

Krafcik, Patricia A. *Witnesses to Interwar Subcarpathian Rus': The Sojourns of Petr Bogatyrev and Ivan Olbracht*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2024. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Map. x + 317 pp. \$130 (hardback). \$117 (e-book). ISBN 9781666931709 (hardback). ISBN 9781666931716 (e-book).

This richly detailed volume offers literary and scholarly biographies of two figures who did significant work in and related to the Subcarpathian Rus' region of Czechoslovakia (Transcarpathia in other nomenclatures) in the interwar period. It will not replace full biographies, which are otherwise lacking for both figures in English, but it offers a rich contextualization of their work on the region in relation to their larger life trajectories and political and social contexts and serves as a comprehensive introduction for folklorists and specialists with an interest in Rusyn studies.

Petr Grigorievich Bogatyrev (1893–1971) came to Prague in 1921, following a brief time in Berlin, already a graduate of Moscow University and a budding ethnographer and folklorist. He took a position as a translator with the newly established Soviet Embassy through the mediation of his close friend Roman Jakobson (37) but soon began ethnographic expeditions to the Subcarpathian Rus' region through the support of the Czech Academy of Sciences. The theoretical ideas that underlay his interpretive practice coalesced within the Prague Linguistic Circle (est. 1926) with its structuralist approach. He continued his fieldwork in the 1930s while teaching at Comenius University in Bratislava and only returned to the Soviet Union in early 1940 (to rejoin his wife and child, who had left in 1928). As Krafcik and others portray him, Bogatyrev had great sympathies for the folk, but his scholarly concerns and interests superseded politics. He remained largely apolitical even as he was eyewitness to the tumult of the century (his first return to Prague was in 1968 and was interrupted by the Warsaw Pact invasion).

In contrast, Ivan Olbracht (pseud. of Kamil Zeman, 1882–1952) was a journalist and brilliant writer with strong political convictions. A co-founder of the Czech Communist Party in 1921 (he visited the Soviet Union for six months in 1920) and chief editor of its news organ *Rudé právo* from 1926–27, he was expelled in 1929 for his anti-Bolshevik views (118–124). He first visited the Subcarpathian Rus' region in 1931, eager to investigate conflicting accounts of the economic transformation there pursued by the Czechoslovak government, and continued to visit frequently until 1936, publishing ethnographic reportage and literary works set in the region and portraying its Rusyn and Jewish inhabitants (his Jewish mother had converted in order to marry, 181). Olbracht hid in a small village in southern Bohemia during the Nazi occupation, readopting his given name, which was not associated with his communist political activities, as cover (258), and worked on screenplays and story adaptations for children. Following the war, he rejoined the Communist Party, became a member of its Central Committee for the remainder of his life, and served as Minister of Information from 1945–49 (277).

Bogatyrev and Olbracht may have crossed paths in the Prague Linguistic Circle of the 1920s (203), and when Bogatyrev began his study of the brigand folklore of the region he referenced Olbracht's novelistic account (213), but there is no evidence of any real contact between the two. They are nonetheless united by their interest in the region and its way of life and remain two of the most important sources on this from the period before that way of life was to dramatically change. Subcarpathia was a multilingual, multiethnic region in which traditional lifeways still dominated, though these were facing significant pressures of modernization from the new Czechoslovak state, including divisive questions of national identity given the diverse population that included Slavs, Germans, Hungarians, Jews, and Roma. As Krafčík importantly reminds readers, while the region was often seen as backwards, "ancient," and exotic, it also had a history of an emergent high culture (10). Bogatyrev was primarily interested in traditional folkways. While he likely shared some of the ethnographer's temporal prejudice about the ancient aspect of these, he interpreted magical acts and rites from a synchronic perspective based upon the functions and meanings they had for their contemporary practitioners, not as vestiges of ancient beliefs. Olbracht's interest was political, directed against the bourgeois Czechoslovak state's colonial practices, motivated by concern for the residents' rights and freedom, and marked by great sympathy for their way of life.

Bogatyrev and Olbracht's sojourns resulted in an impressive list of significant publications and cultural products. Both penned notable ethnographic studies: Olbracht's ethnographic reportage from the region was collected in two volumes, *Země bez jména* [Land without a Name] (1932) and *Hory a staletí* [Mountains and Centuries] (1935). Bogatyrev published ethnographic reports and his major study, *Actes magiques, rites et croyances en Russie subcarpathique* [Magical Actions, Rites, and Beliefs in Subcarpathian Rus'] (1929). Their overlapping interest in brigand tales and songs resulted in Olbracht's major novelization of the life of a recent brigand, *Nikola Šuhaj—loupežník* [Nikola the Outlaw] (1933), and several articles and a book by Bogatyrev. Olbracht also wrote stories set in the region, including among the Jewish population in the volume *Golet v údolí* [Exile in the Valley] (1937), which included the masterful "The Sorrowful Eyes of Hannah Karadjich," and a major motion picture, *Marijka nevěrnice* [Marijka the Unfaithful] (1934) on which he collaborated with the writer Vladislav Vančura and the composer Bohuslav Martinů.

Krafčík provides readers with an information-packed, balanced account of their lives and detailed overviews of their works. This is an important introduction to two major figures who helped the world to come to better know a region that has had real significance in national movements, and in a moment before it was utterly transformed by WWII.

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