This session is called ‘Ukraine 1772-1914’, and I must congratulate the organisers for such a succinct title that nonetheless manages to throw up so many difficult issues: about territory and sovereignty, about nation and state, and about empires and their peoples. All of that with one word and two dates! Very impressive.

My particular angle here does get caught up a little in some of these complications: In a session on Ukraine, I’m going to talk about Bukovina, which was never - in the Habsburg years - part of what most people would regard as ‘core’ or ‘essential’ Ukrainian regions, notwithstanding the slightly outlandish claim made by one author in 1970 that ‘Bukovina was essentially a compact Ukrainian land dating back to the fourth century A.D’. But even in this pre-First World War period it does figure in the broader Ukrainian story. Bukovina was a very significant land of Ukrainian settlement, although of course the state-of-the-art Habsburg term was ‘Ruthenian’, and its importance for Ukrainians steadily increased under Habsburg rule.

In terms of the larger conference topic of Ukrainians, Poles and Jews, the overall narrative in Bukovina is perhaps not radically different from the Ukrainian ‘heartlands’, but I think it does offer some sufficiently different perspectives to warrant at least a degree of attention. We could call it ‘variations on a familiar theme’.

I want to go about this by focusing on two principal threads. The first is what we might call the Bukovina/Galicia axis. In terms of Ukrainians, Poles and Jews that’s base camp, as it were; and Galicia, Bukovina’s much larger neighbour, was always the most important reference point in this context.

The second organising idea is that I think a very useful way to look at this is through the prism of the relationships between state, society and minority. And here ‘minority’ – for reasons that will become clear – is less a quantitative concept than a term denoting a national, ethnic or religious collective.

In Bukovina, each of these components differs both from its Galician counterpart and from other surrounding areas. So first I’ll introduce Bukovina; then I’ll talk a little about its peoples; and then I’ll try to bring out what might make Bukovina distinctive or unusual in terms of how these particular ethnic/national relationships functioned.

Bukovina, just like Galicia, was created – as a political territory - by Habsburg expansionism in the 1770s, and it too disappeared with the fall of the monarchy at the end of the First World War in 1918. Both provinces have generated a great deal of popular and academic nostalgia, most of it rather fanciful. Both places are often viewed through the distorting mirror of the unhappy post-Habsburg years, which has led to more than a bit of colourful idealisation and myth-making; the Bukovina myth, in particular, has been a mainstay of discussion about the area for a very long time.

This myth paints Bukovina as a model of national, ethnic and religious cooperation, of political moderation and of cultural creativity. Here was ‘multiculturalism, tolerance and the coexistence of diverse cultures’, a ‘Babylon on the river Pruth’, a region infused with what Otto von Habsburg (son of the last Habsburg emperor), called ‘a synthesis of national consciousness with a higher…European outlook’. (Whatever that might be.)
This was myth, as I said, but myth is not invariably devoid of historical substance. In this case, the myth of harmony and cooperation is a useful entry point when considering the Ukrainian, Polish, Jewish triangle in Bukovina, and, more broadly, the relationships between the other nationalities also.

The first thing we need to do is adjust our mathematics, or our ethnic geometry: because the infamous triangle is in Bukovina a pentangle. In addition to our familiar Poles, Ukrainians and Jews, we also have Romanians and Germans, which changes the parameters and the dynamics of the original triangular relationships. And this is to ignore, for our purposes, the mosaic of other peoples – in smaller numbers - in Bukovina.

In other words, Poles, Ukrainians and Jews aren’t the whole, or even the dominant, story in Bukovina, as they might be in Galicia. Keep in mind also that numbers in Bukovina were relatively small: the total population was 75,000 in 1775; 800,000 by 1910. By far the largest groups, right throughout the Austrian period, were the Ukrainians and the Romanians, constituting around thirty-fourty percent. And the trend was clear: the Ukrainian proportion of the population constantly increased in relation to the Romanian, which was the cause of much hand-wringing and anxiety on the part of the Romanians. The Romanians liked to claim for themselves the role of ‘leading force’ in Bukovina, not unlike the Poles in Galicia, and their self-image as a ‘civilised’ and ‘cultivated’ nation was offended by the idea of subordination of any sort to the Ukrainians, whom they regarded as less ‘civilised’ and ‘cultivated’.

So: we have five major ethnic/national groups, rather than three. And the unique characteristic of Bukovina, and one that is a central component of the myth that I mentioned, is that none of these groups was truly dominant, in the fashion that Poles were in Galicia. Instead, there was an uneasy equilibrium, an unstable balance of power between them all.

Similarly, none formed an outright majority of the population. Instead, by the early twentieth century, there were two pluralities, Romanians and Ukrainians, each making up – as I said - over thirty percent of the population (around 275,000 Romanians and 300,000 Ukrainians). Next, there were more than 100,000 Jews (not so obviously a ‘nation’ as the others, but nonetheless always regarded as a distinct group); they were about thirteen percent of the overall population; then Germans, about 70,000 or nine percent; and finally Poles, 36,000 at around four percent.

