



Karen Friedrich, Barbara M. Pendzich, eds. *Citizenship and Identity in a Multi-national Commonwealth: Poland-Lithuania in Context, 1550-1772*. Studies in Central European Histories. Leiden: Brill, 2009. xix + 307 pp. \$158.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-16983-8.

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Connecting Poland-Lithuania to Europe

This title is a festschrift for Andrzej Sulima Kamiński presented by a group of pupils and colleagues. In her instructive introduction, Karin Friedrich declares that the aim of the volume is not “a new interpretation of monarchy but rather” investigation into “the important relationship between power, including monarchic power, and the practical role of the citizen” (p. 9). The contributions take up the conceptual frame and interpretation of the early modern history of Poland-Lithuania as put forward by the honoree; its conceptual cornerstones are the multivalent concepts of “active citizenship” and “civil society.” Following this tone, Poland-Lithuania is portrayed as an almost unique preserver of a participative political culture in early modern Europe. Consequently, active citizens feature everywhere in this volume. It sometimes seems that this stance overburdens the concept of citizenship in premodern societies and its potential analytical value, so that actions subsumed under this umbrella term can be over-interpreted.

The first of three sections of the book, “Inclusion and Exclusion: Citizenship in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth” focuses on these themes from the perspective of their influence on political bodies. It starts with a contribution from Felicia RoÅu, entitled “Monarch, Citizens, and the Law under Stefan Batory: The Legal Reform of 1578.” The author discusses the continuous attempts to reform and centralize the jurisdiction of

Poland-Lithuania since the 1540s. These attempts gained momentum during the interregnum of 1572, which led to a juridical vacuum and a disputed de facto restructuring of the jurisdiction through provincial courts, which were later partially recognized by the king. After its failure in 1576 to agree on its further jurisdictional reform, in 1578 the Sejm finally installed a central court for the Polish crown and a separate but similar court for the Palatinates of Kiev, Volyn, and Bratslav. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania eventually set up a court modeled on this example in 1581. RoÅu argues that these reforms made the judicial system run with unprecedented smoothness, which demonstrates “that early modern Central European states were able to implement institutional reforms while simultaneously defending republican principles and constitutionalism” (p. 41). Although RoÅu emphasizes the Polish political system’s capacity for reform and thus its parity with more autocratic and centralized states in its potential for modernization, she surprisingly reduces this potential in her conclusion to a mere coincidence that only allowed a consensus-oriented system to reach its ends. “A near-perfect combination of internal conflict, external threats, pragmatism, and patriotism” (p. 47), she writes, eventually made reforms possible. She says that the procedure of search for consensus itself guaranteed collectively binding decisions only if all other variables cooperated. This deficit—which she unfortunately does not make an issue in her

text—is precisely the factor that contributed to the demise of Poland-Lithuania. In the long run, no effective institutional mechanisms could compensate for the obviously more common case: the imperfect combination of influences and constellations of power.

The importance of the procedural dimension for the integration of Royal Prussian estates in the political system of Poland-Lithuania and the importance of evaluating the center-periphery relations in the realm are emphasized in the next contribution, “Citizenship in the Periphery: Royal Prussia and the Union of Lublin 1569,” by Friedrich. A main aim of unionists in Poland was a far-reaching integration program to incorporate Royal Prussia in the wake of the 1569 Union of Lublin. This idea had its origins in the centralizing tendencies of the Polish execution movement. In the course of the union the Prussian diet became an intermediary body as the new *sejmik generalny* of the province; the Prussian senators and great lords took up their seats in the Senate chamber of the Sejm. Friedrich points out the ways in which these results were achieved: by political practice and in fierce negotiations between the king, the Polish *szlachta*, and the Prussian estates. The result in the case of the integration in the years after the union is that “the compromise between centralisation and devolution provided a stable basis for cooperation and cohabitation in one *res publica*” (p. 67). Nevertheless, owing not least to the crucial role a corporative self-understanding and the provincial Sejm continued to play in Royal Prussia, a certain ambiguity between identification with Prussia or with the Polish-Lithuanian state persisted among the Prussian estates.

