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## Review Essay

# Mykhailo Zubryts'kyi: "The Nestor of the Ukrainian Village"

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**Frank E. Sysyn, editor-in-chief.** *Naukovi pratsi* [Scholarly Works]. 2013. *Mykhailo Zubryts'kyi: Zibrani tvory i materialy u tr'okh tomakh* [Mykhailo Zubryts'kyi: Collected Works and Materials in Three Volumes], edited by Frank E. Sysyn et al., vol. 1, Vydavnytstvo "Litopys," 2013-19. 3 vols. 610 pp. Illustrations. Tables. Map. Indexes. ₪ 290,00, cloth.

### I. MYKHAILO ZUBRYTS'KYI: LIFE SKETCH

**M**Mykhailo Zubryts'kyi (1856-1919) was a Galician Greek Catholic priest and the long-time pastor of Mshanets, a tiny mountain village in the Boiko region (Staryi Sambir county; Lviv province). He was an extremely prolific "[h]istorian, [e]thnographer, and [f]olklorist" (55), as well as an anthropologist and sociologist. But his works would have remained shrouded in relative obscurity if not for the efforts of Frank E. Sysyn, who spearheaded a publishing initiative and served as its editor-in-chief. The book under review is the first volume in a three-volume set. It contains Zubryts'kyi's scholarly works.

Zubryts'kyi's renovated, bilingual headstone in the cemetery in Berehy Dolishni (Brzegi Dolne, in southeastern Poland) calls him the "Father of Ukrainian Ethnography." Sysyn refers to him as "The Nestor of the Ukrainian Village" (43), which is probably more accurate. Zubryts'kyi's world was the western Ukrainian village, and he went about documenting the present and the past of the village in a way that no researcher (at least not a Ukrainian one) had done before. He corresponded and collaborated with scholars in Vienna, Basel, and Paris and was eventually appointed a member of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in Lviv (the equivalent of a Ukrainian academy of sciences in Galicia). But he would nevertheless remain a respected (and idiosyncratic) outsider within the scholarly community.

Sysyn presents an impressive sketch of Zubryts'kyi (in two languages; see 15-68). Zubryts'kyi was born in a *kurna khata* ("a house without a chimney") in the mountain village of Kindrativ (Turka county). He was the son of an

illiterate peasant of noble extraction (a remnant of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with its abundant impoverished *szlachta* ["gentry"]) and pursued a clerical career under great material hardship. He discovered his love for the past at an early age, at a time when literature on Ukrainian history was scarce (later in life, Zubryts'kyi meticulously listed what he had read in his youth). Sysyn masterfully relates the duality of Zubryts'kyi's position in Mshanets: he was not only the village pastor but also (as was the case with many Greek Catholic parish priests in Galicia) an avid national "awakener" who would side with the Ukrainophiles and a community activist who founded a Prosvita reading room and a co-operative store. Therefore, he had a clear agenda in addition to his scholarly interests:

As he gathered the material, documentary, and oral culture of Mshanets', he directed his parishioners to have new attitudes about their everyday life (*pobut*) and ways. At the same time, he engineered changes in their lives by urging them to abandon the divides between strata of the past, by changing the ways they celebrated ritual occasions, and by taking up new economic activities, all the while also collecting information on the world he sought to change. (53)

It was Zubryts'kyi's political activism that would eventually impact his life in a most tragic way: He was slandered as a "Russophile"—a potentially disloyal citizen—at the beginning of World War I and was briefly confined in the notorious Thalerhof internment camp near Graz. In the aftermath of World War I, when Galicia's Ukrainians were fighting for the establishment of the West Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR), Zubryts'kyi was arrested again, this time by the Polish authorities. He passed away shortly after his release from prison.

## II. DOCUMENTING THE UKRAINIAN VILLAGE: OVERVIEW

The second part of the book's introduction is entitled "The Historian, Ethnographer, and Folklorist" (55; see 55-68). Sysyn provides a detailed overview of the works by Zubryts'kyi assembled in this volume. He identifies, in addition to Zubryts'kyi's autobiographic texts, "five major categories: archeographic collections of seventeenth- to mid-nineteenth century documents, discussions of historical events, descriptions of material culture, collections of oral culture and traditions, and accounts of everyday activities" (58).

