

Historical Dictionary of Belarus. Hrsg. von Grigory Ioffe und Vitali Silitski. (Historical Dictionaries of Europe.) Rowman & Littlefield. 3. Aufl., Lanham u. a. 2018. XL, 435 S., Kt. ISBN 978-1-5381-1705-7. (€ 116,95.)

The purpose of the volume discussed here should have been to provide broad and reliable insights into the complex history of Belarus that could have offered a background for understanding contemporary occurrences for both scholars and interested laypeople. The need for such work as the Historical Dictionary of Belarus, is especially palpable at the present time, now that Belarus has become a significant (albeit often invisible) actor in the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, in which Belarusians, in fact, are engaged on both sides.

Belarus is the European state with the highest number of political prisoners and the second-highest (after Ukraine) number of people who have been forced to flee the country in aftermath of the recent events. In the Belarusian case, the mass emigration followed peaceful protests in 2020 that lasted for months and were brutally suppressed by the authorities. According to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE),¹ the number of displaced Belarusians is estimated to comprise some 200,000 to 500,000 people (between 2.12 and 5.2 percent of the total population).

It seems that the war in eastern Ukraine was one of the reasons a third edition of the *Historical Dictionary of Belarus* was issued. The first two editions appeared in 1998 and 2007 and were authored by Jan Zaprudnik (1998) and Jan Zaprudnik together with Vitali Silitski (2007). What is the main contribution of the present edition, and to what extent does it allow Western readers to understand the entangled past of Belarus and the roots of the massive political and humanitarian crisis the country is facing?

Book reviews do not typically delve in depth into the circumstances in which the respective study was published, but in this case, the question is key to appraising the idea behind this book and understanding its design and purpose. Comparison with the earlier editions also demonstrates that the dictionary has already itself become a valuable source for how different versions of Belarusian history compete and nullify each other. The three authors come from very different scholarly backgrounds and ideological positions that seriously affect the consistency of the whole, and therefore should be considered closely.

Jan Zaprudnik (1926–2022), the author of the first edition, was one of the rare professional historians of Belarusian origin who made it to Western academia. In his youth, he was drafted to a Waffen-SS division, shortly before it surrendered in April 1945. Afterwards, he flew to the US, received his PhD from New York University, worked at different positions at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and taught at several American universities. Zaprudnik, like many postwar Eastern European emigrants of his generation, was an ethnic nationalist and a fervent proponent of a Belarusian nation-state. In the second half of the 1990s, when the downturn of this project in Belarus was already palpable due to Aliaksandr Lukashenka's authoritarian grip on power, Zaprudnik continued to propagate the idea on the pages of his *Historical Dictionary*. Zaprudnik's co-author for the second edition, the promising young political scientist Vitali Silitski (1972–2011) who gained a PhD from Rutgers University in 1999, taught political science in Belarus and returned to the USA as a fellow of the prestigious Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law at Stanford University. The beginning of this fellowship coincided with the publication of the dictionary. As a political scientist, Silitski observed the authoritarian regime in Belarus closely (and with great concern) as it took root. His contribution to the second edition allowed the section on the modern political history of Belarus to be expanded considerably.

Political geographer Grigory Ioffe (born 1951), the third author to work on the dictionary, mentions in the foreword that he was approached by the series' editors and re-

¹ Belarusians in Exile: An Overlooked Issue Addressed by the Parliamentary Assembly, Parliamentary Assembly, 2023-01-25, <https://pace.coe.int/en/news/8955/belarusians-in-exile-an-overlooked-issue-addressed-by-the-parliamentary-assembly> (2023-07-18).

quested to prepare the updated version of the dictionary that finally appeared in 2018. Ioffe, who received his PhD in human geography from the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union in 1980 and, upon his emigration to the USA, worked for many years as a lecturer and then a professor in geography at Radford University, made his name mostly with his extensive publications on the contemporary history of Belarus. In his publications, he emphasized the advantages of the Soviet administrative-command system as well as that of Lukashenka's regime.

As Silitski died prematurely in 2011, it is clear that he did not comment on or approve the present edition. And it seems likely that his contribution underwent questionable editing during its preparation. As a robust critic of Lukashenka, Silitski would certainly disagree with the main thrust of the present edition—which smooths over, to put it mildly, the violations of justice, political freedoms, and human rights committed by the Lukashenka regime, which Ioffe credits with “a subtle understanding of the exact kind of order Belarusians wanted” and proceeding “to reestablish the desired kind of order” (p. 23).

It must also be asked why the name of Zaprudnik, the dictionary's first author, has disappeared from the authorship of the volume despite his significant and easily traceable contribution and the fact that most of his articles reappear in the third edition, albeit in modified form. While working on this review, I was able to ask Zaprudnik this question shortly before his death, and he assured me that he had known nothing about the third edition.² This question should be addressed first and foremost to the publisher of the series.

Having noted crucial formal deficiencies and being constrained by a word limit, I will mention only a couple of the numerous inaccuracies. For instance, Belarusian obtained its status as only official language in 1990, not 1992 (p. 2). One encounters also with contradictory facts, e.g. the emergence of the first informal youth groups during late socialism in Belarus is dated back (wrongly) to 1985 (p. XXX) and (correctly) to 1980/81 (p. 177). There occur also transliteration inconsistencies, e.g. the forename of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, Kisyalou, should be spelled as “Tsikhan,” not “Tikhan” (p. XXX), and the name of another First secretary, Anatol Malafyeu, is spelled in two different ways on the same page (p. XXXI).

