and interaction manifested itself in various ways – the migration of German and Jewish

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example Natalia Jakovenko, "Pro dva mentalni stereotypy ukrainskoi šliakhty: 'Čolovik dobryj' i 'Čolovik zlyj'" (Two Mental Stereotypes of Ukrainian Nobles: A 'Good Man' and An 'Evil Man'), in her *Paralelnyj svit. Doslidzhennia z istorii ujaven ta idej v Ukraini XVI-XVII st.* (The Parallel World: Studies on the History of Imagery and Ideas in Ukraine, Fifteenth to Seventeenth Century) (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2002), 106-47.

<sup>12</sup> Besides the study of Natalia Jakovenko, the idea of the relevance of Ukrainian medieval and post-medieval history to the "long European Middle Ages" has profoundly influenced the scholarly agenda of the journal *Medievalia Ucrainica. Mentalnist' ta istoria idej* (Medievalia Ucrainica. Mentality and the History of Ideas), edited by Natalia Jakovenko and Olexij Toločko in the 1990s. This point has been recently stressed again by Yuriy Avvakumov, *Medievistyka i Ukrainskijj Katolyckijj Universytet* (Lviv: Ukrainskijj Katoyc'kyj Universytet, 2007), esp. 13.

populations that speeded up urban growth; the establishment of institutions of the Roman Catholic Church; the establishment of Vlach settlements in the Carpathian foothills; and the arrival of Polish aristocracy and nobility. In view of this new cultural and social situation the local Orthodox Ukrainian population was forced to make new cultural choices and seek modes of coexistence, including changes in their confessional and ethnic identities.

Historical research still tends to interpret all these complex forms of cultural interaction and cultural hybrids in a traditional way, viewing this as a process of unilateral assimilation. In most cases this assimilation is considered Polonization and it is usually described in terms of accepting a single national identity.<sup>13</sup> Such approaches are clearly visible, for example, in the attempts to deny or diminish the role of Germans and German colonization in late medieval Galicia. For instance, in their persistent search for the national past of Lviv/Lwów/Lemberg, both Ukrainian and Polish historians have often tended to underrate the fact of the German dominance in the city during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Polish historians, particularly, have seen the role of Germans in the history of the city and region as provisional, marginal, and insignificant on the road to the complete polonization. Ukrainian scholars have gone even further in their negation and criticism of the German influence, extending it to agrarian and peasant history. In Ukrainian historiography the massive settlements of Galician villages under German law and the presence of a German population there is either completely ignored or is seen in a particularly dark light as representing another example of the aggressive nature of German medieval eastern colonization and its particularly negative destructive consequences for Slavic communal life.<sup>14</sup> Ukrainian historians

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<sup>13</sup> For an example of such an approach in Polish historiography, see Jan Orzechowski, "Oksydentalizacja Rusi Koronnej w XIV, XV i XVI w.," (Occidentalization of the Rus' Crown in the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Century) in *Państwo, naród, stany* (State, Nation, Estates in the Consciousness of the Middle Ages), ed. Alexander Gieysztor and Sławomir Gawlas (Warsaw: PWN, 1990), 215-243. The tendency towards a critical revision of the old historiographic stereotypes in the treatment of the problem of "ethnic" and "national" in late medieval Galicia is represented by works of Andrzej Janeczek; see, for example, his "Między sobą. Polacy i Rusini na wspólnym pograniczu w XIV-XV w.," (Among Themselves. Poles and Ruthenians on the Common Borderlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century) in *Między sobą. Szkice historyczne polsko-ukraińskie* (Among Themselves. Polish-Ukrainian Historical Essays), ed. Teresa Chynczewska-Hennel and Natalia Jakovenko (Lublin: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 2000), 37-55.

<sup>14</sup> Andriy O. Hurbyk, furnishes a good example of the complete silence about the German presence in: "Silske naselennia v dobu polityčnoj rozdrobrenosti" (A Rural Population in the Period of Political Disintegration), in *Istoria ukraïnskoho selianstva* (The History of Ukrainian Peasantry) vol. 1 (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 2006), 73-124 (hereafter: Hurbyk, "Silske naselennia v dobu polityčnoj rozdrobrenosti"). As for



have interpreted the history of Ruthenian nobility of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in a similar manner, approaching it almost exclusively from the perspective of its total polonization. This clearly evolutionary and theological perspective is accompanied by some moralizing overtones concerning the class egoism of the local aristocracy and its inability to stand up for Ukrainian national interests. Beyond such an understanding of national identity and assimilation is an attempt to project the modern concept of ethnicity into the past and construct the late medieval identities existing in Galicia as homogeneous and exclusive. Such an approach has tended, however, to overlook or underestimate the numerous cases of situational and multiple identities that existed in late medieval Galicia which did not fit the modern national categories of stable ethnicity and unilateral assimilation.

