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**The Evolution of Research on European Medieval and Early Modern
History at Ukrainian Universities**

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Abstract. *The purpose of the research paper is to highlight the evolution of European Medieval and Early Modern history studies at Ukrainian universities within the broader framework of decolonial rethinking in the humanities. Historically, Ukrainian scholarship has been shaped by imperial and Soviet paradigms that limited academic discourse and reinforced ideological constraints. The study of Europe's Medieval and Early Modern periods has played a crucial role in forming the academic culture of Ukrainian higher education, shaping political legitimacy, cultural norms, and identity narratives. Given the ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine, questions of historical legacy, cultural autonomy, and identity have*

gained heightened public and political significance, adding urgency to reexamining this field.

The scientific novelty lies in the exploration of different perspectives and versions in an attempt to reexamine academic traditions surrounding the study of Medieval and Early Modern European history at leading Ukrainian universities, including Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, I. I. Mechnikov Odesa National University, and Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University. These institutions were selected for their historical continuity, existence of specialized history departments, academic presence through dissertations and publications, and regional diversity, allowing for an examination of varied intellectual traditions across Ukraine.

The study of European Medieval and Early Modern history at Ukrainian universities has undergone a dynamic transformation, reflecting broader political, intellectual, and institutional shifts over time. From its early stages under imperial and Soviet influences – when research was often constrained by ideological frameworks – to the post-independence era marked by academic renewal and increasing international integration, the field has progressively embraced methodological pluralism and interdisciplinary collaboration. In recent decades, Ukrainian scholars have expanded their thematic focus, adopted new theoretical approaches, and contributed more actively to global historiographical debates. Despite ongoing challenges, including limited funding and the consequences of war, the resilience and adaptability of Ukrainian historical scholarship offer strong potential for further development. Strengthening academic networks, enhancing digital and archival access, and fostering multilingual competencies will be key to ensuring the continued evolution and global relevance of Medieval and Early Modern studies in Ukraine. Despite the availability of dissertations and academic articles, the evolution of this research field remains underexplored and

unsystematized. Institutional studies focusing on academic lineages and thematic developments are largely absent.

Since Ukraine's independence in the 1990s, there has been a significant shift toward Western academic paradigms, diversification of research topics, and critical reassessment of imperial legacies. Collaborative international programs have further supported this transformation, fostering a more pluralistic and reflective scholarly environment.

By reconstructing the academic history and current state of Medieval and Early Modern European history research in Ukraine, this article contributes to understanding the regional specificities, intellectual influences, and the potential for decolonial rethinking of historical knowledge in Ukrainian academia.

Keywords: *European Medieval history, Early Modern history, academic tradition, decolonial humanities, historiography, postcolonial studies, historical identity, academic lineages.*

**Еволюція досліджень з історії європейського середньовіччя та
раннього нового часу в українських університетах**

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Анотація. Метою цієї наукової статті є висвітлення еволюції досліджень історії європейського середньовіччя та раннього нового часу в українських університетах у ширшому контексті деколоніального переосмислення гуманітаристики. Історично українська наука формувалася під впливом імперських і радянських парадигм, що обмежували академічний дискурс і підсилювали ідеологічні настанови. Вивчення середньовічної та ранньомодерної історії Європи відіграло ключову роль у формуванні академічної культури української вищої освіти, у конструюванні політичної легітимності, культурних норм та наративів ідентичності. В умовах повномасштабної війни в Україні питання історичної спадщини, культурної автономії та ідентичності набули підвищеного суспільного й політичного значення, що зумовлює актуальність переосмислення даної сфери досліджень.

Наукова новизна роботи полягає у спробі проаналізувати різні підходи й версії академічних традицій вивчення історії середньовіччя та раннього нового часу Європи в провідних українських університетах – Київському національному університеті імені Тараса Шевченка, Львівському національному університеті імені Івана Франка, Харківському національному університеті імені В. Н. Каразіна, Одеському національному університеті імені І. І. Мечникова та Чернівецькому національному університеті імені Юрія Федьковича. Вибір цих установ зумовлений їхньою історичною тяглістю, наявністю спеціалізованих кафедр історії, академічною присутністю у формі дисертацій і публікацій, а також регіональним розмаїттям, що дає змогу виявити варіативність інтелектуальних традицій в Україні.

