
Introduction to Part I: 1922 in Soviet Ukrainian Book Studies

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The year 1922 was the end of an era for Ukraine. After being an unwilling breadbasket to the Russian Empire, which in the 19th century defined Ukrainian culture as a regional variation of Russian culture and forbade the use of Ukrainian, Ukraine took its chance for independence after the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, proclaiming itself the Ukrainian People's Republic. Years of fighting followed, long after World War I had officially ended, as Ukrainian and foreign powers alike struggled for control over the newly independent nation. This bid for freedom ended in 1922, when the USSR came into being.

In 1923 an all-Union policy of "indigenization" [Russian: korenizatsiya] was decreed, a strengthening of regional identities and languages designed as an antidote to the tsarist past as well as a path forward to Socialism. Indigenization was enacted in Ukraine as "Ukrainization" [Russian: ukrainizatsiya]. The subsequent flowering of

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Ukrainophone culture in the 1920s has been called the Executed Renaissance [Rozstriliane vidrodzhennia] or the Red Renaissance [Chervonyi renesans].¹ This policy was reversed starting in the early 1930s, when focusing on Ukrainian identity was declared to be anti-Soviet and a manifestation of “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism.” Harsh reprisals followed.² Along with all other aspects of life in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, these changing Soviet policies affected the field of book studies too. Edward Kasinec has this useful overview:

Bibliological work in Ukraine has a long, interesting, and virtually unexplored history. Since the beginning of printing in Ukraine (1574), the focus of printing and bibliographical activity has moved back and forth between the eastern and western Ukrainian lands. Thus, while in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the centers were for the most part in western Ukraine (Lviv, Ostrih), in the eighteenth century, the Ukrainian typographies in Kiev, Chernihiv and the newly established cities of Ekaterynoslav, Mykolaiv, and Kharkiv became important publishing and bibliographical centers. However, with the second half of the nineteenth century, the focus shifted again to Galicia. Here the less oppressive hand of the Austrian government permitted the relatively unfettered development of learned organizations, such as the Bibliographical Commission of the Shevchenko Scientific Society, as well as the creation of historical museums, and the publication of serials on a large scale. [...]

Still, the restrictive policy of the tsarist regime towards the development of the Ukrainian-language book served to arrest the creative development of Ukrainian book culture. With the initiation of “Ukrainization” by the Soviet government in 1923, this policy was partially rescinded and the tsarist fetters broken. This led to

¹ For a study of working-class readers in Soviet Ukraine during the 1920s, see “Reading in Ukrainian: the working class and mass literature in early Soviet Ukraine,” by Olena Palko, in *Social History* vol. 44, no. 3 (2019), 343-68. For a study of reader responses to texts on Ukrainian history between 1905 and 1917, see “Reading the History of Ukraine-Rus': A Note on the Popular Reception of Ukrainian History in Late Imperial Russian and Revolutionary Ukraine,” by Olga Andriewsky, in *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, vols.33/34 (2008), 45-60. Available at <https://cius-archives.ca/items/show/1412>. For a study of 19th-century popular books and their readers, see “A Repertoire of Lubok Books Covering Ukrainian History (1830s-1910s)” by Tetiana Karoyeva, in *Slavic & East European Information Resources*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2021), 133-46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228886.2021.1917063>.

² On the post-Red-Renaissance fate of Ukrainian writers, see Olga Bertelsen’s study of the House of Writers [Budynek Slovo], the housing co-op for writers in Kharkiv, approximately 90 percent of whose residents were repressed in the 1930s: “The House of Writers in Ukraine, the 1930s: Conceived, Lived, Perceived,” *Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, no. 2302 (2013). The 90 percent figure appears on page 6. Available at <https://carlbeckpapers.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/cbp/article/view/170/200>.

the creation of substantial research collections of Ucrainica and the development of a Ukrainian national school of bibliology. This school is best represented by Iu. O. Ivaniv-Mezhenko and his colleagues in the Ukrainian Scientific Institute of Bibliology (UNIK) which was founded in 1922. Unfortunately, these developments in Soviet Ukraine were short-lived. By 1931 Mezhenko had been denounced as a negative force in Ukrainian bibliology [...].³