Numbers and percentages do not, of course, tell the whole story, and in many respects the numbers did not reflect the hierarchy of power; by which I mean that the distribution of power did not flow automatically from demographic weight. And it was the Ukrainian population – i.e. the most numerous as the nineteenth century progressed - that was most disadvantaged by this. The general perception in Bukovina was that the development of Ukrainian society, as well as Ukrainian culture and nationalism, lagged behind that of the other peoples; Ukrainians in Bukovina were overwhelmingly a peasant population, and eighty percent of them were still illiterate in 1900, compared with around half of the general population.

Romanian political and economic elites, whether nobility, landowners or clergy, held many more of the levers of power than Ukrainians at local and regional levels. They were also better represented in the central Imperial Parliament in Vienna, and they dominated the Orthodox church in Bukovina, although the great majority of Ukrainians also belonged to this church (rather than to the Greek Catholic church, as they did in Galicia). Romanians also controlled the Orthodox Church’s immensely wealthy so-called ‘Religious Fund’, which owned a quarter of the agricultural land and half of all the forests -- and we need to remember here that even at the end of the nineteenth century,
ninety percent of both the Romanian and Ukrainian labour force worked in agriculture and fully half of Bukovina was covered by forest.

Poles in Bukovina had a rather different profile: fewer worked the land, they had many artisans spread thinly across the area, and they were more urbanised than either Romanians or Ukrainians, with forty percent of them living in Czernowitz, the capital city. Unlike Romanians and Ukrainians they made no claim to being native to the area; like the Jews, they were a product of the Austrian takeover. Although Poles were the least numerous of the five large groups, Polish influence was important especially in the early years, because between 1786 and 1848, Bukovina was formally – i.e. politically and administratively - part of Galicia. But in the 1850s and 1860s, once Bukovina had become an autonomous crownland following the 1848 revolution, the ascendancy of Polish influence in Galicia ran parallel to its eclipse in Bukovina.

The Germans provide another example of Bukovina’s skewed distribution of power in relation to numbers. Right throughout the period of Habsburg rule, Germans retained their privileged position at the summit of the national hierarchy. From its first years, the Austrian regime imported as many Germans as possible in order to populate and administer the area, since Germans were thought of (in wonderfully essentialising fashion) as reliable and diligent. And these Germans, along with many German-speaking Jews, developed a self-image as upholders of German culture in the Slavic east.

A Germanised public sphere was always – until the very end - a central element of Bukovina society, because German was at all times the imperial language of administration, of the state apparatus, of most educational institutions and of supranational Habsburg ‘high culture’ (although Romanian and Ukrainian were also ‘official’ languages of administration). The fact that German and Germans were the essential oil in the state-building machine in Bukovina enabled them to retain their ‘most-favoured-nation’ status, even though they were heavily outnumbered by Romanians, Ukrainians and Jews.

Now, to the Jews, the third largest group: How did the Jews fit in to all this? Very well indeed is the answer. Bukovina Jewry was the hybrid offspring of Galician Jewry and the Austrian state, and the Jews became a prominent and confident element of local society. In Jewish collective memory, and also in Jewish historiography, Bukovina has enjoyed a remarkably good press (remember the myth I alluded to).

A couple of examples of this: A local journalist and lawyer wrote in 1901 that Jewish ‘influence’ was ‘dominant in all spheres of public life’ (a good thing in his eyes!); this was, he said, the ‘El Dorado of diaspora Jewry’ -- and that was a common phrase. A few years later, another writer described Bukovina as a ‘much-celebrated paradise of the Jews’. As for Czernowitz, where nearly 30,000 Jews made up over thirty percent of the population at that point: ‘in no other large city in Austria, in Europe, or even across the Atlantic, do Jews enjoy anything like the same social, economic and political status’.

Part of what allowed the Jews to play such an important role in Bukovina was that from the very beginning they were part of Austria’s ‘modernising’ development of what was in effect a new society. This helps to differentiate Bukovina from Galicia, which was regarded by the Austrians as slightly less of a blank slate upon which they could imprint their stamp.

For Bukovina Jews, Galicia was more than just a neighbour. It was an omnipresent shadow: it was the principal source of population, and it was the incubator and nursery for its ideologies, for its movements and for its institutions. But there were other sources too: One local Jewish writer commented in 1901 that Bukovina’s Jews were an almost indefinable mixture of Galician, Polish, Romanian, Hungarian and
Russian Jewries, with a thin veneer of German Jewry (thus making them civilised, in his view).