Вивчення європейської історії середньовіччя та раннього нового часу в українських університетах зазнало динамічної трансформації, що відображає ширші політичні, інтелектуальні та інституційні зміни впродовж часу. Від раннього періоду, позначеного впливом імперських і радянських ідеологічних рамок, до пострадянського етапу, ознаменованого

академічним оновленням і зростаючою міжнародною інтеграцією, ця галузь поступово відкривається до методологічного плюралізму та міждисциплінарної співпраці. Протягом останніх десятиліть українські дослідники розширили тематичний спектр, запровадили нові теоретичні підходи та активніше долучаються до глобальних історіографічних дискусій. Попри наявні виклики – зокрема обмежене фінансування та наслідки війни – українська історична наука демонструє значну стійкість і здатність до адаптації, що створює сприятливі умови для подальшого розвитку. Важливими чинниками подальшого поступу є зміцнення академічних мереж, розширення доступу до цифрових ресурсів і архівів, а також розвиток іншомовної компетентності.

Із моменту здобуття Україною незалежності у 1990-х роках відбувся істотний поворот до західних академічних парадигм, розширення тематичних напрямів досліджень і критичне переосмислення імперської спадщини. Міжнародні програми співпраці стали важливим чинником цієї трансформації, сприяючи формуванню більш плюралістичного та рефлексивного академічного середовища.

Реконструючи академічну історію та сучасний стан досліджень середньовічної та ранньомодерної історії Європи в Україні, дослідження сприяє кращому розумінню регіональної специфіки, інтелектуальних впливів і потенціалу для деколоніального переосмислення історичного знання в українському академічному просторі.

Ключові слова: європейська середньовічна історія, історія раннього нового часу, академічна традиція, деколоніальна гуманітаристика, історіографія, постколоніальні студії, історична ідентичність, академічні школи.

Problem Statement. Analysis of the academic tradition of studying European Medieval and Early Modern history at Ukrainian universities is particularly significant in the context of the decolonial rethinking of the humanities. For an extended period, historical scholarship in Ukraine functioned within the confines of imperial and Soviet paradigms, which dictated the boundaries of permissible discourse. The study of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period as components of European historical experience plays a key role in shaping the academic culture of Ukrainian higher education institutions. Through the reconstruction of European history, scholars indirectly modeled modernity, legitimized political regimes, cultural norms, and even identities. Therefore, the significance of this topic is not limited to academic and scholarly domains but also encompasses a public and political dimension – especially in the context of full-scale war, where questions of identity, historical legacy, and cultural autonomy become particularly acute [1].

The main criteria for selecting universities for analysis include: Historical continuity of academic tradition – each of these institutions has a longstanding tradition in the humanities, which originated in either the imperial or Soviet period. Existence of specialized departments – these universities have departments of World History, Medieval or Early Modern History, or relevant academic schools. Presence in the academic space – evidenced by dissertation defenses, published research articles, participation in international programs, etc. Regional representation – the selection includes institutions from various regions of Ukraine, which allows for an exploration of regional academic diversity and the influence of different intellectual traditions [2].

State of the Current Research: It must be emphasized that the issue of the evolution of research on European Medieval and Early Modern history at Ukrainian universities remains underexplored. Although dissertations, departmental profiles, and articles in academic collections contain a considerable amount of relevant

material, they remain unsystematized. Institutional studies (e.g., on departmental academic lineages or thematic dynamics of scholarly schools) are virtually absent.

Particular attention should be paid to the work of Oleksandr Holovko, «*Historians-Medievalists of Contemporary Ukraine: A Reference Book*» (2016, updated in 2019), which compiles biographical and academic information on medievalists working in Ukrainian research institutions [3]. While this resource does not offer a historiographical analysis per se, it serves an important representative function: it helps to map the geography of scholarly centers, the research priorities of specific departments, and the academic schools that have taken shape within the framework of Ukrainian medieval studies. Holovko's reference book is a valuable tool for reconstructing the current state of European Medieval history research at Ukrainian universities and simultaneously underscores the absence of a systematic reflection on the evolution of this field in a postcolonial context.

Identification of Previously Unresolved Aspects of the Overall Problem.

