

Mark R. Baker. *Peasants, Power, and Place: Revolution in the Villages of Kharkiv Province, 1914-1921*. Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2016. Distributed by Harvard UP. Harvard Series in Ukrainian Studies. x, 286 pp. Notes. Works Cited. Index. \$39.95, paper.

The state of the research on the Revolution and Civil War in Ukraine, 1917-21, leaves much to be desired. Many Ukrainian-language accounts relating to this time period have been produced over the past twenty-five years. However, too many of them simply regurgitate nationalist pieties. In the West, hardly any English-language studies have come out, despite the period's seminal importance in the history of Ukrainian statehood and despite the mass of new information that has been made available owing to the opening of the former Soviet archives. Consequently, Mark R. Baker's monograph on the peasants of Kharkiv province between 1914 and 1921 breaks new ground in Ukrainian studies: it is a persuasively argued work on the topic with solid empirical foundations and a sensitive reading of the archival sources.

At the same time, Baker's book also represents an important contribution to the writings on the Revolution and Civil War throughout the former Romanov Empire. Within this broader historiography, it belongs to an increasingly well-established trend that sees these events as part of a continuum of crisis starting with the outbreak of the Great War and seeks to understand them better by examining the kaleidoscope of revolution in the provinces. As such, the book ranks alongside comparable works, for example, by Peter Holquist, Sarah Badcock, and Aaron Retish.

In five chapters arranged chronologically, Baker examines, respectively, the social effects of the Great War; the response to the 1917 revolutions; the German occupation in 1918; the impact of the Civil War in 1919; and the attempts, from 1920, to consolidate Soviet rule in the village. The author presents two main arguments: (1) that peasants were primarily concerned with their own economic interests; and (2) that they continued to think locally despite attempts by successive governments to convince them that they were part of a larger community. In relation to the latter point, Baker maintains that Kharkiv's peasants lacked both a class consciousness as peasants and a national consciousness as Ukrainians. Of course, contemporaries and scholars have often made similar claims. However, Baker's contribution stands out owing to the mass of material that he uses to support his argument. This material includes the minutes and resolutions of peasant congresses and the documents produced by soviets of peasant deputies. Baker makes a considerable effort to reconstruct the peasants' perspectives on the basis of sources that, in most cases, were created by non-peasants. At the same time, he is adamant that one can best understand the

peasants through their actions rather than through the words often ascribed to them.

As a result, Baker's work contains a broad range of detailed local case studies that exemplify the relationships between Kharkiv's peasants and the various organs of power. He provides several close descriptions of land conflicts between peasants of different villages in order to underpin his claim that peasants did not act out of class solidarity. He also convincingly identifies the reasons for peasant discontent toward the governments that sought to rule them. For example, he reveals how the Bolsheviks and the peasants had very different understandings of the purpose of the non-party conferences held in early 1920; the resulting failure of the Bolsheviks to listen to the peasants' complaints regarding the food supply meant that they missed a small opportunity for rapprochement with the village.

In one of Baker's most masterly sections, he takes apart the claim put forward by Steven Guthier that the willingness of peasants to vote for the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (UPSR) in the elections to the Constituent Assembly indicated a potential constituency for a Ukrainian national movement that combined the causes of national and social liberation. Baker shows how the Kharkiv Provincial Soviet of Peasants' Deputies took on the task of informing the peasants about the upcoming elections. The Ukrainian and Russian Soviet republics dominated this body; consequently, the campaign to apprise the village about the elections also involved acquainting it with the joint Socialist Revolutionary position. At the same time, it seems that the UPSR's attraction was more its position on land reform than its view on Ukrainian national autonomy.

Many of Baker's conclusions seem to run counter to another recent local examination of peasants—Aaron Retish's study of Viatka province in the same period. Baker and Retish, certainly, identify similarities in peasant behaviour. However, Retish suggests that the Viatka peasants were more willing to see themselves as citizens of the new state and that the Bolsheviks were better able to forge ties in the village. Of course, Kharkiv and Viatka experienced the Revolution and Civil War differently. As Baker argues, the German occupation was a seminal experience for peasants in provinces like Kharkiv: it sheltered them from war communism, and this, in turn, shaped their perspective on the meaning of soviet power. At the same time, Baker and Retish use different measures of what constitutes an interest in the sphere beyond the local; for example, more than Retish, Baker stresses that the Kharkiv peasants' reluctance to give up their produce to various governments and to support provincial soviets with their taxes were indications of their indifference to wider interests. Certainly, the debate will continue, but in offering a slightly different approach, Baker adds a new,

robust perspective on the debate and suggests questions that future researchers should ask.

Hopefully, Baker's work will act as a spur for historians to conduct similar work on other largely Ukrainian-speaking provinces. Kyiv, for example, witnessed more local uprisings and, apparently, more nationalist agitation than Kharkiv: it would be fascinating to find out whether, as a result, Kyiv's peasants had a different perspective on their relationship to the state.

Baker's monograph is the first Western work on Ukraine during the Revolution and Civil War to fully take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the opening of the former Soviet archives. The book well deserves translation into Ukrainian, if not only because of the widespread assumption that the "Ukrainian" peasants supported the Ukrainian national cause. However, the book also merits the attention of all scholars dealing with the Russian Empire's continuum of crisis and with peasants under Romanov and Bolshevik rule.

Christopher Gilley
Durham, UK

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