

Zitierhinweis

Merchant, John: review of: Adam Kucharski, Placing Poland at the Heart of Irishness. Irish Political Elites in Relation to Poland and the Poles in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020, in: Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung (ZfO), 73 (2024), 1, p. 178-179, <https://recensio-stag.lorax.syslab.com/r/caeed9fd20104f84b6f0c504eae9d281>



copyright

Dieser Beitrag kann vom Nutzer zu eigenen nicht-kommerziellen Zwecken heruntergeladen und/oder ausgedruckt werden. Darüber hinausgehende Nutzungen sind ohne weitere Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber nur im Rahmen der gesetzlichen Schrankenbestimmungen (§§ 44a-63a UrhG) zulässig.

codices (*Toroczkai*, *Árkosi*, and *Kalocsai*). She no longer refers to the manuscript known as the “Toroczkai codex” as such, because the Unitarian bishop Máté Toroczkai was, in fact, only one of its owners. Ú.-N. thinks that part of the manuscript was written instead by András Eőssi, one of the first significant thinkers of Sabbatarianism. Also important is her rejection of the claim that Sabbatism spread along the lines of some kind of Transylvanian social movement based on Old Testament ideals of equality. This thesis has been advanced by Róbert Dán, a researcher of undisputed authority on the issue, and accepted by many scholars around the world.

Ú.-N. also reflects on deeper theological questions, searching for traces of Transylvanian Unitarian theology and the influence of Matthias Vehe Glirius in the Sabbatarian sources. The basis of their theological research was the whole text of the Christian Bible, the rabbinic oral tradition of the Old Testament, and questions of Jewish exegesis. The Sabbatarians applied this mixed method of analysis also to the New Testament, their explanations, for example, regarding the divinity of Jesus are more radical (negativist) than those of the Unitarians.

In the end, it is not the author who answers the question of whether it is possible to be a Christian and a Jew at the same time in a religious sense, or whether the choice between the two is inevitable and necessary, but the story of the Sabbatarians itself. In any case, the Sabbatarians of Transylvania tried to be “open-eyed” Jews and “true” Christians at the same time.

Budapest—Sárospatak

István Monok

Adam Kucharski: Placing Poland at the Heart of Irishness. Irish Political Elites in Relation to Poland and the Poles in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century. (Polish Studies – Transdisciplinary Perspectives, Bd. 29.) Peter Lang. Berlin u. a. 2020. 274 S., Ill., Kt. ISBN 978-3-631-81817-6. (€ 59,95.)

In order for a field of studies to be accepted as legitimate or viable there first needs to exist a collective body of scholarly work that elevates it above that of a niche interest or passing trend. The work under review is the latest in what can be now called without exaggeration a sustained field of academic inquiry into Polish-Irish relations, enhancing the work of scholars such as Katarzyna Gmerek, Róisín Healy, and the authors of another Peter Lang publication published a decade ago, *Polish-Irish Encounters in the Old and New Europe*.

Adam Kucharski's book is a welcome addition to this burgeoning field, which only continues to grow as the ties between Poland and Ireland deepen. The title is somewhat provocative as it suggests an argument for Poland or the Polish Question as being at the “heart” of Irishness in the nineteenth century. By tracing the evolution of the attitudes of Irish elites toward Poland and the Poles from 1772–1849, however, K. makes a compelling case for the justness of the title. Importantly, this is a determination that grows out of one of the core strengths of his book, which is allowing Irish elites to speak for themselves. While it can be a commonplace to perceive parallels between these two historically oppressed countries, it is quite another thing to provide documentary evidence explaining how this notion originated, the methods by which connections were made, the ways in which it resonated in the historical and political context, and the subtle means by which it evolved over time. Drawing heavily on a substantial body of evidence gleaned from a wide range of sources in the contemporary Irish press, letters from Irish and Polish elites, diary entries, poems, debates and speeches, K. provides the necessary evidence to make a convincing case for this period being a foundational one in Polish-Irish relations.

