The Author's Observations

Paul Robert Magocsi*

Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Toronto, Canada
*Corresponding author. Email: ukr.chair@utoronto.ca

May I begin by thanking the organizer of the panel, Nick Kupensky, and the five panelists—Harvey Goldblatt, John-Paul Himka, Reverend Peter Galadza, Chris Hann, and Valerii Padiak—for their preparation of written remarks on the monograph, *With Their Backs to the Mountains: A History of Carpathian Rus' and Carpatho-Rusyns*.[1] It is particularly gratifying to know that several distinguished colleagues not only read the book but provided thoughtful commentary which allows us to reflect further on the conceptual and factual matters raised in the text.

Over the years I have become increasingly curious about how a book of mine is understood by its readers. In other words, what are the differences, if any, between what I expect and what readers find new and important in a given text. For instance, I devoted much attention to religion, in particular jurisdictional matters and the role of priests in secular society, and this was indeed noted with appreciation by most of the commentators. On the other hand, I would have thought that the most innovative aspect of *With Their Backs to the Mountains* is a theme underlying the entire text: that Carpathian Rus' in geographic, political, and cultural terms has always been firmly part of central Europe and, in particular, the Danubian Basin. Its relationship to the East is, therefore, a kind of aberration associated primarily with the second half of the twentieth century. Does the fact that none of the commentators challenged such a view imply that they accept it as a given?

I would have also expected some push back on my attempt to undermine the stereotypical view that Carpathian Rus', especially the bulk of its territory on the southern slopes of the mountains, was by the 19th century a destitute and forgotten land whose Carpatho-Rusyn inhabitants were always so poverty-stricken that they had little or no educational background or cultural achievements. In order to sustain such assumptions the vast majority of historians who write about this topic make no mention of a Carpatho-Rusyn intelligentsia (secular as well as religious) that functioned in a wide range of professional and cultural spheres within Hungarian society. Have our four commentators on the ASEEES panel also accepted what I had thought was my clearly revisionist viewpoint: that Carpathian Rus' was not "simply a land of downtrodden, exploited, uneducated, and destitute peasants" (Magocsi 2015, 147).

What the commentators have not yet internalized is the issue of terminology which they do discuss. To be blunt, Rusyns are not the subject of *With Their Backs to the Mountains*. *Rusyn*, after all, is an ethnonym that refers to all East Slavs, living primarily in the eastern borderlands (*kresy*) of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth—the ancestors of present-day Belarusans and Ukrainians. The idea that *Rusyn* is the older name for—and therefore exclusive equivalent of—the newer ethnonym *Ukrainian* is simply false, even though this view is constantly repeated by scholars of Ukraine and has become an integral part of Ukrainian state ideology. The point is that the ethnonym *Rusyn* does not belong exclusively to any modern East Slavic nationality, and to avoid confusion (and to stop buttressing the false Rusyn-equals-Ukrainian equation) it should not be used to describe the people who are the main subject of *With Their Backs to the Mountains*. One should continually keep in mind the principle enunciated in the title of one of my Ukrainian-language books: *Every Carpatho-Rusyn is a Rusyn, But Not Every Rusyn is a Carpatho-Rusyn* (Magochii 2015).

John-Paul Himka points out that in *With Their Backs to the Mountains* "the cultural aspect is underdeveloped." He is certainly correct and, at first glance, one might think that the problem could be corrected by adding a few more paragraphs on art and music (both religious and secular). Such additions would not necessarily be an adequate response, however. This is because

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Professor Himka's criticism goes to the heart of the conceptual matter of how to write an introductory volume about a specific territory/culture/people. Should such a volume be governed by a chronological or thematic approach?

I chose the chronological approach for *With Their Backs to the Mountains*, which inevitably would make it difficult (at the expense of a readable narrative) to develop, let us say, the arts or musical culture of Carpathian Rus'. I have even thought of writing yet another general book about Carpatho-Rusyns, something like Gerald Stone did for the Lusatian Sorbs (Stone 1972) or that I, together with Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, recently did for two peoples, Jews and Ukrainians (Magocsi and Shtern 2016). Both those volumes adopted a thematic approach, which, if applied to Carpatho-Rusyns in yet another book, would allow separate chapters not only on music and painting but also on language, literature, and traditional culture/ethnography—topics which also were inadequately developed in *With Their Backs to the Mountains*.

