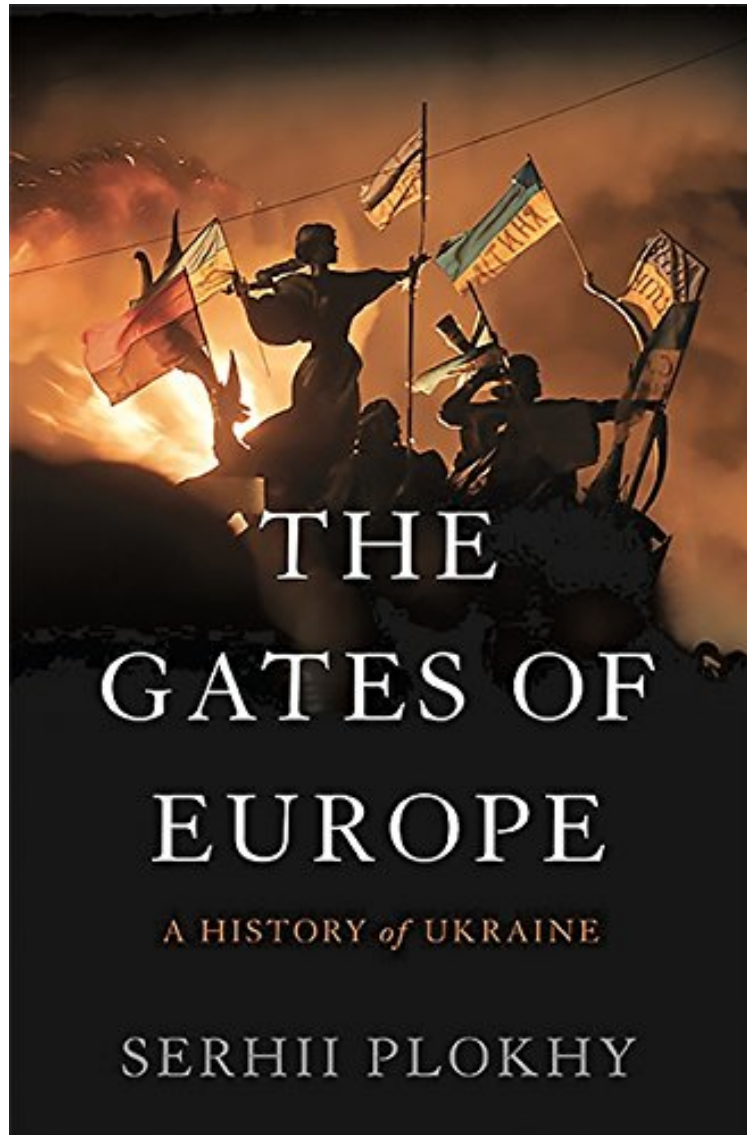


(Free) The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine

The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine

Serhii Plokhy

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Serhii Plokhy : The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Essential History of a Coveted Land, Back to the Greek ExplorersBy Dr. Victor S. AlpherBack to the Greeks.....Yes, I saw remains of Greek exploration of Odessa from B.C., nicely preserved below glass on a major promenade overlooking this important port (and now Ukraine's largest port)....quite astounding. That experience prepared me for this book--for it is not only a history of Ukraine, but of this important

bridge between Europe and Western and Central Asia. Well written and clear, I highly recommend this book for anyone interested in more than the 20th century history of Ukraine--for which you must read Tim Snyder's book "Bloodlands" which I have also reviewed--a 20th century history of the land between Berlin and Moscow that is so coveted for its vast fertile soil and rather defenseless position between the hordes of the East and the West. Great reading.

