

## History and Social Science Reviews

Leonard G. Friesen, ed., *Minority Report: Mennonite Identities in Imperial Russia and Soviet Ukraine Reconsidered, 1789–1945*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 338. Hardcover, \$59.25.

With some exceptions it has been North American and Mennonite historians who have told the story of the Mennonite experience in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. That, together with the inaccessibility of primary sources in Soviet archives during the Cold War, has resulted in a confessional and ethnocentric historiography. This collection of essays marks an important milestone. Sources that have become available in Russian and Ukrainian archives in the Russian language shed new light on that story and do so for English readers. Not only that, but many of the contributors are also not ethnically or confessionally Mennonite.

The book has an introduction and four sections that embrace the entire period of identifiably Mennonite life from 1789 to 1945. The first section alludes to what the title considers to be new approaches to Mennonite history. A study of the Borozenko colony by Svetlana Bobyleva uses a small daughter settlement to engage the broader questions of Mennonite-Ukrainian relations over a long period of time. A difficult part of her analysis is to attempt to understand the violence that neighbouring Ukrainian peasants inflicted upon the villages of Steinbach and Ebenfeld. After listing a number of factors, she concludes the “loss of all moral-ethical principles . . . made it possible for previously peaceful peasant neighbours to wreak havoc on their Mennonite neighbours” (45). Also in this section, although not fitting well with the first chapter, is John Staples’s argument that it was pietism that formed Johann Cornies’s world view and was the driving force of his progressive vision for the Mennonite colonies. More cogent is his argument that Cornies was driven by an aesthetic impulse. Also not fitting well into the overall theme of the book is John B. Toews’s chapter on A. A. Friesen, a leader of the 1920s emigration movement. Although Toews sheds light on the organizational turmoil that difficult times produced, as opposed to the rest of the book, the chapter has a distinctly North American focus. In contrast, the 1870s migration to North America receives only passing notice in the other chapters.

Sections two and four present a wealth of new research and interpretation and offer insights that reflect the availability of new sources. Irina (Janzen) Cherkazianova's analysis of education, Oksana Beznosova's of religion, and Nataliya Venger's foray into the world of Mennonite entrepreneurs interrogate the notion of Mennonite isolationism. "Venger's analysis examines the dynamic relationship between emerging Russian "nationalistic sentiments" and the response to those sentiments by Mennonite entrepreneurs in Ukraine (143). The interplay between the two would trouble Mennonites in the 1890s and beyond.

Section four is a sobering read. Colin Neufeldt argues that Mennonites were not only victims but also participants in the repressive policies of the Soviet state, Alexander Beznosov suggests the 1933 famine "transformed Mennonite identities" (261), and Viktor Klets provides a nuanced portrait of the challenges of navigating identities during the Nazi attack, occupation, and resettlement of ethnic Germans.

As a whole, *Minority Report* offers a nuanced view of both how Mennonites were much more a part of their Russian and Ukrainian environment and how their own identities underwent transformation with increasing rapidity in the later nineteenth century and the tumultuous years of revolution, famine, Sovietization and war.

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Sean Patterson, *Makhno and Memory: Anarchist and Mennonite Narratives of Ukraine's Civil War, 1917–1921*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2020. Pp. xi + 199. Softcover, \$27.95.

We are more than a century removed from the horrific events of November 8, 1919, when peasant troops loyal to Nestor Makhno massacred seventy-five Mennonite males in the village of Eichenfeld. They also sexually assaulted numerous Mennonite females before they departed. In this past century two different narratives have emerged about Makhno and the so-called Eichenfeld massacre. Sean Patterson places those two conflicting narratives at the heart of his engaging study, and then creates a coherent account of the massacre itself, based on those perspectives. There is much to commend in Patterson's study, which largely relies on a careful reading of previously published materials.