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### Pietrzyk-Reeves, Dorota. Polish Republican Discourse in the Sixteenth Century. Trans. Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa

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of Reformation-era developments and that has a chance to bring its history to a wider audience.

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**Pietrzyk-Reeves, Dorota.**

***Polish Republican Discourse in the Sixteenth Century.* Trans. Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa.**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. vii, 268. ISBN 978- 1-1084-9323-9 (hardcover) \$114.95.

The history of political thought in Poland-Lithuania has lately been garnering attention in Anglo-American historical study with a stream of important English-language monographs by Benedict Wagner-Rundell, Curtis G. Murphy, Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, Felicia Rosu, and Robert Frost, all published in the last five years—not an insignificant accomplishment for a field that is still often seen as peripheral. Dorota Pietrzyk-Reeves's *Polish Republican Discourse in the Sixteenth Century* is the most recent addition to this body of literature, one that aims to provide the first comprehensive analysis in English of republican thought in Old Poland. Both a synthesis and an original contribution, the book is simultaneously attentive to local contexts and comparative in scope, setting Polish republicanism against European counterparts to determine its distinct dynamics and specificities.

Pietrzyk-Reeves does a good job outlining the basic components of Polish republicanism, reminding the reader that what is discussed is not the modern anti-monarchical concept of government but an early modern theory of the *libera res publica*, a free, well-ordered commonwealth. To this end, she surveys the thought of key political theorists of Old Poland who drew on classical and modern models to frame their kingdom as a physical manifestation of *rzeczpospolita* (the Polish translation of *res publica*), a political system embodying the values of liberty and civic virtue. Wawrzyniec Goślicki, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski, Stanisław Orzechowski, Łukasz Górnicki, Krzysztof Warszawicki, Andrzej Wolan, Sebastian Petrycy of Pilzno, and Piotr Skarga

are among the authors whose different variants of the ideal *res publica*, based on the principles of law and justice, self-government, and attainment of the common good, feature at some length in the book. That Skarga, a supporter of strong monarchy, finds himself in the company of authors like Orzechowski, who favoured popular sovereignty, that is, the rule of the gentry, reveals Polish republicanism's attachment to the mixed system of government (*forma mixta*) in which popular, aristocratic, and monarchical elements shared rule over the *res publica*. At the heart of this system was the *Sejm*, Poland's legislative assembly formed by three parliamentary estates: the chamber of envoys (representing the gentry), the senate (representing the lay and ecclesiastical lords), and the king. Since even Skarga, sometimes described as an advocate of absolutism, could not fathom the removal of the other two estates from the constitutional arrangement, he should—as Pietrzyk-Reeves convincingly argues—more appropriately be understood as a republican thinker embedded in the normative order of the *res publica*.

Drawing new conclusions from familiar material is one of the book's greatest strengths. So is its ability to foreground Polish republicanism in its proper early modern context. Influenced by the theories of Aristotle, Polybius, and Cicero, Polish writers maintained a distinction between the *res publica*, a community of free citizens, and the state (Polish *państwo*), an abstract political entity separate from its people and with a legal personality of its own, an idea associated most typically with Jean Bodin. Pietrzyk-Reeves demonstrates that Polish political theorists were interested more in the earlier than the latter as they assumed that proper education and the emendation of manners would prove sufficient enough to maintain the stability of their mixed *rzeczpospolita*. In practice, this excessive trust in the role of civic virtue and moral character, but without state bureaucracy and with no provision in the law to enforce the constitutional order, made it impossible to uphold the *forma mixta*. Polish theorists failed to design proper control mechanisms and institutional checks and balances to secure harmonious coexistence of the three *Sejm* estates, thwarting the preservation of liberty without undermining the mixed system. But although the Polish *res publica* eventually collapsed in the late eighteenth century, it enjoyed free institutions much longer than most other early modern polities. The book offers an overview of ideas that made this political project possible.

*Polish Republican Discourse in the Sixteenth Century* will be read with interest by students and scholars of Poland and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as well as historians of early modern political theory. Although certainly useful and illuminating, it would nonetheless be difficult to determine an ideal audience for this book. Neither an introduction to the subject (because it demands too much prior knowledge on the part of the reader), nor a critical monograph (because it neglects to take a clearly defined stance and follow it through); it falls somewhere between a textbook and a brave attempt to demarcate the field. It is first and foremost a work of history of ideas with few examples of their practical application in the courtroom, classroom, and the *Sejm*. And it takes the eponymous “Polish republican discourse” to the letter as it pays little attention to Lithuanian, Ruthenian, and Prussian perspectives. This is not so much a criticism as an invitation to other scholars to take up the subject where Pietrzyk-Reeves left it off, so as to give us a new perspective on Polish-Lithuanian politics that is transcultural in scope and multidisciplinary in outlook. If only for that reason, *Polish Republican Discourse in the Sixteenth Century* is an invaluable contribution to the study of Old Poland and good value for money for the National Programme for the Development of Humanities, a Polish government body that sponsored the translation from Polish to English. All in all, Pietrzyk-Reeves wrote an important book that offers often surprising and compelling new ways of approaching familiar material, affording important insights and opening up new lines of inquiry into the early modern Polish *res publica*.

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**Pirillo, Paolo, and Lorenzo Tanzini, eds.**

*Terre di confine tra Toscana, Romagna e Umbria. Dinamiche politiche, assetti amministrativi, società locali (secoli XII–XVI).*

Biblioteca storica toscana. Series 1, vol. 80. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2020. Pp. viii, 464 + 4 ill. ISBN 978-8-8222-6730-6 (paperback) €48.

“More than a perimeter, we have to imagine a series of points, tied together by threads more or less resistant, to build a weft of relations with a warp either