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## DO WE NEED SEPARATE HISTORIES OF SLAVIC COUNTRIES TODAY?

The German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) gave a well-known description of the Slavs' role in the world order: "Die slavischen Volter nehmen auf der Erde einen größern Raum ein, als in der Geschichte" ("Slavic people occupy more place on earth than in history" (Herder 37). In many respects, this idea has formed the way Slavs were perceived during the era of romantic nationalism in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Czech, Slovenian, Bulgarian, Serbian, and Croatian *revivalists* ("buditeli") argued that their nations also had a Great Past, their history marked by heroic feats and major accomplishments. For this purpose, they appealed to medieval Slavic kingdoms, sometimes inventing their history – albeit with the best intentions; recall for example, the famous story of fake Czech Dvůr Králové and Zelená Hora manuscripts (Lapteva, "Kraledvorskaya 11-119).

Slavic historical thought of this era contains many common ideas (Goldblatt 336-354; Lapteva, *Istoriya slavyanovedeniya v Rossii v XIX veke*; Lapteva, *Istoriya slavyanovedeniya v Rossii v kontse XIX*). All Slavic historians were guided by their belief in the common origin of the Slavic peoples and their ensuing kinship and common historical destiny. All of them also considered the Slavs victims of empires – Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, Russian, and later German. As a result, the meaning of their historical choice was the struggle for freedom. Romantic nationalism called for the creation of separate sovereign states (See, for example: Aratò and Zinner 73-98; Kunze 189-206). However, since these ideas were born in the context of empires,

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everyone understood that a “small independent state” was a concept doomed to failure, as only large entities could survive in the war against the empires. Hence the dreams of the Slavic Empire, and the ideas of Pan-Slavism. These, in turn, lead to Russia’s appeal as the only formidable Slavic power. With all due respect, Serbia and other Balkan states which gained independence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, could hardly serve as political leaders in the all-Slavic struggle for freedom.

As a result, the outside view of the Russian Empire was rather ambiguous. On the one hand, it appeared to be a threat to the idea of Slavic freedom (recall the tragically events of 1772-1795 in Poland, as well as Russia’s “gendarme” role in the 1848 “Spring of Nations”). On the other hand, Russia was the only state that could crush other empires and take the lead in building a single Slavic domain. Russian Army’s liberation of the Balkans from the Ottoman rule was enthusiastically received by the Balkan peoples. Here it is important to distinguish between the negative attitude of the Slavic peoples towards the imperial regime and the positive feeling towards the Russians in the Balkans as fellow believers and liberators. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russian social democrats were also perceived by the Slavic countries as leaders of the working class resistance against the global bourgeoisie and found support among certain political groups.

It should be noted that the idea of Slavic unity was largely based on the notion of the common enemy. The Slavs were friends against the empires (D’yakov 232-260; Leskinen 52-61). However, when the those collapsed, the friendships quickly dissipated, while mutual contradictions sharply escalated. This is exemplified by the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, when former Turkish subjects including Serbs, Montenegrins, and Bulgarians started fighting each other soon after gaining their freedom. The collapse of the empires after World War I caused another round of discussions regarding Slavic unity based on T. Masaryk’s suggestion that the history of new nation states had to be studied. For this purpose, the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies was founded in 1915. In 1919, the Slavonic Institute was founded in Prague.

The outcomes of World War II had tremendous consequences for Slavic countries. Firstly, they confirmed that “small countries were not viable.” In the 20th century, they could not be truly sovereign, and sooner or later they would have to choose sides, forcefully or voluntarily, in the war of the great powers. This was inevitable. Secondly, the Yalta-1945 accords and the results of the war split Europe into Eastern and Western parts, with the former