I might mention parenthetically that Professor Himka alerts us to the achievements in Carpatho-Rusyn sacral art. Even more important, however, is secular painting that developed to an exceptionally high degree of sophistication in Carpathian Rus' during the interwar years of the 20th century. At that time there existed a quite unique school of painting, the Subcarpathian Barbizon, whose leading figures (Adalbert Erdelyi, Iosyf Bokshai, and Fedor Manailo among others) had basically no contact with Ukrainian artists even in nearby Galicia, but instead were inspired by and worked in the artistic milieus of Munich, Paris, and Prague.

In other words, painting like literature and historic tradition are areas in which Carpatho-Rusyns clearly created forms of culture distinct from neighboring peoples, whether Poles, Slovaks, Magyars, or Ukrainians. I probably will not write a thematic based general book on Carpatho-Rusyns, but I do hope to publish a general history of Carpatho-Rusyn painting and sculpture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Most Ukrainian specialists are baffled about the inclusion of Galicia's Lemkos but not Boikos as part of the Carpatho-Rusyn ethnos. Professor Himka also seems skeptical at first, but then accepts the geographical explanation proposed in *With Their Backs to the Mountains*, which he suggests "seems very sensible." On the other hand, was it my ineffectiveness in explanation or his misreading that led to a misunderstanding of what one colleague from Poznań said about the most important border that is found on Map 2 and what I proverbially call the tomato-grape line?

In no way does my hypothesis about cultural features propose, to quote Professor Himka, a "difference between Carpatho-Rusyns and Ukrainians based on the alcoholic beverages they traditionally consume." My point is that the tomato-grape line is just one of the many borders (geographic, ethnolinguistic, religious, political, socio-climatic) that converge or pass through Carpathian Rus'. In other words, it is Carpatho-Rusyns themselves who are divided between those in the foothills and those in the lowlands (numerically the majority). The cuisine and drink of each group of Carpatho-Rusyns is differentiated depending on whether they live north or south of the tomato-grape line. Those to the south belong to a café and wine culture, while those to the north living in the less climatically hospitable higher mountainous elevations have a cuisine and drink based on potatoes, mushrooms, and hard alcohol with all that such products mean for one's diet and psyche. Climate, then, is in large measure the cause of a problem that is frequently associated with all Carpatho-Rusyns, but that is especially prevalent among males and females living north of the tomato-grape line: the disease of alcoholism.

Professor Himka suggests at the outset of his remarks that *With Their Backs to the Mountains* contains "thought-provoking insights" for others "to think more deeply about the formation of identity in the western borderlands of Eastern Europe." It is so refreshing to see this carefully nuanced phraseology, which most others would likely describe somewhat tendentiously as the borderlands of western Ukraine.[2]

Professor Himka ends his commentary by asking the big question: "How did Carpatho-Rusynism survive four decades of Communist rule during which the Ukrainian orientation was

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

imposed by all the regimes that ruled Carpathian Rus'?" At the risk of seeming facetious—and I certainly do not mean to be so—one might draw on an analogous situation and ask: how did the Catalans survive nearly four decades of Franco's suppression? Maybe the answer to both questions is: Carpatho-Rusyns are not Ukrainians in the same way that Catalans are not Castilian Spaniards.

Then there is Professor Himka's even larger "question begging to be answered: what was it about the Ukrainian orientation that the Carpatho-Rusyns found off-putting?" This is certainly a question that needs to be addressed, and not necessarily by historians but rather by sociologists and social anthropologists who have better methodological and analytical tools. As a historian, I might propose a hypothesis. The Ukrainian national orientation entered Carpathian Rus'—and for that matter came to Carpatho-Rusyn immigrants in the United States—through the prism of Galician Ukrainians. The process began with Galician Ukrainian intellectuals visiting the Carpatho-Rusyns of Hungary in the late 19th century, then continued with resettled Ukrainian exiles from Galicia during the interwar years of the 20th century, and finally reached its culmination with upward of 100,000 permanent Galician Ukrainian in-migrants who settled in Transcarpathia during the four decades of Soviet rule after World War II. In all cases, but certainly among the post-World War II in-migrants, the desire to re-educate and "civilize" the Transcarpathian locals in order that they realize the alleged joys and advantages of knowing that they are Ukrainian was—and still is—high among the missionary objectives of Galician in-migrants (*novoprybuly*) and their descendants numbering today in total of about 170,000.

