

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Ogonowski, Zbigniew. Socinianism: History, Views, Legacy. Introduction by Mario Biagioni. Translated by Marcin Turski

Francesco Quatrini

Volume 46, Number 1, Winter 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1107810ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v46i1.41762>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Quatrini, F. (2023). Review of [Ogonowski, Zbigniew. Socinianism: History, Views, Legacy. Introduction by Mario Biagioni. Translated by Marcin Turski]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 46(1), 292–294. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v46i1.41762>

© Francesco Quatrini, 2023



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Ogonowski, Zbigniew.

***Socinianism: History, Views, Legacy.* Introduction by Mario Biagioni. Translated by Marcin Turski.**

Sociniana 212. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2021. Pp. xxxiv, 492. ISBN 978-8-8935-9632-9 (paperback) €74.

The Unitarian Polish Brethren, better known as Socinians, are certainly one of the religious groups that were most debated in seventeenth-century Europe. This is not surprising. As they denied both Christ's divinity and his sacrifice on the cross, Protestants and Catholics alike did not consider them Christians at all. If one adds that they held dissenting views on politics as well—such as a steadfast non-resistance theory—it becomes clear why Catholics, Lutherans, Reformed, Anglicans, Remonstrants, and many others produced pamphlets and treatises against Socinianism as a theological and political system. Accordingly, the Socinians have received much attention by historiography as well, but perhaps not as much as they would deserve. Zbigniew Ogonowski's *Socinianism: History, Views, Legacy* makes thus a new major contribution that might further boost Socinian studies. This is an English edition of Ogonowski's original Polish book from 2015, translated by Marcin Turski, with an introduction by Mario Biagioni. It offers a compendium of both Ogonowski's extensive research on the Socinians and other studies by Polish scholars, which have not been available to non-Polish readers so far. But this is not the only strength of this edition. As stated by Biagioni, Ogonowski's book is the only comprehensive work on Socinianism in current historiography. Between 1945 and 1952, Earl Morse Wilbur also published two major volumes on the history of Unitarianism, but focusing mostly on the history of the communities and their persecution. Ogonowski not only provides a summary of such a history, but he also offers an overview of their theological and political doctrines, and of their long-lasting influence up to the nineteenth century.

The volume is divided into three parts, preceded by a prelude about the history of the Polish Brethren previous to the arrival of Fausto Socinus (from whom the name "Socinians" is derived). This prelude is useful to fully understand the presence of antitrinitarianism in Poland and Lithuania in the mid-sixteenth century, as well as the contacts between Polish antitrinitarians and Moravian anabaptists. Part one then reconstructs the history of the Socinians from the arrival of Socinus in Poland around 1579 to the Socinian

diaspora in the late 1650s, touching briefly on the lives of third-generation Socinians such as Benedykt Wyszowaty and Samuel Crell. Part two is devoted entirely to the Socinian doctrinal system, examining both their theology and political ideas. On the one hand, Ogonowski provides a clear picture of the Socinian views on the Trinity, Christology, Christ's sacrifice and the doctrine of Christ's satisfaction, their rational approach to the scripture and the ontological elements in their theology; on the other, he addresses the Socinian political ideas, giving special focus to their views on religious tolerance. The treatment of this subject is divided into three chapters, which reveals in detail the development of the Socinian approach to tolerance over time. The last part tackles the reception of Socinian ideas. As might be expected, most of the chapters in part three address the spread of Socinianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but Ogonowski provides information also on echoes of Socinianism in the nineteenth century, touching on intellectuals such as Kant, Otto Fock, and Wilhelm Dilthey. Biagioni's introduction also deserves to be mentioned here, because it further enhances the whole book. Besides providing information on its content, Biagioni skilfully summarizes the state of the art of Socinian studies up to Ogonowski's book.

There is no doubt of the high value of this edition for early modern scholars. However, it should be said that at times Ogonowski is forced to treat some topics quickly, without giving detailed information. This follows the very nature of this book, being a compendium of more than fifty years of Polish studies on the Socinians. Sometimes he also assumes that the view of a certain Socinian was the same as that of the whole group, while there were often internal differences in both theological and political matters, especially between different generations of Socinians. Moreover, while Ogonowski relies largely on Polish studies, references to non-Polish literature is less abundant. For instance, there is no mention of Sarah Mortimer's excellent studies on Socinus's and Crell's approach to the law of nature, and to divine and human justice. Lastly, Ogonowski devotes only a few pages to the socio-political ideas of the Socinians, while spending three chapters on the topic of religious tolerance. This disproportion might appear surprising if one considers that the Socinians debated fiercely with their adversaries and among themselves about warfare and magistracy. But overall, these might be regarded as minor flaws, which do not diminish the value of Ogonowski's volume and the usefulness of this English edition. Indeed, there is no doubt that it constitutes a major source of information on

Socinian history, as well as on early modern debates on theology and politics, useful for anyone wishing to further their knowledge of this fascinating early modern heretical church.

FRANCESCO QUATRINI

University College Dublin

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v46i1.41762>