

Ukraine before Statehood: A Blind Spot in Western European Historiography of/on Europe since 1991?

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the relationship between Ukraine and Europe in historiography. It asks whether Ukraine was a blind spot in Western European historiography on Europe since 1991. To this end, the article analyzes how general accounts of European history from the early modern period to World War I conceive of “Ukraine” and “Ukrainians” and into which spatial and temporal patterns of European history they insert these lands and people before modern Ukrainian statehood. Furthermore, the article traces the characteristics and structural features of Europe used to frame Ukrainian history as “European.” It is evident that both the people and the country, situated between Poland and Lithuania, the Habsburg Empire, and Russia, are seldom portrayed as protagonists in European history. The article argues that this mirrors the regional expertise of most authors of such overall accounts, or rather, their lack of specialization in Eastern Europe. Moreover, after the “cultural turn,” histories of Europe have rarely been organized according to spatial and state categories. However, it is unlikely that the escalation of Russia’s full-scale attack will lead to a new “spatial turn” that will conceptually integrate state and nation-building processes on the territory of present-day Ukraine into European history.

KEYWORDS: Ukraine, historiography, Europe

Declaration on Possible Conflicts of Interest

The author has declared that no conflicts of interest exist.

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1 Introduction

In their *Histoire de l'Europe*, published in 1990, Jean Carpentier and François Lebrun include the “Eastern part of Ukraine” among the regions whose statehood was disputed after World War I.¹ As historical research has since shown, the Ukrainian lands² between 1917 and 1921 were a laboratory for state-building projects.³ Back in 1990, Carpentier and Lebrun did not elaborate on this. Whereas the accompanying map, “Europe around 1919,” shows several other regions that would *not* achieve statehood, Ukraine, in this *Histoire de l'Europe*, was a blank space or a blind spot.⁴

This article analyzes whether and how Western European historiography of/on Europe over the last 35 years has inscribed Ukraine into European history. Do the “histories of Europe” that have appeared during this period have similar blind spots to Carpentier and Lebrun’s account? Or has Ukraine’s independence, gained in 1991, had an impact on its retrospective historiographical perception? This raises the overarching question of what value is attached to state independence or statehood when a region or country’s “historical worthiness” is negotiated within a larger framework—in this case, the framework of European history. Reference should be made here to the intensive debate among Ukrainian and Western historians after 1991 on whether Ukraine had a history at all, to which the question of statehood was central.⁵ This article also draws on the research of Andreas Kappeler, who has shown that Ukraine “had a firm place on the mental map of Central and Western Europeans in the early modern period.” Around the middle of the nineteenth century, interest in Ukraine waned. Russia increasingly overshadowed Ukraine until the latter disappeared from the focus

1 JEAN CARPENTIER, FRANÇOIS LEBRUN: *Histoire de l'Europe*, Paris 1990, p. 410 (“la partie orientale de l'Ukraine”).

2 In contrast to the static definition of “Ukraine,” the term “Ukrainian lands” seems more appropriate to the historical dynamics; cf.: KERSTIN S. JOBST: *Geschichte der Ukraine*, 3rd ed., Bonn 2022.

3 Cf.: MARTIN SCHULZE WESSEL: *Der Fluch des Imperiums: Die Ukraine, Polen und der Irrweg in der russischen Geschichte*, München 2023, pp. 162–176; ANNA VERONIKA WENDLAND: *Befreiungskrieg: Nationsbildung und Gewalt in der Ukraine*, Frankfurt am Main—New York 2023, pp. 139–145.

4 Map 14 “L'Europe en 1919,” in: CARPENTIER/LEBRUN, pp. 520–521. Besides the Baltic states and Poland, which became independent in 1918, the map also shows Bessarabia, which belonged to the Russian Empire until 1917 and was briefly independent in 1918. It does not show Ukraine.

5 Cf.: MARK VON HAGEN: Does Ukraine Have a History?, in: *Slavic Review* 54 (1995), pp. 658–673, with contributions to the discussion by GEORGE G. GRABOWICZ, ANDREAS KAPPELER, IAROSLAV ISAEVYCH, SERHII PLOKHY, and YURI SLEZKINE, *ibid.*, pp. 674–719; STEFAN PLAGGENBORG, ANDREAS KAPPELER, GUIDO HAUSMANN, OLENA PETRENKO, FRANK GOLCZEWSKI: Diskussion: Wie soll man ukrainische Geschichte betreiben?, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 64 (2016), pp. 626–645.

of the Central and Western European press, journalism, and historiography after the Soviet Union was founded.⁶ Nothing changed in this respect from Ukrainian independence in 1991 until the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine—the country was and remained “terra incognita.”⁷

I understand the “historiography of/on Europe” as the segment of academic historiography that focuses on Europe as a whole, thereby negotiating what is supposed to be “European.”⁸ This historiography is part of research into the history of the idea and the representations of “Europe,” for which it is also a source genre.⁹ The historiography of/on Europe is divided into historiographical works¹⁰ and methodologically or conceptually oriented studies that discuss how

6 ANDREAS KAPPELER: *Vom Land der Kosaken zum Land der Bauern: Die Ukraine im Horizont des Westens vom 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert*, Wien 2020, p. 11 (Ukraine has had “in der Frühen Neuzeit einen festen Platz auf der mentalen Landkarte der Mittel- und Westeuropäer”). By “the West,” Kappeler refers to the European countries that lie geographically west of Poland–Lithuania, Russia, and Ukraine. He focuses on France, Italy, Great Britain, and the German-speaking world. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

7 The image of Ukraine as “terra incognita” for (Western) Europeans (e. g., KARL SCHLÖGEL: *Entscheidung in Kiew: Ukrainische Lektionen*, München 2015, *passim*; JOBST, *Geschichte der Ukraine*, p. 13; and KAPPELER, *Vom Land der Kosaken*, p. 9) was used as early as 1999 by the then-Ambassador of Ukraine to Germany: ANATOLY PONOMARENKO: *Grußwort*, in: THOMAS WERNER (ed.): *Unbekannte Krim: Archäologische Schätze aus drei Jahrtausenden* [exhibition catalogue], Heidelberg 1999, p. 9. Cf. Stefan Albrecht’s contribution to this special issue, p. 101.

8 “European histories—that is, histories of Europe viewed as a unitary whole and understood to signify far more than the aggregation of its states.” STUART WOOLF: *Europe and Its Historians*, in: *Contemporary European History* 12 (2003), pp. 323–337, here p. 325.

9 From the extensive literature on the history of the “European idea”, see only: JEAN-BAPTISTE DUROSELLE: *L’idée d’Europe dans l’histoire*, Paris 1965; ROLF HELLMUT FOERSTER: *Europa: Geschichte einer politischen Idee*, München 1967; PETER BURKE: *Did Europe exist before 1700?*, in: *History of European Ideas* 1 (1980), pp. 21–29; ANTHONY PAGDEN (ed.): *The Idea of Europe*, Washington, DC 2002; GEORGE CHABERT: *L’idée européenne: Entre guerres et culture*, Bruxelles et al. 2007; WOLFGANG SCHMALE: *Geschichte und Zukunft der Europäischen Identität*, Stuttgart 2008; WOLFGANG SCHMALE: *Europe as a Cultural Reference and Value System*, in: *Europäische Geschichte Online = European History Online (EGO)*, published by the Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz, 2010-12-03, <https://www.ieg-ego.eu/schmalew-2010-en> (2025-11-18); PATRICK PASTURE: *Imagining European Unity since 1000 AD*, Basingstoke 2015; SHANE WELLER: *The Idea of Europe: A Critical History*, Cambridge 2021; MATS ANDRÉN: *Thinking Europe: A History of the European Idea since 1800*, New York 2022.