At the same time, any observer of present-day Ukraine knows what central, eastern, and southern ethnic Ukrainians (for that matter Bukovinians as well) think of their Galician brethren. If other Ukrainians are put-off (to paraphrase Professor Himka), what should one expect of Carpatho-Rusyns in Transcarpathia whose neighbors in Galicia, as well as Galician in-migrants, have for nearly a century been telling them how to think, feel, and speak. During the last months of Soviet rule, a professor of linguistics at Uzhhorod National University, Pavlo Chuchka, published in 1991 a seminal study titled, "How Subcarpathian Rusyns Became Ukrainians" (Chuchka 1991). What we really needed then and still today is a serious study that addresses not an ideological imperative but a reality: "Why Some Carpatho-Rusyns Did Not Become Ukrainians."

I am especially pleased that Professor Peter Galadza appreciates the amount of attention I have given to church-related matters in *With Their Backs to the Mountains*. He is particularly concerned about a three-page text insert entitled, "Christianity Becomes 'Our' Religion," which appears early on in the book. His concern raises a larger issue: how to treat documents in a book whose text is driven by a chronological narrative. In this and some other books I have chosen the technique of including side-bars, or text inserts as documentary illustrations that elaborate on some matter raised in the narrative on the same or nearby page. The documentary illustrations can take different forms: an explanatory note written by the book's author, a verbatim reproduction of an actual document, a literary or journalistic passage intended to show how an event is perceived, or a statement by a participant in the historic process that is being described in the narrative.

Without question, literary, journalistic, and memoiristic statements are by their very nature impressionistic, factually suspect, and perhaps even deliberately false. As Professor Galadza admits, the egregious text insert in question is not mine, but rather the interpretive view of another individual, John Righetti. While Righetti is neither a professional scholar nor theologian, he does "preach" to thousands of Carpatho-Rusyn Americans each year, so that inevitably his views have become internalized by a large number of listeners as something akin to the "Gospel truth." I, too, like Professor Galadza may question the accuracy of Righetti's statements about St. Cyril and Methodius and the alleged amalgam of pagan and Christian belief systems. Nevertheless, I believe there is some value is using such texts, despite all their academic flaws, as

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

legitimate documentary evidence to illustrate how a community's understanding of its national past is formed.

The *prostopinie* (plainchant) matter raises another challenging question, that of balance. Some readers looking for more detail on purely historical (read: political) matters might wonder why there is so much in this book about what could be considered esoteric and not always relevant religious and church matters. Plainchant might fall into the less relevant category. This matter recalls the above-mentioned concerns of Professor Himka. Certainly, were this another kind of book, one governed by themes not chronology, a chapter devoted specifically to religion would inevitably have much more on the Carpathian plainchant, its practitioners, and its importance as an instrument not only of spiritual fulfillment but also of preservation of a distinct Carpatho-Rusyn identity.

I am a bit puzzled by Professor Galadza's proposition that "The ability of the Slovak Greek Catholic—as well as Hungarian Greek Catholic and Byzantine-Ruthenian Catholic Churches—to transcend Carpatho-Rusyn identity has ultimately brought them unique vitality, at least religious vitality." One must question the descriptor *vital* for the Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic Church in the U.S., which in the past several decades has lost nearly half the number of parishioners it once had. But that is not the point.