Despite substantial progress in examining the development of medieval and early modern studies within Ukrainian academia, several critical aspects of this broader problem remain insufficiently addressed. Previous scholarship has tended to emphasize institutional history and individual contributions, while paying relatively limited attention to the methodological shifts that shaped the discipline, the uneven integration of Western European research paradigms, and the long-term effects of political and ideological constraints on scholarly practices. In addition, the role of archival accessibility, language training, and international academic mobility in defining research trajectories has not been systematically explored. These unresolved dimensions highlight the need for a more comprehensive and methodologically grounded analysis of how Ukrainian universities have approached the study of European Medieval and Early Modern history over time [4].

Formulation of the Article's Objectives

The primary objective of this article is to analyze the historical evolution, methodological transformations, and institutional dynamics that have shaped the study of European Medieval and Early Modern history at Ukrainian universities. The article seeks to clarify how scholarly priorities, research practices, and academic environments have changed over time in response to broader intellectual, political, and international developments.

To achieve this aim, the study sets the following tasks:

1. To trace the main stages of the development of medieval and early modern historical studies within Ukrainian higher education.
2. To examine the methodological approaches employed by Ukrainian scholars and assess their alignment with broader European historiographical trends.
3. To identify unresolved or previously overlooked aspects of the discipline's evolution, including institutional constraints, ideological influences, and access to archival resources.

Covering the core research findings. The Department of Art History at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv has a long-standing and dynamic tradition of studying medieval art. This tradition was shaped by the academic legacies of European art historical scholarship, particularly the German and French schools, but it has undergone significant methodological and thematic transformations over time [5].

During the Soviet period, the study of medieval art was primarily focused on stylistic and formal-historical analysis. Particular attention was given to the architecture, sculpture, and monumental painting of Western Europe, with an emphasis on stylistic evolution – from Early Christian and Romanesque to Gothic. These analyses were framed within Marxist interpretations of the social context of art development, which limited methodological diversity and thematic exploration.

Beginning in the 1990s, with shifts in the broader academic climate and increased access to foreign literature, the department's approach to medieval art

studies began to modernize. The geographical scope of research expanded, with growing interest in Byzantium and the cultures of peripheral regions of medieval Europe, including Ukraine.

Methodological innovations were equally significant: alongside stylistic analysis, the curriculum incorporated iconographic, iconological, semiotic, and reception-oriented approaches, as well as visual culture studies. Active exploration of the role of art within sacred space, its interactions with texts, rituals, and political ideologies of the time has been introduced [6].

Contemporary courses emphasize interdisciplinarity and the intersection of art history with archaeology, theology, philosophy, and anthropology. Students engage directly with primary sources, analyzing medieval images as complex cultural texts and interpreting artistic representations in relation to the mentality of the epoch.

The department also supports research projects and student initiatives focused on Ukrainian medieval visual culture – particularly monumental painting of Kyivan Rus', manuscript illumination, and ecclesiastical architecture [7].

Thanks to these developments, the Department of Art History at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv has become a significant center for the study of medieval art in Ukraine, combining classical academic training with contemporary approaches in the humanities. It actively contributes to the scholarly research and public dissemination of art history, with special emphasis on the medieval period [8].

Among her Ukrainian-language works, special attention should be paid to the article «*Look, but Don't Touch: The Ideal of Female Dietary Conduct in the Narratives and Imagery of the Late Middle Ages*» (2020), where she employs gender history approaches to analyze food discipline and the control of the female body in late medieval culture. Another noteworthy study is «*Erasmus of Rotterdam, 'Secular Banquet' and the 'Reformation' of Feasting*» (2021), which traces the connection between feasting culture and the ideas of humanism [9].

National University of «Kyiv-Mohyla Academy». Since the founding of the Department of History at the National University of «Kyiv-Mohyla Academy», the study of medieval history has held an important place in the academic curriculum, though the approaches to its teaching and research have significantly evolved in line with the development of historical scholarship, shifts in academic priorities, and changing student demands [10].

In the early years of the department, emphasis was placed mainly on the classical narratives of political history in medieval Europe, with particular attention to the history of Western Europe, the formation of feudalism, the Crusades, and the rise of states. The curriculum aimed to familiarize students with key events, figures, and institutions of the medieval period [11].