10 Cf., i. a.: CSABA LÉVAI (ed.): *Europe and the World in European Historiography*, Pisa 2006; HEINZ DUCHHARDT (ed.): *Nationale Geschichtskulturen—Bilanz, Ausstrahlung, Europabezogenheit*, Stuttgart 2006; HEINZ DUCHHARDT, MALGORZATA MORAWIEC et al. (eds.): *Europa-Historiker: Ein biographisches Handbuch*, vol. 1–3, Göttingen 2006–2007; HARTMUT KAEUBLE: *Die Europaforschung der Historiker*, in: FRIEDRICH JAEGER, HANS JOAS (eds.): *Europa im Spiegel der Kulturwissenschaften*, Baden-Baden 2008, pp. 183–203; WOOLF; SUSAN RÖSSNER: *Die Geschichte Europas schreiben: Europäische*

the history of Europe should be written.¹¹ However, it also includes syntheses that seek to put these programs into practice. These works on Europe claim to trace or outline the major lines of European history by bundling developments and identifying guiding ideas or structural principles. As historiographical “mental maps,” they determine which territories and social groups belonged to Europe and mark those territories and social groups’ ways of thinking and behaving as “European.” In this way, these academic histories of Europe, be they monographs or collaborative works, confirm and update normative spatiotemporal orders of knowledge about Europe.¹² They are the focus of this article. It is divided into three sections with these guiding questions:

First, what is understood as “Ukraine” and “the Ukrainians” in the histories of Europe when they deal with periods before 1922? In which contexts and with which narrative intentions do they introduce this Ukraine before its statehood? Are “the Ukrainians” presented as historical subjects with their own agency or, if at all, rather as passive objects of history?

Historiker und ihr Europabild im 20. Jahrhundert, Frankfurt am Main—New York 2009; PHILIPP NIELSEN: What, Where and Why Is Europe? Some Answers from Recent Historiography, in: *European History Quarterly* 40 (2010), pp. 701–713; DENIS CROUZET (ed.): *Historiens d’Europe, historiens de l’Europe*, Ceyzérieu 2017.

- 11 Cf., i. a.: GERALD STOURZH (ed.): *Annäherungen an eine europäische Geschichtsschreibung*, Wien 2002; ROLF PETRI, HANNES SIEGRIST (eds.): *Probleme und Perspektiven der Europa-Historiographie*, Leipzig 2004 (*Comparativ*, 14/4); JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL: *Europamodelle und imperiale Kontexte*, in: *Journal of Modern European History* 2 (2004), pp. 157–182; MATTHIAS MIDDELL: *Das Verhältnis von nationaler, transnationaler und europäischer Geschichtsschreibung*, in: KERSTIN ARMBORST, WOLF-FRIEDRICH SCHÄUFELE (eds.): *Der Wert “Europa” und die Geschichte: Auf dem Weg zu einem europäischen Geschichtsbewusstsein*, Mainz 2007, pp. 96–114, <https://www.ieg-mainz.de/beiheft/beiheft-online-2/> (2025-11-18); OLIVER RATHKOLB (ed.): *How to (Re)write European History: History and Text Book Projects in Retrospect*, Innsbruck et al. 2010; CHRISTOF DEJUNG, MARTIN LENGWILER (eds.): *Ränder der Moderne: Neue Perspektiven auf die Europäische Geschichte (1800–1930)*, Köln et al. 2016; MATTHEW D’AURIA, JAN VERMEIREN: *Narrating Europe: (Re)thinking Europe and Its Many Pasts*, in: *History* 103 (2018), 356, pp. 385–400; ROLF PETRI: *Meanings of Europe and Meaning in History*, in: *History* 103 (2018), 356, pp. 401–417; MARJET BROLSMA, ROBIN DE BRUIN et al. (eds.): *Eurocentrism in European History and Memory*, Amsterdam 2019; DAG NIKOLAUS HASSE: *Was ist europäisch? Zur Überwindung kolonialer und romantischer Denkformen*, Ditzingen 2021; *L’histoire européenne après le tournant global*, in: *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 76 (2021), 4, pp. 641–810.
- 12 Cf.: FRITHJOF BENJAMIN SCHENK: *Mental Maps: The Cognitive Mapping of the Continent as an Object of Research of European History*, in: EGO, 2013-06-05, <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/schenkf-2013-en> (2025-11-07); JOACHIM BERGER: *Multiple Europes? Raumzeitliche Ordnungsversuche der Historiographie*, in: JOACHIM BERGER, THORSTEN WÜBBENA (eds.): *Wissen ordnen und entgrenzen—vom analogen zum digitalen Europa?*, Göttingen 2023, pp. 201–224.

Second, into which spatiotemporal patterns of order do these histories of Europe place “Ukraine” (that is, the Ukrainian lands)?

Third, which characteristics and structural features of Europe are used in the “European” framing of Ukrainian history? To what extent are these characteristics charged with values?

This article covers general histories of Europe. The monographs¹³ favor comprehensive syntheses with a clear line of arguments, while edited volumes¹⁴ bring

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- 13 WALTHER L. BERNECKER: *Handbuch der Geschichte Europas*. Vol. 9: Europa zwischen den Weltkriegen 1914–1945, Stuttgart 2002; SERGE BERSTEIN, PIERRE MILZA: *Histoire de l’Europe*. Vol. 3: États et identité européenne: XIVe siècle – 1815, Paris 1994; SERGE BERSTEIN, PIERRE MILZA: *Histoire de l’Europe*. Vol. 4: Histoire de l’Europe contemporaine: Nationalismes et concert européen 1815–1919, Paris 1992; T. C. W. BLANNING: *The Pursuit of Glory: Europe, 1648–1815*, London 2008; NICOLAS BOURGUINAT, BENOÎT PELLISTRANDI: *Le 19e siècle en Europe*, Paris 2003; CARPENTIER/LEBRUN; NORMAN DAVIES: *Europe: A History*, 2nd ed., New York 1998; HEINZ DUCHHARDT: *Handbuch der Geschichte Europas*. Vol. 6: Europa am Vorabend der Moderne 1650–1800, Stuttgart 2003; RICHARD J. EVANS: *The Pursuit of Power: Europe 1815–1914*, London 2016; MICHEL FAUQUIER: *Une histoire de l’Europe: Aux sources de notre monde*, Monaco 2018; JÖRG FISCH: *Handbuch der Geschichte Europas*. Vol. 8: Europa zwischen Wachstum und Gleichheit 1850–1914, Stuttgart 2002; HÉLÈNE FRÉCHET: *Histoire de l’Europe au XIXe siècle*, Paris 1991; ROBERT VON FRIEDEBURG: *Neue Fischer Weltgeschichte*. Vol. 5: Europa in der frühen Neuzeit, Frankfurt am Main 2012; JEAN-MICHEL GAILLARD, ANTHONY ROWLEY: *Histoire du continent européen: De 1850 à la fin du XXe siècle*, Paris 1998; GIUSEPPE GALASSO: *Storia d’Europa*. Vol. 2: Età moderna, Roma—Bari 1996; GIUSEPPE GALASSO: *Storia d’Europa*. Vol. 3: Età contemporanea, Roma 1996; WOLFGANG VON HIPPEL, BERNHARD STIER: *Handbuch der Geschichte Europas*. Vol. 7: Europa zwischen Reform und Revolution 1800–1850, Stuttgart 2012; RAINER LIEDTKE: *Geschichte Europas: Von 1815 bis zur Gegenwart*, Paderborn et al. 2010; AURELIO MUSI: *Un vivaio di storia: L’Europa nel mondo moderno*, Milano 2020; JOHANNES PAULMANN: *Globale Vorherrschaft und Fortschrittsglaube. Europa 1850–1914*, München 2019; J. M. ROBERTS: *The Penguin History of Europe*, London et al. 1997; LUISE SCHORN-SCHÜTTE: *Geschichte Europas in der Frühen Neuzeit: Grundzüge einer Epoche 1500–1789*, 3rd, rev. ed., Paderborn 2019; HAGEN SCHULZE: *Phoenix Europa: Die Moderne. Von 1740 bis heute*, Berlin 1998; WILLIBALD STEINMETZ: *Neue Fischer Weltgeschichte*. Vol. 6: Europa im 19. Jahrhundert, Frankfurt am Main 2019; PAOLO VIOLA: *L’Europa moderna: Storia di un’ identità*, Torino 2004; GERRIT WALTHER: *Staatenkonkurrenz und Vernunft: Europa 1648–1789*, München 2021. Only the second volume of the *Cambridge History of Europe* (originally planned to comprise four volumes) has been published: MERRY E. WIESNER: *Early Modern Europe, 1450–1789*, Cambridge—New York 2006.
- 14 THOMAS A. BRADY, HEIKO AUGUSTINUS OBERMAN et al. (eds.): *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation*, Leiden—New York 1994–1995; CHARLES-OLIVIER CARBONELL, DOMINIQUE BILOGHI, JACQUES LIMOUZIN, FRÉDÉRIC ROUSSEAU, JOSEPH SCHULTZ: *Une histoire européenne de l’Europe*. Vol. 2: D’une renaissance à l’autre? (XVe–XXe siècle), Toulouse 1999; ALESSANDRO BARBERO, GUSTAVO CORNI (eds.): *Storia d’Europa e del Mediterraneo*, vol. 10–15, Roma 2009–2017; T. C. W. BLANNING (ed.): *The Oxford History of Modern Europe*, 3rd ed,

