

**Jarosław Moklak**

Jagiellonian University, East European State Higher School,  
Kraków, Przemysł

## **Yuliiian Tarnovych (1903–1977) as Historian<sup>1</sup>**

---

Yuliiian Tarnovych was born in the Lemko village of Rozstajne, near Dukla, on 2 January 1903, the son of an Eastern Rite priest. His youth, i.e. the period in which his national consciousness was formed, coincided with the years of the Polish-Ukrainian War of 1918–1919. The war decisively influenced the definitive choice of Ukrainian identity by Rusyns living in those areas where combat operations were taking place. Though the village of Rozstajne was not in the theater of war, a considerable number of its inhabitants became seized with the idea of Ukrainian nationhood. The formation of young Yuliiian's worldview became complete while he was living in Lviv, where he arrived in 1921. In Lviv he at first enrolled at the secret Ukrainian university, and next enlisted with the Ukrainian Military Organization. Thus by the time he began working as a writer he had already declared himself as a Ukrainian. His literary debut came in 1928 in the underground student magazines "Nedila" and "Beskid." Beginning in 1930 he was published in well-known Ukrainian magazines as a specialist on economic topics — he received his training in this subject while a student at the Academy of Foreign Trade in Lviv. At the same time, he got involved in educational activism in the ranks of the Prosvita Society, and when the Executive Board of Prosvita in Lviv took the decision to revive its educational work in the Lemko region he became a member of the Lemko Commission established by Prosvita in 1932. The commission had the task of disseminating the idea of Ukrainian nationhood among Lemkos. Tarnovych's greatest success in his work with Prosvita was his rise to the post of editor-in-chief of the newly-created Lemko magazine called "Our Lemko" in 1934. As editor of the magazine he fulfilled his mission of promulgating Ukrainian culture throughout all Lemko communities. The title "Our Lemko" was adapted

---

<sup>1</sup> The results of this article were presented at the ASEEEES Convention (November 21–24, 2013) in Boston, MA.

subsequent to interference by the government censors, as the planned initial designation had been “Ukrainian Lemko.”

After a few years of journalistic practice, Tarnovych had mastered the art of writing and gradually broadened his knowledge of various issues facing the Lemko region. In the course of editing the texts submitted to the magazine, he devoted particular attention to articles written by inexperienced correspondents from that region. In keeping with the guidelines set down by the Lemko Commission, he attached a great deal of importance to these, since they were perceived as the voice of the Lemko people, emerging from the very heart of the Lemko community, and were most effective in diffusing the Ukrainian idea. The Lemko Commission was thus able to draw conclusions from the ineffective and harmful agitation in which the Ukrainian intelligentsia had engaged before World War I, based on subsuming Lemkos under the umbrella term “Ukrainian,” without proper preparation.

Tarnovych was not a professional historian, and did not have experience with research methodology or organizing sources; he therefore had to learn these skills. His greatest asset, however, was his strong emotional connection to the Lemko region, which was his homeland. When the pace of the Lemko Commission’s activities picked up and Prosvita reading rooms began to crop up like toadstools after the rain (at first the reading rooms which had ceased activity during the war, then new ones<sup>2</sup>), there arose a need for diffusion of knowledge about the region’s past through a monograph written according to the methodology used by historians. Tarnovych undertook this task, supplementing his knowledge of the Lemko region with consultations with professional historians in which he discussed his concept for the book. He received the most valuable input on periodization and construction of the book from Prof. Ivan Krypiakevych, author of a *History of Ukraine* published in Munich in 1949 under the pseudonym Ivan Khołmsky. Krypiakevych was a student of Mykhailo Hrushevsky. He was also the teacher of the late Prof. Isaievych. But let me return to Yuliiian Tarnovych, who also profited from the criticism of Prof. Mykola Chubaty, an expert on ecclesiastical and legal history, also an outstanding pupil of Hrushevsky. On the one hand, his conversations with these renowned professors enabled Tarnovych to rightly claim that his *History of the Lemko Region* was a scholarly work, while on the other, they influenced his decision to adopt elements from the tradition of Ukrainian national historiography which originated with Mykhailo Hrushevsky.