becoming *a cordon* between the USSR and the North Atlantic bloc. Historic events naturally led Slavic countries to become part of this *cordon* and became *people's democracies*, members of the Soviet bloc. With that, the Slavic world established political unity. It is telling that the status of Slavic Studies in the USSR dramatically strengthened in the 1940s. (Dostal', *Kak Feniks; Osnovnyye* 270-288). The Institute of Slavic Studies of the Soviet Academy of Sciences (1947) (Nikiforov 570-589) was established and the mandatory course *History of Southern and Western Slavs* (Kutyavin 154-161) was introduced in Soviet universities. The academic journal *Soviet Slavic Studies* (*Советское славяноведение*) began publication in 1965 succeeding the *Slavs* journal started by the All-Slavic Committee in 1942. In 1955, Poland established the Institute of Slavic Studies. All this meant further institutionalization of Slavic studies as a separate branch of historical science (see: Suslov 575-595; Naydenova 1-25).

The view of Slavic history in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also involved a number of common paradigms. Firstly, there was the theory of historic unity of the Slavic peoples, from the ancient ancestors to present state. As a result, the existing system of *people's democracies* headed by the USSR was legitimized. It embodied the historically grounded idea of unification of brotherly Slavic peoples.

Secondly, the reason behind any historic division among the Slavs was simply explained as having been purposefully perpetrated by the enemies, who were mainly foreigners (German and Ottoman Empires), or exploitative powers alien to the working classes, i.e. monarchs, feudal lords, capitalists, imperialists, etc.). They were the ones who prevented fair unification and liberation of peoples. Mutual conflicts between members of the Slavic world, especially ethnic and nationalist violence, were not publicized and sometimes covered up completely.

Thirdly, the Slavic world as a whole was considered a historical alternative to the German world with emphasis on their confrontation, starting from the conquests of the Franks, the struggle against the medieval German Order, and finally World War II.

Fourthly, the Slavs' historical path was still regarded as the path of the struggle for freedom, the path of national liberation fight against the imperial oppression. This interpretation had a strong association with class wars and the unification of workers from all Slavic countries against feudalism and capitalism.

Finally, starting with the 18<sup>th</sup> century at the latest, Russia/USSR had been widely considered a historical leader of the Slavic world.

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the *nonviolent revolutions* of the 1990s in the Slavic countries, and the war which led to the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1992-1995, there was nothing left of these beliefs. All Slavic countries gained back their independence and made a U-turn on their historic paradigms. The idea of Slavic unity was only in demand among the archaeologists searching for the ancestral Slavic homeland. Everything else, including the ideas of Pan-Slavism and *Slavic reciprocity* (J. Kollar's idea), was gone from the immediate historiographical agenda. The paradigm of interpreting Slavic history as a path to freedom remained (recall the title of a famous work by Piotr Wandycz (Wandycz), yet completely changed its direction. In current science, it is at best looked at as the idea of independence from the Russian Empire and the USSR. Other empires are often treated much more sympathetically, sometimes even with gratitude, like the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Ukrainian Galicia (see: Chłopecki 27-48; Bialasiewicz 21-44; Styczynska 191-200). Even in the Balkans, they are now discussing potential symbiosis of the Slavs with the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of a special multicultural type, *the Balkan man* (Jeftić-Šarčević 691-714).

One might observe that the Slavic world is increasingly losing its historiographical sovereignty as a unique phenomenon. Slavic historians representing various national scholarly traditions are trying their best to demonstrate that their states are rooted in Europe and belong to the Western civilization. The Slavic world is no longer separated from or opposed to the West; on the contrary, various integrative schemes are taking shape. However, since it is impossible to fully equate Western and Eastern Europe, new terms emerge, including *Central-Eastern Europe* (Wandycz; Halecki), *Junior Europe* (Kłoczowski), *Middle Europe* (Szucs 134-184), with the focus on 'Europe' – not any Slavic association – as the major part of the name.