together specialized knowledge for various societal sectors as well as temporal and geographical areas. This applies to the monumental 2018 *Encyclopédie historique* with its 400 or so authors, which surveys European history from multiple perspectives along five “axes,” but also to the digital anthologies *European History Online* (EGO) and *Encyclopédie d’histoire nouvelle de l’Europe* (EHNE).

The source corpus is limited as follows: Firstly, I only consider works that, in principle, focus on all areas of human life, i. e., that are not limited to one sector (e. g., economics) or that do not solely deal with the international relations of European nation-states. Secondly, I concentrate on accounts of Europe’s history from the early modern period to the end of World War I. In other words, I look at periods in which European unification remained a theoretical construct and in which there was no permanent body politic called “Ukraine” that claimed to unite all people who saw themselves as “Ukrainians” in a single territorial entity. Thirdly, I limit myself to overviews that have appeared since Ukraine’s independence in 1991. Fourthly, I examine only texts published in German, English, French, or Italian.¹⁵

This corpus has a Western European bias. This bias stems from my own standpoint and lack of competence for Eastern Europe as well as the constellations of origin, languages of publication, and national-language target audiences of the histories of Europe examined here, with which the expertise of their authors correlates. It should be noted that until the turn of the millennium, the authors of the European histories analyzed here could only draw on a few syntheses in their first languages that treated Ukraine’s history as an independent subject. However, even these few histories of Ukraine are not referenced in the works on Europe discussed here.¹⁶ In English, around 1990, apart from specialized studies and works published in rather obscure places, there were essentially the overviews by exiled Ukrainians Roman Szporluk and Orest Subtelny. In the decade after independence, these texts were supplemented by the works of Paul

Oxford 2000; CHRISTOPHE CHARLE, DANIEL ROCHE (eds.): *L’Europe: Encyclopédie historique*, Arles 2018; ÉTIENNE FRANÇOIS, THOMAS SERRIER (eds.): *Europa: Notre histoire*, Paris 2017; EGO | Europäische Geschichte Online = European History Online, published by the (Leibniz) Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz 2010 ff., <https://www.ieg-ego.eu>; Encyclopédie d’histoire nouvelle de l’Europe, Paris 2016 ff., <https://ehne.fr> (2025-11-05).

15 The question of the extent to which *Western* European historiography can be equated with that of “the West” cannot be addressed here. Therefore, I have excluded works by authors trained and active outside Europe. This concerns, e. g.: JOHN MERRIMAN: *A History of Modern Europe: From the Renaissance to the Present*, New York 1996; JONATHAN SPERBER: *Europe 1850–1914: Progress, Participation and Apprehension*, Harlow 2009, and WIESNER. BRADY/OBERMAN, however, is a North American and Western European co-production.

16 Except for DUCHHARDT, *Handbuch der Geschichte Europas*, vol. 6, who lists PAUL R. MAGOCSI: *A History of Ukraine*, Seattle 1996, in the bibliography.

Magocsi and Andrew Wilson.¹⁷ A history of Ukraine in French first appeared in 1993.¹⁸ The first, more recent syntheses were published in German at the same time.¹⁹ Anyone wishing to consult an Italian-language overview had to rely on Jevhen Onac'kyj's work, first published in Italian in 1939 and reprinted in 1995.²⁰ When overviews and special studies on Ukrainian history began to appear in the 2000s, these were not consulted by the authors of our European histories either. Their bibliographies reflect the conceptual structure of the works: Those with a regional-spatial focus categorize the secondary literature according to states and empires or even "national histories,"²¹ which means that "Ukraine before statehood" is also omitted from the bibliography.

So, how do these historians look at a historical region that is, in many respects, distant from them? How do they fit Ukraine as a "stateless nation" into the historical development of Europe from the early modern period to the end of World War I?²²

2 Agency: The Ukrainians and the Ukrainian Lands as Subjects and Objects in History

Historical experts have characterized today's Ukraine as a "state with different historical-political cultures of memory and reference spaces,"²³ whose historical development demonstrates "the fluidity and randomness of national classifications."²⁴ They agree that, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, Ukraine was "not a space that could be defined by political or geographical borders."²⁵ Moreover, the history of the Ukrainian lands is "often overshadowed by the grand

17 ROMAN SZPORLUK: *Ukraine: A Brief History*, 2nd, exp. ed., Detroit 1982; OREST SUBTELNY: *Ukraine: A History*, Toronto—Buffalo 1988; PAUL MAGOCSI; ANDREW WILSON: *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, New Haven 2000.

18 ARKADY JOUKOVSKY: *Histoire de l'Ukraine*, Paris 1993; previously only: ROGER PORTAL: *Russes et Ukrainiens*, Paris 1970.

19 FRANK GOLCZEWSKI (ed.): *Geschichte der Ukraine*, Göttingen 1993; ANDREAS KAPPELER: *Kleine Geschichte der Ukraine*, München 1994; MYCHAJLO BRAJČEVS'KYJ: *Kleiner Abriss einer Geschichte der Ukraine: Vom Paläolithikum zur Perestrojka*, München 2001.

20 JEVHEN ONAC'KYJ: *Studi di storia e di cultura ucraina*, Abano Terme 1995; then LUCA CALVI: *Ucraina: questioni di storia e cultura*, Trieste 2002.

21 BLANNING, *Pursuit of Glory*; EVANS.

22 DAVIES, *Europe*, p. 833. See also: footnote 39 below.

23 WENDLAND, *Befreiungskrieg*, p. 196 ("Staatswesen mit unterschiedlichen historisch-politischen Erinnerungskulturen und Bezugsräumen").

