

BOOK REVIEWS

Gábor BARABÁS: The West, the East, and „the Last Pagans” /Márta Font: Zur Entstehung der Russia Minor und Russia Alba: Ostslaven unter polnisch-litauischer Herkunft im 13.–15. Jahrhundert. Mainz – Stuttgart. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz – Franz Steiner Verlag, 2024. 51 p. (Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz, Jahrgang 2024, No. 4)/ DOI: 10.15170/SPMNNV.2025.14.13

Márta Font, professor emerita at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Pécs, is a prominent figure in Hungarian medieval and Russian studies. Numerous studies and monographs of hers testify to her research on the Árpád era and Kievan Rus, but her research extends beyond this chronological framework to cover the entire Middle Ages. Her latest volume—written in German—was published by Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur of Mainz, Germany, of which Márta Font has been a member since 2002.

The volume under review here deals in great detail with a topic that lies at the intersection of Polish, Lithuanian, and Ruthenian, as well as, in part, Hungarian history. The study focuses on Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, as well as the Orthodox Eastern Slavs who lived under the rule of the personal union between the two from the fifteenth century onwards, but the monograph also provides a thorough historical context. As indicated in the title, the Slavic territories under Polish-Lithuanian rule were named Russia Minor and Russia Alba, which are areas and populations that are still significant from a contemporary perspective.

In the first chapter, Font summarizes the formation and history of Kievan Rus, as well as the Polish and Lithuanian principalities, up to the thirteenth century, followed by a discussion of the short- and long-term effects of the Mongol expansion, which can be considered, without exaggeration, a turning point in the history of the region. This primarily involved structural changes in the territories of Rus, although some principalities were able to retain their independence to a greater or lesser extent, most of them came under direct Mongol rule. The formation of the Kingdom of Poland and the Lithuanian expansion that began in the second half of the thirteenth century also posed challenges to the Rus'ian territories from the west and north, including Galicia (Halych) and Lodomeria (Volhynia). In connection with the fourteenth-century Polish campaigns, the role of Louis I the Great, King of Hungary and later King of Poland, cannot be forgotten, especially since, as King of Hungary, he renounced his claims to Galicia in favour of his uncle, King Casimir III of Poland, knowing that it would fall to him again as his heritage.

In the third chapter of the book, Márta Font presents the Polish and Lithuanian structures of government, followed by a discussion of the impact of the new power systems on the church organization in the regions of *Russia*. This naturally requires a presentation of the situation prior to the Mongol conquest, followed by a discussion of one of the most interesting issues, namely the situation of Orthodox Christians living under pagan rule. It is a common observation that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was the last pagan country in Europe, but it is often forgotten that a significant part of the population living under pagan rule was Christian, or more precisely, Orthodox Slavs. The Lithuanian rulers, in their well-understood interest, tolerated the practice of

Christianity, similar to the Mongols. Not only did they support the functioning of the church organization, but they also sought to establish an independent metropolitan see. It is also noteworthy that, from the fourteenth century onwards, Polish expansion led to the establishment of a parallel Western Latin church organization in *Russia*, alongside the Eastern one. Within this framework, the town of Halych, the centre of an Orthodox bishopric, became the seat of a Latin archbishopric, but only temporarily. In addition to all this, Font presents the development of Western efforts for a Church-union, which, after sporadic precedents from the thirteenth century, became particularly intense at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Naturally, rivalry with the Grand Duchy of Moscow also played a role in this. The book discusses the ecclesiastical and political background of the metropolitan elections, the role and significance of individual church leaders, and the path leading to the union declared at the Council of Ferrara-Florence, as well as the eventual failure of the union in the fifteenth century. The volume ends with several tables as appendices. The first provides information about Orthodox church leaders, followed by a list to help readers navigate through the geographical names. Finally, there are two maps displaying Polish and Lithuanian expansion and the parallel church organizations on the second one.

Márta Font's work analyses a topic in detail that is not widely known. Given the language of the volume, we can speak of a scientific work of particular significance for German readers. Nevertheless, due to its subject matter, Font's book is of outstanding importance for medieval studies, but the unfortunate current political situation, the emergence of *Russia Minor* and *Russia Alba* in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine, and the regional background of the period before the thirteenth century may be of interest to a wider readership.