



## **Two Historians in One Lviv**

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# Two Historians in One Lviv

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For decades, the intellectual landscape of Lviv was shaped by two historians: Yaroslav Isayevych and Yaroslav Dashkevych. Academically they were equal competitors, whose intellectuality and strong personalities led them to a great rivalry.

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In Ukraine, the profession of a historian has always been regarded as risky and requiring a fair amount of courage. This was especially true under communism, when the government would do anything to subordinate Ukrainian historiography to join in the mission of creating a “new Soviet man”. This goal was never reached. Even at the most cruel of times, historians generally had freedom, though limited, in their choice of lifestyle.

In this context, Lviv has played a special role. It was absorbed into the Soviet Union only after the Second World War. That is why it did not experience the changes that Stalin made to science in the 1930s. And while in Kyiv the continuity of the historical school of Mykhailo Serhiyovych Hrushevsky, the father of modern Ukrainian history, was being brutally severed by repression, his students and followers were calmly working in the interwar Lviv. Among them was Ivan Krypyakevych, who after the Second World War became a member of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. He headed the Institute of Social Research. Krypyakevych, although not allowed to teach at Lviv University, retained great influence amongst young historians who worked at the institute. It was thanks to his help that both Yaroslav Isayevych and Yaroslav Dashkevych were introduced into the positivist-national tradition of historiography, strongly associated with Hrushevsky.

Dashkevych was born on December 13th 1926, in Lviv in the family of Roman Dashkevych, a general in the Ukrainian People’s Army. Isayevych, almost ten years younger than Dashkevych, was born on April 7th 1936, in a small village in Volhynia. His father, Dmytro Isayevych, had once been a member of the Central Council of Ukraine (a council that led the nationalist movement, later becoming the

revolutionary parliament of Ukraine – editor’s note) and a delegate of the People’s Republic of Ukraine to the Peace Conference in Paris. He returned to Ukraine from France in 1930. When Yaroslav turned eight, the family moved to Stryi, in western Ukraine. In 1949, Dashkevych graduated from the Department of Philosophy at Lviv State University. Three years later, Isayevych began his studies at the History Department of the same institution.

### Two paths

Dashkevych worked as a student at the Lviv Library of the USSR Academy of Sciences. There, on December 10th 1949, he was arrested as being the son of the “famous Ukrainian nationalist Olena Stepaniv-Dashkevych” and imprisoned for possessing and distributing “anti-revolutionary literature”. He returned to Lviv in 1956, after spending almost seven years in prison and forced labour camps. A year later he found a job as a bibliographer at the Department of Ukrainian History in the Institute of Social Sciences, part of the USSR Academy of Sciences. In 1958, the same institute employed Isayevych.

Dashkevych’s and Isayevych’s academic publications quickly gained **acclaim** in both the **Soviet Union** and **abroad**.

In 1961, Isayevych received the title of Candidate of Science (the equivalent of a PhD). Dashkevych defended his thesis two years later in Yerevan at the Armenian Academy of Sciences. The topic of his dissertation was *Armenian colonies in Ukraine in the light of sources and literature from the 15th to 19th centuries*.

Dashkevych’s book was published under the same title in Russian in 1962, with Isayevych as the reviewer. In 1964, the two Yaroslavs, for the first and last time, co-authored a text: an article for the *Communist*.

Soon after, their career paths again converged. A job opening appeared for a senior academic position and for the first time, the two historians entered into direct competition. Dashkevych, for political reasons, found himself at a slight disadvantage, and he lost the position to Isayevych.

In 1966, Isayevych’s book *Brotherhoods and their role in the development of Ukrainian culture from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century* (*Братства та їх роль в розвитку української культури XVI–XVIII ст*) was published. In the same year, Dashkevych lost his job at the Institute of Social Sciences “due to an elimination of the position of bibliographer”. It took him three years to find a job at the Museum of Ethnography and Craft and later in the Central Historical Archives in Lviv. In 1969, the same publishing house that published Isayevych’s book in 1966 printed a collection

of documents on Ukrainian-Armenian cultural ties in the 17th century that had been prepared by Dashkevych. Three years later, Isayevych's book *Sources for the history of Ukrainian culture of the feudal period* (Джерела з історії української культури періоду феодалізму) appeared from the same publisher.

Dashkevych's and Isayevych's academic publications quickly gained publicity in both the Soviet Union and abroad. They were particularly popular among the Ukrainian diaspora and its academic circles. Omeljan Pritsak, director of the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, tried on many occasions to invite both historians to Harvard University. Clearly, the Soviet government did not agree to such visits.

Complicated relations between the two historians were **no secret**.

Inside Soviet Ukraine, the two historians were received differently. For Dashkevych, it was impossible to have an official academic career in Soviet Lviv. The main reason was his family history, but his unwillingness to compromise also played a role. From 1980 to 1990, Dashkevych was again unemployed. During this period, he wrote numerous articles on the science of historical sources, published in academic journals in Moscow, Warsaw, Yerevan, Harvard, and Paris.

