

confraternities within “secure” theoretical boundaries provides a fascinating historiography and summary of the important achievements of the discipline.

Gianni Cicali  
 Italian Studies  
 University of Toronto

Isaievych, Iaroslav. *Voluntary Brotherhood: Confraternities of Laymen in Early Modern Ukraine*. The Peter Jacyk Centre for Ukrainian Historical Research, 2. Edmonton and Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2006. 324 pp., 23 illustrations ISBN 1-8948-6503-0 \$29.95 (paperback), \$49.95 (cloth)

The publication of an English translation of Iaroslav Isaievych’s revised and updated 1966 original monograph on early modern Ukrainian and Belarusian Orthodox confraternities adds significantly to our knowledge of eastern rite voluntary lay associations. Although the study was first published forty years ago, it suffered under the constraints of Soviet censorship. In this revised version, Isaievych was able to delete material forced on him during the first publication as well as bring the scholarship on the subject up to date. The study focuses on the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, concentrating on the early modern period. For those familiar with the medieval and early modern lay confraternities of Western Christianity, Isaievych opens a window on the fascinating position of the Ukraine and Belarus as mediator between Roman Catholic western Europe and the influence of their post-Byzantine eastern neighbour, Orthodox Russia.

The book is divided into six chapters, preceded by an introduction in which Isaievych explains his choice of the term *confraternity* in describing the voluntary Ukrainian and Belarusian lay associations of the time period. Having defined his terms, the author moves on to discuss the origins of the Ukrainian and Belarusian confraternities, their social composition and organizational structure, their role in public and religious life, their significance in the development of schools, their publishing activities and the legacy to be found in their archives.

Throughout his book, Isaievych reminds the reader that the Ukraine and Belarus stood in a unique position in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. Subjugated by foreign powers (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the west and Russia in the east), these two ethnic nationalities expressed their uniqueness and proclaimed their identity via groups of lay people gathered along linguistic, ethnic and religious lines. In his Introduction Isaievych clarifies why he has chosen to use the western term *confraternity* over the usual expression *brotherhood* for the Orthodox *bratsva*. He believes that the voluntary lay religious associations of the Ukraine and Belarus resembled the western religious lay confraternities more than social or craft-based brotherhoods or guilds. To underline the distinction between an association identified along ethno-religious lines and one founded on socio-economic interests, Isaievych

rejects the usual English term brotherhood for the more accurately descriptive confraternity.

After discussing the medieval (and even pre-Christian) origins of the Ukrainian and Belarusian confraternities, Isaievych outlines the differences of the Ukrainian and Belarusian confraternities of the late sixteenth century from their western counterparts. The eastern confraternities were composed of lay burghers, craftsmen, tradesmen and some wealthier peasants. There were no confraternities of clergy nor did the eastern confraternities involve themselves in providing indulgences. They were local parish organizations rather than trans-parish entities united by a common focus. Even as Tridentine Roman Catholicism used revitalized western confraternities in the battle against schism and heresy, their eastern counterparts demonstrated as much anti-clericalism as patriotism. The desire for independence was expressed in both religious and national aspirations. Isaievych considers the typical praise for the religious toleration of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to be vastly over-rated, citing many instances of discrimination as well as violence against Orthodox believers who refused to convert to the eastern-rite Uniate Church that acknowledged Rome but preserved Byzantine religious rituals. This anti-Uniate theme, presenting the confraternities as often beleaguered and persecuted, traces a path throughout his study as he examines the confraternities' involvement in public life, religious controversies, nationalist aspirations, education and publishing.

In tracing the legal foundations of the Ukrainian and Belarusian confraternities Isaievych points to founding documents from Eastern patriarchs and synods in the 1590s as well as decrees from Polish kings (many of which contradicted each other, but were used to justify whatever a particular confraternity was claiming as its right). Later, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Russian czars would look to descendant organizations of the original confraternities to establish a firmer pro-Russian stance. Neither early pro-Uniate stances by the Polish nobility nor later Russian efforts to solidify political supremacy by supporting the Orthodox religion were successful in influencing the Ukrainian and Belarusian confraternities, which promulgated ethnic nationalism along with a pro-Orthodox religious commitment. Isaievych relies heavily on the archives of the Dormition Confraternity of Lviv (which later became the Stauropegion Institute) to provide the basis for understanding many other Orthodox confraternities (e.g. Kyiv, Lutsk, Lublin, Vilnius, etc.) whose documentary evidence is not as complete. Despite minor variations, the confraternities were mainly dependent on the emerging burgher class for leadership. The unique position of the Kyivan Confraternity in embracing a strong Cossack presence offers an interesting insight into the shared goals of the Cossacks and the urban Ukrainian Orthodox community.

The public and religious life of the confraternities centred on the promotion of ethnic nationalism based in the Orthodox faith. Thus in the early modern period one finds that these organizations sponsored hospitals, education, and social assistance, all under the Orthodox umbrella. Nevertheless, positioned as they were, sandwiched between western Roman Catholic Poland and Lithuania and eastern Orthodox

Russia, the Ukrainian and Belarusian confraternities mediated the clash of east and west. The explosion of a humanist educational model in the west found its counterpart in the sponsorship of elementary and advanced educational institutions by the eastern confraternities. While western Protestants used the printing revolution to encourage direct access to the Bible, the Ukrainian and Belarusian confraternities of larger towns began their own publishing houses. Printing in the vernacular, with the Cyrillic alphabet, became at once a method of socio-economic advancement as well as a means of promoting ethnic identity and pride.

The volume concludes with an extensive bibliography of published and unpublished sources. *Voluntary Brotherhood* makes a significant contribution to the study of early modern confraternities and does it via a very polished and eminently readable English translation.

Christine O'Brien  
Toronto School of Theology  
University of Toronto