67 of 72 people found the following review helpful. A COMPLICATED STORY By The Curmudgeon

The history of Ukraine is so complicated that most Ukrainians do not understand it. It seems that Ukraine has changed its borders at least once every century and has also changed its name a few times. It is best described as a fallen medieval country which took over 700 years to re-establish its independence. Its history is largely determined by its geography which consists of three east-west bands. The northern band which contains Chernobyl is forest. The middle band which contains Kiev is the biggest and is forest-plain. The southern band consists of the steppes, a treeless plain which stretches from the Black Sea through Central Asia to Mongolia. This band was historically controlled by nomadic Asian tribes and did not fall under Russo-Ukrainian control until the time of Catherine the Great in the 1760s. Ukraine entered history in 882 when Vikings looking for a trade route to Byzantium occupied Kiev on the Dnieper River. They consolidated the twelve Ukrainian tribes into a large medieval kingdom ruled by the Vikings. It stretched from today's eastern Poland to today's western Russia. Its capital was Kiev and Moscow was a minor border outpost at that time. It called itself Rus (a Viking word) and is nowadays called Kievan Rus. Its high point was from 980 to 1054. It gradually became weak due to succession wars and in 1240 was destroyed by a Mongol Invasion from the steppes, led by the grandson of Genghis Khan. The term Mongol Invasion is somewhat of a misnomer as the invaders were mostly Turkic-speaking nomadic tribes (Tartars) from Central Asia, led by the Mongols. The Mongols established a new state in the Russo-Ukrainian steppes called the Golden Horde. With Kiev destroyed, the center of Ukraine moved to the western and eastern peripheries. The Principality of Galicia-Volhyn survived in the west as did the Grand Duchy of Muscovy in the east (initially called Vladimir-Suzdal). Also surviving was the Republic of Novgorod (now the St. Petersburg area). The Mongols gave these areas autonomy but they had to pay tribute. So just like the fall of Charlemagne's Carolingian Empire eventually produced the countries of France and Germany, the fall of Kievan Rus eventually produced the countries of Ukraine and Russia (and also Belarus). In 1349 the Kingdom of Poland invaded Galicia-Volhynia and the next year the Grand Duchy of Lithuania took central Ukraine. The two conquerors later formed a union known as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Kingdom of Poland was the senior partner here and nearly all further acts by the Commonwealth in Ukraine were done by Poland. Nevertheless, the Lithuanian occupation of northern Ukraine eventually resulted in that area acquiring a separate identity, resulting in the nation known today as Belarus (formerly White Russia). Meanwhile, the Grand Duchy of Muscovy had become the major power in the east, largely because the Mongols used it as their tax collector, and by 1476 had become strong enough under Ivan III to gain independence from the Mongols. So Ukraine was now dominated by the Commonwealth with a growing Russian state to the east. With Ukraine subjugated and Moscow growing, it was around this time that the term Little Russia was introduced for Ukraine, in contrast to the term Great Russia for the Moscow area. The Golden Horde was also weakening and in 1449 broke up into three khanates with the Crimean Khanate controlling the Ukrainian steppes. In 1478 the Ottoman Empire, a fellow Turkic Muslim state, took over the Crimean Khanate and made it a vassal state. Meanwhile, an autonomous warrior state of escaped Ukrainian slaves (from the Ottoman Empire) and escaped serfs (from Polish Ukraine) was developing in the borderland between Polish-Lithuanian Ukraine and the Crimean Khanate. These warriors called themselves Cossacks (a Turkish word meaning freemen) and as a people called themselves Ukrainians (borderlanders) where Ukraine basically means borderland. This is when the name Ukraine apparently originated. In 1648 the Cossacks were powerful enough to launch a major revolt against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and conquer most of central Ukraine including Kiev. This uprising was led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky the leader (Hetman) of the Cossacks and the independent state he established is known as Hetmanate Ukraine. This independent state only lasted until 1654 when increasing pressure from the Commonwealth forced it into an alliance for protection with what was now called the Tsardom of Muscovy. This brief period of independence is constantly celebrated in Ukraine and was the only real independence between Kievan Ukraine and modern Ukraine. The Hetmanate thought it was entering into an equal treaty but Moscow saw it as a chance to gain new territory and new subjects. By 1663 Ukraine was divided into two with Right Bank Ukraine (west of the Dnieper River) controlled by the Commonwealth and Left Bank Ukraine (east of the Dnieper River) controlled by Moscow. This split accelerated the differences between western Ukraine (ruled by an elected and more liberal Polish King) and eastern Ukraine (ruled by a hereditary and oppressive Russian Tsar). So today western Ukraine is pro-Western and largely Ukrainian-speaking while eastern Ukraine is largely pro-Russian and mostly Russian-speaking. Meanwhile, an expanding Moscow had become a major power under Peter the Great, especially with his 1709 victory over the Kingdom of Sweden and others at the Battle of Poltava. In 1721 he renamed the Tsardom of Muscovy the Russian Empire, thereby giving it its modern name of Russia. The main Russian objective was a continuation of its policy to unite the lands of Kievan Rus under Moscow's control. The name Ukraine was largely forgotten by now and Right Bank Ukrainians were mostly called Rusyns or Ruthenians and Left Bank Ukrainians were mostly called Little Russians. The next big Russian move came in 1768 under Catherine the Great when the Russian Empire took Crimea and the Russo-