There is a historiographic trend, especially in Ukraine and Belarus, to conduct research to confirm the European origin of these countries starting from the Middle Ages, including the history of knighthood, castle construction, noble democracy, Magdeburg law, etc. These same countries are also developing an obvious anti-Russian discourse focused on establishing and affirming own identity by means of negating the other nation. Thus, a historical antipode is created, and own identity is constructed through the opposition to it. In addition, the anti-Russian theme is as also widely represented in historiography of the Western Slavic countries, especially in the 19-20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Against the background of this complete ‘change of historiographical scenery’ in Slavic countries, the position of Russian historians appears old-fashioned and confused. Russian historiography either mechanically reproduces somewhat modified paradigms of the twentieth century regarding Slavic historical unity, *Slavic reciprocity*, etc., without offering any fundamentally new ideas, or falls between two extremes: full disclosure and self-flagellation (‘Russia oppressed everyone and is to blame for everything’), or a conservative protective reaction to the anti-Russian discourse (‘all negative coverage of Russia/USSR is nothing but fake history’). These views are mostly associated with alternative historical attitudes that are common in modern Russia (hence the antagonism between the Free Historical Society and Russian Military Historical Society), and are more related to the current political situation than any new authoritative research.

Considering all of the above, the question arises if it is possible today to regard the history of the Slavs as actual ‘Slavic history’, ‘the history of the Slavic world’, or, as the title of the course still taught at every Russian university goes, ‘the history of Southern and Western Slavs’. Or has the history of the Slavs finally disintegrated, become fragmented, and now represents a set of separate national histories?

We must first ask ourselves why we would need such a common history and how much we should focus on historic synthesis. What is the matter with a set of national histories? There is nothing wrong with it when it concerns a single country. National histories serve the purpose they are created for; i.e. reconstructing the story of the nation and the country, formulating its priorities at different stages, creating a nomenclature of significant events, a pantheon of national heroes, and a list of enemies. All these are part of the national historical canon, which is used in different ways – in education, in commemorations, in creating *memorials*, in forming priority research areas, etc. Having such a history is imperative for every nation.

However, there are three reasons why this type of history is not enough to understand the overall historical process, or to do scientific research. Firstly, it is the inevitable subjectivity, opportunism, and partisan nature of national histories. Apart from natural self-praise and criticism of others, which are avoidable, the problem lies in the approach and methodology. Each country forms its own scholarly traditions, approaches, and historical canons. If there is no international dialogue between the scholars grounded in shared interests, mutual ‘deafness’ arises. For example, A. V. Martyniuk aptly defined the study of East European Middle Ages as ‘the great split of East Slavic

medievalism (Martynyuk, «Velikiy raskol» 146-153). It is not only a question of politics. If one scholar is educated solely in the scientific views of Lowmianski, another in those of Grushevski, and still others in the traditions of Yermolovich or Froyanov, they may regard those traditions as the only ones worth considering, thus making any reasonable discussion nearly impossible. For research, this is a dead end (see: Filyushkin 3-24; Martynyuk, *Istoriya* 25-38; *Kak segodnya* 39-65).

Secondly, in order to understand historical process, it is absolutely necessary to be able to compare different factors and process participants. This type of research can only be productive when scholars think outside the canons of national histories and consider a broader historical background, whether global, European, or sub-regional (the Baltic World, the German World, the Balkans, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, etc.) This approach makes it possible to develop new concepts and to bring historical research up to modern standards.

It is obvious that the current views on Slavic history as a whole are outdated, even old-fashioned in many respects, matching those defined by the historians in the 19-20th centuries. There is a definite void of new ideas, new concepts, new optics, new important historical narratives. However, they can never develop within the framework of localized national histories. History becomes an exercise in self-reflection. This type of history, which does not generate any new concepts or deeper theoretical understanding of the past, will remain a minor study of *Junior Europe*, serving only politicians, tourists and the goals of national identity. However, this is cultural practice, not true science. Figuratively speaking, Central and Eastern Europe needs another Fernand Braudel with a work similar to his *History of the Mediterranean*. Yet today this type of research trend appears absolutely alien to national historians.