The history of the Lemko region is still a source of controversy today, and disputes regarding the Lemkos’ origin and their national identity continue. These disputes were particularly heated during the interwar period, all the more so since the Lemko region at that time had a lively existence, cultivating its cultural traditions and keeping its demographic structure intact. That atmosphere must obviously have influenced both Tarnovych’s journalism and his historical research. Yet a crucial role was also played by the methodological principles of Hrushevsky, the founder of the nation-conscious approach to Ukrainian historiography, developed by his students, including Krypiakevych and Chubaty among others. In keeping with the general tendency of national historiography, Tarnovych declared at the beginning of his *History of the Lemko Region*: “This is where the Ukrainian tribe of the Lemkos lives. Lemkos are the Ukrainian tribe located the farthest along the

---

<sup>2</sup> The greatest number of reading rooms appeared in 1932 and 1933, cf. J. Moklak, *Lemkowszczyzna w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Zagadnienia polityczne i wyznaniowe*, Kraków 1997, p. 111.

southwest of the lands belonging to the Ukrainian people”<sup>3</sup>. These words, written in the mid-1930s when the struggle for the Lemkos’ national identity was reaching its apogee, indicate his uncompromising approach to national self-definition. Such a position was necessitated by the existing political reality, which consisted of a rivalry among the political camps with Lemkos in their ranks: Moscovophiles, Old Rusyns, and the Ukrainian formations. Polish state authorities were also involved in this struggle, engaging in an effort to draw Lemkos into the Polish cultural sphere—at the beginning of the 1930s these authorities gave their support to the Old Rusyns, thus weakening the development of Ukrainian sympathies, and then in the second half of the decade they opposed the Old Rusyns, striving to Polonize the Lemkos. In this atmosphere of growing political rivalry, journalists and historians expressed their views with particular vehemence, leaving no doubt as to which side they represented. Each camp was creating its own version of history, as the work of such Polish scholars as Krystyna Pieradzka or Roman Reinfuss demonstrates; so for that matter does the work of Ukrainian scholars such as Yulian Tarnovych, or that of Old Rusyn scholars such as Ivan Polansky.

Yulian Tarnovych set about writing a history of the Lemko region as an amateur historian. He had completed a university degree, but had not formally studied history, only law and philosophy. As an amateur, he is less vulnerable to the charge of lacking professionalism than is e.g. Pieradzka<sup>4</sup>, who was trained as a historian and in her area of specialization, medieval history, has contributed a series of valuable studies. Regardless of the fact that Tarnovych’s *History of the Lemko Region* is an example of a politically engaged publication like other similar monographs written during the period, the methodology, content, and construction of his book still have something to teach us.

Tarnovych began with a description of the geographical layout of the Lemko region, which he did in simple terms, tracing the borders along the rivers—the San and Uzh in the east and the Poprad in the west. He situated the territory of the Lemko region on both the northern and southern sides of the Carpathian Mountains. Next he enumerated the 16 villages of Pogórze Strzyżowskie<sup>5</sup>. He designated the boundary of the Lemko region in pictures along the Polish cities of Dynów, Kańczuga, Łańcut, Fryszak, Biecz, Nowy Sącz, Stary Sącz, and Krościenko. Tarnovych doubtless did not intend to make these part of the border, but to mark a line encircling the region. Nonetheless, he can with some justice be accused of a lack of precision, and the less forgiving among his adversaries could even accuse him of attempting to expand the borders of the Lemko region to include territories inhabited by ethnic Poles. Tracing the borders of Ukrainian settlements from the west, he marked the river Tanev, which had no connection whatsoever with Lemko settlements.

For Tarnovych, the history of the Lemko region was closely linked to that of the Principality of Halych, and later the Principality of Halych Volhynia. He focused particular attention on the cities of Przemyśl and Sanok. He depicted the reign of Kazimierz the Great as a time when western cultural influence on Halych Rus and the Lemko Region grew stronger, devoting some attention to German settlements there. He wrote critically of Kazimierz the Great’s eastern policy, stating

<sup>3</sup> In the original: Тут живе українське плем'я Лемки. Отже Лемки — це українське плем'я, висунене найдалі на полудневий захід тих земель, що є заселені українським народом.

<sup>4</sup> See K. Pieradzka, *Na szlakach Łemkowszczyzny*, Kraków 1939.

<sup>5</sup> Близьканка with Гвоздянка, Малівковд, Баричка, Полом'я, Явірник, Гвозниця, Жарнова, Небиљец; Бонарівка with Висоцьке Буди; Ванівка (Wegłówka), Красна, Опарівка, Ріпник, Чорноріки.

that “Poland mastered Halych—and with it, the Lemko region—at the time of their greatest political and national downfall, and did not hesitate to take advantage of this situation”<sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, overall he presented Polish-Lemko relations in a fairly even-handed manner, avoiding harsh generalizations.

