

Review of Guy Russell Torr, translator. *Gente Rutheni, Nazione Poloni: The Ruthenians of Polish Nationality in Habsburg Galicia.* By Adam Świątek

Andriy Zayarnyuk

Volume 8, Number 1, 2021

Empire, Colonialism, and Famine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077136ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus654>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies University of Alberta

ISSN

2292-7956 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Zayarnyuk, A. (2021). Review of [Review of Guy Russell Torr, translator. *Gente Rutheni, Nazione Poloni: The Ruthenians of Polish Nationality in Habsburg Galicia.* By Adam Świątek]. *East/West*, 8(1), 267–270.
<https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus654>



Guy Russell Torr, translator. *Gente Rutheni, Nazione Poloni: The Ruthenians of Polish Nationality in Habsburg Galicia*. By Adam Świątek, with a preface by Frank E. Sysyn, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies P / Księgarnia Akademicka, 2019. The Peter Jacyk Centre for Ukrainian Historical Research Monograph Series 9. 634 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography. List of Illustrations. Indexes. \$39.95, paper.

This new addition to the ever-growing historiography of Habsburg Galicia sets out to examine the organizational lives of those Galician Ruthenian figures who identified with the Polish nation while maintaining a degree of Ruthenian self-identification—what the book’s author, Adam Świątek, defines as a “two-tier” identity (27). This book features an impressive array of prominent men who can be identified as *gente Rutheni, natione Poloni*. It succeeds in showing that the hybrid identity of these prominent politicians and intellectuals was, and has been, the main reason for their subsequent marginalization in Ukrainian and, to a lesser extent, Polish historiographies.

While the book does not take a consistently chronological approach, the bulk of its narrative is devoted to the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The period under examination begins with the Polish independentist conspiracies of the 1830s and 1840s, and it ends in the 1860s, when the Habsburg Empire reinvented itself within a new constitutional framework, gradually giving Galicia a broad autonomy. Not surprisingly, these were also the decades during which the self-declared Ruthenians of Polish nationality figured prominently in the province’s political and public life, often claiming to represent the province’s Ruthenian population.

The subject of this book is both fascinating and challenging, and the author should be congratulated for finding his way through a massive amount of sources. However, the final product suffers from a myriad of conceptual and methodological problems and contains factual errors. One major conceptual problem is the book’s reliance on the illusion of unity within a group. The author acknowledges the difficulty of identifying and defining those elusive Ruthenians of Polish nationality, but he nevertheless tries “to present a holistic picture of the group *gente Rutheni, natione Poloni*” (27). He assigns them collective agency, shared preferences, and political choices, without ever demonstrating the existence of even a minimal degree of social cohesion or some awareness on their part of belonging to a distinct, bound group of all of those labelled “Ruthenians of Polish nationality.” They exist as a distinct social group in the book’s narrative, but the book fails to prove this group’s existence within the lived social reality of nineteenth-century Galicia. Did that alleged group indeed articulate its own political program, as the author claims (201), or was that program formulated by the

broader Polish political camp? The author himself at one point acknowledges the following about the so-called Ruthenian Assembly of 1848: "This representation of Ruthenians of Polish nationality would not have emerged as a separate body had it not been for the creation of the very first national Ruthenian organization, the Supreme Ruthenian Council . . ." (256).

We are promised a "holistic" picture of Galicia's "various social layers" (69), but only the views of well-known public figures are discussed in any detail. The book relies heavily on open political statements, various speeches, and brochures and pamphlets. We learn very little about private lives of those people and the thoughts that they reserved for close relatives and friends. We do not see even a single coherent biography in this book. Whom did these people marry? Who were their childhood friends and university classmates? Was this hybrid identity ever transferred from one generation to the next, that is, from parents to children? How important for them was the Byzantine rite, the most important mark of Ruthenian identity in Galicia?

By way of example, we can look at the treatment of Leon Daniluk, the son of Józef Daniluk (Iosyf Danyliuk), a famous participant in the 1863 insurgency and a radical artisan who turned toward socialism in the 1870s. Everything that is related about Leon Daniluk in this book is based on a single pamphlet that he published. Even though the pamphlet is signed with the pseudonym "a Ukrainian," Świątek, after much ungrounded speculation, concludes that "his opinions must derive from his identity as a *gente Ruthenus, natione Polonus*" (114). Leon Daniluk was both a product and an integral part of Lviv's radical and urban culture. That culture, while possessing an element of hybridity, had little to do with the culture of Ivan Vahylevych or Teofil Merunowicz, both of whom this book treats as belonging to, and shaped by, the same *gente Rutheni, natione Poloni* context.