Lingua Franca now offers two perspectives on Ukrainian book studies a century ago. The first perspective, appearing in English translation for the first time, comes from a Soviet Ukrainian scholar who wrote about Ukrainian, Russian, and other literatures in both Ukrainian and Russian, named Oleksandr Biletskii (1884-1961) in Ukrainian, Aleksandr Beletskii in Russian. He was a full member of both the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR and the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. He was Director of the Shevchenko Literary Institute in Kyiv from 1939 to his death in 1961 (except during World War II, when the entire Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR was evacuated to the city of Ufa, just west of the southern Urals). His 1922 article, “An Immediate Task of Historical-Literary Scholarship: Studying the History of the Reader” [Ob odnoi iz ocherednykh zadach istoriko-literaturnoi nauki: Izuchenie istorii chitatelia], was written in Russian, using primarily Russian literature as its focus, and is signed Aleksandr Beletskii. Damiano Rebecchini calls Beletskii’s paper “pioneering,” noting, “Beletskii raises, in particular, two key issues in the reader-author relationship: the problem of the implicit reader, especially in poetry, and the question of the stratification of literary tastes in society as an evolutionary factor in literary history.”⁴ Along with the scholarly and theoretical contributions Beletskii makes in his essay, I’d also note the appealingly

³ Edward Kasinec, “Documentation for Ukrainian Studies: Reflections on the Background, Problems, and Perspectives of the Harvard Experience” in *Journal of Ukrainian Graduate Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Fall 1977), 91-2. For more on Mezhenko in English, see the article by Halyna Koval'chuk appearing in the current issue of *Lingua Franca* as well as Edward Kasinec’s much earlier Harvard Krawciw lecture, “Iurii O. Ivaniv-Mezhenko (1892-1969) as a Bibliographer during His Years in Kiev, 1919-1933” in *The Journal of Library History*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Winter 1979), 1-20.

⁴ Damiano Rebecchini and Raffaella Vassena. “‘Reader, Where Are You?’ An Introduction,” in *Reading in Russia: Practices of Reading and Literary Communication, 1760-1930*, eds. Damiano Rebecchini and Raffaella Vassena (Milano: Ledizioni, 2014), 16. Pages 11-27 of “Reader, Where Are You?” were written by Damiano Rebecchini, pages 27-31 by Raffaella Vassena.

Borgesian flavor of Beletskii's insistence that "a literary historian must listen to everyone patiently and not feel ill at ease by the fact that, rather than a simple one-story building, his historical-literary diagram of the era will require constructing a building of several floors, and sometimes with outbuildings."

The second perspective on Ukrainian book studies comes from 2022, written by historian Halyna Koval'chuk, Director of the Institute of Book Studies at the Volodymyr Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine in Kyiv. Koval'chuk wrote the article translated here, "From the History of Ukrainian Book Studies: On the Centenary of the Ukrainian Research Institute of Book Studies," about the Ukrainian Research Institute of Book Studies [Ukrains'kyi naukovyi instytut knyhoznavstva], or UNIK, specifically for the Institute's centenary.⁵ Not to be confused with the similarly-named institute of which Koval'chuk is currently director, UNIK existed from 1922 to 1936 as part of the arrested Ukrainian renaissance of the 1920s. Yet even that brief existence left behind a rich trove of materials. Koval'chuk's article gives a sense of the scope of work that remains to be done on this period in Ukrainian book history, work that will be delayed now as Ukrainian academics and cultural workers divide their attention between their professional activities; providing for daily needs; and restoring Ukrainian cultural heritage sites, such as libraries and museums, whose buildings and collections have been damaged by missile strikes.⁶

Readers will have noted that references in this introduction cite English-language scholarship on Ukrainian book history topics. I hope these references will both provide a point of entry to Ukrainian book history for readers with no Ukrainian and highlight the need to make more scholarship in this field available in English.

⁵ The original is Halyna Koval'chuk, "Z istorii ukrains'koho knyhoznavstva (do 100-richchia Ukrains'koho naukovooho instytutu knyhoznavstva," in *Library Herald* [Bibliotechnyi visnyk], no. 3 (2022), 56-70, available at http://bv.nbuv.gov.ua/doc/bv_2022_3_7.

⁶ For more information on Ukrainian libraries, both today and in the past, see the website of the Library History Round Table, <https://lhrt.news/supporting-ukrainian-libraries/>, particularly the section "Ukrainian Libraries & Their History."