Paul Srodecki, *Antemurale Christianitatis: Zur Genese der Bollwerksrhetorik im östlichen Mitteleuropa an der Schwelle vom Mittelalter zur Frühen Neuzeit* (Ser.: *Historische Studien*, Bd. 508), Husum: Matthiesen Verlag. 2015. 532 p. ISBN 978-3-7868-1508-2

This monograph represents the first comprehensive treatment of the Bulwark of Christendom rhetorical device used so extensively during the Middle Ages and Early Modern times in order to face down the ‘other’ for the sake of your own *raison d’être*. So far, this phenomenon has been known largely from its individual incarnations from country to country, while its transnational ghost was hovering in the air waiting for someone to pin it down. Paul Srodecki has done this. Starting as a doctoral thesis, it grew to become a detailed and thoroughly documented study that offers a panoramic view of East Central Europe through the lens of the Bulwark ideology. The phenomenon spread across Europe, but it was especially prominent in countries of Medieval and Early Modern Christendom that bordered on other cultural areas, either Muslim or Greek Orthodox lands (pp. 14–15). Along with the Iberian Peninsula, Austria, Venice and Croatia, three other Catholic polities stand out: the Teutonic *Ordensstaat* in Prussia and Livonia, Poland, and Hungary, and they have won the most attention from the author. A special point of interest is presented by the Romanian principalities of Walachia and Moldavia that from the 14th century onwards found themselves placed precariously between their Catholic neighbours (Hungary and Poland) and the Ottomans. Notwithstanding their Greek Orthodoxy, in the second half of the 15th century these countries adopted much the same tenets of the Bulwark ideology vis-à-vis the expanding Ottomans as their Roman Catholic counterparts had. This phenomenon may be viewed as one more argument in favour of the thesis that after the fall of Byzantium in 1453 ‘crusading can be regarded, for the first time in its history, as an inclusively Christian activity rather than exclusively Catholic one.’¹

It is virtually impossible nowadays to find a topic that has not already been broached by colleagues in the field. The ever-rising tide of subject-matter literature makes it rather difficult even for a professional researcher to keep pace with what is being done in the dozen countries falling within the remit of your topic. It is no wonder that the list of primary and secondary sources extending over 129 pages speaks for

¹ N. Housley, *Crusading and the Ottoman Threat, 1453–1505* (Oxford, 2013) p. 2.

itself, to the effect that Srodecki has accomplished a great job in mastering a staggering number of sources, contributions, articles and books related in one way or another to this quite specific theme. For one, this book serves very well as a comprehensive reference work, even when a number of recent studies closely related to the self-perception and the 'other' may be adduced.² He is right in stressing the fact that there is a shortage of studies devoted to a narrative analysis of the discourse on the Shield or Bulwark of Christendom, and to the issue of which agents and channels for its dissemination all across Europe were most active (pp. 15–18). By making his own contribution to the narrative turn in the humanities, he has largely filled the gap. However, in view of the detailed description of the origin of the *Antemurale* (pp. 31–39), less attention is given to the *Christianitas* expounded today in a variety of ways from Rome-oriented Christendom to more recent micro-Christendoms, to Early Medieval Christianities, to Europe's House Divided, and so on.³ Using rigid scholarly analysis, the author has succeeded in demonstrating how significant this ideological weapon was at one time or another, in one and the same country, in East-Central Europe as a whole, and even across the Continent. How avidly it was used by the Hungarian ruler Matthias I 'Corvinus' Hunyadi (1458–1490) demonstrates in vivid detail the ways Late Medieval politics were conducted (pp. 210–216). Hunyadi was adept

² For example, M. Wüst, *Studien zum Selbstverständnis des Deutschen Ordens im Mittelalter* (Weimar, 2013), S. 113–118, 138, 270. W. Świeboda, *Innowiercy w opiniach prawnych uczonych polskich w XV wieku: Paganie, Żydzi, Muzułmanie* (Cracow, 2013), pp. 221–239. I have encountered just a few passing remarks that may be regarded as somewhat out of step with contemporary research. After the study by Tomasz Jasinski, the Rimini bull of Emperor Friedrich II should be dated to 1235 (not to the fake date of 1226, p. 64): T. Jasiński, *Kruschwitz, Rimini und die Grundlagen des preussischen Ordenslandes: Urkundenstudien zur Frühzeit des Deutschen Ordens im Ostseeraum (Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens, 63)*, (Marburg, 2008), esp. pp. 117–124, 129–130. A reader far away from Byzantine studies may take for granted that in the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Turkish cannons played the decisive role (p. 305). That was not the case, and more prominence has been attributed to traditional siege methods and contingency: M. Philippides, W.K. Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople in 1453: Historiography, Topography, and Military Studies* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 567–568. As far as the idea of Moscow as the 'Third Rome' is concerned, cf. Srodecki, *Antemurale*, p. 241; D. B. Rowland, 'The Third Rome or the New Israel', in: *Russian Review*, 1996, vol. 55, No 4, pp. 591–614.

