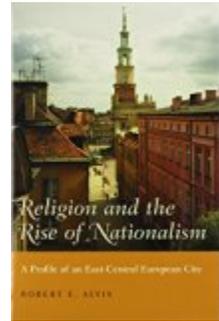


Robert E. Alvis. *Religion and the Rise of Nationalism: A Profile of an East-Central European City.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005. xxvi + 227 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8156-3081-4.

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Published on H-Nationalism (April, 2007)



Poznanians into Germans and Poles

Many scholars of nationalism, including those as diverse as Anthony D. Smith and Benedict Anderson, suppose an inverse relationship between religion and nationalism. Dating the rise of nationalism to the modern era, they assume that the religiosity of earlier times encouraged political passivity and that the secularization of the eighteenth century unleashed energies that were then channeled into nationalism. Even scholars from Emile Durkheim to Josep Llobera, who contend that nationalism replaced religion in answering people's spiritual needs, see Christian doctrines as incompatible with the rational and popular thrust of nationalism. From this perspective, contemporary religious-based nationalism, most obviously in the Middle East, is a recent phenomenon that inevitably leads to clashes with the secular tradition of western nationalism.

In this book, based on a dissertation submitted to the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, Robert E. Alvis challenges these views by means of a case study that demonstrates the impact of religious beliefs and confessional identities on the formation of Polish and German national identities in the early nineteenth century. Regrettably expunged from the title of the original work are the precise parameters of the study: the book deals with the city of Poznan or Posen (to give it its official German name) in the period from its occupation by Prussian forces in 1793 to the revolution of 1848.[1] Presumably the publishers wished to attract a broader audience than specialists in east-central Europe and could not rely on English-speaking readers to be familiar with the city, de-

spite its status as a regional capital.

Given its complex and changing ethnic and confessional demography, Poznan offers an excellent site in which to examine the rise of nationalism. In 1794 60 percent of the city's inhabitants were Catholics, 25 percent were Jews, and 15 percent Protestants. By 1846 just half the inhabitants were Catholics, 20 percent Jews, and 30 percent Protestants. While the Protestants, and increasingly the Jews, were generally German-speakers, the majority of the Catholic population spoke Polish. The period that Alvis takes for his analysis is also well suited to his purposes, in that it saw heightened competition for the allegiances of the city's inhabitants. Poznan experienced a shift in government from an independent Polish state to Prussia, and then in 1848 the possibility of incorporation into a broader German union.

Alvis shows clearly that confessional identities did not dictate political ones, but that the events and developments of the period encouraged Protestants to opt for German identity and Catholics for Polish. He notes, for instance, that up to 1793, the Germans of Poznan had little contact with Germans over the Prussian border and that they were wary of their new Prussian rulers because of the disruption that the partitions had caused in the local economy. He explains effectively how they gradually came to see the advantages of Prussian rule. They witnessed an economic recovery and then expansion under the Prussians. They further benefited from the new regime's preferential treatment for Protestants and its

promotion of the German over the Polish language. The local archbishop's opposition to mixed marriages deepened their hostility to Catholics, who had already discriminated against them in pre-partition Poland. Finally, the trade and communication links opened up by incorporation into Prussia as well as technological improvements encouraged them to add to their local identity an affinity with Germans with different political pasts. Not surprisingly, in 1848 they welcomed the prospect of a greater German union.

In the same way, the political loyalties of Catholics crystallized only gradually, according to Alvis. The bishop of Posen condemned Kosciuszko's rebellion and conservative nobles initially took up positions in the Prussian administration. Continued attacks on the church, which had enjoyed a privileged position in pre-partition Poland, and the Germanization policies that followed the 1830 rebellion in Russian Poland, however, made loyalty to Prussia difficult to reconcile with a commitment to Catholicism and Polish culture. Long before the *Kulturkampf*, the Prussian government's policies caused Polish nobles, especially women, and even middle-class anticlericals to join with ordinary Catholics in embracing Polish nationalism. Alvis illustrates very effectively the fusion of Catholicism and nationalism in a close analysis of the Golden Chapel of Poznan Cathedral, with its carefully arranged images of early Polish kings, the Black Madonna, and local saints. The fruits of this fusion were abundantly evident in 1848, when the Archbishop Przyłuski championed the Polish nationalist cause.

Given that they constituted one-quarter of the city's population in 1794, it is surprising that Alvis chooses not to include an analysis of Jews in his account. While he excludes them on the grounds that they did not develop a national consciousness until later in the century, he hints that they were moving towards Germanization in this period. He points out that the German government tried to win them over by an offer to naturalize them in 1833 and that, as Yiddish-speakers, the German language was more accessible to them than Polish. Interestingly, he also argues that their past had equipped them with more of the building blocks of nationalism than Catholics or Protestants, although they had no fixed territorial focus for their political ambitions. These factors would seem to make the Jews a particularly interesting object for the study of nationalization. A greater focus on another transition group closer to the core of his story, the German Catholic community, who were separated by language

from Poles and alienated by anti-Catholicism from German Protestants, would also provide a more nuanced picture of nationalism in the region.

The work is based on an impressive range of sources, in both Polish and German, from the perspectives of the clergy, the government, and the city's ordinary inhabitants. Alvis relies heavily on memoirs, which provide a good flavor of individuals' experiences of the nationalization process. The concision of the account does not always allow him to do equal justice to the richness of the many unprinted sources he has consulted, however. For instance, the report about clerical responses to the insurrection of 1830 in Russian Poland that Alvis briefly cites also provides an indication of the paranoia of Prussian officials about the practices of Catholic priests, specifically the charge that priests used the confession to incite young Poles to go over the border to fight. The ingenuity of the Polish clergy is also lost in Alvis's account—priests urged collaboration in vague formulations such as the duty of brothers to help one another, a command defensible within Christian theology, but incendiary in the immediate political context.

That said, the distillation of the vast array of source material will make this a particularly attractive book for students, including undergraduates, who are interested in nationalism but lack the language skills to read most of the literature on east-central Europe. Like the earlier book by Christian Pletzing on Prussia's Polish provinces to the north, this study proves the merits of examining competing nationalisms in tandem.[2] Historians of religion will be interested in the evidence it contains of continued religiosity in opposition to the claims of secularization theory. And its attention to demographic patterns, physical infrastructure, and political developments in Poznan makes it a useful addition to the field of urban history, which is becoming increasingly popular for specialists in central and eastern Europe. One hopes that this book will allow Poznan to retain its Polish spelling in the titles of future studies of the city.

Notes

[1]. The dissertation, submitted in 2000, was entitled "Religion and the Rise of Nationalism in East-Central Europe: A Case Study of Poznan, 1793-1843."

[2]. Christian Pletzing, *Vom Volkerfrühling zum nationalen Konflikt. Deutscher und polnischer Nationalismus in Ost- und Westpreussen 1830-1871*, Quellen und Studien des Deutschen Historischen Instituts Warschau 13 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003).

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Citation: Roisin Healy. Review of Alvis, Robert E., *Religion and the Rise of Nationalism: A Profile of an East-Central European City*. H-Nationalism, H-Net Reviews. April, 2007.

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