Let us put aside national identity and certainly international borders, which by definition stateless peoples like Carpatho-Rusyns do not have. Is not the issue at hand language, which is so important for the pastoral role of any church? In other words, the desirability of bringing the word of God to the faithful in their own language. Does the Lord wish to be heard only in state languages? Why can't there be Bibles, catechisms, and homilies in Kashubian, Silesian, Catalan, or in one of the five variants of Walloon? Why are only Polish, Castilian Spanish, and French worthy for communication for the above peoples and Slovak or Ukrainian for Carpatho-Rusyns? Several Greek Catholic priests, especially in Slovakia, may or may not "bemoan ethnic assimilation," but they certainly find it hard to accept that their traditional Church Slavonic liturgy is increasingly being replaced by Slovak. Why not replace it with Rusyn? One might pose the same question for the Greek Catholic Church in the Transcarpathian Oblast, where the vast majority of village parishioners speak on a daily basis the Rusyn language (or a Rusyn dialect of Ukrainian, if you prefer).

This is not the place to discuss Professor Galadza's imperative that state and ecclesial boundaries should coincide. Suffice it to say that the Eparchy of Mukachevo existed long before Ukraine came into being. To speak of "the Vatican's removal of Mukachevo from the jurisdiction of the Synod of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church based [only recently] in Kyiv" is particularly egregious. It is well known that the Eparchy of Mukachevo was never part of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church based in L'viv and more recently in Kyiv, and that in 1937 the Vatican announced the creation of a metropolitan province for the Greek Catholics in what was then Czechoslovakia. From that time the Eparchy of Mukachevo has functioned as a church governed by its own law (*Ecclesia sui iuris*) under the direct jurisdiction of the Vatican. By no means did the Vatican remove Mukachevo from the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. All that it did in response to Ukrainian nationalist criticism was to investigate the situation (through the person of the papal nuncio in Kyiv) and to declare in 1993 that "for the time being the status quo of the Mukachevo Eparchy shall remain in effect" and that it shall remain subordinate to the Apostolic See in Rome.[3]

Particularly disturbing is the slippery slope of Professor Galadza's argumentation, which in large part reflects present-day attitudes among the Greek Catholic hierarchy in Ukraine. Namely, an outside force, the Vatican, "removes" Mukachevo from the rest of the church in Ukraine; any support for that position among the clergy of the eparchy is evidence of "Rusyn separatism;" all of which leads to the conclusion that Mukachevo as a "distinct. . . . jurisdiction. . . . is almost the ecclesiastical analogue of having a 'republic' 'under the international control of the European Union.'"

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Professor Galadza refers to the ethical dimension of the Carpatho-Rusyn nationality question. There is also an ethical dimension regarding the use of labels to describe what for all intents and purposes are non-existent phenomena. While one can understand the needs of political commentators and government policy makers, why should scholars use labels devised by opponents to describe the post-1989 Carpatho-Rusyn movement? Some of these appear as acceptable vocabulary in Professor Galadza's commentary: "political Rusynism;" "political Muscophilism;" the seemingly benign formula—"the Rusyn question;" and the much more ominous phrase "Rusyn separatism."

Is it so difficult to accept the possibility that there may be a legitimate movement of a group of people, regardless of their number, who simply wish to be accepted as a people equal to other peoples among whom they live? Some impartial observers have used the term national emancipation. With laudable tolerance, Professor Galadza proposes that "*apriori* 'political Rusynism' should be considered a legitimate cause" as long as it does not morph into "political Muscophilism."

But why remain hung up on labels? There has been since 1989 and still is a Rusyn movement concerned with ethnocultural emancipation. Like any social movement it contains a wide range of strategic goals and tactics that continually change depending on specific circumstances in the various states where Carpatho-Rusyns live. If we as scholars truly wish to understand the Carpatho-Rusyn phenomenon, let us eschew politicizing labels whose use has no intrinsic value other than distorting our view of what we should be trying to understand, not judge.

Professor Chris Hann points out at the beginning of his remarks that he and I "have always disagreed" on "what makes a nation or nationality" and that, after reading *With Their Backs to the Mountains*, we are "destined forever" to disagree. I believe he is right, but the reason has less to do with an alleged opposition between "an 'ideal' and an underlying 'reality'" than it does opposition between the very disciplines in which each of us were trained and still profess: history and social anthropology.