³ Cf. C. Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity* (London, 1932); P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000* (New York, 2013, 3rd edition); *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 3: *Early Medieval Christianities, c. 600–c. 1000*, ed. T.F.X. Noble, J.M.H. Smith (Cambridge, 2008); D. MacCulloch, *The Reformation: Europe's House Divided* (London, 2003).

at using the rhetoric of defence of the faith on virtually every front of his realm, in confronting every sort of enemy, be they Muslim, or Roman or Greek Christian. Even if he was unusually skilled at this game, he was by no means the only one. Another good instance is provided by the Teutonic Order, who justified the occupation of Polish Pomerania by the need to defend the Christian faith, let alone its fight against the pagans in the Baltic area (p. 106). Therefore, a continuous thread running through the book can be seen in the affirmation of *polyvalence* of the Bulwark ideology (pp. 85–86, 92, 121, 238–239, 240, 250). The origins of this multi-purpose ideological weapon may well be traced to the Crusades of the High Middle Ages (pp. 66–67), with precedents lying even deeper. Srodecki has proven especially successful in tracing back and forth the producers and brokers of this ideological weaponry: the royal courts with their literate staff, Italian humanists, Popes, Jesuits, and the printing presses. Having given ample attention to early publications, tracts and one-page flyers, Srodecki was able not only to present a fully fledged picture, but also to establish the long-term impact of authors such as Pope Pius II (p. 159), and the Polish diplomats Jan Ostrorog (p. 238) and Nicholas Rozembarski (p. 248). The *topoi* of the defence of the Christian faith were thriving well into the 18th century (pp. 147, 252).

What about Lithuania? This country, its rulers and inhabitants do appear here and there in the book, mostly in close relation to Poland. This state of affairs is predicated on the fact that in their confrontation with the Teutonic Order, the Lithuanians acted almost always (at least up to the Treaty of Melno of 1422) in tandem with the Poles, who, being able to boast of *litterati* in their ranks, left far more sources than their Lithuanian allies. On the other hand, the issue of Lithuania's adoption of the topic of the defence of the Christian faith has not been sufficiently clarified to date. In essence, there is still only the one article by S.C. Rowell dealing specifically with the issue of the Bulwark ideology in relation to Lithuania.⁴ The example of King Jogaila, who was styled as absolutely devoted to the propagation of the faith (p. 138), is interesting, in my opinion, as laying the foundations for the Jagiellonian claim to act and to be seen as acting on behalf of Christianity in general (p. 239). Srodecki gives due weight to Sigismund of Luxemburg's good offices in describing Lithuania as one more 'Shield of Christianity', in an attempt to disassociate it from the close union with Poland by upgrading it to the status of a kingdom. This seems to be the first-known instance when Lithuania as a country was presented in this capacity (p. 102). As the related attempts to gain royal status for her ruler ultimately failed (1429–1430), the adoption of this particular topic, as of the crusading spirit in general, also seems to have lagged for a number

⁴ S.C. Rowell, 'Lietuva – krikščionybės pylimas? Vienos XV a. ideologijos pasisavinimas', in: *Europos idėja Lietuvoje: Istorija ir dabartis*, ed. D. Staliūnas (Vilnius, 2002), pp. 17–32.

of decades to come. Only the late 15th and early 16th centuries saw the revival of this spirit, and Lithuania, along with other Jagiellonian lands, came to be described again as a *Vorpost* of Christianity in general, and the Bulwark of Germania in particular (pp. 250, 261). In general terms, such particular instances coincide with the raising of the temperature of the crusading spirit in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; however, a more reliable picture of this interplay still needs to be reconstructed. This is just one example among many, many others, showing what use can be made of Srodecki's work. It certainly provides strong evidence for the continued popularity of crusading long after the golden age of the Crusades was over. To tell the truth, the title of this monograph does not reflect faithfully all the wealth contained between the covers. There are a number of things that may be of interest to the Medieval historian specialising in the High Middle Ages, or even the Early Middle Ages. There is even more of interest to the historian of modern times. Srodecki has built a bridge from Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe to the Europe of our times, by showing how the idea of the Bulwark of Christendom was nationalised, to become the Bulwark of Europe in the 16th to 18th centuries, and to find its ultimate incarnation in the idea of 'fortress Europe' that reverberates to this day.

The risks inherent in writing a book covering many centuries and many countries are obvious to everyone. In summary, Paul Srodecki emerges victorious against all the slings and arrows that might be aimed at his 500-page-strong fortress. Special points to be repeated are: 1) the comprehensiveness of the treatment of the subject matter, demonstrating the rise, spread and reception of the Bulwark ideology across East-Central Europe and further afield; 2) the transnational sweep doing justice to Late Medieval and Early Modern modes of communication on a Europe-wide scale; 3) the many political uses to which one and the same topic can be put: cry for help, increase in prestige, going over to attack, heroic stand-ups, and unscrupulous *Realpolitik*. We might say all shades and colours of human beings as political animals. Last but not least, the book is written in German prose that is both precise and amusing to read, even for a non-native German speaker.

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