Ukrainian steppes from the Ottoman Empire. This was the first time the Slavs controlled the steppes. In 1772 Russia, Prussia, and Austria defeated the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and partitioned Poland. Russia got all of Ukraine except Galicia which went to Austria. Apparently this is when Russia gained control of the Baltic countries for the first time. Ukraine then became more Russified while Galicia became more westernized under the liberal Austrian Empire. As education spread in the 19th century, Ukrainian intellectuals re-introduced the term Ukraine and compared the legacy of the egalitarian and democratic Hetmanate Cossack state with the autocratic and oppressive state of Imperial Russia. Russia's response was a crackdown on Ukrainian culture including the prohibition of the Ukrainian language which they called Little Russian. Meanwhile, industrialization was spreading at this time and iron as well as coal were discovered in the steppes of what is now eastern Ukraine. The Russians built new cities such as Donetsk and Luhansk around these deposits. The steel industries there initially used Western European management and mainly Russian peasant labor. Two of the families that moved to this area to take advantage of the employment opportunities included the Khrushchev and Brezhnev families. When the Russian Empire collapsed in 1917 near the end of World War I, the Ukrainians in Kiev established the Ukrainian National Republic. When the Austrian Empire (now called the Austro-Hungarian Empire) collapsed in 1918, the Ukrainians in Galicia established the Western Ukrainian National Republic. These lasted until the Russo-Polish War in 1920 when the Soviets captured Ukraine and the Poles captured Galicia and Volhyn. While western Ukrainians were relatively free under Polish rule during the interwar period the rest of Ukraine suffered under Stalin. This included the Great Famine of 1932-1933 where millions died (estimates run from 4 million to 6 million) when armed Soviet bands confiscated most of the grain in Ukraine under the theory that Ukrainian farmers were resisting collectivization, hoarding grain, and sabotaging Soviet goals because of their bourgeois beliefs. This was followed by the show trials and purges of 1936-1940 where hundreds of thousands were executed on suspicion of being anti-Soviet because they had formerly lived in non-Soviet countries. This usually meant Ukrainians initially from originally Austrian areas (now Polish again) who had accidentally found themselves on the Soviet side when World War I ended. World War II began with the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939 which divided Poland again with the Germans taking Polish-speaking Poland and the Russians taking the Ukrainian-speaking eastern part of Poland which meant Galicia. All Ukrainian speaking areas were now under one government for the first time since the fall of Kievan Rus. In 1941 Hitler attacked the Soviet Union and divided Ukraine into three parts. He incorporated western Poland into Germany and ruled eastern Poland, which included Warsaw and Ukrainian Galicia, as an administrative area called the General Government. Ukrainians were treated relatively well here. Formerly Soviet Ukraine was divided in two. Central Ukraine became the Reichskommissariat Ukraine and suffered the most. Stalin had refused to sign the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners and civilians because it was a bourgeois institution, so Hitler obliged him by not following the convention there. Eastern Ukraine was near the frontlines in Russia and remained under German military command. In 1944 the Soviets took back all of Ukraine and united it once again as a Soviet Republic. In 1939 they had abolished the historical name Galicia (Halychyna in Ukrainian) because of its association with Ukrainian nationalism. They renamed it Lvivshchyna (formally the Lviv Oblast) which it still maintains today. In 1954, when the Soviets celebrated the three hundred year anniversary of the forced union of Ukraine and Russia, Khrushchev decided to transfer Crimea from Russia to Ukraine. This made sense geographically since Crimea (a peninsula) was physically attached to Ukraine but across the sea from Russia. But the problem was that Crimea had never belonged to Ukraine before and was populated mostly by Russians and whatever Tartars Stalin had not deported to Central Asia. In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed and Ukraine declared its independence. The newly independent Russia signed various agreements guaranteeing Ukraine's borders. The most important of these was the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 where Ukraine, with American encouragement, agreed to give up its nuclear weapons in exchange for Russian guarantees of its integrity. Ukraine has now once again found itself a victim of an agreement with Russia. Its nuclear weapons are gone while Russia is once again challenging its integrity. After independence, Ukraine was initially run by former Communist officials who were pro-Russian but also pro-independence. These included the first two Ukrainian presidents Kravchuk and Kuchma. In the 2004 presidential election a pro-western candidate, Yushchenko from north-central Ukraine, appeared for the first time. His pro-Russian opponent was Yanukovich from Donetsk in eastern Ukraine. Faced with a pro-western opponent, the easterners employed old Russian-type tactics such as first trying to poison Yushchenko and then hacking the electoral computer to give Yanukovich a victory. This resulted in the famous Orange Revolution of 2004 which forced the government to reschedule the election which Yushchenko then won. Ukrainian hopes for a national renaissance fell apart after rivalries in the Yushchenko government, especially between President Yushchenko and Prime Minister Tymoshenko, produced no progress. This rivalry repeated the pattern which finished Kievan Rus. This instability led to Yanukovich winning the 2010 presidential race against Tymoshenko, as a Putin-style strong leader who could get things done after the disorder of the previous administration. Then in true Soviet style he had her imprisoned on some trumped up charge. Nevertheless, in order to win Yanukovich had promised to increase ties with the European Union. When it came time to sign an economic agreement with the European Union in late 2013, Yanukovich reneged, apparently persuaded by Putin. This resulted in massive and violent demonstrations in Kiev. Yanukovich was forced to flee to Russia and the Ukrainian parliament removed him from office, established a provisional government, and an interim