Another side of this problematic nature of the late medieval Galician past is that it has been often regarded as an “un-heroed,” one would even say an opportunistic, episode in Ukrainian history. Abundant historical evidence is preserved for fifteenth-century Galicia pointing to deep cultural and social transformations in the life of the region at that time. The sources, however, have little if any utility for elevating a “national spirit,” since they offer no significant evidence about “national” statehood and the struggle against foreign conquerors. This image of late medieval Galician history probably accounts for the tendency in present-day history writing to marginalize or even exclude it from the national historical grand narrative. For example, the Galician history of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was completely omitted from the ambitious and multi-volume project of Ukrainian history, called “Ukraine through the Centuries,” which was published recently by the major historical academic institution – the Institute of Ukrainian History.<sup>15</sup>

The same holds true for the recent “The History of Ukrainian Peasantry,”<sup>16</sup> which barely mentions the evidence of Galician fifteenth-century sources concerning

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the highly negative and ideologically biased assessment of the German influence on Galician agrarian life see the otherwise brilliant investigation by Vasyl Inkin, *Silske suspil'stvo Halyč'koho Prykarpattia u XVI-XVIII stolit'iaakh, istorični narysy* (The Village Society of the Halyč Carpathian Foothills in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth century) (Lviv: Institut istoričnyh doslidžen' LNU “Ivana Franka,” 2004), esp. 256. Recently Thomas Wunsch has made an endeavor to reinterpret the expansion of German law in late medieval Galicia from a fresh methodological point of view, see his “Ostsiedlung in Rotrußland vom 14.-16. Jahrhundert – Problemaufriß für die kulturgeschichtliche Erforschung eines Transformationsprozesses in Ostmitteleuropa (mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der terra Halicz),” *Österreichische Osthefte* 41, No. 1 (1999): 47-82.

<sup>15</sup> The volume in question was published by Olena Rusynna, *Ukraine under the Tatars and Lithuania* (Kiev: Altenatyvy, 1998.)

<sup>16</sup> See Hurbyk, “Silske naselennia v dobu polityčnoj rozdroblenosti.”

peasant life at that time. This is especially surprising if one takes into account the fact that the sources for other regions have not survived in such a sizeable volume as they have for Galicia in that period.<sup>17</sup> “The History of Ukrainian Peasantry” also provides an interesting example of how present-day historians have tried to construct the national spatial framework for the local histories of social classes. In this regard one should not forget that the peasantry has always enjoyed a special status in both nationalist and Marxist history-writing in Eastern Europe. It has been regarded as a basic constituent brick for building modern East European nations or represented as one of the driving forces in the permanent class struggle. The main research procedure visible in such studies is first to search for local evidence, then construct the “national” medieval peasant community and single out its fundamental features. This is usually done without raising the question of how relevant it is to interpret the highly local and geographically fragmented village communities of the Middle Ages in terms of a single “national” peasantry.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, one can also observe attempts to impose completely irrelevant temporalities on the history of the peasantry. One of the central chapters on the medieval period contained in the “History of Ukrainian Peasantry” has the title “A Rural Population in the Period of ‘Political Disintegration.’”<sup>19</sup> The chapter does not explain what the term “political disintegration” means nor how it is relevant for the history of peasantry. I have a suspicion that it betrays the specific “statist” (state-bound) vision of authors who are unable to think of the history of medieval peasantry without linking it to the idea of the nation state. It seems to be quite easy to trace the ideological origins of this concept. It reminds one of the concept of feudal disintegration that originated in Soviet times and was used to explain the social and political developments of the Rurikid polity after the death of Jaroslav the Wise. Moreover, it was a heavily biased ideological concept because it interpreted political fragmentation and princely feuds not as a feature inherent in the medieval polities, but as a sort of historical anomaly that had to be overcome in the process of historical development towards a national centralized state. In this sense the application of this concept represents the strange mixture of the Soviet

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<sup>17</sup> See Hurbyk, “Silske naselennia v dobu polityčnoj rozdroblenosti.”

