

**Danilo Facca, Valentina Lepri, 2013. *Polish culture in the Renaissance. Studies in the arts, humanism and political thought*. Firenze University Press: Firenze. pp. 140.**

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Conceived as an introduction to the complex and specific experience of the Polish Renaissance, *Polish culture in the Renaissance: Studies in the arts, humanism and political thought* gathers seven papers which were presented over the course of the Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America held in San Diego in 2013. The aim of the editors was to give not only scholars interested in Humanism, but also general readers, a survey of different aspects of the Renaissance phenomenon in Poland, touching on a variety of subjects from the original reception of Western cultural models in art, literature and philosophy, reaching towards the debate on the modern idea of Europe and its Eastern borders. The compilers by no means secondary aim was also to support the interpretation of local variations of the Renaissance, attempting to deliver its diverse cultural aspects from the nowadays widespread italo-centric vision.

The coexistence of multiple artistic styles in the diversified Polish territory is clearly described in the opening article by Robin Craren, which is devoted to the development of Cracow, the capital and main commercial and cultural hub of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Gothic influences, hailing from bordering Germany, blend with the new Classicistic shapes of Italian making, that proliferated in and developed from the 16<sup>th</sup> century under the reign of Sigismund I Jagiellon. Yet Renaissance influences never entirely replaced previous Gothic models: this is evident in the cathedral and castle on the Wawel Hill, the seat of the political and religious powers of the city.

In the second paper Maria Kozłowska illustrates, by means of a comparative analysis of the work *Lingua* by Erasmus of Rotterdam and its Polish translation, the divulgative strategy of an editor and the quick ascent of the invention of the printing press in Poland from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. In the translation of the Erasmian treatise one can trace the intent of popularisation of a work intended for general local readers, simplified in style and enhanced with explanatory notes.

Charles Keenan's exposition concerning religious tolerance deals with a pivotal point in the political and social configuration of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Confederation of Warsaw, stipulated in 1573, was to guarantee religious peace in the kingdom – where different confessions were represented – with the purpose of avoiding violence excesses; nevertheless it also led to opposition from the Catholic Church, which saw in it a serious threat to its commitment to arresting the spread of Protestantism. The Confederation was indeed opposed for a long time, but Polish kings generally accepted its articles, to assure themselves the consent of member electors (among whom many were of Protestant confession) for their election to the throne.

Related to the old question of the Eastern borders of Europe, Katharina Piechocki's article examines the work *Tractatus de Duabus Sarmatiis* (1517) by geographer Maciej Miechowita, which outlines the historical implications of the term "Sarmatia", starting from Ptolomy's *Geography* up until Humanists' interpretations. Miechowita brightly grasps through his terminological study a progressive shift towards the East of a portion of territory that was called Sarmatia in the ancient times. This focus is a result of the conquests by the Polish Armies and thus can be described as a *translatio imperii*, which can be symmetrically compared to the contemporary military expansion to the West promoted by Portugal.

The special geographical and political position of Poland can easily explain the success of Niccolò Machiavelli's works within its borders: Valentina Lepri takes into consideration 16<sup>th</sup> century diplomat Krzysztof Warszewicki and his *De legato legationeque* (1595), a book that was addressed to ambassadors. The author, in describing the qualities of a good ambassador, reassesses and adjusts machiavellian values according to the current political situation, providing additional reflections by Italian Humanists, like Poggio Bracciolini and Coluccio Salutati. For instance, Warszewicki confers a slightly different role to religion, which he considers not only as an instrument of power, but also as a source of unity and motivation for one nation against a common enemy (the Turks).

In a similar way other works from the same period can be considered adaptations, like *Dworzanin polski (The Polish Courtier)* (1566) by Łukasz Górnicki – free translation

of Castiglione's *Cortegiano* – and *De optimo senatore* (1568) by Wawrzyniec Goślicki, as we read in Marta Wojtkowska-Maksymik's paper. Both treatises show the purpose of training perfect courtiers and senators just as their original Italian models, nonetheless their authors do not ignore the different political system in which they operate and, moreover, they reveal a deep influence of Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas, which are filtered by Marsilio Ficino's thought.

The volume is closed by Danilo Facca, who presents two intriguing, as well as oppositional, exponents of the Humanistic Aristotelian reflection. In the Polish *res publica*, where to some extent the political principle of the so called "mixed government" was realised, the interest in Aristotle's practical wisdom (Ethics and Politics) was understandably remarkable. Among the different interpretations it could assume, it is interesting to examine the positions of Bartholomaeus Keckermann, native of Gdańsk and belonging to the mercantile middle class of the Protestant tradition; and Sebastian Petrycy, court gentleman of Catholic faith. The former asserts – along with Aristotle – in his work *Systema disciplinae politicae* (1606) that *polis* should encourage "dianoetic virtues", i.e. science and not religious cult, to promote citizens' intellectual advancement and to prevent tyranny. On the other hand, Petrycy's translations show a more pedagogic and moralising approach to Aristotelian practical philosophy: he makes an appeal for the preservation of the mixed government and the virtue of *prudentia*, to restrain the passions and the anarchic urges of the soul (of which he often accused the *szlachta*, viz. minor nobility).

As one can plainly see from this overview, the book does not offer a general or a systematic guide to the Polish Renaissance, papers indeed go into detail regarding very specific topics, which are not often related to each other. Even so, the survey in its heterogeneity may arouse interest among wide ranges of specialists in the field of Renaissance studies and certainly be an authoritative source for the debate on the reception of classical models in Europe's borderlands.