24 FRANK GOLCZEWSKI: *Die Ukraine als (erfolgreiches?) Nationsbildungsprojekt*, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 64 (2016), pp. 640–645, here p. 642 ("die Fluidität und Zufälligkeit nationaler Zuordnungen").

25 KAPPELER, *Vom Land der Kosaken*, p. 297 ("kein Raum, der durch politische oder geographische Grenzen bestimmt werden konnte").

narratives of the empires that dominated the region.”²⁶ Outside this specialized literature, the Ukrainian lands are therefore usually considered in the context of the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Habsburg and Russian empires. This section asks how far general histories of Europe present the Ukrainians and the Ukrainian lands as historical subjects with their own agency. The answer depends on what these authors understand as “Ukraine” and “the Ukrainians” in the period before 1922, and in which contexts, and with which narrative intentions they introduce this “Ukraine before statehood.”

Most of our authors do not clearly state who or what they mean by “Ukraine” or “the Ukrainians.” In this way, they accept that static, supratemporal ideas are invoked or that developments and features that have characterized Ukraine since its independence in 1991 are projected back onto previous historical stages and actors. At the same time, Ukraine and the Ukrainians appear in these histories of Europe almost exclusively as objects.²⁷ In Paolo Viola’s work, for example, the Ottoman Empire had to cede Podolia and “the Ukraine” to Poland in the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699.²⁸ In a few works, “the Ukrainians” are granted agency in a mostly decontextualized space.²⁹

However, a good third of the histories of Europe discussed here explicitly want to understand “Ukraine” as the territory of the present-day state to place historical events in space. Heinz Duchhardt, for example, speaks of the “Cossacks living on the present-day territory of Ukraine” and Willibald Steinmetz of the “new ethnic-national movements of the Ukrainians (Ruthenians)” in the nineteenth century.³⁰ This historical-contextualizing approach to the terms “Ukraine” and “Ukrainians” can evoke a variety of connotations in readers, depending on their previous knowledge and expectations, including those of a long continuity of state and power and those of spatial-temporal breaks and leaps.

The “grand collective histories of Europe,” like *The Cambridge Modern History*, published 1902–1911, or the *Propyläen Geschichte Europas*, published 1975–1978, established territorial-state categories as an organizing principle for such multi-volume undertakings.³¹ In the last 30 years, two collections were

26 SERHII PLOKHY: *Das Tor Europas: Die Geschichte der Ukraine*, Bonn 2023, p. 22 (“oft von den großen Narrativen der Imperien, die das Land jahrhundertlang beherrschten, überlagert”).

27 Cf. esp.: CARPENTIER/LEBRUN; GALASSO, vol. 2; GALASSO, vol. 3; GAILLARD/ROWLEY; CARBONELL/BILOGHI; FISCH; BOURGUINAT/PELLISTRANDI; VIOLA; LIEDTKE; HIPPEL/STIER; BARBERO/CORNI; SCHORN-SCHÜTTE; PAULMANN.

28 VIOLA, p. 175.

29 ROBERTS, pp. 301–302; BLANNING, *Oxford History of Modern Europe*, p. 39; FRIEDENBURG, pp. 245, 251, 280.

30 DUCHHARDT, *Handbuch der Geschichte Europas*, vol. 6, p. 300 (die “auf dem heutigen Territorium der Ukraine lebenden Kosaken”); STEINMETZ, p. 556 (die “neuen ethnisch-nationalen Bewegungen der Ukrainer [Ruthenen]”).

31 Cf.: WOOLF, p. 324.

published that stuck to these principles: the *Handbuch der Geschichte Europas*, initiated by Peter Blickle and published 2002–2012, and the *Storia d'Europa e del Mediterraneo*, published by Alessandro Barbero and Gustavo Corni 2006–2017. The latter includes the Ottoman and Islamic world in its contact zones with the Habsburg and Russian empires. Both series are based on the territories under their rule at the time, and both struggle to come to terms with the Ukrainian lands: Ukrainians primarily appear in relation to the Habsburg Empire (as Ruthenians) and the Tsarist Empire, which means they are not given their own history with agency.

Let us now primarily take a look at the works that are *not* organized on a territorial-state basis at the highest level. A probe of how much agency their authors concede to “the Ukrainians” is how they treat the Cossacks of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as the Ukrainian national movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Regarding the Cossacks, the Zaporozhian Sich, the Khmel’nyts’kyi Uprising, and the Hetmanate after 1648 have served as a projection screen for proto-national striving for freedom and pre-modern statehood of “the Ukrainians” in historiography, at least since Mychajlo Hrushevs’kyi.³² Half of our histories of Europe covering the early modern period mention the Cossacks on the territory of present-day Ukraine. John Roberts laconically remarks that between the Ottomans and the Muscovites lay “the Ukraine, the land of the Cossacks, peoples who fiercely protected their independence.”³³ Duchhardt takes a more differentiated approach to the “seesaw politics of the Cossack state,”³⁴ and Gerrit Walther sees the Cossacks as the “inhabitants” of Ukraine, of whom “no one could say to which ruler they actually belonged,” as a stabilizing factor between the empires. Walther and Robert von Friedeburg present the history of the Cossacks as a problem for Poland in its relationship with Russia. Unlike Walther, von Friedeburg does not mention the Hetmanate but merely speaks of “Cossack unrest in Ukraine with its own ethnic and religious identity.”³⁵ In both cases, the authors insinuate that the Cossacks acted on the territory of present-day Ukraine without drawing a spatial or ethnic connection

32 Cf., i.a.: VON HAGEN, pp. 667–668; ANDREAS KAPPELER: Die Geschichte eines “geschichtslosen” Volkes, in: Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas 64 (2016), pp. 626–631, here p. 628.

33 ROBERTS, pp. 301–302.

34 DUCHHARDT, *Handbuch der Geschichte Europas*, vol. 6, p. 313 (“Schaukelpolitik des Kosakenstaats”). Wendland’s assessment fluctuates between a “Ukrainian maneuvering between different powers” (einem “ukrainischen Lavieren zwischen verschiedenen Mächten”) and, echoing Ukrainian political scientists, a “multi-vectoral foreign and alliance policy” (eine “multivektorielle Außen- und Bündnispolitik”). WENDLAND, *Befreiungskrieg*, pp. 195, 80.

35 WALTHER, pp. 47 (“niemand sagen konnte, welchem Herrscher sie eigentlich zugehörten”), 63; FRIEDEBURG, pp. 245, 280 (“Kosakenunruhen in der Ukraine mit eigener ethnischer und religiöser Identität”).

between the historical actors and the territory. On the contrary, the *Storia d'Europa e del Mediterraneo* presents the consequences of the Khmel'nyts'kyi Uprising from a Russian perspective, stating that for the first time, the Ukrainians had found themselves in their own governmental structure, the Hetmanate, in which local administration was delegated to allogeneic elites and the serving nobility.³⁶ Overall, the Cossacks are thus introduced primarily as an ambiguous, separate group between the established powers.