The collections of documents, most prominently "Selo Mshanets' starosambirs'koho povita: Materiialy do istorii halyts'koho sela" ("The Village of Mshanets, Saryi Sambir County: Materials toward the History of a Galician Village"; see 292-447; my trans.), are Zubryts'kyi's magnum opus—

"the culmination of over two decades of searching for the documents of the past and publishing them" (64). Sysyn describes the significance of these documents—"one of the largest published source bases for a Ukrainian village of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries" (58)—in a lively and readable manner and highlights the social and economic transformations of the early modern period up to the beginning of the twentieth century. Zubryts'kyi did not have access to archives. Thus, it is his anthropological approach (as we would call it today) and his reflections on his own position as a researcher and on the difficulties that he encountered during the research process that make his document collection so outstanding. For example, Sysyn notes,

As so often in his writings, he comments on the wall of mistrust that the folk had for the intelligentsia, including their clergy. He indicates how long it took him to win the trust of his parishioners sufficient to show him their documents in mentioning that an elderly *gazda* [farmer] feared that revealing documents might put his land-holding in question and only after more than a decade showed the priest what he had. (59)

Sysyn explains that the peasants had good reason to be cautious: in an "overwhelmingly illiterate society," they could not know the exact content of their documents, and reading them aloud could reopen old conflicts on land ownership. Zubryts'kyi also discusses in detail "why some documents survive and why so many were lost"—interestingly, not only owing to frequent fires but also because the Austrian bureaucracy "administered fines for documents without stamps in the first half of the nineteenth century" (59).

The other four categories of Zubryts'kyi's work are no less important. He covers previously undocumented events and activities, such as the reactions of villagers to the violent recruitment methods used by the Austrian military in the first half of the nineteenth century, the smuggling of tobacco from Hungary, and the strategies used by peasants to buy sheep. A remarkable feature of Zubryts'kyi's process is his use of oral history. He employed an almost modern methodology in constructing it. He assiduously recorded the names and biographic data of his respondents, as well as of the individuals that his respondents named as sources. In some cases, the pastor wrote down the peasants' oral speech in the Boiko dialect, even adding stress marks. As Sysyn emphasizes, Zubryts'kyi frequently juxtaposed his "oral history interviews" with documents that he had gathered or with entries from church lists (ecclesiastical registers of baptisms, marriages, and burials).

The extraordinary abundance and diversity of Zubryts'kyi's assembled materials in this volume can provide answers to a multitude of research questions pertaining to a variety of scholarly disciplines. I, as a student of

migration, will address the question, What can we glean from Zubryts'kyi's work regarding the migration processes in a Galician village?

### III. DOCUMENTING VILLAGE MIGRATION

In the "archeographic collections" amassed by Zubryts'kyi in "Materialy do istorii halyts'koho sela" ("Materials toward the History of a Galician Village"), we see two documents from the first half of the nineteenth century that deal explicitly with migration. The first is an 1822 circular of the regional authorities of Sambir calling on the Greek Catholic pastors in Sambir circle to dissuade peasants from migrating to Bukovyna (see document CXLVIII; 404-05). The second is a collective passport granting four peasants of Mshanets free passage to Bukovyna "in order to garner a larger income through field labour" (my trans.). The passport, which was issued on 11 June 1835, expired after three months; this indicates the seasonal nature of this type of migration (see document CLXXXVII; 426-27).

Zubryts'kyi's article on the potato famine of 1846 (largely unchronicled in this part of the world) illuminates the event itself and the half-hearted efforts of the Austrian authorities to alleviate the plight of the peasants. Furthermore, the pastor sheds light on the long-term ramifications caused by the hunger period, which were still visible half a century later when he commenced his inquiries, collecting both oral-history accounts and the administrative documents found in the village. Just as in other areas of Europe where the potato blight had struck (most prominently in Ireland), the cataclysmic events triggered a migration. In Mshanets, the regional migration patterns established in the first half of the nineteenth century were of paramount importance. According to Zubryts'kyi, around half of the population left for Bukovyna. As the Austrian authorities attempted to prohibit the peasants' movements, some villagers would work first as lumberjacks in Limna (Turka county) and then apply for a passport. Some villagers sold their farmsteads prior to their departure, while others left them to family members or neighbours. Families disintegrated. Parents abandoned their children and sent them to landowners or wealthier peasants in order to save them from starvation. Zubryts'kyi describes scenes reminiscent of the late medieval plague epidemic: twenty-two houses in the village were left empty, and the remaining inhabitants would till only the most fertile pieces of land.

Regarding those who left, Zubryts'kyi provides a painstaking description of their living conditions—an indication that he still considered them to be an integral part of the village community. There was a reason for this. A portion of them ended up returning to the village when another

famine ravaged Bukovyna at the beginning of the 1860s. People from Bukovyna would occasionally still show up in the late 1890s in order to collect their land rent. Zubryts'kyi provides a list of the Bukovynian villages where Mshanets migrants found employment, primarily on landed estates. Some ended up in a new linguistic environment, among Germans ("Shvaby") and Romanians ("Volokhy"). The majority of the Mshanets migrants were paid not in money but in kind, and Zubryts'kyi details how much grain, cheese, and other products they received. He also does not forget to mention that those who worked in distilleries had unlimited access to *horivka* 'vodka' (128-30).

