

## IMPERIAL BIOGRAPHIES OF ALEKSANDRA AND PETRO EFIMENKO

Andreas Kappeler, *Russland und die Ukraine: verflochtene Biographien und Geschichten* [*Russia and Ukraine: entangled biographies and histories*]. Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2012, 395. pp.]

Renowned historian Andreas Kappeler describes the life and work of Aleksandra and Petro Efimenko, a married couple of historians, ethnologists and historians of custom law. Although their works played an outstanding role in the 19th and early 20th centuries, in recent years they and their authors have been almost completely forgotten. The book under review is not, however, only an intellectual biography, but also a proposal for a counter-narrative to the history of Ukrainian-Russian relations as a continuous conflict: Instead, Kappeler chooses the approach of entangled history in a double sense, On the one hand, the history of the Efimenkos is a story leading from Varzuga on the Kola Peninsula (birthplace of Aleksandra) and Tokmak on the shores of the Black Sea (birthplace of Petro) to Kharkov and St. Petersburg. The Efimenkos' life is an exemplary history, enabled and shaped through the empire, its multiethnicity, multiculturalism, political conflicts, and voluntary and forced migrations. A term recently proposed for such phenomena – imperial biography – reflects well the complexity of such lives.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Kappeler attempts to introduce the entangled-history narrative proposed in 1906 by Jefimenko in her *History of the Ukrainian People* [История украинского народа] as an alternative to the Ukrainian historical narrative formed by Mykhailo Hrushevsky'i. The longest chapter in the book (pp. 213–282) is concerned precisely with the confrontation of these narratives.

The book is structured in chapters describing the life and work of the Efimenkos. Kappeler begins his history in opposite regions of the

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<sup>1</sup> In 2012 Tim Buchen and Malte Rolf organised two conferences (Berlin and Bamberg) devoted to the topic of “imperial biography” in Central and Eastern Europe (see the description of the project and conferences accessible at the homepage of Bamberg University: <http://www.uni-bamberg.de/hist-oeg/team/prof-dr-malte-rolf/forschungsschwerpunkte/imperiale-biographien-elitekarrieren-in-den-vielvoelkerreichen-der-romanows-habsburger-und-osmanen-1850-1918/>, last access 13-03.2013). See also D. Lambert, A. Lester (eds.), *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careerism in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge 2006.

Empire, Varzuga and Tokmak, condenses around the Archangelsk Oblast (Kholmogory / Холмогори) where Petro was exiled and the future couple met, and then around their arrival in Ukraine to Chernihiv and Kharkov, and finishing in St. Petersburg (where Aleksandra worked and Petro died) and Volchansk/ Волчанску (Liubochka/ Любочка), where Aleksandra and her daughter Tetjana were murdered by unknown culprits. This linear story is interspersed with deeper considerations on the historical and journalistic works of the couple. Kappeler also engages in many side topics, placing the Efimenkos against the backdrop of the intellectual life of the 19th-century Romanov Empire. This once more shows the assets of this new approach to biographies as exemplified intellectual history.

In contrast to classical biographies of couples, Kappeler clearly places Aleksandra in first position: For example, it is her birth which begins the biographical section, although she was born after Petro. Her death is also the concluding point of the biographical section. Kappeler shows how their scientific and cultural interests developed, often depending on the place they lived in. Here, too, they do not conform with stereotypical visions of married scholars – Petro gathered and thriftily published materials, and Aleksandra, often based on these materials, but also on her own research, published synthetic imaginative works. Especially after 1887 and a relapse of a grave sickness, Petro was a “dependable archivist” (p. 10) for Aleksandra, as was a reader at Kharkiv University, Dmytro Bahalii / Dmitrij Bahalei (Дмитро Багалій / Дмитрий Багалей), who similarly compiled archival research for the non-academic authoress. As Kappeler stresses, from the 1870s Aleksandra became one of the most important and influential advocates of Ukrainian culture in the empire. An ethnic Russian, she wrote for significant journals about the value of Ukrainian literature and culture, and pleaded for Ukrainian education. At the same time, Petro, who had been convicted in 1860 of participation in narodniki and vertepniki organisations, did not take part in political discussions. Although she had gained symbolic honours, as a woman and authoress of texts that did not comply with the then-prevailing positivistic style of scholarly writing, Aleksandra was not appreciated by the historians of the most important Ukrainian journal of the time, *Kievskaya Starina* (Киевская старина). As Kappeler shows, based on the example of the publication history of her most important book, *A History of the Ukrainian People*, the consequences of this were serious: Aleksandra’s manuscript, submitted as the only entry in a competition to write a history of the Ukrainian people in 1900, was criticised with

arguments pertaining to gender, nationality, and writing style – one of the points of dispute was also Norman's role in the establishment of Kiever Rus' (pp. 238–239). The fact that it was only published in 1906 in St. Petersburg gave the winner's palm to Hrushevskiy, who in 1904 published his *Survey History of the Ukrainian People* (Очерк истории украинского народа).

Analysing in almost 70 pages (213–282) Aleksandra Efimenko's magnum opus, Kappeler compares it with Hrushevskiy's work and the textbook of Dmitriy Il'ovskiy (Дмитрий Иловайский), a popular imperial state historiographer.<sup>2</sup> With examples of chosen historical events and processes, Kappeler shows how these three narratives differed. It is not a surprise that Kappeler proposes that the narrative of Efimenko, which stresses interdependencies and cultural transfers, should replace the conflict-stressing approach of Hrushevskiy.

The imperial biography of the Efimenkos is certainly one of the most interesting propositions on how to write about an empire published in recent years. Three points are worth accentuating here, especially in the context of Central Europe. Firstly, the entangled history, both as imperial biography and in Aleksandra Efimenko's oeuvre, does not, as Kappeler stresses, have to negate the existence of power and a subalternity divide, but it should question the erasing of interdependencies and their black-and-white description according to own-foreign schemata. Secondly, Kappeler does not speak about identities, but identifications<sup>3</sup> (national, imperial, concerning social movements like the narodniki) that are changeable and non-exclusive. They also do not depend entirely on things like language, place of birth or ethnicity. The third new perspective is the decentralised historiography, which Kappeler proposes in his conclusions, when he asks whether history told from the standpoint of the (hybrid) periphery is not sharper in relating more about the time under investigation than a history from the point of view of the centre. These are certainly controversial points, but discussion of them may have a decisive impact on the shape of national historiographies of the 21st century.

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2 Д. Иловайский. Краткие очерки русской истории: Курс старшего возраста. — 9-е изд. — Москва 1860. Up to 1912 36 editions of this official textbooks were printed.

3 R. Brubaker, Cooper, F. (2000). "Beyond 'Identity'", *Theory and Society* 29: 1–47.