Some of the best parts of the book are only tangentially related to its topic. They deal with the place of Rus', the Ruthenian past, and Ruthenian cultural heritage in the broader Polish literature and Polish historiography of the nineteenth century. Arguably, a focus on Rus' within the cultural and political imagination of Polish nationalism would have been more productive than book's current focus on an elusive and illusory group of Polish Ruthenians. These examinations, as they stand, are too cursory and undeveloped, and they are too little connected with the book's main subject. The discussion of the Krakow school of Polish historiography, and of Michał Bobrzyński in particular, provides a good example of this. It ends with a banal, awkwardly phrased, and, quite frankly, inaccurate conclusion that is typical of this book: ". . . the Cracow historical school were not able to destroy the notion of the special significance of Polish-Lithuanian unions cultivated for decades within Polish national historiography" (200). One can only guess why this was of any significance to Galicia's Ruthenian Poles.

Numerous inaccuracies can be found throughout the book. Some of them take the form of sweeping, questionable, and awkwardly phrased generalizations. For example—“The ideas of the Enlightenment understood the nation as a political community expressing itself in the form of a state” (202). We also see, “After the partitions of Poland . . . until the November Uprising of 1830 there were not a lot of factors among the inhabitants of Galicia that impacted the development of Polish national consciousness” (205). And we read, “At a time when the so-called Ruthenian question did not exist as a political problem, Ruthenians would go to fight in solidarity with their Polish neighbours” (213). All of these statements are problematic on many levels and should not have appeared in the work of a professional historian.

The book shows insufficient knowledge of Ukrainian history and Ukrainian (or Ruthenian) sources. Furthermore, many of its claims are not supported by any evidence. For example, when Świątek asserts that at the turn of the twentieth century “the call to ‘drive Poles back over the San River’” was becoming “increasingly common” (472), he does not cite a single Ukrainian source. Instead, the footnote directs us to Jan Skwara’s article on large landowners of Eastern Galicia, which, in turn, does not contain a single reference to any Ukrainian publications, or even Ukrainian statements for that matter. Following his nineteenth-century sources, Świątek sees the “‘civil’ script” in Ruthenian publication as a Russian influence that replaced the native Ruthenian Cyrillic (349). A title change from *Zoria Halytska* to *Zoria Galitskaia* is also presented as an example of creeping Russification (350-51). However, if we abandon arbitrary transliterations and look at the original titles, we see only a slight change in the ending: *Зоря Галицка* became *Зоря Галицкая*. This new ending was just as Ukrainian or Ruthenian as the previous one. In fact, the exact same form was used in the title of the almanac *Rusalka Dnistrovaia* (*The Dnister Nymph*). A book that discusses at length the Ruthenian language in Galicia would benefit from references to the excellent studies of that language by Michael Moser.

The book under review suffers from numerous gaffes that should have been corrected either by the reviewers or by the editors. *Rusalka Dnistrovaia* becomes “the first Ruthenian periodical” (117). Apparently, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Uniates were commonly ordained as Roman Catholic priests, and “[e]rasing the difference in ecclesiastical practices and rituals between the two Churches was seen as paramount” (127). The “expansion of Orthodoxy” is seen as “the Galician reality of the mid-nineteenth century” (170), while the Greek Catholic seminary in Lviv somehow “[u]p until 1848 . . . was not yet associated with the Ruthenian national movement . . .” (227). Merunowicz, a notorious anti-Semite, is presented as a champion of Jews, “for whom he demanded . . . equality in

rights" (456). The ugly truth is that Merunowicz's calls for "equality" were directed against the "privileges" allegedly enjoyed by the Jews at the expense of Galicia's Christian population.

Finally, there are problems with the translation of this book into the English from the original Polish. "Duma" is not synonymous with "Lament" (see 155). Since the word *origins* is for some reason translated as "generation," we see in the book how Iosyf (Iosyp) Lozyns'kyi defines the foundation of the Ruthenian nationality as "generation, language, and rite" (314). Revolutionary leaflets become "gutter publications" (see 316, note 183), while the famous social thinker Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz becomes "Kelles-Krauze" (see 478, 611). This is just a sampling of the book's many blunders.

One can only wonder why this particular book was selected for translation and publication in English, while many truly excellent works on Ukrainian history in Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, and German are still waiting their turn. This book could be of interest to historians working on nineteenth-century Galicia, but they will be better off reading it in the original, Polish version.

Andriy Zayarnyuk
University of Winnipeg