<sup>18</sup> This approach can also be found in the studies of some Polish historians, for example, Jerzy Wyrozumski has used Galician evidence extensively to reconstruct the Polish medieval peasant community, see his “Gromada w życiu samorządowym średniowiecznej wsi polskiej” (The Communal life of the Polish Medieval Village), *Spółeczeństwo Polski średniowiecznej* 3 (1985): 219-251.

<sup>19</sup> See Hurbyk, “Silske naselennia v dobu polityčnoj rozdroblenosti.”

imperial and Ukrainian nationalistic historical stereotypes that coexist in present-day Ukrainian academic history writing.

The contingency of the Ukrainian medieval past also opens another perspective, in some sense complementary to, but also a reversal of, the local point of view that has been stressed above. It proposed going beyond the local and seeing the situation of the cultural encounter in the wider context of the constant flux of people, ideas, texts, and artifacts of diverse cultural and ethnic origins in the broad geographical space between Central Europe, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia.

This approach facilitates rethinking the old and outdated idea of a border of culture and civilization in Ukrainian history writing. The notion of border has been a crucial conceptual tool for a long time for the cultural mapping of nationality and civilization and for representing them as geographically closed and ethnically homogenous entities. It was used to reinforce the perception of the Ukrainian past as a purely Slavic and Orthodox world whose relationships with the outer world were treated in terms of a besieged stronghold. This historiographic interpretation, which has a strong Slavophile and Soviet ideological background, maintained that Ukrainians constantly fought against Western, Catholic, and German-Polish-Hungarian expansion. On the other hand, it represented Ukraine as another European *antemurale* resisting the constant attacks of Eastern nomadic people. It is a matter of paradox that such views of the founding fathers of Ukrainian historiography, many of whom were often the ardent Ukrainian nationalists, contributed to the creation of a holistic and homogeneous image of Rus' and Ukrainian history. It was an image which, in fact, coincided almost completely with the idea of Russian imperial medievalism and a Russian imperial way of thinking about the East Slavic past.

The approach viewing the Ukrainian medieval past as a zone open for both cultural confrontation and interchange partly reminds one of the old historiographic concept of Ukraine as another frontier region “between the East and West.” But it implies more than that. First it tends to demonstrate that the notions of East and West themselves as seen in the context of Ukrainian history were historical constructs that emerged in the process of cultural interaction.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, this

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<sup>20</sup> Insightful observations in this regard can be found in Ihor Ševčenko, “Ukraina mizh Skhodom i Zakhodom” (Ukraine between East and West), in his *Ukraina mizh Skhodom i Zakhodom. Narysy z istorii kultury do počatku XVIII stolittia* (Lviv: Ukrainskyj Katolyckyj Universytet, 2001), 1-12. The book was originally published in English as *Ukraine between East and West. Essays on Cultural History to the End of the Early Eighteenth Century* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1996).

re-evaluation of the traditional civilization map of Ukrainian medieval history has also resulted in a new understanding of traditional concepts of center and periphery within this space and has offered new interpretative possibilities for the analysis of highly interesting cultural phenomena and artifacts that existed on the margins. Another important consequence is that it has shed new light on the problem of the cultural reception and reinterpretation of Western and Eastern traditions in the Ukrainian medieval context. For example, emphasis on the cultural reception and transmission has sharpened historians' sensitivity to the fact that the traditional "high" Eastern Slavic Orthodox culture of the eleventh through the fifteenth centuries was grounded mostly on translated and imported texts in terms of text production and reception. The original texts produced by the local literati were only a tiny minority in its textual equipment (there is now growing suspicion that some of them, like the famous Igor tale, were later forgeries). One would certainly assess the significance of this fact bearing in mind that modern national culture and the idea of national heritage fostered by it have always favored original and native medieval texts and artifacts over foreign borrowings and influences.<sup>21</sup>

Historians who have come to privilege such a cross-cultural approach focusing on how institutions, ideas, and texts were transmitted and adopted in new cultural contexts have pursued their research in many directions. Some of these studies have investigated the spread and reception of feudal institutions and norms, Vlachs, and German urban law. Another important venue of studies concerns the analysis of the interrelation between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches with special emphasis on the rise and spread of the idea of a church union and Unionist thought in Eastern Europe.<sup>22</sup> This research has also touched upon an

