

**Adrian Wesolowski: *Philanthropic Celebrity in the Age of Sensibility*.** A Historical-Comparative Study of the British, French, and Polish Examples, c. 1770–1830. Routledge. New York – London 2023. VII, 273 S., Ill. ISBN 978-1-032-37388-1. (£ 39,99.)

Adrian Wesolowski is one of the most interesting young scholars of eighteenth and nineteenth-century celebrity culture. He has already made thought provoking contributions in the field: His work in *Celebrity Studies*<sup>1</sup> argued for the “consolidation” of fame studies given the overlap between different types of positive attention, while an essay in *History Compass*<sup>2</sup> provided a valuable overview of the rapidly expanding genre. In this, his first monograph, through exploring case studies of British prison reformer John Howard (~1726–1790), Alsatian pastor Johann Friedrich Oberlin (1740–1826), and Polish scholar and public figure Stanisław Staszic (1755–1826), W. introduces the concept of the “philanthropist” as a new type of public figure in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In his first section, W. examines the social and cultural conditions of the “long” eighteenth century that made this new conception possible. These included the prevailing cult of sensibility, exemplified by the emergence of the “man of feeling” as a model of elite masculinity; the growth of the press which facilitated a “celebrity culture”; and the strengthening of humanitarian impulses driven by the suffering of ordinary people at a time of almost continual warfare and periodic revolution.

As W. notes, conflict was central to the cultural and political “moments” when his case studies achieved their fame. Howard’s reputation was forged during the time of the American Revolutionary War, seen by British historians as a moment of national self-doubt. Oberlin and Staszic achieved public notoriety in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars of 1803–1815, which eventually saw the defeat of France and restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. For Staszic’s home country of Poland, the wars raised and then dashed possibilities of national renewal following the partition of 1795. Each crisis shaped, while not necessarily determining, contemporary interpretations of these men’s significance.

The case studies are developed in the second section, which explores the mechanics and meanings of these individuals’ fame. Howard was an indefatigable prison visitor and reformer, so ubiquitous he became simply “The Philanthropist”; Oberlin was a teacher who brought “civilization” to one of France’s supposedly most primitive regions. While Howard’s calling and reputation was continental, taking him to prisons across Europe, Oberlin’s, on the other hand, was rooted in a specific place. Though W. does not overtly make the connection, Oberlin’s status as a stopping point on the picturesque tourist trail through Alsace was mirrored by contemporaries elsewhere in Europe. For example, the “Ladies of Llangollen” in northern Wales, exemplars of Romantic friendship, were also sought out by the great and good, and like Oberlin their fame was entwined with the touristic discovery of their local area.

While W.’s case for the “celebrification” of Oberlin and Howard is more obvious, Staszic appears something of an outlier. This is partly because his “fame” during his own life was of a much more limited scope than either Howard’s or Oberlin’s. He was apparently a cult figure among the students of Warsaw, who often encountered their idol during his regular attendances at the theater. However, his wider reputation only really took off after his death. The division of his fortune between several charitable institutions in Warsaw saw his funeral become a major public event, cementing his philanthropic image and eclipsing his previous reputation as a miser. Moreover, Staszic quickly became a touchstone of national feeling and identity when overt expressions of Polish nationhood were

1 ADRIAN WESOŁOWSKI: Beyond Celebrity History: Towards the Consolidation of Fame Studies, in: *Celebrity Studies* 11 (2020), 2, pp. 189–204.

2 ADRIAN WESOŁOWSKI: History of Celebrity Branching Out, in: *History Compass* (2023), 12, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12791>.

fraught with risk. The ascription of “celebrity” status to Staszic is therefore open to question.

However, as W. demonstrates, contemporaries often interpreted the epithet of “hero” in narrow martial terms, with the “philanthropist” role existing almost as its antithesis. Here, his argument that the philanthropist drew on older traditions of sainthood comes into play. Philanthropists were moral exemplars, inheriting many features of religious sainthood, though defined not by belief but rather by “their innately superior capacity for feeling the suffering of others” (p. 187). At a time when ill feelings over religious divisions were still raw and secularization uneven, charity was a less problematic rallying point than faith. Philanthropic fame meanwhile rested on an outward show of humility and self-effacement. These themes emerge in the final section of the book, where W. evaluates the wider significance of the philanthropist at a time of cultural and political change.

W. concludes that the cultural phenomenon of the philanthropist was short-lived. He suggests the only real successor to Howard’s philanthropic reputation was the nineteenth-century prison visitor Elizabeth Fry, an interesting observation given his earlier identification of the philanthropist as an essentially masculine figure. However, in the shorter-term it is surely plausible to see in the celebration of Howard’s humanitarianism a foretaste of the praise heaped on Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce and other members of the “Clapham Sect” (the collective name for his circle of religiously motivated abolitionists) in their struggle to abolish the slave trade. Perhaps the long-term significance of the emergence of the philanthropist was to broaden the range of people thought worthy of both living celebrity and posthumous glory far beyond soldiers and statesmen to a whole range of friends of humanity. In this way, the tree of Howard’s descent had many branches.

This thought-provoking and well-researched book will mainly be read by scholars with transnational interests in the histories of humanitarianism and fame culture, but for the general reader it throws important light on the role of fame in the cultural modernization of Europe at this time period. While historiographies of fame in France and Britain are more mature, W.’s study of Staszic and his recent essay on the November Uprising of 1830<sup>3</sup> represent ground-breaking contributions to the field and its applicability to the history of East Central Europe.

Leeds

Simon Morgan

- 
- 3 ADRIAN WESOŁOWSKI: Politics of Popularity in the November Uprising (1830–31), in: *European Review of History* 31 (2024), 4, pp. 635–659.

**Franciszek Wasył: Armenians in Old Poland and Austrian Galicia.** A Demographic and Historical Study. Brill Schöningh 2021. XVI, 572 S., Ill. ISBN 978-3-506-76010-4. (€ 109,–.)

In his study, Franciszek Wasył examines the daily routines and family life of Armenians in Galicia (Galizien/Halychyna) from the late eighteenth century up to the 1860s. His research is based on numerous statistical sources the author examined in the archives of L’viv, Vienna, Warsaw, Wrocław, and Yerevan. W. describes the life cycle of local Armenians from their birth through their weddings and marriages up to their deaths and funerals. The choice of life events is not surprising, since the book is based on church records of baptisms, weddings, and funerals. The author also used some memoirs and diaries. Thus, methodologically, the book is written within cultural anthropology and related to the history of everyday life and historical demographics.

The author studies various topics, such as housing, weddings, inheritance, divorce, disease, and healing. On two occasions, he illustrates the general narrative with biographical case studies. Special praise is due to the author’s research on onomastics, e.g. names given to newborns. The topic of Armenian names in Austrian Galicia had not been studied before.