

Kivelson, Valerie A., and Christine D. Worobec, eds. *Witchcraft in Russia and Ukraine, 1000–1900: A Sourcebook* (Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies Series). Ithaca and London: Northern Illinois University Press/Cornell University Press, 2020. Timeline. Notes. Index. xxx+506. \$32.95 (paper). ISBN 9781501750656.

Valerie Kivelson and Christine Worobec number among the leading scholars who study the history of witchcraft in Russia and Ukraine. In this volume, they have joined together to recap the conclusions of their previous research published in monographs and scholarly articles and to share examples of the historical documents from which they drew them. They collaborated with numerous other scholars in this effort, including most notably Elena Smilianskaia, Aleksandr Lavrov, and Kataryna Dysa, who contributed to this volume archival documents they had found and transcribed along with their insights into them. Thus, this book expresses the collective knowledge of many scholars and constitutes a summation of their consensus.

As a “sourcebook,” the volume features 100 documents relating to witchcraft. While a few originated in the period of Kyivan Rus’, most date to a later era, the 16<sup>th</sup> century through the mid-19<sup>th</sup>. The documents are rendered into accurate, readable English translation, with adequate notation concerning the terminology in the original. When not providing the entire document, the authors have opted for longer passages rather than shorter, so that readers can get a sense of the context. As a result, these documents speak to more than just the conceptions of witchcraft in Russian and Ukrainian society, to encompass judicial practice, gender relations, folk belief and customs, and daily life. Although many of the documents were previously published in their original language (often Old Russian or Polish, in addition to modern Russian), many others are unpublished, and this volume provides the only option for ready access to them.

The editors have chosen to focus on legal and judicial texts of which they are experts, rather than literature or ethnography. For the premodern period, ethnographic materials scarcely exist, and so the chronological scope of the volume perhaps dictated excluding such texts. The volume includes several excerpts from chronicles of the 11<sup>th</sup> through the 16<sup>th</sup> century recounting the activities of suspected sorcerers, but not fictional tales. In short, the editors excluded purely literary depictions of magic to direct attention instead to “real” witches.

The types of sources the editors selected color the image of witchcraft in dark tones. Readers who are hoping to find depictions of light-hearted magic and kindly wise women as in folktales and ethnographic reports will be taken aback by the vision of the world in this volume. Much of the magic that appears in this book harmed others, deliberately or inadvertently. The witches themselves were banal, casting their spells out of desperation or in hopes of modest rewards or just as a favor to a relative or neighbor. Most did not identify as witches at all, but came under suspicion because they possessed herbs, roots, amulets, or (especially) written material. Mostly, these accused witches came under suspicion because

they had the wrong family, friends, or enemies. The government authorities who investigated the allegations of witchcraft come across as unfeeling executors of cruel policies.

Readers hoping to find the texts of spells and incantations will find numerous examples in this volume. Judicial inquest records occasionally recorded them verbatim, and the editors have reproduced them here. Accused witches described their rituals in detail, as well as the circumstances which prompted them to use magic. Because most of this information was extracted under threatening interrogation and torture, readers cannot be certain whether these descriptions represent actual magical practice or versions that hapless victims of government investigations believed would satisfy the authorities. Either way, the texts yield much information about conceptions of witchcraft.

The editors also provide lavish commentary on the practice of witchcraft in its cultural context in the twelve-page introduction to the volume, in the introductions to each chapter, and in the introductions to each of the documents. They point out the prevalence of magical practice among all layers of society, elite and common, clergy and laity, educated and illiterate, men and women. In Russian lands, males greatly outnumbered females in the ranks of accused witches; in Ukrainian lands, it was the opposite. Unlike in Western European lands, the witches of Russia and Ukraine infrequently enunciated any association with Satan or any sophisticated demonology; much more often they invoked figures from the Christian pantheon, albeit in uncanonical ways. The hardships and inequities of life prompted people to seek relief through the power of magic. But while witchcraft might tip the scales of the moral economy in favor of the weak, so could appeals to the authorities with allegations of forbidden magic. Once the government got involved, though, the situation rarely was resolved in anyone's favor. All too often, both accused and accusers suffered grievous interrogation, torture, imprisonment, exile, and death.

For any serious scholar of Russian and Ukrainian witchcraft and magic, this volume is a "must read." Even though the overall conclusions may be familiar from the editors' earlier publications, the additional insights that emerge from the discussions of specific documents add nuance and crucial information. Scholars of folklore and popular culture also will find much of value, particularly in the second part of the book, which is organized around aspects of magical practice— healing and harming, sex and love, demon possession, and orality, among others. However, the distribution of the source texts into different thematic chapters is somewhat arbitrary, as the editors themselves admit, because so many of them touch upon multiple aspects of magical practice. Thus, folklorists would be advised to read all the chapters, so as not to miss material of interest to them. The volume is suitable for undergraduate students, too, particularly as a resource for class discussion and term projects. The lack of a glossary of terms and the limited inclusion of subject headings in the index are regrettable in this context, but the timeline of the history is very useful, as are the notes, which clarify terminology and direct readers to additional scholarly publications. Finally, scholars of

witchcraft outside the area of Russian and Ukrainian studies can use this volume as an entrée into that milieu.

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