The overall organization of the dictionary largely follows the previous editions and those of the series. It consists of an introduction that offers a concise and rather conventional overview of the history of Belarus from the first settlements on its present territory until 2018. The overview is followed by a chronological outline of major events in the history of Belarus, the main part consisting of some 500 lemmas on political and cultural personalities, events, political institutions, and key concepts, and a solid bibliography. Political topics clearly dominate over cultural topics throughout.

As a political geographer, Ioffe understandably yet hardly justifiably concentrates his attention on contemporary developments and the historical events which occupy a significant place in contemporary memory-making. His, not always consistent, amendments and additions to the previous editions have been applied mostly to the post-Soviet history of Belarus, as well as to the Soviet period, one of the most contested periods in historiography, and, to a lesser degree, to imperial history. Simultaneously, the period of late socialism, so crucial in many ways, receives only marginal attention (this was also a shortcoming of earlier versions) and is reduced to general clichés about Belarus as a “partisan republic” (p. 9) and “a Soviet success story” (p. 15).

As has already been mentioned, Ioffe's engagement with the “phenomenon of Lukashenka” (p. 21) exceeds the limits of legitimate scholarly interest and affects the overall integrity of this work. Together with the introduction, this seeps into the content of the separate articles and seems likely to confuse the reader despite the provision of factual information that is valuable in many ways. The ideologization and centralization of educa-

² Email exchange Zaprudnik–Astrouskaya, 2021-12-03. I am thankful to Dr. Natallia Hardzienka for her assistance with this correspondence.

tion under Lukashenka, which has led to purges in academia and a crackdown on free thought in schools that continue even now in Belarus, was highlighted by Silitski in the second edition but has now been bluntly edited out of the present edition (see: “Education,” pp. 131–134). Violence and repressive actions in the Soviet Union and in post-Soviet Belarus have similarly been blurred, for example, in the sections on “Collectivisation” (p. 104), and “Political repressions” (pp. 267–268). Ioffe’s (hardly unbiased) criticism of intellectual and political attempts at democratic reforms and the geopolitical reorientation of Belarus away from Russian influence and towards the West (pp. 18, 20, and *passim*) is also especially pronounced. And these are only a few examples of many.

The *Historical Dictionary of Belarus* is an important and weighty contribution to English-speaking scholarship on Belarus. It is written in comprehensible language, draws on sources, and includes an extensive bibliography. It provides a much-needed broad perspective on Belarusian history that is reinforced by a detailed chronology. Its publication would merit celebration if the author’s personal opinions did not clearly dominate the narrative, which is, of course, dubious in a scholarly work. The other serious flaw is the problematic authorship of the dictionary.

The facts that contributions by one author have been republished without a clear indication of his name and contributions by another author have been significantly amended after his death unfortunately raises questions about the reliability of the work as a whole.³

Marburg

Tatsiana Astrouskaya

³ I am thankful to Prof. Andrej Kotljarchuk, Dr. Anton Liavitski and the participants of the Herder Institute emerging scholars seminar for their comments on the earlier drafts of this review.

Sources on Jewish Self-Government in the Polish Lands from Its Inception to the Present. Hrsg. von François Guesnet und Jerzy Tomaszewski. Brill. Leiden – Boston 2022. XXXI, 694 S. ISBN 978-90-04-19136-5. (€ 300,67.)

Die mit knapp 350 Dokumenten aus dem 11. bis 21. Jh. groß angelegte Quellensammlung geht auf eine Anregung von Artur Makowski und Marcin Soboń zurück und ist in Zusammenarbeit polnischer, israelischer, amerikanischer und deutscher Historikerinnen und Historiker entstanden. Im Titel ist von „Polish Lands“ die Rede, doch vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende der Teilungszeit ist immer ein klares Bemühen zu erkennen, auch die Gebiete des Großfürstentums Litauen mehr als nur randständig mit einzubeziehen. Lediglich die Kapitel zum 20. Jh. konzentrieren sich dann auf das jeweilige Staatsgebiet der II. Republik bzw. der Volksrepublik und der III. Republik Polen.

Zehn chronologisch und zum Teil regional differenzierte Kapitel enthalten jeweils eine Einführung zum Forschungsstand und zu den wichtigsten Charakteristika der Epoche sowie eine Auswahl von 20–48 Dokumenten, die zum großen Teil erstmals in englischer Sprache zugänglich gemacht werden. Ihnen liegen Texte in hebräischer, jiddischer, lateinischer, polnischer, mittel- und neuhochdeutscher Sprache zugrunde, die eine große Bandbreite von Perspektiven auf die jüdische Geschichte eröffnen. Abgeschlossen wird der Band durch ein kurzes Glossar zu häufig verwendeten Fachbegriffen sowie ein Register, welches die Einführungstexte und die jeweilige Kopfregesten erfasst, nicht aber den Inhalt der einzelnen Dokumente. Als Manko erscheint allerdings, dass der Verlag darauf verzichtet hat, ein Verzeichnis der einzelnen Dokumente anzulegen, was eine schnelle Orientierung über das Material unnötig erschwert. Das kann man, wie die Einleitung (S. XVI) vorschlägt, auch als Einladung zum Stöbern und Schmökern sehen, doch ist angesichts des Ladenpreises nicht wirklich zu erwarten, dass das Buch häufig als Lektüre auf dem Nachtschisch zu finden sein wird.

Inhaltlich nimmt die Periode der Teilungen Polen-Litauens zwischen 1772 und dem Ersten Weltkrieg mit fünf Kapiteln und ca. 340 Seiten ziemlich genau die Hälfte des Ban-