The ties between the Lemko region and Galicia were presented by Tarnovych in extensive sections of his work devoted to their coexistence under Habsburg rule. He accurately described the process of the Rusyns’ efforts to divide Galicia into two sovereign countries, Polish and Ruthenian (Tarnovych consistently uses the word “Ukrainian,” which is understandable if we take into account that he was influenced by the Ukrainian school of national historiography). He recounted the activities of the “Ruthenian Trinity,” though it had no connection with the Lemko region whatsoever. In the first half of the nineteenth century, not only the Lemko region but also the Hutsul and Sokal regions as well as Pokuttya, Podolya, and others had not taken part in Galician politics, and the modern Ukrainian sense of identity was just beginning to take shape there. Tarnovych’s approach may be justified, however, by the participation of some portion of the Lemko intelligentsia in the religious life of Galician cities, chiefly Lviv and Przemyśl. Tarnovych mentions the names Yosyf and Sylvester Sembratovych and Toma Polansky, among others who held high positions in the church hierarchy.

The chapter on Lemko emigration is particularly interesting. Today it can be confidently stated that that is the second of two phases in the history of the Lemkos, as complex and complicated as the history of the Old Country. Tarnovych understood the emigrants’ tragic lot and managed accurately to portray how social relations looked in the New Country, a situation which he described in the following words: “Those Lemkos who journeyed across the ocean were met by a painful experience. There the Lemko saw and felt on his own skin how hard it was to be unlettered among foreigners. Various American Societies, particularly ecclesiastical ones, founded in America, did not grant aid, ... they only collected member dues and in the case of a member’s death they took care of the burial and sometimes took donations for managing the deceased’s affairs. Of unity beneath the Ukrainian banner there was not a word! The Societies in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New York, Boston, Baltimore and Washington gathered together the emigrants of the East Coast, but those who went further into the American land vanished, that is, they got lost in those unknown waters. And there were also some Lemkos who worked still further West, in Nevada, Arizona, Montana, Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas...”<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, he wrote of Lemko emigrants’ feeling of attachment to their traditions, customs, rituals, etc. Describing their daily life, Tarnovych gave many details

<sup>6</sup> Польща опанувала Галичину — і з нею Лемківщину — в хвилину її найбільшого, державно-політичного занепаду й не полінувалася використати цього в свою користь.

<sup>7</sup> Цих Лемків, що виїхали за Океан, стрінуло болюче явище. Там Лемко побачив наглядно та відчув на своїй шкірі, як тяжко жити неграмотньому між чужими. Різні американські брацтва, з’окрема церковні, засновані тоді в Америці (...) не давали помочі ані пільги ніякої, хіба, що збирали членські вкладки, а в разі смерті члена займалися похоронами та деколи поладнали грошево-спадкові справи помершого. Певної мети об’єднання під український національний прапор, про те — тоді мови не було! Філадельфійські, пітсбурзькі, ню-йорські, (...) бостонські, бальтиморські та Вашингтонські товариства-братства гуртували прибережних емігрантів; однак ці, що пішли ще глибше в американський край, над ріку Міссісіпі, Кольорадо, пропадали — цебто загублювалися в чужинецькому морі. А були ще такі Лемки, що заробляли даліше ще на захід в стейтах Невада, Арізона, Монтана, Дакота, Небраска, Канзас (...).

of the level of their wages, debts, prices of goods, and so on — he was surely an avid student of these topics, being a trained expert on economics.

Tarnovych also dealt with social and cultural questions. He took a particular interest in the phenomenon of alcoholism, which he described in a separate chapter. His monograph also covered the time in which he lived, whose history he was helping create, as seen in the chapter devoted to the activities of the Prosvita Society in 1931–1932. On the other hand, there is a noticeable imbalance in his description of the history of the parts of the Lemko region to the north and south of the Carpathian Mountains — he allots a relatively small amount of space to this latter, though he gives a thorough description of its borders in the introduction, appearing to promise equal treatment for both regions. The great virtue of Tarnovych's book is the freedom with which he approaches the history of the Lemko region, placing it against a wide background of events in the broader history of Europe. The work contains numerous references to the foreign policies of Russia, Austria, Turkey, and the Crimean Tartars. There are references to watershed moments, decisive for the European balance of power, e.g. the Great Northern War, World War I, and the Polish-Ukrainian War. Overall, the book leaves a positive impression, as a result of Tarnovych's skillful weaving together of local, Galician and Lemko affairs with the great-power politics of Central and Eastern Europe.

#### **Jarosław Moklak. Yuliiian Tarnovych (1903–1977) as Historian**

This article presents the personage of Yuliiian Tarnovych, one of the most recognized Lemko political and cultural-educational activists who functioned in interwar Poland and in the Canadian émigré circles during the second half of the twentieth century. Tarnovych is known as the author of a monograph regarding the history of the Lemko region (*Lemkivshchyna*) written in the current of the Ukrainian national historiographical narrative.