As I understand it, anthropologists focus on a particular community, in a sense isolated from its immediate surroundings. Rather than study in further depth another one or more neighboring communities, the anthropologist usually moves on to another community, preferably in another part of the world. After studying several geographically dispersed communities, the anthropologist may make comparisons and draw some general conclusions. The point is that the field for comparison is the entire world based on the underlying assumption that the best way to understand the human experience is not by limiting one's research to an area that may have putative common characteristics determined by a common geographical space or alleged national characteristics. On the other hand, historians frequently focus on a particular geographical space (certainly much larger than a single village) which the researcher tries to understand through an examination of the past as a means to understand and interpret the present. If any comparisons or general patterns are to be drawn, they should be based on the greatest number of examples within a given geographic space.

Professor Hann has always been skeptical about those scholars, whether anthropologists, historians, or otherwise, who draw boundaries between groups and thereby "create" the very groups they proceed to analyze. Of course, there are some boundaries that can be said to have sharp edges, such as a geographic watershed where one can easily determine where rivers run in one direction or another, or a political border created and then enforced by neighboring political jurisdictions, or a speech boundary (isogloss) that is determined by the phonetic sounds, morphology, even vocabulary used on one or other side of the boundary.

There are as well indeterminate or "fuzzy" boundaries, to use a favorite adjective of Professor Hann. Actually, these are not boundaries at all, but rather areas where linguistic, religious, and national characteristics of various groups interface.

Professor Hann is rightly concerned with scholarship that accepts boundaries which researchers themselves create. Since, to my mind, states, languages, and peoples (nationalities)

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

are all constructs, then *With Their Backs to the Mountains* admittedly represents just another construct. As the author, I have not created either the territory or the people which is the subject of the book. Rather, the construct itself, formulated by many others, is the subject of the book. In a sense, it is irrelevant whether or not the construct is intellectually legitimate and represents "scholarly truth" (a concept so dear to former Soviet Marxists and to many present-day Ukrainian historians). The real question is whether the construct can hold its own against competing national constructs.

It is in this sense that *With Their Backs to the Mountains* ends with a chapter rhetorically entitled "Real or Imagined Community?" The Carpatho-Rusyn "project" is a work in progress and, not surprisingly it has all the highs and lows, fits and starts, and successes and failures that characterize any work in progress. One of the Carpatho-Rusyn project's greatest challenges is Ukraine. Whether the East Slavs of Transcarpathia are lost or recoverable to the Carpatho-Rusyn project is for me still an unknown. Professor Hann, on the other hand, doubts that the Carpatho-Rusyn "national awakening" will ever have an impact on the majority of the population in Transcarpathia. Such conflicting attitudes about the future are what Professor Hann and I are "destined forever" to disagree about.

Valerii Padiak has provided a unique perspective not so much for his remarks themselves, but rather because of all the commentators on the panel he is the only one who is—and who unabashedly describes himself as—a Carpatho-Rusyn. Nor is he just any Carpatho-Rusyn: he is an active, some would say, leading spokesperson for the present-day movement in Ukraine's Transcarpathian region as well as an instructor at the Institute of Rusyn Language and Culture at Prešov University in neighboring Slovakia. Therefore, he is for some observers the embodiment of "political Rusynism," "Rusyn separatism," or the "Rusyn question" in the flesh.

Dr. Padiak's take on *With Their Backs to the Mountains* also turns out to be somewhat unique. With the exception of Soviet Marxist writers, virtually all historians, publicists, journalists, and belletrists past and present generally describe in positive terms Czechoslovak rule in Subcarpathian Rus' (the present-day Transcarpathian oblast of Ukraine) during the two-decade interwar period of the 20th century. Whether in the realm of politics, education, culture, or civic and socioeconomic infrastructure, this period is recalled somewhat nostalgically as the "golden age" and characterized as the national renaissance of Carpatho-Rusyns.

By contrast, Dr. Padiak makes the unexpected statement that the interwar period "has the reputation among historians as being the most tragic era in the history of Carpatho-Rusyns." While it is difficult to agree with such a sweeping assertion, his views as to why the period was so negative warrant our attention.