The next contribution, Artūras Vasiliauskas’s “The Practice of Citizenship among the Lithuanian Nobility, ca. 1580-1630,” also concentrates on political practice. Vasiliauskas aims to define a minimum standard for active citizenship and uses it to measure the political maturity (a rather imprecise category) of the Lithuanian nobility. In comparison with the supposedly high standard of Polish political life, he claims, the Lithuanians are often underestimated. To make his point he examines the duration of diet sessions, the venues where they took place, and the frequency of attendance of different groups (defined by income and property) of the nobility. This method allows him to correct previous assumptions in Polish historiography about a magnate oligarchy. Attendance was comparatively high and continuous among one-third of the nobles, and less well-off noblemen were frequently present. While the attendance figures are interesting, however, one might wonder whether the use of “secular places of public administration” (p. 78) instead

of churches for sessions is really a measure of its inclusiveness of non-Catholic noblemen, or simply an administrative tradition. The simple fact that meetings did not take place in churches seems to be not enough to support his point. The conclusion that the duration of sessions reveals the intensity of debates and the level of political commitment by local noblemen also seems to overstretch the evidence. A qualitative analysis of arguments in diet records—in cases where they are available—seems necessary for examining the engagement of participants in political decision-making. Vasiliauskas’s contribution is convincing where it shows that “seemingly minor procedural traditions” (p. 85) could not be overcome even by powerful magnates and that a “symbolic breach of the established order was perceived as an encroachment upon the status of the local community” (p. 85). These symbolic forms lay at the heart of the creation and representation of early modern political order. Furthermore, this perspective on symbolic communication opens promising avenues for future research on the functioning of politics in early modern Poland-Lithuania.

In the final contribution of this section, “Civic Resilience and Cohesion in the Face of Muscovite Occupation,” Barbara M. Pendzich examines the resistance of towns (SÅuck and Stary BychÅ³w) against the invasion in the wake of the Northern War in the 1650s. She examines the prosperity and confessional plurality of the towns in the eastern part of Poland-Lithuania well into the seventeenth century. Pendzich concludes that successful resistance was based on “a way of life” of townsmen who “were free citizens ... who participated in the self-rule and representative institutions of their civil society” (p. 105). They fought Muscovy so fiercely because they feared autocratic rule and the limitation of their traditional rights as guaranteed in the Third Lithuanian Statute, the Union of Lublin, and Magdeburg law.

The second section of the book, “The Commonwealth of Many Nations and Faiths,” collects a number of essays on the negotiation of confessions and religions in a multinational state. It opens with Gershon David Hundert’s contribution, “Identity Formation in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.” He concentrates on the role of Jews in the eighteenth century and the ways in which Poland-Lithuania shifted from a political to an ethnic notion of the nation. He examines the relation between the church and Jews, which was particularly affected by Christian mission efforts, in this case those of Bishop Franciszek Antoni Kobielski, who addressed an increasingly influential and important Jewish urban citizenry. Hundert doubts that these campaigns had any

great success. He therefore proposes an interpretation of the literature and sermons as a “form of public, symbolic, theological apologetic” (p. 146) that addressed a mostly Catholic audience to bridge the gap between “theological principal and historical reality” (p. 147). The “gap” was the prosperity of Jewish communities despite their condemnation by God.

In her contribution, “Khmelnysky’s Shadow: The Confessional Legacy,” Barbara Skinner shows how the Cossack uprising of 1648 influenced the uprising of 1768. She convincingly demonstrates that religious and political loyalties were connected in the events of the seventeenth century. She emphasizes the crucial role the Muscovite state played in the internal politics of Poland-Lithuania due to territorial acquisitions after the Peace of Andruszowo of 1667 and the Cossack-Muscovite alliance. She argues that “the long view of Polish-Lithuanian confessional history shows the bridge from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century to be one of an increasingly rigid confessional identity, of diminished respect for non-Catholic confessions, at times overlapping with strident xenophobia” (p. 159). The Muscovite influence as protector of Orthodox Ruthenians in Poland-Lithuania is identified as a main factor that led to the partitions of Poland. Skinner ends with a plea for a long-term perspective that takes into account more strongly not only internal weaknesses but also external factors in any explanation of the eventual demise of the Polish-Lithuanian state.

In one of the most instructive contributions of the volume, “Commonwealth of All Faiths: Republican Myth and the Italian Diaspora in Sixteenth-Century Poland-Lithuania,” Joanna KostyÅo shows how Italian, particularly Venetian republican political thought, was transferred to Poland via anti-Trinitarian and Anabaptist exiles in the sixteenth century. This thought shaped political programs, led to the introduction of new constitutional elements, gave rise to the peace between the confessions in the interregnum 1572/73, and influenced the underlying notions of political order of the *rokosz* in 1606 and beyond. These exiles introduced a pronounced Protestant, sacralized idea of political order into Polish political discourse. In the sixteenth century, “the myth of Venice as an Ideal Republic became an important ideological reference point and a potent symbol in the political culture of early modern Poland” (p. 176). KostyÅo opens up an important, frequently neglected perspective on notions of political order in early modern Poland by asking where political languages come from. Understanding their textual and educational foundations is necessary for contextualizing them in ways that allow us to proceed

beyond generalizations and anachronistic notions of republicanism.

