public” (237). Yet, “civilization” always had its cosmopolitan, non-national aspects, and identity certainly had many components besides the national, including the self-satisfaction of participating in a manifestation of cultural elitism. “The existence of German, Polish, and Czech opera cannot be regarded as a given or the natural result of nation-building,” argues Ther—and indeed, nation-building itself could hardly be regarded as a given or as something “natural.”

Ther’s study thus emphasizes the profound contingency of national developments in operatic history. Wagner’s programmatic nationalism was, Ther suggests, less important than Wagner’s rejection by Paris in the Tannhäuser scandal of 1861, leading, at last, to an enthusiastic reception of Wagner in Dresden. The ensuing nationalization of opera in Dresden was not simply conditioned by the national spirit of the unification of Germany in the 1860s, but was also perhaps a matter of compensation for Saxony’s relative insignificance in the new empire governed by Bismarck from Berlin.

Contingent factors produced unanticipated results. The national success of the Czech and Polish composers Smetana and Moniuszko had a stunting effect on national opera, making it harder for Czechs to embrace the operas of Dvorak and for Poles to get excited about what ought to have been the ultimate national opera, Władysław Żeleński’s Konrad Wallenrod, which was based on the Mickiewicz drama and performed in L’viv in 1885. Finally, the elevation of some forms meant the contingent diminishment of others, and the cherishing of national opera led to the denigration of operetta, which became the object of anti-Semitic venom for its supposedly Jewish associations. Ther’s brilliant and complex book has provided an enormous amount for historians to reflect upon as they consider issues of urban culture, national society, and European civilization in the nineteenth century.

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This book is a welcome, stimulating, and theoretically strong addition to the literature dealing with the Ukrainian peasantry under Habsburg rule. Despite the dates specified in his title, Andriy Zayarnyuk essentially covers the period from the days of Enlightened Absolutism up until 1914, making the book truly representative of the Galician experience. The focus here is less the Ukrainian peasantry per se than the discourse around the peasantry (the “framing” of the title): that is, “the imagining of the society and the repercussions of such an imagining in the villages of the region” (x). The author sets out to probe identity construction in the Galician countryside, present the pertinent discourses shaping the process (as well as to periodicize them), and analyze their reception and negotiation at the grassroots level by peasants themselves. This involves the analysis of a number of case studies, in which one finds a wealth of peasant voices.

The abundant primary sources used in the book encompass intellectuals’ views of the peasantry, publications directed at the peasantry, as well as—and most importantly—peasant testimonies from the regions of Sambir and Staryi Sambir. Zayarnyuk gives his sources (in particular, the last of the above-mentioned) a fine, detailed close reading—one of the reasons why his text weighs in at 385 pages (not including the numerous appendices, comprehensive bibliography, and index). His analysis consistently leads him to draw conclusions at odds with the prevailing literature, making the book an enlightening read.

The substantive chapters provide fresh insights into the way the Ukrainian peasant in Galicia was viewed throughout the period in question, as well as into the behavior and identity formation of
peasants. A reconsideration of the attempted Polish revolution of 1846, as seen from the Sambor province, which saw some revolutionary activity, sheds new light on that key event, to which Galician peasants—if not Ruthenes—reacted violently (chapter one). Any talk of Ruthenian violence, according to Zayarnyuk, was a projection on the part of the Polish national movement designed to help the Poles forget 1846. Chapter two details the imagery of the Ruthenian national community in the Revolution of 1848, demonstrating—among other things—how that community had essentially been formed by Austrian Enlightened Absolutism and how the Ruthenian movement struggled in its dealings with the peasants, who refused to sign petitions of support because they feared the return of labor obligations toward their landlords (robot). Chapter three revisits the issue of servitudes, which the author maintains—contra to the prevailing wisdom—was shaped by the liberal discourse of the 1860s as opposed to being feudalistic.

Chapter four continues the chronological analysis of the framing by examining what Zayarnyuk calls the “paternalistic populism” (115) of the Ruthenian clergy in the 1860s and 1870s; he sees the clergy as engaged in Hroch’s phase B and focuses on the modes of “patriotic agitation” (128), mainly the publishing of books by Prosvita and the Kachkovsky Society, reinterpreting their activity in new ways. The 1880s (as discussed in chapter five) brought a new generation of activists, as well as the first peasant activists who connected to the national movement, among other things, through the periodical Bat’kivshchyna (studied by John-Paul Himka in his book Galician Villagers and the Ukrainian National Movement in the Nineteenth Century [Edmonton, 1988]). Here, Zayarnyuk deals with peasant activism as seen though the Dobrivliany affair, the arrest of some peasant activists for Socialist agitation and anticlerical propaganda, shown to be a very complex event that nonetheless demonstrates how a truly national public sphere was being shaped. The extensive activities and writings of peasant mayor and activist Ivan Mykhas, the subject of chapter six, reveal the sometimes uncomfortable position of radical peasants, antagonizing clergy while not being fully supported by the intelligentsia; at the same time, it shows the peasant’s ability to think independently and formulate his own ideas. As Zayarnyuk argues, through activities such as the all-important reading clubs (discussed in chapter seven), which helped to foster a public sphere in which ideas could develop and spread, especially as of the 1890s and early twentieth century, peasants were being constituted as a new class, with a class consciousness of their own.

Every chapter of Framing the Ukrainian Peasantry in Habsburg Galicia challenges the reader to think in new ways about identity formation and the Ukrainian peasants. Those who take the time to read the book—something that should be done by scholars and graduate students specializing in Ukraine, Galicia, and the Habsburg monarchy—will be rewarded for their efforts.

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SINCE 1918


Markus Benesch should know the terrain of Austrian politics well. Today he is a member of the administration in the political cabinet of the Austrian minister of foreign affairs, as well as an award-winning historian of the political history of Vienna in the first decades of the twentieth