The history of each country and nation has its own place in the global and sub-regional historical process. It becomes meaningful for all if it makes it possible to effectively demonstrate and analyze the processes and phenomena that have had a major impact on the course of history. Any discussion of the Renaissance is incomplete without recalling the Italian communes of the XIII-XV centuries; or the Reformation wouldn't be whole without Germanic lands of the XVI century; religious wars in Europe must include France of the XVI-XVII centuries; the Great Geographical Discoveries have to mention the Spanish Composite Monarchy of the XV-XVII centuries; the mechanisms of building a world empire must involve Britain of the XVI-XIX

centuries, etc. The study of world history is based on these important milestones, or reference points of human history, since total history of everything is impossible.

In this context, a question arises of whether and when there might come a time to view Slavic history as a primary source of understanding the history of all mankind? Are there Slavic case studies which we should highlight to better comprehend certain global phenomena? Do such narratives exist? Or is Slavic history redundant, a pale imitation important only for the Slavs themselves within the framework of local national stories? The fact that for a long time the Slavs were part of one empire or another undoubtedly had a great effect on their history, with numerous influences in every field. The Slavs followed the same overall historical path as the rest of Europe, yet cultural and political pressure came from the West to the East, not the other way around. The Slavs, especially in their recent history, are vulnerable to the “copycat effect” aptly defined by Zygmunt Bauman as a search for a role model and imitation in all activities, from politics to culture (Bauman). This is undoubtedly a legacy of the Slavs’ imperial past linked to the conquerors’ direct influence and the rejection of them in the context of the anti-Imperial struggle while at the same time exhibiting loyalty to another civilization regarded as a symbol of freedom and progress.

It is in this space that we might find that unique value of Slavic history to the solution of global problems of historical science. The Slavic world is essentially a limitrophus, a ‘strait’ between civilizations. It lives on the edge of contacts and conflicts between cultures, nations, religions, and great empires. Due to the peculiarities of their historical path including the absence of antiquity, weakness of the national tradition, and influence of empires, the Slavs were often the subject of historical experiments.

In their difficult history, the Slavs have often served as a ‘testing ground’ for the processes that influenced the entire world history. The study of Slavic history has the potential to help with the understanding of the mechanisms of interaction, mutual influence, suppression, imitation, cultural injections and transactions. Today, these are highly relevant issues related to the history and theory of nations, nation-building, nationalism, migration, formation, and collapse of empires and nation states. The issue of emancipation from the communist past and the collapse of the USSR has become a special and unique area of research (for situation analysis of how the perception of the Slavic world has changed in the current context, see: Emerson 449-464). It is Slavic lands that were in the epicenter of both World Wars I

and II, and the problems of occupation, war trauma (especially for the civilian population), memory trauma, collaborationism, the resistance movement, and preservation of national and cultural heritage under a totalitarian regime are all most productively studied using Slavic historical material.

The potential for research in these areas using Slavic case studies has been underestimated. Unfortunately, there is very little scientific research on the aforementioned issues; instead, there is a predominance of politically biased work aimed at justifying or blaming the past rather than finding the truth. In all modern Slavic countries, the *politics of history* clearly prevail over science. A comparative study of common Slavic history could help turn the research in the direction of actual science, and overcome the immanent opportunism of national histories.

The third argument for exclusion of national histories from academic discourse is that such an approach is simply anti-historical. It is also too focused on the present: it takes a brand new country formed at the beginning or even at the end of the twentieth century and converts the history of the lands that are part of this country today into justification for its existence. However, the Medieval and the New Age inhabitants of these lands did not suspect that they were building, for example, Belarus, Ukraine or Slovakia in their modern borders. It is logical and natural for national histories to exploit such motives, but it is anti-historical and unscientific. Is it possible to understand the history of Rzeczpospolita without mentioning Kyiv, Lviv, Vilno, Smolensk, or Polotsk? Whose was Kievan Rus? Is it part of the Ukrainian, Belarussian, or Russian history? A. V. Martyniuk suggested we “*byzantinize*” the history of Kievan Rus, that is to study it as a separate historical phenomenon that has no direct link to any modern states, as is done with the Byzantine Empire (Martyniuk, «Velikiy raskol» 149-151). Though debatable, the idea merits further consideration.