president. Later the candy billionaire Poroshenko was elected president. In 2014 Putin waited for the Winter Olympic games to end in Sochi and then invaded Crimea to re-incorporate it back into Russia. Pro-Russian rebels in Donetsk and Luhansk, with the help of Russian mercenaries and secret agents, then began a rebellion against the Ukrainian government to establish Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine as a new country called New Russia and allied with Russia. They ended up declaring two new states: the Donetsk Peoples Republic and the Luhansk Peoples Republic. As a result of Ukrainian government resistance and Western economic sanctions against Russia, they didn't get very far and the situation is now a stalemate where the rebels control just the areas around the two cities. Nevertheless, Putin may be waiting for the 2018 soccer World Cup in Russia to end before making another move.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Ukraine is not Russia. It has its own character and its own history - and its own language. By Graham H. Seibert. Most of the major themes in Ukraine's history over the past several hundred years parallel those of Western Europe. There is a west to east gradation. The Enlightenment had a strong impact in Poland, somewhat less in Ukraine, and less than that in Russia. Likewise the romance, which is a good place to start the story. The romance era, in the early 1800s, celebrated nationalism, folklore, and national language. Russian and Ukrainian have always been sufficiently separate languages that translators were required as far back as the time of the Mongols. This history puts the origin of the Ukrainian language in the Pripyat marshes on the border with Belarus, and credits romance era poets such as Taras Shevchenko and scholars such as Ukraine's first historian, Khrushovskiy, with defining the modern language. Several themes run throughout Ukrainian history. The first is a sense of egalitarianism, or rough democracy. The founders of Kyivan Rus in the seventh and eighth centuries were Scandinavians, whose harsh life, according to evolutionary psychologists, required a kind of egalitarian government. Although there were hereditary kingships, Ukraine never witnessed the divine right of kings at a level approaching that of the Occident. The downside of this egalitarianism is disunity. The Poles, Russians and others, united under strong leaders, were generally able to divide and conquer the fractious Ukrainians. A second theme is closeness to the land. The Ukrainian people are farmers. Minorities among them, Russians, Poles, Jews, Hungarians, Austrians and others, were all more given to city life. The Ukrainians themselves stayed on their beloved land. A third theme is constant invasion. Ukraine's flat geography leaves it wide open to the east, west and north. Turkey, on the Anatolian peninsula, enjoyed more natural defenses. Russia had the defense of its vastness, and Germany and Austria had the Alps. Ukraine's rich land made it a tempting and difficult to defend target. Language politics has been an issue for the past few centuries. Russians have wanted to call Ukrainian a mere dialect. It is not. Though the languages diverged 1000 years ago, about the same time Portuguese split from Spanish, this reviewer finds a greater difference between them: about the same level of difference in the sound, but more difference in the structure of the grammar and in the vocabularies. Every historian has to carefully select events upon which to report, and attempt to give an appropriate balance. Plokhy does a very creditable job. Given, however, that he is dealing with 1500 years of recorded history and several millennia of prehistory, there are things he must leave out. His account of the last decade in Ukraine is necessarily brief. Having lived here, I can appreciate how much he had to leave out. His account does, however, capture the general tenor of the country and events. He does not have time to deal with the nuances of whether or not the current war is a result of Russian invasion. He goes with the consensus view that it is. He does not have time to deal in depth with the ways in which corruption manifests itself. The book is good for what it is. It is as good a choice as any for a reader who is going to choose a single source for Ukrainian history. Other books that a reader may want to pick up include Orest Subtelny's "Ukraine - a History," Timothy Snyder's "Bloodlands," Andrei Kurkov's "Ukraine Diaries," about Maidan, J. V. Koshew's "Abuse of Power - Corruption in the Office of the President," Related books about Russia would include Van Herpen's "Putin's Wars" and Alena V. Ledeneva's "How Russia Really Works," which gives a lot of insight into Ukraine's style of corruption.