Actually, the German veneer was not so thin at all: over time, in fact, German culture came to hold pride of place for Bukovina’s Jews and a core part of the Jewish population identified itself as German (by culture). This German strain was evident even in Jewish nationalism. The Galician Leon Kellner, an internationally-recognised Shakespeare expert, professor of English literature at the University of Czernowitz, Herzl’s great friend and ally and a Zionist leader in his own right, described himself as ‘entirely German’. The German language, he said is ‘my second fatherland’. This was a not untypical Zionist view in Bukovina, where Jewish nationalism was extremely successful but was almost entirely a German-language movement: Hebrew and Yiddish were very much poor relations. As a counterpoint to the notion of Bukovina as a fortress of the Germanised Jewish bourgeoisie, it was also a great and flourishing centre of Hasidism.

What we have here, then, is an uncommonly intense coexistence in a very compact land (living therefore in very close proximity) of what is often called, using a convenient shorthand, eastern and western European Jewry. Bukovina had a unique blend: a modernising, eastern European Jewry rooted in traditional Jewish society, along with a highly acculturated western European Jewry, in a multinational context, with no dominant nationality -- and all this in the framework of an ambitious Habsburg project of state-building at the eastern edge of empire.

Which brings me back to state, society and minority. I hope it’s clear from what I’ve described that this unusual Habsburg milieu decisively shaped the relationships of the various nationalities. So as not to be too abstract about this, I want to give an example of how it played out in practice. And the most obvious and striking example is the intersection of nationalism and antisemitism, which covers a multitude of sins, as it includes economic, religious, cultural and political tensions. In this regard, Bukovina was indeed a little different, even if it doesn’t quite bear out the more grandiose claims of the myth-makers regarding harmony and cooperation.

I would make the argument that antisemitism in Bukovina, whether from Poles, Ukrainians, Romanians or Germans, was comparatively restrained until the 1890s, and even later. One observer described this rather nicely in 1893: ‘the antisemitic bacteria in my beautiful Bukovina lie mostly dormant’, he wrote, but added: ‘one does not, however, need a microscope to detect them’. Then he switches metaphors: ‘the sky overhead is currently clear, but I see a dark, threatening cloud gathering on the distant horizon’.

There were certainly the familiar frictions and anti-Jewish prejudices: Ukrainian and Romanian peasants resented Jewish innkeepers, estate managers and landowners; German artisans, shopkeepers and merchants felt threatened by Jewish competition; Romanians, Germans and Poles who aspired to a career in the liberal professions saw far too many Jews blocking their upward path; blood libels circulated into the nineteenth century and anti-Jewish violence was not unknown. But this all too common mixture of economic, social and religious conflict was notably less intense, less extreme and less systemic than in Galicia, Romania or Germany.

For the most part, this was a function of circumstance and context: targets were different here, as were power relationships. To repeat the obvious: this was not a Polish land; Ukrainians were at loggerheads with Romanians rather than with Poles; the Jews had much more power, the Poles less; the Germans’ position was, paradoxically, precarious and powerful. (Please excuse alliteration.) Consequently, the potential for direct competition and overt hostility between Jews and Poles, and between Jews and Ukrainians, and in fact between Jews and Germans and Romanians, was somewhat
reduced and diffused.

Nationalism, in its more aggressive forms, changed this picture for the worse when it charged into Bukovina in the 1890s. Conflict certainly intensified. But while nationalism was responsible for the greater part of Bukovina’s antisemitism, the political equilibrium between the nationalities worked to curb nationalist conflict, because it mandated - it necessitated - permanent interaction among all groups. The name of the game was alliances and coalitions, and Jews were simply too powerful to ignore; they could not be marginalised. One of Bukovina’s most important newspapers described it in this way in 1906: ‘Slavs and Germans, Jews and antisemites, Poles and Ruthenians, makes pacts of all kinds’ in a perpetual game of ‘national chess’.

This ‘national chess’ helped to keep the worst at bay, in comparison with neighbouring lands. Antisemitism in Bukovina was often a by-product of the competition for primacy between Romanians, Ukrainians and Germans, and it was mostly confined to furious and hateful rhetoric. This isn’t to say that there weren’t also some racial, religious and cultural manifestations, but these were fewer and they at no time amounted to a serious challenge to Jewish interests.

That the compound of antisemitism and nationalism was slightly different in Bukovina is a good example of the ‘variations on a theme’ that I mentioned at the outset, and it was part of what changed the ground rules of the relationships between Ukrainians, Poles and Jews, among others. One significant consequence of this was that some truly explosive national hatreds were kept in check here. As ever, if you’ll forgive a platitude, this was due to history and context: more precisely, it was due to the particular combination of geography, demography, politics and culture that made up the Habsburg matrix of state, society and minority. And that, I think, is the key.

Given what happened here a generation later, when nationalism and antisemitism became quite extraordinarily vicious and murderous, it’s difficult to draw any larger lessons from this, beyond the obvious strictures of needing to be attentive to historical contingency and contemporary perspectives, and the need to avoid what is sometimes called ‘backshadowing’, or teleology. In other words, just as there are no proverbial straight lines in history in general, so too are there none in the uneasy relationships between Ukrainians, Poles and Jews, whether in Bukovina, Galicia, or anywhere else.