The third section, “Notions of Citizenship: The European Dimension,” attempts to put Poland-Lithuania in broader context. It opens with a contribution by James B. Collins, “‘County Republicans’ and the Concept of Active Citizenship in Sixteenth-Century Poland and France.” His comparative discussion, which juxtaposes Poland-Lithuanian with the absolutist model of France, convincingly calls into question dominant views about Polish exceptionalism in European history. He moves beyond ideal types and generalizations to look at constitutional reality beyond the rhetoric. Collins concludes that “contrary to historiographical myth, western Europe was as familiar with the principle of consensus as were the Poles” (p. 212). Although hardly new, this fact is still not recognized in much of the historiography on early modern Poland-Lithuania. He also concludes that “sixteenth-century French county republicans ... had a political programme that scarcely differed from that of the Polish *szlachta*” (p. 217). Furthermore, he makes translation and “ambiguities about the relationship of vocabulary and practice” an issue (p. 227). He raises—like KostyÅo—the question of the origins of concepts that describe the political order and their transformation in translation from Latin to the vernacular. He examines this problem via the example of Jean Bodin, which reveals how concepts like state and sovereignty as conceived in the second half of the sixteenth century and inserted into political discourse around 1600 merged with older concepts of commonwealth and republic. He thus warns of “the danger of loose modern translations” (p. 216) and emphasizes the importance of the textual foundation in research.

The authors of the last two essays try to demonstrate how Polish

models influenced Great Britain and attempt to use categories of English

political thought to examine Poland. In “The Hidden Commonwealth: Poland-Lithuania and Scottish Political Discourse in the Seventeenth Century,” Allan Macinnes demonstrates how Scottish thought on commonwealth (versus monarchy) in discussion of the English union was informed by Polish discussion of the right of resistance, as embodied most prominently in the institution of the *rokosz*. The volume closes with a rather erratic contribution by Krzysztof Åazarski, entitled “Freedom, State, and ‘National Unity’ in Lord Acton’s Thought.” In it, Åazarski tries to apply Acton’s categories of “national liberty” and “national unity” to examine early modern Poland-Lithuania and its place in the history of freedom

and western civilization. The essay concludes that “national unity” in Lord Acton’s sense is a “retrograde stage in history” and “therefore even more dangerous and evil than socialism” (p. 276).

The overall impression the contributions in this volume leave is mixed. Some—especially those of Friedrich, Vasiliauskas, Skinner, KostyÅo and Collins—put forward convincing arguments and touch on important points for further research like political practice and procedures, employment and transformation of political languages, the connection of politics and religion, and comparative perspectives. These approaches help to connect the historiography of early modern Poland-Lithuania with international debates and thus can overcome the still strong isolation of Polish historiography from that of western Europe. In contrast, the contributions that mostly gather details to examine them under the lens of the terminology of active citizenship do not move beyond the conclusions that remain value judgments: that the Lithuanian nobility was politically as mature as the Polish, or that the defense of SÅuck and Stary BychÅ³w was as heroic as that of CzÅstochowa.

Taken altogether, the cases discussed here that do demonstrate an extraordinary level of active citizenship, moreover, seem to follow patterns of behavior that were common in estate societies. Defense of liberties, rights, and privileges was the day-to-day business of people who did not want to lose their status and thereby their legal position. They defined their status not only legally (following written law) but just as importantly *in actu*. Symbolic communication and performative actions were important because of the lack of equality before the law—people had to fight to uphold their positions across every level of society. Recognizing these structural factors

in early modern life is not sufficient to assert the existence of an entire political culture of active citizenship, or even a premodern civil society, in Poland-Lithuania. Thus the conceptual framework of the collection, with its highly normative implications, raises problems that are hardly engaged in these contributions. In line with recent scholarship on early modern modes of authority, anachronisms derived from descriptions of centralized nation-states and stereotypes about absolutist tendencies in early modern times are rejected in most contributions. But the essays fail to ask whether terms such as “civil society,” “participatory political culture,” and “active citizenship” are not equally anachronistic. This conceptual framework leads to a blurring of fundamental differences between modern and premodern characteristics of authority and the relationship between rulers and subjects. The volume does not reveal new insights as to how the factors it treats—transformation of notions of natural law, the appreciation of the individual and his development, and the depreciation of corporative privileges, the discussion of religious toleration and their contribution to modern constitutions and constitutional models—are connected. Revealing these connections and transformations, and their disruptions, seems to be the decisive task when one talks about historical contributions to a civil society.

Despite these criticisms, the volume lives up to its self-declared historiographical aims. Its purpose was not to offer a new interpretation of the Polish monarchy, but rather to investigate the relationship between power and the practical role of citizens. Here it discloses interesting and valuable information. Additionally, an index, a glossary, and an extensive bibliography, listing printed sources and secondary works, make this volume useful and accessible.

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