

## Introduction

*Danilo Facca and Valentina Lepri*

In the course of the 2013 Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America, which was held in San Diego, the attention of those attending was attracted by two panels dealing with the Renaissance in Poland<sup>1</sup>. This was a novelty in the history of the prestigious Conference and, we might even be permitted to suggest, one that was surprisingly late in view of two factors. On the one hand, the undeniable importance of the Renaissance in Poland, well known to scholars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, who are fully cognisant of the fact that the culture of this country must be placed on a par with those of the leading players on the European stage in the period that marked the passage from the Middle Ages to the modern world. On the other hand, there is the extraordinary scope and significance of the Polish tradition of historical studies on the Renaissance: a sector of research which is not only fundamental to the historic knowledge of this country, but also boasts studies and publications of outstanding quality that frequently succeed in garnering just recognition even on the international academic scene.

In our capacity as organisers of the panels, we are therefore delighted to have contributed to giving Polish Renaissance studies this undoubtedly timely official acknowledgement, and arguably of no slight significance considering the presence at the Conference of an international audience of specialists. The papers presented during the session touched aspects that are important, if not crucial, for an understanding of the historic-intellectual dynamics of 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century Poland within the broader European context. Consequently we have asked the contributors to revise their contributions, bearing specifically in mind the viewpoint of the “external” reader. Indeed, such readers need to be introduced to an intellectual universe with specific, and even unique, features which are not easy to relate to those we are accustomed to encounter in the history of closer cultures. This means that we are now able to present the papers from the two Polish panels in an enriched form, substantially revised in line with the conventions of the academic article. Clearly, we make no claims here to offer an exhaustive overview of the cultural and intellectual is-

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<sup>1</sup> The Conference was held from 4 to 6 April 2013. The title of the panels was “The Polish Renaissance: Paths, Books, Ideas”.

sues of the *Rzeczpospolita* in the Renaissance. Rather, what has driven us is the conviction that all the contributors have sought, each according to his or her expertise and research perspective, to focus the pivotal issues underlying the historic and cultural development of Poland at this time, avoiding secondary aspects or those spurred by a more or less erudite *curiositas*. It appears to us that the result is a collection of articles not devoid of a certain organic consistency, despite the variety of topics addressed. These include, for example: the “creative” reception of western cultural patterns through models of literature and patronage; the confrontation with the “other” – the Near and Far East – and the definition of Europe; the adoption of classical philosophical and ideological models to interpret the political struggle of the time; the intellectual crisis ushered in by the Reformation and the political and social conflicts that it triggered. Furthermore, many other issues, while not explicitly addressed, are touched upon, glimpsed in passing or intuited by reading between the lines.

The aim that we set ourselves in presenting these issues at the Conference was to offer a rudimentary compass to readers specialised in the Renaissance of western Europe to help them find their bearings within the sphere of issues characterising the intellectual world of 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century Poland.

We were essentially guided by the conviction that making better known the Polish perspective on the era of passage to the Modern Age could contribute to a more polyphonic vision of the European Renaissance in its various geographical and thematic expressions. The intention is to correct an “Italo-centric” bias that has become widespread in this field of studies, which tends to consider the Renaissance – however this historical concept is understood – as a phenomenon in which ideas and models irradiated from the peninsula towards the “periphery”. We instead favour a notion of the flowering of “local” forms in all – or almost all – the countries of Europe, that find their expression in the new languages of that historic period.

We are fully aware that a collection of case studies such as this certainly cannot suffice to illustrate such an image of the Renaissance. Nevertheless, our aim is to allow the reader to appreciate the richness and potential inherent in what we have just defined as the Polish perspective.

The hope is that our work may introduce a fertile season of studies, involving academics from different disciplinary fields both in Europe and in the rest of the world.