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<sup>21</sup> This point has been nicely emphasized by John-Paul Himka, "What Constitute a Ukrainian Cultural Artifact?" esp. 229. See also his forthcoming study on Carpathian icons of the Last Judgement: *History on Linden Boards: Last Judgment Iconography in the Carpathians* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2010)

<sup>22</sup> The necessity to formulate a new scholarly agenda for the investigation of the Church Unions and Unionist thought stressing the general context of European Middle Ages has been recently proposed by Yurii Avvakumov, *Medievistyka i Ukraïnskyj Katolyckyj Uniwersytet*, 13-27. Some valuable recent contributions to the problem of the Church Unions in the context of East Slavic history have been made by Ihor Ševčenko, "Polityka Vizantijskoho patriarkhatu u Skhidnij Europi v XIV st." (The Politics of the Byzantine Patriarchate in Eastern Europe in Fourteenth century), in his *Ukraina mizh Skhodom i Zakhodom*, 75-98; Yurii Avvakumov, *Die Entstehung des Unionsgedankes: Die lateinische Theologie des Hochmittelalters in der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Ritus der Ostkirche* (Berlin, 2002); and Olena Rusyna, "Poslannia kyivskoho mytropolyta Mysaila papi rymskomu Sykstu IV z 1476 roku: novi aspekty doslidzhennia" (The Letter of the Kyivan Mytropolite Missail to Pope Sixtus IV from 1476: New Aspects of the Research), *Kovčeh* 5 (2007): 50-72; eadem, "Poslannia papi Sykstu IV i problema interpretacii literaturnykh pamiatok XV st." (A Letter

interesting problem of the after-life of Western medieval texts and authors in the post-medieval period in the new cultural milieu and their interpretations in the context of Orthodox-Uniate polemics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>23</sup> The research perspective outlined above would be incomplete without close investigation of the interaction between the nomadic, Jewish, Turkish, and Armenian people on the one side and the Slavic people on the other. It seems that today such research, an agenda postulated by Omelian Pritsak at the beginning of 1990s, needs new application.

The community of scholars interested in the Ukrainian medieval past is in some sense similar to the past they investigate. It has fluent and ill-defined borders that are difficult to define in terms of national historiography. This is perhaps reason that I have found it impossible to omit the contribution of non-Ukrainian scholars to the field of Ukrainian medieval history when compiling the list of most important publications. On the one hand, this academic situation does not lack positive aspects. It permits conducting an investigation as if starting from a blank page without feeling the burden of outdated academic discourse and institutional constraints. Perhaps in this light one should see the emergence of new institutions and journals like *Krytyka*, *Ruthenica*, *Socium*, and *Ukrainskyj Humanitarnyj Ohliad* (Ukrainian Review of the Humanities) that have proposed new fresh interpretations and considerably widened the research perspectives of medieval and historical studies in Ukraine during the last fifteen years.

On the other hand, the Ukrainian academic situation is still characterized by extreme parochialism and marginalization within the global academic world of the humanities. For a long time it has been the renowned research centers of Ukrainian studies located in North America (Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, Canadian Institute for Ukrainian Studies in Edmonton) that have provided links to the international academic world and functioned as the main international forums for scholars interested in Ukrainian and East European history. Their efforts, as important as they are, cannot substitute for the work of scholars in Ukraine. And this is the point where, in my opinion, the Medieval Studies Department with its mission comes in. From my personal experience I can say that the Department's

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to Pope Sixtus IV and the Problem of the Interpretation of the Fifteenth-Century Literary Texts), *Ukrainskyj Istoryčnyj Zhurnal* 2 (2008): 16-34.

<sup>23</sup> An interesting example of such research has been supplied recently by Valeriy Zema, "Papa Hryhoriy Velykyj u labetakh lehend ta istoriohrafii" [Pope Gregory the Great in Legends and Historiography], *Ukrainskyj Istoryčnyj Zhurnal* 1 (2007): 20-38.

devotion to the training of young medievalists from the East European region in the last fifteen years represents a great scholarly and teaching achievement. Together with other CEU departments it has contributed enormously to the emergence of a new and mobile network of young Ukrainian scholars in the humanities and social sciences who are trying to find their own voices and their own disciplinary legitimacy within the international scholarly community.

### List of Significant Recent Works in Alphabetical Order

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Rusyna, Olena. *Ukraine under the Tatars and Lithuania*. Kiev: Alternatyvy, 1998.

Ševčenko, Ihor. *Ukraine between East and West. Essays on Cultural History to the End of the Early Eighteenth Century*. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1996.

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