The career path of Isayevych was definitely much calmer. In 1975, Isayevych published another book titled *Ivan Federov and the emergence of printing in Ukraine* (Першодрукар Іван Федоров та виникнення друкарства на Україні). Three years later, in Moscow, he received the title of Doctor of Science (an academic title higher than a PhD). This was quite significant, as in the Brezhnev period it was possible to defend academic dissertations in Moscow which had been rejected in Kyiv for their "bourgeois nationalism".

### **Independent, but still unequal**

In the early 1990s, the Institute for Social Studies (renamed the Institute for Ukrainian Studies in 1995) was chaired by Isayevych. A year later the Academy of Sciences nominated Isayevych to "Corresponding Member" and in 1992 to "Member of the Academy". Isayevych would then often state that this rise in his career was quite accidental and only possible in democratic times.

Dashkevych followed a different path in the avant-garde of the post-Soviet Ukrainian historiography. Unlike Isayevych, who left Ukraine after 1988 to lecture at Harvard, Dashkevych spent more time lecturing and publishing. He established, under his own leadership, a Lviv-based branch of the Institute of Ukrainian Archaeology and the Science of Historical Sources. In the early 1990s, Dashkevych published a number of ground-breaking academic articles on Ukrainian-Jewish

relations and Polish-Ukrainian relations. The most significant of these was entitled “Ukraine at the border of East and West”. In this piece, he departed from simple schemes of eternal confrontation between Ukraine and the East while simultaneously questioning the over-optimistic “Occidentalism”. To a great extent, thanks to Dashkevych’s article, the metaphor of “Ukraine between East and West” has played a central role in the different concepts of Ukraine’s history since 1991. Articles from the once persecuted, unemployed historian, started to be receive recognition by being published in the historical journal *Ukrains’kyi Istorychnyi Zhurnal* (*Ukrainian Historical Journal*).

Dashkevych died on February 25th 2010. On June 24th 2010, Isayevich passed away. **Since their deaths**, an intellectual **gap** has been left in **Lviv**.

In 1994, Dashkevych received the title of Doctor of Sciences for his overall academic achievements and in 1995 he was exonerated as a victim of political repressions. Nonetheless, both of his attempts to become a “Corresponding Member” of the Academy of Sciences ended in fiasco. The academic *nomenklatura* decided it was better to have him as an “experienced heretic” outside a privileged circle of recognised academics. Despite the political change and the acknowledgement of his achievements, Isayevych’s formal status remained unachievable to his older colleague.

**Political choices**

At one point in his career, Dashkevych became a regular political commentator, criticising globalisation and the European Union, but also focusing on Ukraine’s domestic issues. The world which emerges from his publications is like a combat arena with different nationalisms competing for supremacy. Even though he gave up thoughts of a political career, he was considered a potential charismatic leader in right-wing circles.

Isayevych refrained from making political comments, although he had an exceptional understanding of politics. He also never tried to portray himself as a dissident, a victim of the communist regime or a man who has the right to explain issues to wider audience. His patriotism was based on criticism, European values and was, to a large extent, very private.

Dashkevych, on the other hand, wanted to set up a standard of thinking about certain problems of Ukraine’s past and present. Very often he would surprise with unexpected theses. Also unlike Isayevych, who was always ready to question elegant theories and popular books, Dashkevych refrained from being involved in polemics with views and works that, in his opinion, were not meeting the standards of historic texts.

### One was the measure of the other

In Brezhnev's times, Isayevych's and Dashkevych's academic papers maintained, although somewhat limited, continuity with the Hrushevsky and Kryp'yakevych schools of historiography. In an independent Ukraine both historians could try to find the wider perspective, yet none succeeded in proposing their own syntheses of Ukraine's history. They continued to remind others that history is there to be discovered, relativism is relative and breaking with tradition is rooted in tradition.

The complicated relations between the two historians were no secret. In Dashkevych's publications one can find claims against Isayevych, although they are quite far apart. Dashkevych would accuse Isayevych of a lack of patriotism and mention his unpleasant behaviour from the communist era. These allegations were of a personal nature and mostly unjustified. Isayevych would respond calmly and tactfully. He would answer every criticism but would never strike back in return. He would say much more in private conversation than he would ever write on the subject.

In this unavoidable and understandable rivalry the two great historians complemented each other perfectly. For years, one was a measure of the other. Dashkevych died on February 25th 2010. Less than half a year later, on June 24th 2010, Yaroslav Isayevich passed away. Lviv is empty without them and the Ukrainian intellectual space has become flatter and more predictable. 🏰

*Translated by Iwona Reichardt*

Dr Andriy Portnov is a Ukrainian historian. His newest book, *Histories of Historians: Images of Ukrainian historiography in the 20th Century* is expected to come out in autumn 2011.