

## Between Roman Authority and Greek Ritual: The Turbulent History of the Uniate Church at the End of the Eighteenth Century

Kacper Radny

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Giessen)

[Kacper.Radny@gcsc.uni-giessen.de](mailto:Kacper.Radny@gcsc.uni-giessen.de)

### Abstract:

*Disunion within the Union* is a revised study of the author's article published in the journal of the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University in 1984. Larry Wolff, the leading scholar and historian in the field of eighteenth century Central and Eastern Europe, has decided to return to the subject and enrich his earlier engagement with it with new insights. The result is an engaging study of the history of the Uniate church during the turbulent times of the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

### Zwischen römischer Autorität und griechischem Ritual: The turbulente Geschichte der Unierten Kirche zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts

#### German Abstract:

*Disunion within the Union* ist eine überarbeitete Fassung eines Artikels des Autors, der bereits 1984 veröffentlicht wurde. Larry Wolff, der führende Wissenschaftler und Historiker auf dem Gebiet der Mittel- und Osteuropa Forschung des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts, greift das Thema erneut auf und reichert seine früheren Ausführungen dazu mit neuen Erkenntnissen an. Das Ergebnis ist eine fesselnde Studie über die Geschichte der Unierten Kirche in den turbulenten Zeiten der Teilungen von Polen-Litauen.

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## Between Roman Authority and Greek Ritual: The Turbulent History of the Uniate Church at the End of the Eighteenth Century

Kacper Radny

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Giessen)

Wolff, Larry. *Disunion within the Union. The Uniate Church and the Partitions of Poland*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020. 152 pages, 18 EUR, ISBN 978-0-674-24628-7.

Larry Wolff is a highly regarded scholar and historian in the field of Central-Eastern European history with a large selection of publications on the subject to his name. He has written extensively, but not exclusively, on the history of the Habsburg Empire, Prussia, Poland and Ukraine, and engages with cultural and intellectual history of Europe, as it is the case with this study. The author shares that working on *Disunion within the Union* was particularly exciting for him since the discussed topics had served as a starting point for his early academic career. In fact, his 1984 article on the Uniates published in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* serves as the basis for the study at hand.

*Disunion within the Union* focuses on the relatively short but eventful period of history of the Uniate church. The church itself came into existence at the Union of Brest in 1596 when the Ruthenian Orthodox Church dioceses of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth decided to break the ties with their Eastern counterpart and to place themselves under the authority of the Roman Catholic Pope. Religion remained an integral part of the Commonwealth for almost two centuries, until the state's final dissociation at the end of the eighteenth century.

In the introduction to the book, the author successfully sets up the publication's premise and its thematical and temporal restraints. He states that the goal of the book is to explore the history of the eighteenth-century Uniate church and to connect its "issues of piety together with the problems of ecclesiastical politics" (p. 8). In the opening line, he shares that the title of the publication comes directly from the 1774 letter of the Uniate archbishop of Polatsk Jason Smogorzewski who *de facto* serves as the central character throughout the entirety of the study. The author adduces Smogorzewski's political prominence and his aptitude in courtly affairs as

the reasons why “his perspective on Uniate disunion will serve as the focus for this analysis of the Uniate Church in the age of Polish partitions” (p. 13). Later in the introduction, he conducts a very brief literature review, praising the importance of selected works but also pointing out their shortcomings. He also sets the events of the Polish partitions within the European context and stresses the problematic implications of the Uniate church previously consolidated under the rule of the Polish Crown suddenly finding itself under the rule of different monarchs.

Somewhat symbolically to its subject, the book is divided into two sections, “the first part focused on Church and state, and the second part on ritual and identity” (p. 8). Both parts are further divided into smaller sub-chapters. However, those serve more as an aid in continuous narration rather than independent pieces. The entirety of the study, as had been promised by the author in the introduction, is being anchored to the political stage of the times by the figure of Jason Smogorzewski.

The first part, entitled “Church and State,” focuses on the organisation, logistics, and politics of the church amidst the unstable governmental environment. This is also where Wolff exercises his sweeping scholarly experience. The result is a comprehensive and fascinating analysis of how the monarchs from the end of the eighteenth century, particularly Catherine the Great of the Russian Empire and Maria Theresa of the Habsburg Empire, engaged with the inter- and post-annexation situation of the Uniate church and used it for their own political agendas. Consecutive historical events are being introduced in a chronological manner and often enriched by primary sources or the commentary of contemporary historians, including Wolff himself. However, the scope of authors cited is very limited. Throughout the whole text, the author relies repeatedly on Barbara Skinner’s and Edward Litowski’s texts, as well as his own previous publications. Thus, it could be argued that the author has not been able to present a sufficiently broad and critical perspective on the subject. Similar points of critiques have been brought forward to his other works, including *Inventing Eastern Europe* (Place 1994), which is arguably his most influential study to date.

The second part of the book, “Ritual and Identity,” shifts the focus to the internal character of the church, in particular its ambiguous duality in liturgy and, consequently, the issues of its cultural and national identity. At the beginning of this section, the author seemingly ‘resets’ the timeline to the first partition of Poland and we get a chance to see the following events unravel

not from the historical point of view, as previously, but from within the church institution. The recurring themes in this study are the liturgical practices, national identities, and politics between diverse religious institutions. Those include, besides the Uniate church, the Jesuits, the Basillian monastic order, and the Vatican Propaganda Fide. This switch of focus comes with a much appreciated, and needed, introduction of new sources. It is a shame, however, that such scrupulous analysis of the character and everyday realities of the Uniate church arrive so late in the book. Given the current scarcity of the scholarly focus on the subject, the overall publication would have benefited from introducing various concepts included in this part of the book much sooner.

All things considered, *Disunion within the Union* reads as a work of an experienced and well-established scholar. It can be commended on the pertinent analysis of the historical events and the skilful use of primary and secondary sources — albeit the amount of those leaves a little to be desired. The author should also be applauded for his numerous translations of the primary sources, including official and private letters. Those texts are not just a welcome personal touch but also a statement of Wolff's long-standing engagement with the historical subject. Nevertheless, it is hard to shake off the feeling that the publication has a character of an informal study, rather than comprehensive, academic research. However, given the current state of the work done on the subject of the Uniate church, it is certainly an appreciated contribution to the field. *Disunion within the Union* will be particularly gratifying reading for scholars and casual readers interested in the history of Eastern Europe or Christianity and can be picked up without the necessary extensive background knowledge.