Interestingly, it was not Bukovyna but Podilia (*Podilie*) that entered into the vocabulary of the Mshanets villagers. The name of this region, which had been divided between the Russian and Habsburg Empires after the first partition of Poland, was code for the fertile and more affluent lowlands rather than being a precise geographic designation. Zubryts'kyi explains that after the potato famine, peasants from Mshanets worked for landowners around Horodenka (129). In his piece on the recruitment, he writes about a villager who had worked for nine years for a wealthy peasant "in Podilia, in [the village of] Rohynia, near Tovmach [Tlumach]" (my trans.; 166). The destination of these migrants, therefore, was not Podilia but Pokutia, in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains.

In the book, the reader often unexpectedly comes across migration processes within other discussions, as, for instance, in an article on folk costumes:

In the lean years, many people from Mshanets went to Podilia, but most of them ended up in Bukovyna. Some of them or their descendants came back here either to visit family that had stayed in the village or to claim an estate or sell a piece of land from their legacy. They showed up here wearing vests, such as those worn in Bukovyna . . . . (my trans.; 463)

Documenting folk beliefs about "[m]ills and [m]illers," Zubryts'kyi recorded a story that was told by a villager who had worked at a steam mill in Stanivtsi (Stănești, a predominantly Romanian village). Zubryts'kyi explains parenthetically that "in the [18]70s, a large portion of the unmarried young men of Mshanets went to work in Bukovyna. They worked there primarily in distilleries and earned a great deal of money. With this money, they paid off their debts at home or invested in their farms" (my trans.; 94).

#### IV. DOCUMENTING VILLAGE ECONOMY

The regional migration patterns that connected the village to Bukovyna over the course of the nineteenth century were a harbinger of what would follow around 1900. The onset of transatlantic migration processes in the Boiko region had huge repercussions on the village economy. The last article of the volume, entitled “Maietkovyi stan selian u Mshantsy starosambirs'koho povitu v 1910 r.” (“The Wealth Level of Peasants in Mshanets, Saryi Sambir County, in 1910”; see 573-77; my trans.), is a scrupulous statistical study of the economic situation of every single household in the village (including the six Jewish families). In typical fashion, Zubryts'kyi reflects on his role as a researcher and admits that “[i]t was relatively difficult to collect this information. Some peasants, distrustful people, did not want to honestly reveal the amount of money that they had. At the same time, those who had debts did not all correctly and precisely provide the amounts because they felt embarrassed about their indebtedness” (my trans.; 574-75).

Zubryts'kyi explains that “there are 1,179 people living in their homes and [that] 143 people are living away from home (in America or as servants [in other homes] in the village or in other villages)” (my trans.; 574). By mentioning American migrants in the same breath as the local servants, Zubryts'kyi is implicitly defining (labour) migration as working outside of one’s own home. This is a remarkably original approach given that local migration patterns were (and are) frequently overlooked by researchers. Transatlantic migration was, therefore, one option among others for those seeking employment, depending on their readiness to take risks and on their financial means; the expenses for the trip to the United States (US) were, according to Zubryts'kyi, around 400 crowns. He specifies that 117 villagers were in the US at the time of his survey, among them six Jews. The migrants “were predominantly young unmarried men and girls and fewer married farmers, and there were three married women who had left behind their farmer husbands here in the village and one widow.” The pastor adds that young male migrants would usually marry girls from the village, but sometimes they married girls from other villages as well (my trans.; 574). The remittances sent by US migrants to Mshanets in 1910 amounted to 29,119 crowns, an imposing sum that was equivalent to almost thirty annual salaries of an unskilled worker in Vienna.<sup>1</sup> Around 4,000 crowns were used to facilitate the migration of other villagers, and the rest “remained in the village.” Zubryts'kyi concludes that “the peasants have more money than

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<sup>1</sup> In 1910, an unskilled Viennese worker would earn 20-24 crowns per week (Kleindl 298).

debts," an indication that many individual migration projects had already paid off for the migrants' families (my trans.; 575).

US remittances, however, were not the sole source of monetary income. Some peasants made significant amounts of money selling eggs, juniper berries, or different types of grain, primarily to Jewish merchants. With their surplus funds, the peasants created their own thriving "credit market," without the intermediation of banks. The transatlantic dimension played a pivotal role: local credits would facilitate the migration of those who were not (yet) able to rely on remittances, but money was also lent by the village to migrants living in the US. The villagers would demand higher interest rates in the latter case—15 percent, as opposed to 8-10 percent when the money was lent locally (575).

