

Voluntary Brotherhood: Confraternities of Laymen in Early Modern Ukraine. Iaroslav Isaievych. Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 2006. 324 pp. \$29.95. ISBN 978-1-894865-03-6.

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In a field where so little has been written—east European history—and where historiographical trends are still not too distant from the old dominant ideologies and narratives of teleological progress (either of the Marxist or nationalist kind—and the two were not always exclusive), it is refreshing to find a historian old enough to have amassed a deep and thorough knowledge of the source base and yet young enough of mind and spirit to present it in an updated mode. Isaievych's book is both a newly accessible translation and reworking of

his 1966 monograph (showcasing the strengths of his original research) and a revisioning and reframing of the comparative context. Isaievych successfully outlines a historical question of general interest and answers it with detailed investigation of a distinct case.

How did the Orthodox confraternities of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ukraine, and the city of Lviv in particular, organize and provide a forum for social activity, individual identity, and religious expression? The larger question that will interest early modernists is comparative. Catholic confraternities (or brotherhoods) were important in France, Italy, and Spain. Trade guilds flourished in the German towns of the Russian-ruled Baltic territories. Orthodox confraternities flourished in the trading cities of Ukraine and Belarus, but not farther east in Russia proper. Why this particular pattern? And what were its effects?

These cities of modern Ukraine and Belarus present a particularly interesting case not only because they are unfamiliar to western scholars but also because, while this territory was being drawn ever more substantively into the administrative and economic structures of the Russian empire to the east, it was still a genuine transition zone, open culturally and economically to its western neighbors. In a way unsurpassed in early modern Europe, east Slavic trading cities such as Lviv and Kiev were multiethnic and multireligious, with Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, and Jews living in close proximity (even if they were not exactly mixing and mingling).

Isaievych refreshingly breaks from the previous studies of his compatriots in stressing the genuinely religious motivations and activities of these brotherhoods. They founded schools, marshaled economic and political resources to patronize church buildings and religious art, founded (and funded) the first printing presses in the region. There were more presses, and more printed books, in these "borderland" cities than there were in the capital, Moscow. Lviv University dates its founding to 1661, an expansion of the higher schools of the Lviv confraternities; Moscow State University was not founded until nearly a century later.

The author follows an older trend, however, when he agrees that they were an embodiment of national identity—which is either the wishful thinking of presentism or a separate question, as yet undemonstrated, and still to be rigorously investigated. Fortunately, this is not the focus of the book.

In the comparative context, the confraternities are intriguing as a spontaneous, indigenous, and self-propelled attempt at local self-government in a region where the central tsarist administration and bureaucracy were as yet distant and sporadic. Because these cities were neither part of a national Ukrainian state nor particularly in Moscow's attention, it has been easy to ignore the vibrant local urban culture and to see the whole region as marginal to the national histories of Russia or, alternately, Poland. But for the individuals who comprised the brotherhoods, government (and, for us, the making of history) was local, personal, and in their direct control. It is not a stretch to see the precursors of democracy and civil society in such seventeenth-century brotherhoods, even if, in subsequent history, they reached fruition in France, England, and the American colonies but not in Ukraine. The confraternities form a very worthy case study for social and cultural history in an area which is otherwise unfairly dismissed as an undeveloped and undeveloping backwater. In the early modern era, it was nothing of the kind.

It is a bit of an academic fairy tale that the book is published at all. Despite the requisite obeisance to Marxist rhetoric and the learned scholarship, the original monograph barely squeezed by the censors' gatekeepers to be published four decades ago (its topic was, apparently, not politically relevant enough, although it was presciently in line with contemporary cutting-edge Western scholarship on social history). "I am especially grateful," Isaievych

writes with refreshing humor and self-deprecation, for the western scholars who criticized the book's superficial ideology, for "without such criticism, a positive review" in the West could have sunk his professional career. One of the same historians who critiqued the book in 1966 has now as a senior scholar justifiably and proudly overseen its translation, expansion, and republication.