The Ukrainian national movement is being dealt with in a third of the works covering the nineteenth century. In the *Handbook of European History*, Stefan Fisch presents this movement in the context of Russification, which the tsars implemented more easily in Ukraine than, for example, in Finland, “as [Ukraine] almost completely lacked its own state tradition.”³⁷ As a contrast, the Italian-language histories of Europe and the Mediterranean think of the Ukrainian national movement along the lines of the Polish case, just as the Polish national movement with the uprisings of 1830 and 1863 generally recurs as a leitmotif in many histories of Europe. Exceptions are Richard J. Evans and Willibald Steinmetz, who embed the Ukrainian national movement in a European context.³⁸ Of course, there is also Norman Davies, who, as an expert on Polish history, takes a differentiated view of the ethnicities, language groups, and nationalities in the Russian Empire and locates nation-building processes in Ukraine between the Habsburg and Romanov Empires. He treats those speaking as “Ukrainians” as active subjects, yet at the same time concludes that “the Ukraine remained a stateless nation.”³⁹

Of the thirteen works covering the interwar period, Davies' book is again one of only three that mention Ukraine's state-building projects from 1917 to 1921. This is partly due to the caesura that the beginning of World War I continues to represent in European historiography, despite all the differentiations in the specialized literature. Representations of the nineteenth century, which in their sections on political history culminate in 1914 with the assassination of Sarajevo, often concentrate on the “powder keg” of southeastern Europe and “the Balkans.” The works that begin with or after the Great War focus on the states that permanently achieved statehood after 1918, such as Poland or Czechoslovakia. Therefore, the Ukrainian national movement in the nineteenth century and the state-building projects between 1917 and 1921 remain underexamined.⁴⁰

36 MARCO NATALIZI: L'ingresso della Russia in Europa, in: ROBERTO BIZZOCCHI (ed.): *Storia d'Europa e del Mediterraneo*. 2: Dal Medioevo all'età della globalizzazione. Sez. 5: L'età moderna (secoli XVI–XVIII). Vol. 12: Popoli, stati, equilibri del potere, Roma 2013, pp. 467–495, here p. 485.

37 FISCH, p. 142 (“fehlte doch eine eigene staatliche Tradition fast völlig”).

38 Cf.: EVANS, pp. 203, 490; STEINMETZ, pp. 554–556.

39 DAVIES, *Europe*, pp. 828–829, 831, 833 (citation).

40 This omission is particularly striking in: GAILLARD/ROWLEY.

Overall, a pattern emerges: Those authors who allow “the Ukrainians” to appear as historically active subjects in concrete contexts have a differentiated understanding of the territory and population of “Ukraine,” and vice versa. However, the question of whether Ukraine’s history, like that of Russia, is part of European history, is except for Davies and Martin Aust,⁴¹ only posed in one of the works on Europe considered here (and left open in favor of a flexible understanding of Europe).⁴² The other works answer the question implicitly by either including or excluding Ukraine from their narrative.

3 Spatiotemporal Patterns of Order for “Ukraine”

In the metaphor of Ukraine as the “gateway of Europe,”⁴³ which can be passed through from two directions, older historiographical ideas of Ukraine’s function as an interface “between East and West” shine through.⁴⁴ These ideas interweave spatial demarcations with temporal conjunctures. Thus, the focus of this section is on the spatiotemporal patterns of order in which the histories of Europe place the Ukrainian lands.

The static maps accompanying the histories of Europe are instructive for such spatiotemporal patterns.⁴⁵ They represent temporal and spatial snapshots without depicting the development of dynamic spaces. Generally speaking, cartographic representations are inconsistent even within a single work;⁴⁶ they cannot do justice to the complex spatial-territorial, linguistic, ethnic, and religious constellations in Eastern Europe. Therefore, it is important to consider which segments these maps choose and in which instances the Ukrainian lands appear. However, the works naturally do not reveal whether and how the authors collaborated with

41 MARTIN AUST: *Russia and Europe (1547–1917)*, in: EGO, 2016-03-10, <https://www.ieg-ego.eu/austm-2015-en> (2025-09-15); Aust deals in particular with the “transfer of European knowledge [...] to Russia through the Ukraine” (p. 14).

42 WIESNER, pp. 3–4. The book, written by a US-American historian, is therefore strictly speaking not part of our source corpus (see note 15). On Norman Davies, see footnote 64 below.

43 PLOKHY.

44 ANDRII PORTNOV, TETIANA PORTNOVA: *Ukrainische Geschichte: Interpretations- und Erklärungsansätze*, in: *Osteuropa* 72 (2022), 6–8, pp. 79–102, here pp. 96–98.

45 A methodologically stimulating and substantively advanced analysis of maps of the Ukrainian lands is provided by: ANNA VERONIKA WENDLAND: *Ikonografien des Raumbilds Ukraine: Eine europäische Wissenstransfergeschichte*, in: PETER HASLINGER, VADIM OSWALT (eds.): *Kampf der Karten: Propaganda- und Geschichtskarten als politische Instrumente und Identitätstexte*, Marburg 2012, pp. 85–120.

46 See, e. g.: WIESNER, where “Ukraine” is not outlined in territorial terms, but the name appears on the maps “Europe in 1559” (p. 108, within the borders of “Lithuania”) and “Europe in 1763” (p. 296, overlapping “Poland” and the “Russian Empire”). It does not appear on the map “Europe after the Peace of Westphalia” (p. 293).

the cartographers; the latter are often not mentioned by name. Thus, we can cautiously assume a certain “obstinacy” in the cartography.

The “blind spot” shown at the beginning of this article in regard to Carpentier and Lebrun is reproduced, for example, in the maps of the *Oxford History of Modern Europe* or in Roberts’s *The Penguin History of Europe*. Some regions and political units within and between the territorial states are shown there, but Ukraine is not.⁴⁷ In contrast, the *Storia d’Europa e del Mediterraneo* underlays maps of population density in the early modern period or the spread of industrialization in the nineteenth century with the borders of today’s states.⁴⁸ This suggests a historical continuity that does not exist for any of the states depicted.

This technique contrasts with another pattern of interpretation that recurs both on maps and in narratives. In this second pattern, Europe, or more precisely Western and Central Europe, reaches out to the “East” during the early modern period, and the East grows into Europe, i. e., towards the West. For example, a map in the *Storia d’Europa e del Mediterraneo* shows the spread of humanism and the Renaissance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The easternmost places are Krakow and Vilnius, while the Black Sea and today’s Ukraine are not shown.⁴⁹ It cannot be discussed here whether such a narrow perspective is appropriate to the historical situation. This narrow approach is even more conspicuous in a map in von Friedeburg’s book, showing the “Confessions in Europe” in the second half of the sixteenth century. The map ends east of Krakow, so the area of present-day Ukraine is not pictured.⁵⁰ Thus, the map suggests that the areas dominated by Orthodox Christianity are outside Europe. The map is aligned with von Friedeburg’s narrative. For him, early modern Europe is a transforming and expanding area of communication that gradually integrates the area of Eastern Orthodoxy with Russia until the end of the eighteenth century. Therefore, Ukraine did not belong to Europe at the beginning of the sixteenth century. However, the sub-

47 Map “Europe in 1789,” in: BLANNING, *Oxford History of Modern Europe*, pp. 356–357 (indicating Galicia and Lodomeria, Banat, Wallachia). Cf. map “Europe in 1815,” in: ROBERTS, p. 395 (indicating Kyiv within the Russian Empire, without further internal differentiations).

48 Maps 1–2 in: ROBERTO BIZZOCCHI (ed.): *Storia d’Europa e del Mediterraneo*. 2: Dal Medioevo all’età della globalizzazione. Sez. 5: L’età moderna (secoli XVI–XVIII). Vol. 10: Ambiente, popolazione, società, Roma 2009; map 3 in: GUSTAVO CORNI (ed.): *Storia d’Europa e del Mediterraneo*. 2: Dal Medioevo all’età della globalizzazione. Sez. 6: L’Età contemporanea. Vol. 13: Ambiente, Popolazioni, economia, Roma 2016.