With regard to the eighteen "gypsies" living in the village, Zubryts'kyi repeats some of the common stereotypes of his time: "Among the gypsies, no one goes to America. They explain that they do not have the money for the voyage. . . . [A]nd they do not have any property. But they probably are not interested in going to America, as one has to work there; neither do they do anything in the village . . ." (my trans.; 574). However, farther along in Zubryts'kyi's narrative, it becomes clear that the "gypsies," rather, had a complementary function in the village economy: the men worked as farmhands or blacksmiths, and the women engaged in fortune-telling (*vorozhat'*) and palm reading, probably much to Zubryts'kyi's chagrin since they often pursued these activities during the time of the Sunday church service (574).

In his article on "extended families" in Mshanets (see 288-91), Zubryts'kyi analyzes different household formations, including families containing US migrants. In one case, three married sons were living with their mother in one home, and the money was controlled by the matriarch. Thirteen people were crowded into a house without a chimney; the youngest of the three sons had recently gone to the US. In contrast, in a different family with elderly parents and two married sons, most activities were divided, and "even the laundry is done separately." Not surprisingly, one of the sons who had been in the US also kept his money for himself. In a third family with two married sons at home, the younger of the two sons worked in the US "in order to earn money for a third brother to get married [*zvinovaty*], although this money would have been needed at home" (my trans.; 290-91).

## V. DOCUMENTING VILLAGE CULTURE

A particular strength of Zubryts'kyi's materials is his depiction of migrants and their networks all as intrinsic elements of village life. Zubryts'kyi thus



covers everyday interactions between migrants and non-migrants, which were usually overlooked by his contemporaries in their studies of migration (or “emigration,” as it was called then). It is equally important that Zubryts'kyi, who focused on the most ancient layers of material culture, folk customs, dialects, and so on, was also interested in documenting change (this was not the case with many scholars of his time). Some of the phenomena that he describes come close to being what sociologist Peggy Levitt calls “social remittances”: migrants not only were sending significant amounts of money back to their native village but also were also adopting new cultural practices that eventually altered the life of the whole community. In several of Zubryts'kyi's articles, the US serves as a point of reference for him; he himself had never been abroad: “The peasant masses are also introducing a change to their outer clothing [*ohartka*] when they feel that it is more practical to do so. One can accept, as well, that with time, these masses will assume the outer clothing generally used by the intelligentsia, as is now already the case in the United States” (461). Zubryts'kyi's piece on bast shoes (see 494-99; it was published with an abstract in German) earned him some renown in the international scholarly community. He remarks that *cherevyky* (“tall leather shoes”) were introduced in later times by a local Jew, who had purchased them in large quantities in the nearby town of Dobromyl. He adds that remigrants from the US were also coming back with this new type of shoe (499).

Analyzing monikers in Mshanets and their origin (see 448-57), Zubryts'kyi mentions a peasant dubbed “Bahun” by his fellow villagers. The man during his younger years had worked in “Podilia,” where he picked up the dialectal term *bahun* (“stomach of a pig”); he then popularized that term in his native village (450). We also see names alluding to the migration to adjacent regions of Hungary: for example, *Madiar* ‘Hungarian’ and *Kondash* ‘swineherd’ in Hungarian (451-52). Interestingly, the experience of American remigrants does not yet seem to be reflected in the Mshanets monikers published by Zubryts'kyi in 1907.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This volume is a masterpiece of editing, although the starting point could not have been more difficult. The articles and documents collected by Zubryts'kyi are in varying orthographies of the Ukrainian language (sometimes in the Church Slavonic script) and partly in the (Old-)Polish, German, and Latin. It is an especial accomplishment that the editor retained the original orthographies of all of those languages. There are some minor

points of criticism, but they in no way diminish the outstanding value of this collection. Given the large number of historical documents contained in the book, it would be helpful to still have a separate table of contents in English, preferably, to better guide researchers who do not read Ukrainian to the non-Ukrainian parts of the book. As for the geographic index, there are some small errors: the region of Podilia has been overlooked, while America is mentioned in the text more often than is noted in the index.

The volume under review is a milestone. It is brilliantly edited and introduced by Sysyn. Moreover, it constitutes an extremely rich source of important ethnographic data. One simply cannot write a comprehensive history of Galicia, at least not one that is not exclusively focused on cities, without drawing on information from Zubryts'kyi's research and work.

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