Dr. Padiak's explanation is deceivingly simple. From the Carpatho-Rusyn perspective, the so-called insider's view, the ideal era was the historic or long 19th century, the period from 1772 to 1914, when Carpathian Rus' functioned within one political entity, Habsburg-ruled Austria and eventually Austria-Hungary. The post-World War I era, beginning with the interwar period and lasting to the present, brought with it the division of Carpatho-Rusyn-inhabited territory into various states, each of which in one way or another worked against Carpatho-Rusyn national interests. Even the interwar Czechoslovak regime, which did so much to raise cultural, educational, and social standards, committed a very serious error. By allowing and even encouraging the immigration into the region of Russian and Ukrainian émigré intellectuals from former Habsburg-ruled Galicia and Bukovina and from the former Russian Empire, and by giving them responsibility as educators and civic administrators, they stunted the "natural" evolution of Carpatho-Rusyn society by convincing an entire younger generation that they were part of either the Russian or Ukrainian nationality. Dr. Padiak faults, and perhaps rightly so, *With Their Backs to the Mountains* for not giving sufficient attention to this matter.[4]

Of course, the volume under consideration here is hardly the last word on the subject. Valerii Padiak has usefully reminded us that the political division of historic Carpathian Rus' and Carpatho-Rusyn society is not necessarily the norm. In other words, scholars might do well to

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

study the region from the perspective of its Carpatho-Rusyn inhabitants and not from the perspective of those powers who have ruled the region in the 20th century, whether Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Hungary, the Soviet Union, Slovakia, or Ukraine. And it is thanks to him for reminding us, however indirectly, of the principle that states come and go, but the people ultimately remain.

Notes

1 Harvey Goldblatt spoke at the Washington, D.C. ASEEES panel but was not able to submit his written commentary in time for Professor Magocsi to respond.
2 A superb example of Professor Himka's nuanced argumentation (with which I do not necessarily agree) is his study "The Construction of Nationality in Galician Rus': Icarian Flights in Almost All Directions" (Himka 1999)
3 See the Letter of the Congregation for Oriental Churches, dated January 8, 1993, in Fenych (2015).
4 Looking again at my coverage of this matter in *With Their Backs to the Mountains*, I too was struck by the lacuna pointed out by Dr. Padiak. Perhaps the reason is that subconsciously I did not want to repeat a discussion elaborated earlier in an entire monograph devoted to the topic (Magocsi 1978).

References

Chuchka, P. 1991. "Iak rusyny staly ukraïntsiamy." *Zakarpats'ka pravda*, 12–16 September.
Fenych, Volodymyr. 2015. "'Ecclesia sui iuris': lehendarni vytoky, unikal'na istoriia ta oryhinal'nyi suchasnyi status Mukachivs'koï hreko-katolyts'koï ieparkhiï." *ProZak*, 22 June. http://prozak.info/IIstoriya/Legendarni-vitoki-Mukachivskoyi-greko-katolickoyi-eparhiyi.
Himka, John-Paul. 1999. "The Construction of Nationality in Galician Rus': Icarian Flights in Almost All Directions." In *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, edited by Ronald Grigor Suny and Michael D. Kennedy, 110–164. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
Magochii, Pavlo-Robert. 2015. *Kozhen karpatorusyn ie rusynom . . . ale ne kozhen rusyn ie karpatorusynom*. Uzhhorod: Vydvo V. Padiaka.
Magocsi, Paul Robert. 1978. *The Shaping of a National Identity: Subcarpathian Rus', 1848–1948*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Magocsi, Paul Robert. 2015. *With Their Backs to the Mountains: A History of Carpathian Rus' and the Carpatho-Rusyns*. Budapest: Central European University Press.
Magocsi, Paul Yohanan Robert and Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern. 2016. *Jews and Ukrainians: A Millennium of Co-Existence*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Stone, Gerald. 1972. *The Smallest Slavonic Nation: The Sorbs of Lusatia*. London: University of London/Athlone Press.

Cite this article: Magocsi, PR. 2019. The Author's Observations. *Nationalities Papers* 47: 530–536. doi: 10.1017/nps.2019.11

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press