49 Map 5 “Diffusione dell’Umanesimo e del Rinascimento nei secoli XV–XVI,” in ROBERTO BIZZOCCHI (ed.): *Storia d’Europa e del Mediterraneo*. 2: Dal Medioevo all’età della globalizzazione. Sez. 5: L’età moderna (secoli XVI–XVIII). Vol. 11: Culture, religioni, saperi, Roma 2011.

50 Map 1 “Denominations in Europe, Second Half of the 16th Century,” in: FRIEDEBURG, pp. 106–107.

sequent process of its integration in the form of the reception of humanism, the Renaissance, and theological reform is not explicitly described.⁵¹

Other authors see similar processes in other fields. According to Giuseppe Galasso, the large countries of Eastern Europe, including Russia, the Baltic countries, Poland, and Muscovy, which he differentiates from Russia, entered European agricultural geography between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵² The narrative in the *Histoire européenne de l'Europe* parallels the expansion of Europe to the West and East, stating that “The conquest of the Atlantic was followed by the conquest of the steppes in Ukraine, Russia and soon also beyond the Urals.”⁵³ So, even here, at the beginning of the modern era, Ukraine did not belong to Europe. Duchhardt describes the same process, calling Eastern, Southeastern, and East Central Europe “regions that were *initially* only involved in transcultural interactions to a limited extent.”⁵⁴ The way of thinking runs from east to west. This is also reflected in the fact that works with chapters on countries and regions never begin their narratives with Russia or the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁵

In the Western European historiography of/on Europe, “Eastern Europe” usually functions as a collective term for the eastern part of the European peninsula.⁵⁶ This historiography shows no signs of integrating Ukraine conceptually into “East Central Europe” and thus separating it from Russia. Only Evans, for whom “space” is not a leading category, provides a map of the “Languages and Peoples of East-Central Europe” in 1914. On this map, Ukrainian and Belarusian appear as the easternmost languages and ethnic groups. Russia and Estonia are shown in the northeast on the map (which is not oriented to the north), such that Ukraine belongs to East Central Europe.⁵⁷ However, this is an exception. We also cannot discern that “Central Europe” is used to distinguish Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary from Eastern Europe (i. e., Russia), as is sometimes the case in the historiographies of these countries. When they are included, these countries are subsumed under the label of East Central Europe. This term “in its usual sense encompasses the countries of Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia,” but not usually Ukraine. It is usually understood as a “border region [or]

51 Ibid., p. 13.

52 GALASSO, vol. 2, p. 74.

53 CARBONELL/BILOGHI, p. 24. (“À la conquête de l’Atlantique répond celles des steppes d’Ukraine, de Russie et bientôt au-delà de l’Oural.”)

54 DUCHHARDT, *Handbuch der Geschichte Europas*, vol. 6, p. 35 (“Regionen, die in die transkulturellen Interaktionen *zunächst* nur beschränkt eingebunden waren”; my emphasis).

55 Cf.: GAILLARD/ROWLEY; GUSTAVO CORNI (ed.): *Storia d’Europa e del Mediterraneo*. 2: Dal Medioevo all’età della globalizzazione. Sez. 6: L’Età contemporanea. Vol. 15: Stati, nazioni, politica, Roma 2017.

56 E. g.: LIEDTKE, p. 48.

57 Map 13 “Languages and Peoples of East-Central Europe, 1914,” in: EVANS, p. 486.

an intermediate space between east and west, between Germany and Russia.”⁵⁸ “West Central Europe,” the concept counter to East Central Europe, introduced by Oskar Halecki, is not used in the historiography of Western Europe. It has generally received little attention in historical scholarship.⁵⁹

Generally speaking, our analysis confirms that the “spatial turn,” understood as “an intense interest in the regional dimensions of Europe,” has not been reflected in the general histories of Europe. This historiography of/on Europe has only begun to adopt the concept of historical mesoregions, which function as a “missing link between the levels of ‘state’ and ‘Europe.’”⁶⁰ But how do these European histories deal with spatiotemporal metanarratives of progress and backwardness, which, despite all the criticism, continue to be formative to the historiography on Eastern Europe?⁶¹

The image of Ukraine as a transitional zone or a border region between the west and east of Europe, which corresponds to the name’s etymology, is rarely invoked in our general histories. One exception is Walther, who briefly introduces Ukraine as a “transition zone, [...] in which the borders of Poland, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire overlapped.”⁶² EGO has dedicated a series of articles on the integration of “Ukrainian” issues into European communication networks and transfer processes. For example, in the thread “Crossroads: Spaces of Concentrated Communication,” the “Northern Black Sea region,” most of which “currently belongs to Ukraine, which has been an independent state since 1991,” is discussed alongside several other European “border regions,” to which corresponding “Ukrainian nationalist narratives” are attached.⁶³ As expected in an anthology comprising around 300 contributions, no authoritative interpretation

58 Cf.: WOOLF, p. 329; JOACHIM VON PUTTKAMER: East Central Europe, in: EGO, 2015-11-11, <https://www.ieg-ego.eu/puttkamerj-2014-en> (2025-11-18; quotes: abstract, sect. 1). Example of this subsumption: LIEDTKE, pp. 41, 48.

59 OSKAR HALECKI: *The Limits and Divisions of European History*, London 1950. Cf.: STEFAN TROEBST: *European History*, in: DIANA MISHKOVA, BALÁZS TRENCSENYI (eds.): *European Regions and Boundaries: A Conceptual History*, New York 2019, pp. 235–257, here p. 239.

60 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 235–236.

61 Cf. the introduction of this special issue.

62 WALTHER, p. 47 (eine “Übergangszzone, [...] in der die Grenzen Polens, Russlands und des Osmanischen Reiches einander überlappten”).

63 KERSTIN S. JOBST: *The Northern Black Sea Region*, in: EGO, 2017-02-13, <https://www.ieg-ego.eu/jobstk-2015-en>, para. 3 (2025-08-11). Other relevant EGO articles on Ukraine in Europe (in addition to AUST) are, e. g.: YESHAYAHU BALOG; MATTHIAS MORGENSTERN: *Hasidism: A Mystical Movement within Eastern European Judaism*, 2010-12-03, <https://www.ieg-ego.eu/balogy-morgensternm-2010-en>; ALFONS BRÜNING: *Netzwerke der Kiewer Mohyla-Akademie*, 2014-07-29, <https://www.ieg-ego.eu/bruecinga-2014-de>; EDWARD FARRUGIA: *Theological Networks of Orthodoxy*, 2014-07-11, <https://www.ieg-ego.eu/farrugiae-2014-en>; THEODORE R. WEEKS: *Russification / Sovietization*, 2010-12-03, <https://www.ieg-ego.eu/weekst-2010-en> (all 2025-11-18).

of the European framing of Ukraine between West and East can be identified in EGO.