The book is divided into four separate chapters, each of which traces a portion of the evolution of the attitudes of Irish elites toward Poland from 1772 to 1849. Chapter 1 starts at the beginning, which in the Polish-Irish case is the intersection between the events surrounding the successive partitions of Poland and the Act of Union in Ireland at the end

of the eighteenth century. The case Kucharski presents is remarkable not only for the sense of the scope of Irish interest in Polish affairs that emerges during this period but also the speed with which it reaches Irish readers. Whether it is the reactions of Irish elites such as Edmund Burke to the different partitions, the efforts of Polish reformers to address Poland's problems by passing the May 3rd Constitution of 1791, or the Kościuszko Uprising of 1794, interest in Polish affairs in the Irish press occurred more or less in real time. In addition to bringing Poland to the consciousness of Irish readers, it is clear even at this early stage that Irish interest in Poland and the Poles is filtered through the lens of Irish interests. Wolfe Tone, for instance, plays a "critical role" in making the Polish "parallel a 'tenet' of Irish nationalism" (p. 69). K. then extends the sense of national affinity established between the Poles and the Irish during this initial period through the Napoleonic era, the Congress of Vienna, and the formation of the Kingdom of Poland. Significantly, Chapter 1 ends with a coming together of two seminal events in Polish-Irish relations, the passage of Catholic Emancipation in 1829 and the November Uprising of 1830. Not surprisingly, both the Irish and the Polish struggle would find its spokesman and a defender in the figure of Daniel O'Connell who "was instrumental in his interpretation of Polish history" (p. 77), particularly as it could be applied to and exploited by Irish interests.

As important as this foundational period is to Polish-Irish relations, K. makes clear in Chapters 2 and 3 that it is in the first half of the nineteenth century that Irish interest in Poland and the Poles really takes root. It was in this period, during and after 1830, that the "subject of Poland became almost unmissable during contemporary Irish political gatherings" (p. 127). Given the proximity of Catholic Emancipation and the Polish revolution, it is understandable that the Poles "provided an incentive for the Irish to look at their own situation from a new perspective" (p. 146), but it is equally telling that this incentive was not interpreted uniformly by Irish elites. Chapter 3 makes a case for how the Polish Question after 1830 was entangled in the Irish national cause, allowing the Polish experience to emerge as a "useful tool" in the burgeoning Irish struggle. Thanks to the extraordinary nature of the Great Emigration, which scattered Poles of all political stripes across the European continent by the tens of thousands after 1830, Polish and Irish elites found themselves with a unique opportunity to support one another's causes. Faced with a lack of real geopolitical standing and an uphill battle in gaining international attention, especially the English public, "Irish and Polish political elites needed one another for their own political gains" (p. 189). The ties established between Irish and Polish political, literary, religious, and social actors with wide ranging agendas, both radical and conservative, ensured that the Polish cause remained visible in the Irish and English press if not also in parliament.

Chapter 4 further details the way that the popularity of the Polish cause in the minds of the Irish and English public served as a handy tool for Irish elites to underscore their own cause, whether that be the Repeal movement, the suffering of the Irish during the Famine, religious freedom, or revolutionary nationalism. Despite their many differences, the Polish Question oddly served as a unifying factor for Irish elites, for they were "undivided when it came to Polish matters" even if the complexity of Anglo-Irish relations tended to divide them (p. 190).

K.'s book is a welcome addition to the growing list of series studies aimed at examining the Polish-Irish relationship. It devotes considerable space to summaries of Irish and Polish historical events, but this may be necessary for readers lacking knowledge in either area. Especially valuable is the inclusion of two annexes featuring letters and documents illustrating episodes of Irish-Polish relations and an assortment of poetry, songs, and other literary texts regarding Poland in the Irish press. Such materials are either inaccessible in English or generally hard to find, yet they are valuable primary documents that serve to reinforce the point of K.'s larger argument of how Poland evolved from a "distant, nearly exotic country" in the minds of Irish elites to an integral part in "the process of shaping modern Irish nationalism" (p. 269).