Since the 2000s, under the influence of new methodological approaches – especially in cultural and social history – the department has actively introduced courses focused on everyday life, religious practices, and medieval perceptions of the body, space, and time. There has been increased emphasis on interdisciplinary analysis of sources, particularly through philosophical, anthropological, and literary approaches.

One of the department's key tools for academic communication is the professional periodical «*Magisterium. Series in History*», which is included in Ukraine's list of professional academic journals. This collection publishes research by faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates working on medieval and early modern history. Of special importance are studies dedicated to the intellectual legacy of Latin Christendom, the history of the Church, university education, chronicles, and medieval conceptions of power, corporeality, and sacred space [12].

Summarizing her approaches, Tetiana Hryhorieva also authored a fundamental textbook, «*The History of Diplomacy from Antiquity to the End of the 18th Century* (2015)», which demonstrates her deep knowledge of diplomatic practices across various eras and contributes to the training of a new generation of

researchers in this field. In addition, her numerous reviews and participation in interdisciplinary collections testify to her active integration into the international scholarly community and her ability to reflect on European diplomatic experience within a broad cultural context [13].

I. I. Mechnikov Odesa National University (ONU). The profile of the Department of Archaeology, Ethnology, and World History – established on September 1, 2022, as a result of the merger of two departments within the Faculty of History and Philosophy (the Department of Archaeology and Ethnology of Ukraine and the Department of World History) – and the materials of the ONU library, which provides access to dissertations and dissertation abstracts defended at the university, allow for the analysis of the main research directions pursued by the university's scholars in the study of medieval and early modern history [14].

After defending his Candidate of Sciences dissertation in 2021 on the topic *«Richard II Plantagenet: Political Practices and the Concept of Rule»*, V. Chepizhenko established himself as a specialist in the history of late medieval England. He interprets the political strategies of the monarchy through the lens of contemporary approaches to the study of power, legitimacy, and cultural symbolism. The researcher heads the Center for Classical and Medieval Studies. Chepizhenko actively participates in professional development, having completed international and national educational programs, including the course *«Magic in the Middle Ages»* offered by the University of Barcelona. His personal profile and the department's profile indicate that he actively integrates European methodological approaches into teaching and research while maintaining a strong focus on the local context and the academic tradition of Odesa University [15].

Conclusions. The study of European Medieval and Early Modern history at Ukrainian universities has undergone a dynamic transformation, reflecting broader political, intellectual, and institutional shifts over time. From its early stages under imperial and Soviet influences – when research was often constrained by ideological

frameworks – to the post-independence era marked by academic renewal and increasing international integration, the field has progressively embraced methodological pluralism and interdisciplinary collaboration. In recent decades, Ukrainian scholars have expanded their thematic focus, adopted new theoretical approaches, and contributed more actively to global historiographical debates. Despite ongoing challenges, including limited funding and the consequences of war, the resilience and adaptability of Ukrainian historical scholarship offer strong potential for further development. Strengthening academic networks, enhancing digital and archival access, and fostering multilingual competencies will be key to ensuring the continued evolution and global relevance of Medieval and Early Modern studies in Ukraine. Despite the availability of dissertations and academic articles, the evolution of this research field remains underexplored and unsystematized. Institutional studies focusing on academic lineages and thematic developments are largely absent.

Since Ukraine's independence in the 1990s, there has been a significant shift toward Western academic paradigms, diversification of research topics, and critical reassessment of imperial legacies. Collaborative international programs have further supported this transformation, fostering a more pluralistic and reflective scholarly environment.

By reconstructing the academic history and current state of Medieval and Early Modern European history research in Ukraine, this article contributes to understanding the regional specificities, intellectual influences, and the potential for decolonial rethinking of historical knowledge in Ukrainian academia.

In sum, the analysis of the academic tradition of medieval and early modern history studies in Ukrainian universities reveals a deep historical continuity dating back to the 19th–20th centuries. However, the current stage is characterized by a gradual departure from ideological unification and a shift toward interdisciplinary, microhistorical, and postcolonial approaches. The dominant trend moves from

imperial dependency to academic autonomy, from ideological uniformity to methodological pluralism, aiming to decolonize historical scholarship and rethink European history from new perspectives.

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