It is Norman Davies who offers such a programmatic interpretation in his 1996 text. He opposes a historiographical tradition that allows Europe to be absorbed into the “West” and, in particular, an “allied scheme of history” that presents the “Atlantic community” as the pinnacle of human civilization. In contrast, Davies charts differentiated spatiotemporal patterns, which nonetheless retain and reinforce the categories of West and East in principle. His map, “East-West Fault Lines in Europe,” places Ukraine in a central position. Europe is divided between East and West by six temporal fault lines. These are natural geography, the Roman Limes, the border between Catholic or Latin and Orthodox Christianity (with a further dividing line between the Uniate and Orthodox churches, which identifies Ukraine as belonging to the West), the Ottoman Empire (“very close to [the] modern limits of Islam”), the spread of industrialization, and the Iron Curtain.⁶⁴

Davies does not want to divide Europe into essentializing “natural” or “historical” regions but prefers physical and geographical criteria. However, these tend to have an equally essentializing effect.⁶⁵ Accordingly, Ukraine belongs to the “Great European Plain,” the areas east of the Vistula, which functioned as a “highroad to and from the steppes.”⁶⁶ Ukraine appears as a transition zone *par excellence* between Europe and non-Europe or the Asian steppes. In the introduction to his 1,400-page volume, Davies includes an in-depth box entitled “Ukraina,” the first of around 260 such “capsules.” He portrays Ukraine as an independent settlement area that experienced “many twists and turns of fortune” under various rulers.⁶⁷ Davies also introduces a spatiotemporal meta-level for historiographical introspection—namely, a map showing the geographical distribution of the in-depth thematic “capsules” in his book. The author thus depicts his own European mental map. The map is not oriented to the north, and the eastern part extends to the Volga River and east of the Black Sea. The territory of today’s Ukraine thus moves away from the eastern edge of Europe.⁶⁸

If we look beyond the individual case of Davies, in the historiography of/on Europe as a whole, older macro-dichotomies between a progressive, “proper” Western or Northern Europe and a regressive, marginalized Eastern or Southern Europe seem to be increasingly dissolving into internal differentiations that focus on the center-periphery divide, urban-rural relationships, and social stratification

64 Map 5 “East-West Fault Lines in Europe,” in: DAVIES, *Europe*, p. 18. Unfortunately, the agency representing Norman Davies’ rights has not responded to my repeated requests to reproduce maps from his work here.

65 Cf.: TROEBST, pp. 248–249.

66 DAVIES, *Europe*, pp. 51–52.

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.

68 Map 30 “Europe, a History: Capsules”, *ibid.*, pp. 1368–1369. See: footnote 64.

across all regions of Europe.⁶⁹ The idea of the backwardness of Eastern Europe, particularly Russia, has come to be predominantly viewed critically and rejected as teleological. At the same time, however, that idea is implicitly maintained. One example is Wolfgang von Hippel and Bernhard Stier's monograph on Europe between 1800 and 1850, which places "backward" Russia in quotation marks but affirms its backwardness in principle despite its differentiation in detail. Blanning also notes an economic development gap for the eighteenth century "from the commercial north-west of Europe [...] to the underdeveloped east."⁷⁰ Meanwhile, Jean-Michel Gaillard and Anthony Rowley remark on the economic development in Russia, which allowed Ukraine to present itself as a "new, particularly promising Ruhr area" from 1880 onwards.⁷¹ The two French historians are not the only ones who apply Western European models to pan-European developments.⁷² The idea persists that Eastern Europe—which explicitly or implicitly includes Ukraine—is catching up or still needs to catch up.

4 Value Attributions: Characteristics and Structural Features of Europe in the "European" Framing of Ukrainian History

Since Russia has escalated its war against Ukraine, Western European media have often argued that "European values are being defended in Ukraine." This argument is a modified version of the Antemurale motif of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, according to which Poland, Hungary, and Croatia, in particular, protected Latin Christianity from the Ottomans and the Orthodox Russians.⁷³ Given what has been said so far, it is unsurprising that this pattern is not used to describe Ukraine in the histories of Europe examined here, all of which were published before 24 February 2022. Nevertheless, it is worth asking which traits and structural features of Europe are used in this earlier "European" framing of Ukrainian history, and to what extent these traits are charged with values.

As already indicated, the historiography of/on Europe over the last thirty years has increasingly questioned the equation of Europe with Western Europe as the core or synonym of the "West" and has called for the Eastern parts of Europe to be included equally and for greater attention to be paid to the internal differentiation of all regions of Europe.⁷⁴ The histories of Europe examined here do

69 BERGER, p. 214.

70 HIPPEL/STIER, p. 180; BLANNING, *Pursuit of Glory*, p. XXVI. The question of how "European" Russia (the Grand Duchy of Moscow, the Russian Empire, etc.) is portrayed in the historiography on Europe cannot be pursued further here.

71 GAILLARD, ROWLEY, p. 116. ("L'Ukraine se présente comme une nouvelle Ruhr, particulièrement prometteuse.")

72 Cf. also: BERSTEIN/MILZA, vol. 3, pp. 6–7.

73 Cf.: WENDLAND, *Befreiungskrieg*, pp. 15–16.

74 BERGER, p. 204.

indeed break away from some older patterns. For example, a division of Europe into a “Latin,” “Occident,” or “Abendland” and an inferior Eastern Orthodox “non-Occident” or “Außerabendland,” which did not belong to (Western) Europe but could at best extend it, can no longer be fundamentally established.⁷⁵ Other normative attributions of European characteristics, such as a certain level of development or degree of civilization or the character of a society’s system of rule, have become rarer since 1990.⁷⁶ One exception is Paolo Viola’s assertion that the Russian and Ottoman Empires, with their autocratic regimes, contradicted one of the basic features of Europe. However, such a normative dictum, published in 2004 in the year of the European Union’s so-called Eastern enlargement, remains an anomaly in the recent literature.⁷⁷ Since the 2010s, the historiography of/on Europe has shown a tendency to de-essentialize Europe by historicizing its structural features and borders as contemporary attributions.⁷⁸ To what extent the history of Ukraine belongs to the history of Europe is rarely asked. Similarly, a division “into European strands and non-European strands” (which is not only misleading for the history of Russia) is rarely made.⁷⁹

Generally, the narrative challenge of depicting European commonalities and individual spatial-territorial developments in an intertwined way is solved differently depending on the preferences and the authors’ spatial-linguistic specializations. Most histories of Europe take an eclectic, illustrative approach.⁸⁰ Evans does this at the highest level in his treatment of the peasant uprisings as the aftermath of peasant liberation, the transformation of the rural subsistence economy, the rise of the landless poor as a result of population growth and expropriation, national emancipation movements, and the linguistic-ethnic assimilation of minorities. He includes Ukrainian examples when he describes these processes and events, and he situates them as central structural features and lines of nineteenth-century European development.⁸¹

Only a few works systematically use comparisons drawing on Ukrainian history to create models and types to determine such European structural features and lines of development. The *Histoire européenne de l’Europe*, published in 1999, defines Europe in three essential ways: a plural society, once shaped by Christianity, and now secularized. With its teleology and historical-political mission, the text is predestined to frame groups and nations in European terms and

75 Ibid., p. 213. For “Außerabendland,” see: RÖSSNER, p. 174.

76 BERGER, pp. 213–214.

77 VIOLA, pp. 68–69, 122. Cf.: BERGER, pp. 214–215.

78 BERGER, p. 216.

79 SCHULZE WESSEL, p. 12 (a division “in europäische Stränge und nicht-europäische Stränge”). Here, too, exceptions confirm the overall tendency. See, e.g.: FAUQUIER, pp. 22–24, who already identifies the fate of a Europe in the Greco-Persian wars around 480 BC, which defined itself in contrast to the “East”—and thus to Russia.

80 BERGER, p. 210.

81 EVANS, pp. 117, 203, 247, 490.

charge this framing in terms of values. It provides numerous examples from the historical space of today's state of Ukraine, including wars, uprisings, religious conflicts and schisms, industrialization, and new inequalities, to demonstrate a common European heritage and prove the common identity of a *européanité*. Ironically, the work that argues most normatively with its European political thrust and, therefore, appears most problematic from a historiographical perspective is also the one that most inscribes pre-1922 Ukraine into European history.⁸²

The volumes on Europe in the *Neue Fischer Weltgeschichte* take a completely different approach. When Robert von Friedeburg and Willibald Steinmetz use Ukrainian "cases" to work out European structural features in a comparative way, they focus not only on analogies, similarities, and connections but also on constitutive differences. Steinmetz, for example, uses Miroslav Hroch's three-phase model to characterize developments from nation-building to nationalism in European societies in a comparative manner. He writes that the model is "also suitable [for analyzing] the nationalist aspirations among the Slovaks, Croats, Ruthenians (Ukrainians) and other nationalities, with some limitations."⁸³ The use of Ukrainian examples thus serves to differentiate rather than homogenize European history.

