

Isaievych, Iaroslav. *Voluntary Brotherhood: Confraternities of Laymen in Early Modern Ukraine*. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2006. xxxii + 324 pp. \$29.95 (paper). ISBN 1-894865-03-0.

This book is identified as a translation of a study that Isaievych had published in Ukrainian in 1966. In fact, it is much more than that. The author has added and rewritten large sections of the original, done a good deal of additional research, and updated the citations. The result is an empirically rich, thoughtful, and generally even-handed discussion of an important topic that has received very little attention in English.

Confraternities were widespread in early modern Europe, typically in cathedral or mercantile centers. Affiliated with the church, they nevertheless consisted mostly of laymen (and occasionally laywomen) who in quite a few instances pursued agendas independent of the direction of spiritual and political authority. For this reason some scholars have considered them as building blocks of urban civil society, organizations with high sense of self-consciousness and mission that pursued the interests and visions of their members. In some locales they were almost indistinguishable from trade guilds. In others they organized schools, publishing houses, philanthropic activities, and occasionally political struggle, all in the service of a faith-driven civic mission.

What was true for Europe in general, according to Isaievych, was true for Ukraine and Belarus as well. He identifies many Orthodox and Catholic confraternities that functioned in that area between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, and he exploits to good purpose the extensive records of the L'viv Dormition Confraternity, whose records miraculously survived intact. He details their social activities, in particular education and print (subjects about which Isaievych has written extensively over many years), their complex interactions with bishops, and especially their involvement in the region's interconfessional struggles after the Union of Brest and the establishment of the Eastern-rite Catholic Church (Uniates). In the face of the politically sensitive nature of the Orthodox/Uniate conflict, Isaievych sticks to the facts, carefully avoiding any hint of religious partisanship. If anything, he understates the rupture's deleterious social effects and situates the decades of violence that it engendered in the background.

Although the writing is scholarly throughout, it does have an ideological dimension to it, if only by implication. He treats Ukraine as a coherent geopolitical entity, not as a nation *per se* but as a single space nevertheless. The cultural boundaries of his historic Ukraine correspond to the geographic boundaries of independent Ukraine today. Implied here is the idea that theirs was a shared experience, irrespective of shifting political borders and the pressures of outside powers from the west and east. This is not an unreasonable perspective, but it is, or should be, controversial, and one would have appreciated a more explicit and detailed discussion of the transposition of modern borders onto an early modern era for which the idea of national consciousness is a bit of an anachronism.

The complement to the idea of a historic Ukraine is the insistence on a historical trajectory separate from, and even in opposition to, Russian history. Here Isaievych is more explicit, albeit *in sotto voce*. The boundaries of the shared European experience of confraternities end, implicitly, where Muscovy/Russia begins. Here he has a point, although he never develops it. Muscovy had few if any confraternal societies prior to the incorporation of eastern Ukraine. Even then, the institution did not spread eastward, a noteworthy point of contrast between Russian urban society and much of the rest of Europe. But the significance of this contrast, if there is one, needs to be spelled out in the full scholarly manner that informs the rest of the book.

Finally, a word about style. Chapter organization is logical, but the decision to treat confraternities within each chapter *ad seriatim* makes for some confusing chronology. The translation is accurate, but at times overly literal. Still, these are very minor matters. Scholars in our field are fortunate to now have such a well-researched and substantively presented book available in English.

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