Giovanna Siedina, ed.

Latinitas in the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Its Impact on the Development of Identities. Biblioteca di Studi Slavistici 25. Florence: Firenze

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As we read in the foreword to this essay collection, it was “both an honour and a duty” for Italy, “the country that has always preserved and promoted the legacy of classical antiquity in Europe and throughout the world,” to hold the first-ever gathering (Florence, August 2013) of scholars from Poland and Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, to discuss the “impact of [*Latinitas*] on the development of identities in the lands of the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania” (7). The basic proposition seems at first glance somewhat defensive. Assuming there never has been such a gathering, is there a need to be reminded what all European cultures, at a variety of levels—language, grammar, rhetoric, literature, historiography, law, “patterns of culture and mentality”—owe to Roman (and Florentine, and so on) models; or to be reminded that the early modern Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, with the modern nation states that have grown out of it—Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine—was just as much a part of the Europe of Humanism, Renaissance, Reformation, Counter-Reformation, Enlightenment as were the centers and the other peripheries? This continued insistence on the obvious seems, at first glance, unnecessary by now. It seems a reaction to a habit of especially North American, but also some Western European academic centers, to draw their mental maps of early modern European culture according to Cold War boundaries: early modern Europe ended at the same limit where, until 1989, Warsaw-Pact border guards in green drab uniforms with lethal looking weapons welcomed you to their country. One would think that the claim—especially strong (if at times simply implicit) in Polish scholarship, even during the Communist period—that this huge historical polity and its peoples had been an integral part of humanistic Europe had finally been vindicated, and that the call for the “return to Europe,” already a bit repetitive, need no longer be raised.

And yet, old ways of thinking die hard, especially in the drawing of institutional boundaries in North American and West European academe. In that sense, a book on *latinitas* in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth remains central to the discussion, and an impetus for rethinking. This book is of further interest in that it links active participation in *latinitas* to the creation of various sorts of early modern identities—from the most personal and local; to larger polities that were part of, or would develop out of, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; to claims to membership in a supranational cultural community.

A foreword by Marcello Granite leads into a helpful *précis* of the general topic and the individual papers by the volume's editor, Giovanna Siedina.

There follow nine articles by scholars from today's Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine, covering a wide range of topics pertaining to the formation of identities in the old Commonwealth, all in good English, and each with an English summary and a useful bibliography.

Žanna Nekraševič-Karotkaja emphasizes that, in a world of the growing use of the “vulgar tongue” (here, mostly Polish) for higher literary purposes, the reservation of Latin for the epic genre could be a carrier of aspects of a larger local identity. Jakub Niedźwiedź focuses on eight epic poems (both Polish and Latin) written in the early and later sixteenth century, and their re-use of the *Aeneid* in creating “myth-like narratives” that served to: 1) locate Lithuania in Europe; 2) describe its geography and 3) history; 4) represent the inhabitants' own sense of identity; and 5) provide a definition of a homeland. Alexandra Osipian offers an account of Lviv burgher Józef Bartłomiej Zimorowic's puzzling use of Tacitus in a complex recreation of his city's collective genealogy in *Leopolis tTriplex* (written 1665–1672, first published in Lviv, 1899), a work surely now deserving of further investigation.

Aleksander Wojciech Mikołajczyk examines how an *aemulatio* (rather than *imitatio*) *antiquorum*, (in other words, a creative new work based on old models, rather than an attempt to rewrite a classic for new times) in the Polish-Latin poetry of the Renaissance and the Baroque established a Polish literature that was both “Western” and “uniquely” Polish. Piotr Urbański revisits the work of the undisputed leader of Jesuit neo-Latin poetry in Poland—Lithuania—Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (1595–1640)—and comes to the conclusion that the author's own goal was to achieve the status of a *Horatius Christianus* (in other words, a pan-European identity), and not that of a more local *Horatius Sarmaticus* (i.e., “the Polish Horace”).

One of the longer and more significant articles in the collection is that by its editor, Giovanna Siedina, who undertook a detailed and fascinating examination of the “teaching of lyric meters and the reception of Horace (99)” in the courses in poetics at the Kyiv-Mohilanian Academy, which would shape poetic sensibilities from Ukraine to Petersburg (suffice it to mention Feofan Prokopovič) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. What is missing for me, here, is a focus on how these exercises forged “a distinct Ukrainian cultural and national identity (126).”

Valentyna Myronova examines the creation of a local variant of chancery Latin in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century southwestern Ukraine. Sigita Narbutas reexamines the myth of the Roman origins of the Lithuanian nation.

All collections of this sort hold together only more or less. The final article by Dainora Pociūtė makes the least obvious fit with the collection as a whole, but it is one of the more interesting. It is devoted to Abraomas Kulvietis (Abraham Culvensis, Abraham Kulwieć, 1509–1545), a man about whom we know so little, and yet who figured so crucially in the first stages of the intro-

duction of the Reformation to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; more intriguing is his role in the early, most optimistic stages in the plans of Albrecht, duke of Prussia, to use his newly founded Lutheran university (the “Albertina”) and its professors to propagate the Reformation among the neighboring Baltic and Slavic peoples, in their “vulgar tongues.” It is a story that receives far too little attention in the national historiographies, perhaps because of its Lutheranism, perhaps because of the German origin of the larger program.

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