5 Conclusion and Outlook

After 24 February 2022, Ukraine in the public perception in Poland, Germany, and the UK went from being an unknown country on the edge of the continent to a central part of Europe within a few months.⁸⁴ If the print media examined by Gregor Feindt had wanted to fall back on historical narratives and interpretations, they would hardly have found what they were looking for in the histories of Europe of the last three decades presented here. These portrayals provide few arguments that embed Ukrainian history in European history. Exceptions to this are Davies's comprehensive account and the EGO anthology, the edi-

82 CARBONELL/BILOGHI. Cf.: JOACHIM BERGER: Gretchenfrage oder Nebensache? Zur konzeptionellen Verortung von "Religion" in Überblicksdarstellungen zur europäischen Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts, in: JUDITH BECKER, ANDREA HOFMANN et al. (eds.): Zugänge zur Europäischen Religionsgeschichte im Gespräch, Heidelberg 2022 (Cursor_: Zeitschrift für explorative Theologie, <https://cursor.pubpub.org/digitales-projekt-religionsgeschichte>), at note 54, <https://cursor.pubpub.org/pub/religion-in-ueberblicksdarstellungen> (2025-11-20).

83 STEINMETZ, pp. 554–555. (Das Modell eignet sich "mit Einschränkungen auch [zur Analyse] der nationalistischen Bestrebungen unter den Slowaken, Kroaten, Ruthenen (Ukrainern) u. a. Nationalitäten."); FRIEDEBURG, p. 280. See also MIROSLAV HROCH: Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations, Cambridge 1985.

84 See Gregor Feindt's contribution to this special issue, p. 146.

torial board of which brings together expertise on Eastern (Central) European history.⁸⁵ However, the overall picture seems to confirm a topos of Ukraine as “terra incognita.” Authors of Ukrainian histories continue using this common framework to highlight their expertise, whereby they, whether consciously or unconsciously, fall back on self-exoticizations.⁸⁶

The fact that the Ukrainian lands are rather neglected in the European histories examined here is due, firstly, to most authors’ lack of expertise in Eastern Europe, which is reflected in “Western European” perspectives, proportions, and interpretations.⁸⁷ Additionally, there is a general historiographical development: increasingly, the narrative guidelines and interpretations of these general histories are no longer those of Europe becoming a collection of nation-states. The more these works are characterized by structural history, the less weight they give to national phenomena and developments; a “late” nation-state such as Ukraine, therefore, falls through the cracks. Since at least the 2010s, the epistemic order of European histories, which structures their narrative, has consisted of the analytical separation of human spheres of action and areas of life.⁸⁸ Due to the predominance of social and, more recently, cultural history, the concept of a history of Europe composed of the history of individual nations and states has become obsolete for the time being. There is certainly no way back to an “essentialization of the ‘nation’ as a timeless collective entity,”⁸⁹ which has shaped Ukrainian, but not only Ukrainian, historiography since the nineteenth century.⁹⁰

In 1996, Davies made himself the historiographical advocate of Ukraine, writing, “[t]heir population is similar in size to that of England or France, and contains important minorities; but the Ukrainians find very little place in the history books. For many years, they were usually presented to the outside world as ‘Russians’ or ‘Soviets’ whenever they were to be praised, and as ‘Ukrainians’ only when they did evil.”⁹¹ Such distortions can no longer be blamed on the Western European historiography of the last 30 years; Davies himself played a large part in this. Nevertheless, it would be understandable from the point of view of Ukrainian historians if they criticized the fact that Ukraine appears as a “blind spot” or a “blank space on the horizon” in the histories of Europe examined here.⁹²

85 Cf.: <https://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/ego> (2025-09-15).

86 See the works cited in footnote 7.

87 On this general trait of European historiography, see: CHRISTIAN AMALVI: *Historiens de l’Europe: une communauté en devenir*, in: CHARLE/ROCHE, pp. 1455–1457.

88 BERGER, p. 209.

89 PORTNOV/PORTNOVA, p. 84 (“Essentialisierung der ‘Nation’ als einer überzeitlichen kollektiven Einheit”).

90 In this sense, see: PLAGGENBORG/KAPPELER, p. 626.

91 DAVIES, *Europe*, pp. 53–54.

92 FRANZISKA DAVIES: *Einleitung: Von Kolonialismus und Arroganz. Zur deutschen Debatte über die Ukraine und Russland*, in: FRANZISKA DAVIES (ed.): *Die Ukraine in Euro-*

It would also be appealing if histories of Europe devoted even more attention to developments that were initially unsuccessful or did not prevail at all, but which nonetheless help illuminate historical path dependencies and spaces of opportunity. The most obvious example is the Cossack Hetmanate, provided it is not used for today's "national narratives" of Ukraine but as a "nucleus of a first independent Ukrainian state formation" (in which Jews were also excluded and "massacred and expelled").⁹³ Another example is the observation that in the early modern period, a "Ruthenian nation" could well have formed on the territory of the present-day states of Belarus and Ukraine "on the basis of the written language of Western Rus."⁹⁴ Of course, in overviews and handbooks on European history, the available space does not allow for exploring these alternative and ultimately "unsuccessful" paths. Moreover, many authors presumably believe that they must concentrate on "history-making" developments in the sense of a canon.

It is therefore not surprising that the turning points in Ukraine's recent history after independence in 1991, including the Eastern enlargement of the EU, the Orange Revolution in 2004/05, Euromaidan, and the start of the war in 2013/14, have *not* been reflected in European histories over the last 30 years in the way that texts about the pre-1922 period emphasize more autonomous developments in territories that are now part of Ukraine.⁹⁵ General accounts probably do not react so quickly to current political trends.

It remains to be seen whether and how the escalation of the Russian war against Ukraine and its consequences will shape the histories of Europe published in the coming years. New research findings and interpretations generally take around ten years to seep into overviews, handbooks, and textbooks.⁹⁶ It is not to be expected that the historiography of/on Europe will be seized by a new "spatial turn" to conceptually integrate state and nation-building processes on the territory of today's Ukraine into such a European history. However, this should not prevent us from continuing to attach heuristic value to the question of Ukraine's European past. Davies's argument that "Ukrainian history is part of European history"⁹⁷ must be implemented both conceptually and in terms of practical research.

pa: Traum und Trauma einer Nation, Darmstadt 2023, pp. 7–24, here p. 8 ("blinder Fleck"); SCHLÖGEL, p. 10 ("Leerstelle im Horizont").

93 WENDLAND, *Befreiungskrieg*, pp. 57, 63, 72 ("Keimzelle *einer* ersten ukrainischen eigenständigen Staatsbildung"; "massakriert und vertrieben"; my emphasis).

94 *Ibid.*, p. 91 ("auf der Grundlage der Schriftsprache der westlichen Rus").

95 E. g., in: WIESNER, the passages in the third edition (2022) that refer to Ukraine or the Ukrainians remain unchanged from the first edition (2006), including the open question of whether the history of Ukraine belongs to the history of Europe (see footnote 42).

96 Cf.: TROEBST, p. 251.

97 DAVIES, *Einleitung*, p. 24 ("Ukrainische Geschichte ist Teil europäischer Geschichte."). The edited volume does not conceptually fulfill this claim.

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