Ukraine is currently embroiled in a tense fight with Russia to preserve its territorial integrity and political independence. But today's conflict is only the latest in a long history of battles over Ukraine's territory and its existence as a sovereign nation. As the award-winning historian Serhii Plokhy argues in *The Gates of Europe*, we must examine Ukraine's past in order to understand its present and future. Situated between Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, Ukraine was shaped by the empires that used it as a strategic gateway between East and West—from the Roman and Ottoman empires to the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. For centuries, Ukraine has been a meeting place of various cultures. The mixing of sedentary and nomadic peoples and Christianity and Islam on the steppe borderland produced the class of ferocious warriors known as the Cossacks, for example, while the encounter between the Catholic and Orthodox churches created a religious tradition that bridges Western and Eastern Christianity. Ukraine has also been a home to millions of Jews, serving as the birthplace of Hassidism—and as one of the killing fields of the Holocaust. Plokhy examines the history of Ukraine's search for its identity through the lives of the major figures in Ukrainian history: Prince Yaroslav the Wise of Kyiv, whose daughter Anna became queen of France; the Cossack ruler Ivan Mazepa, who was immortalized in the poems of Byron and Pushkin; Nikita Khrushchev and his protégé-turned-nemesis Leonid Brezhnev, who called Ukraine their home; and the heroes of the Maidan protests of 2013 and 2014, who embody the current struggle over Ukraine's future. As Plokhy explains, today's crisis is a tragic

case of history repeating itself, as Ukraine once again finds itself in the center of the battle of global proportions. An authoritative history of this vital country, *The Gates of Europe* provides a unique insight into the origins of the most dangerous international crisis since the end of the Cold War.

Wall Street Journal