

Johann Christian von Engel. *Istoriia Ukrainy ta ukrains'kykh kozakiv* [History of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Cossacks]. Trans. Iurii Holubkin, L. Nazarenko, Ievhen Khodun, Olena Butenko, Ie. Chekariiev, and L. Udovenko. Ed. Volodymyr Kravchenko. Comp. Taras Chuhui. Kharkiv: Fakt, 2014. 640 pp. Foreword by Volodymyr Kravchenko. Illustrations. Notes. Comments by Dmytro Chorny, Taras Chuhyi, and Volodymyr Mil'chev. Name Index. Geographic Index. Cloth.

When Polish King Sigismund I was preparing for war with Muscovy in 1516, the southern borders of his kingdom were attacked by Crimean Tatars. He demanded an explanation from the Crimean khan; after all, he had signed a peace agreement with Bakhchysarai only a few years earlier. The khan explained that his troops were not to blame: the attacking forces were Tatar volunteers, whom he called “Cossacks.” Dissatisfied, Sigismund commissioned a series of protective weirs on the Dnipro River, where he stationed guards to defend the kingdom. According to Johann Christian von Engel in *Geschichte der Ukraine und der ukrainischen Kosaken (History of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Cossacks, 1776)*, these local guards were also called Cossacks (88-89).

Von Engel's eighteenth-century work has finally been translated into Ukrainian, as *Istoriia Ukrainy ta ukrains'kykh kozakiv*, and published by Kharkiv's Fakt press. While von Engel traces the history of the lands that now comprise central Ukraine from the end of Kyivan Rus' to the eighteenth century, the Ukrainian Cossacks constitute the focus of his research. He examines their turbulent relationship with the Polish monarchs, their ambivalent union with Muscovy, and their unsuccessful bids for independence. The modern approach of the historian is evidenced by his critical assessment of a great variety of sources—from chronicles and memoirs to official documents and folklore. His book was one of the first, and, sadly, became one of the last, analytic works on Ukrainian history written by a western scholar of the time. After *Geschichte der Ukraine und der ukrainischen Kosaken* came out, scholars in Western Europe subsequently showed little interest in Ukraine. The country disappeared from the political and mental map of Europe for almost two hundred years.

Istoriia Ukrainy ta ukrains'kykh kozakiv includes an excellent foreword by Volodymyr Kravchenko of the University of Alberta, who explains how the Ukrainian edition evolved from a series of separately published chapters to a complete book. The process took twenty years and involved various sources of funding and changes in the translation team (23-24). The book is annotated with von Engel's notes, as well as with generous historical background information and the careful corrections of editorial team members. Remarkably, this is the first translation of this work from German

into any other language. This fact is rather striking, particularly given that most scholars researching Ukrainian Cossacks, from a variety of perspectives, have used von Engel's work—from Kliuchevs'kyi, Markevych, and Hrushevs'kyi many years ago to Plokhly and Kravchenko today. Kravchenko stresses that von Engel's work still retains its value for researchers, and later discoveries in the field have only confirmed the historian's assumptions. Nevertheless, despite its long-term usefulness and credibility, *Geschichte der Ukraine und der ukrainischen Kosaken* never reached the mass reader; the lack of translations and re-editions led to its content being selectively taken and regurgitated through numerous tertiary works.

One could ask: Until recently, did a mass reader exist in Ukraine for this type of history? That is, the history of a country without a state of its own at the time and with a high level of illiteracy among its population; a critical and inclusive history without an explicit teleology or a clear-cut division of heroes and villains? This is von Engel's history: inclusive and critical. While he had his own political agenda and relied profoundly on Polish primary sources, he nevertheless sought out and incorporated material from Cossack chronicles and, ultimately, read all of the texts critically. His admiration for the republican spirit of the Cossacks, which led him to compare them to the Spartans, did not prevent him from seeing their brutality and corruption. Moreover, he cast Khmel'nyts'kyi, Mazepa, and Peter I as individual agents and avoided succumbing to contemporaneous conventional interpretations of their personalities. He, accordingly, refused to call Peter I "Great," owing to the latter's inhumane practices in achieving political goals—practices that incorporated a disregard for both human life and the rule of law.

Perhaps the inclusiveness of the facts, as well as their critical assessment, might be a revelation to the Ukrainian reader who has been exposed to the extremes of glorification or amnesia with respect to the past. Indeed, the generation of Ukrainian readers who grew up reading the books of Subtelny, Hrushevs'kyi, or Polons'ka-Vasylenko might find von Engel's narrative unconventional. As opposed to its predecessors and successors in historical scholarship in Ukraine (and in Russia), *Istoriia Ukrainy ta ukrains'kykh kozakiv* is not a chronicle. It does not advance an explicitly teleological narrative of events. Von Engel's book is an account of Ukrainian history by an impartial party.

This Ukrainian edition could not be timelier. It not only grants access to the topic to wider circles of readers, but also reveals a poignant resemblance between the challenges that Ukrainians faced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the ones that they face today. Von Engel convincingly demonstrates how a disregard for the legal equality of all citizens and an irresponsiveness on the part of authorities, exacerbated by

corruption, can ruin the state and expose it to external threats (77). Such problems plague Ukraine still today.

One can only recommend that von Engel's work be further translated into English, which would offer Western audiences a wider historical context within which to understand current events in Ukraine. Such a book could, for instance, provide a crash course on early modern Ukrainian history for journalists reporting on current events in Ukraine. A future English edition could be incorporated into history and Slavic studies curricula across Europe and North America, which would register Ukraine on the international intellectual map as a country with a deep, complex, and unique history. Such an achievement would finally do justice to the insights and innovations of a historian of Ukraine who wrote over two hundred years ago.

Daria Mattingly
University of Cambridge