I am sure, it is too early to consider the common history of the Slavic world part of the historiographical past. It should, however, be written within the framework of new ideas and concepts which are currently nonexistent and have not yet been suggested. Without them, Slavic studies will turn into country studies, local histories with demand limited only to the Slavic states. This framework for productive research should be broader than that of individual national histories.

Today we are following this path. Headlines of the world’s leading history journals often contain new theories and methods developed using case studies of African and Asian peoples rather than Slavic ones. The Web of

Science Core Collection is considered a primary science database for academic journals. As of 24.07.2020, its History category includes 141,011 articles. The papers on non-Russian Slavic history amount to a meager 1.68 % (2375), and to 3.48 % (4918) with Russian history included. The database shows 653 results for *History of Poland*, 437 for Ukraine, 429 for Slovakia, 356 for the Czech Republic, 185 for Bulgaria, 97 for Croatia, 85 for Serbia, 64 for Slovenia, 47 for Macedonia, and 22 for Belarus. Of course, these figures are as approximate as the science metrics themselves. Yet the Web of Science collection is common to all countries, all historiographies and all the topics, whether American, German or Slavic. If the share of the Slavic research amounts to 1.68 % of 141,000 articles on history, it cannot be considered a statistical error, it requires further examination. There are, of course, academic history journals in the Slavic countries which are not included in the Web of Science Collection. However, it is highly questionable whether they are studied anywhere else in the world.

Current scientific periodicals, which serve as indicators of the intensity of scholarly thought, appear to confirm that the aforementioned Herder's prophecy has come true. We believe it is unfair and suggest that we use our common research efforts to help the Slavic world take the prominent place it deserves based on its rich history.

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## CZY POTRZEBUJEMY DZIŚ ODRĘBNYCH HISTORII KRAJÓW SŁOWIAŃSKICH?

### Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia problem korelacji między historiami narodowymi odrębnych krajów słowiańskich i wspólną historią świata słowiańskiego jako całości. Autor przywołuje ewolucję dyskursu wspólnej historii sławistycznej i dochodzi do wniosku, że obecnie wszyscy historycy porzucili paradygmat podejścia całościowego do historii Słowian. Dotyczy to również obecnego stanu czasopism naukowych oraz instytucji badawczych. Autor artykułu uzasadnia, że idea historii narodowych rozwiązuje wprawdzie problemy kulturowe i ideologiczne, lecz jej możliwości co do rozwiązywania problemów badawczych są dość ograniczone ze względu na jej ukierunkowanie i uzależnienie od dyskursu politycznego. Niezbędne jest znalezienie nowego podejścia metodologicznego i nowego spojrzenia na historię świata sławistycznego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** świat sławistyczny; historiografia narodowa; nacjonalizm; metodologia historii.

DO WE NEED SEPARATE HISTORIES  
OF SLAVIC COUNTRIES TODAY?

S u m m a r y

This article deals with the problem of correlation between the national histories of separate Slavic countries and the general history of the Slavic world as a whole. The author reviews the evolution of discourses in common Slavic history and concludes that, today, all historians have abandoned all paradigms of a common approach to the history of the Slavs. It also considers the current state of scientific journals and research institutes. The author of the article substantiates the idea that national histories solve cultural and ideological problems, but their possibilities for solving scientific problems are limited due to their tendency to, and dependence on, political discourse. It is necessary to find new methodological approaches and a new look at the history of the Slavic world.

**Keywords:** Slavic world; national historiography; nationalism; methodology of history.