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Review of Leigh T. I. Penman, *The Lost History of Cosmopolitanism: The Early Modern Origins of the Intellectual Ideal*

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LEIGH T. I. PENMAN, *The Lost History of Cosmopolitanism: The Early Modern Origins of the Intellectual Ideal* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 216 pp. ISBN 978 1 350 15696 8. £85.00

Certain Enlightened philosophers are usually credited with the invention of the idea or ideal of cosmopolitanism. The concept is seen as based essentially on natural equality, morality, freedom, and universal rationality, because these not only enabled global communication with the aim of making progress in civilization, but also sought to create appropriate political conditions, or even enforced their adoption. Approaches predating the Enlightenment, however, are hardly noticed, or are dismissed as insignificant precursors. This volume by Leigh Penman, an Australian scholar of early modern religious and intellectual history, by contrast, combines a more open definition of the term 'cosmopolitanism' with a broader history of the idea. First, he suggests, we should not conceive of it as a central category that has either attracted to itself all the concepts and insights circulating around it, or even absorbed them. Instead, we should speak of a broad 'cosmopolitan vocabulary' (p. 3 *passim*). Second, this group of ideas, he claims, did not initially serve to overcome difference or diversity, but on the contrary helped them to delineate and establish themselves. Third, he goes on, against this background the familiar modern, Enlightened conceptualization of 'cosmopolitanism' can be understood more historically and distinctly as something rather abstract, but also intentionally secular.

After positioning his approach mainly within the Anglo-American academic debate, which I will not go into further here, Penman embarks on a comparative assessment of the writers who first deployed—or redeployed (see Penman's brief references to various precursors from Antiquity)—cosmopolitan concepts and arguments in the early modern period—namely, Guillaume Postel (*De la République des Turcs*, 1560) and John Dee (*Monas hieroglyphica*, 1564, among other works). Penman comes to the conclusion that both drew on a cosmopolitan vocabulary with teleological, even apocalyptic overtones in order 'to designate their self-understanding as prophets, linking it to ideas of

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heavenly citizenship and the maligned *peregrinus*, to highlight their own special status', as well as to exert their respective versions of political influence—French Catholic or English Reformed—'through the postulation of visions of universal Christian empire' (p. 35). At the end of the chapter we find a brief mention that these two pioneers were followed by other, even more humanistic authors.

The account that follows draws primarily on more practical discourses related to the geographical, cartographic, and cosmographic exploration of the world in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Penman places them firmly into the context of the Christian, political cosmopolitanisms elaborated in the preceding chapter. It is worth noting the significance that Penman ascribes to the admixture of 'metaphors of exile, strangerhood and pilgrimage in devotional works, and even in books issued in the utopian genre' (p. 62). Penman sees the connections and perspectival reversals of the previously elaborated approaches as having taken place (sometimes in parallel, sometimes consecutively) within the horizons of confessionalization and fundamentally confessionalized politics—a process he calls 'cosmopolitan inversion' (pp. 65–85). We see first Protestant, then also Rosicrucian and common Christian ideals not of secular citizens of the world, but of 'citizens of heaven (*Himmelsbürger*)' (p. 83), in many cases accelerated by experiences of confessional war.

In the following period, this particular combination of a worldly, middle-class and a Christian perspective acquired protean and fluid, but always fragmentary contents. All that was left for well-known Enlightened philosophers to do was to fit all these tesserae together into their own, necessarily more abstract, systems. This came at the cost of more explicitly and specifically religious elements, and was more or less clearly modelled on a (worldly) urban pattern. Thus the bourgeois in the modern sense was achieved. Yet even in this phase, a uniform understanding of the concept of cosmopolitanism did not emerge, nor was it seen in a completely positive light. Rather, we must note that the philosophers tried 'to appropriate the word cosmopolite as a synonym for a secular "philosopher"' (p. 128)—that is, to monopolize the term for themselves in an intellectual and moral sense. The epilogue then merely hints at the fact that such attempts to appropriate and instrumentalize a category that is not strictly defined, but remains relatively open, still have a part to play in the current debate about regionalism, nationalism, and post-nationalism.

Penman's carefully crafted study offers important insights into the early history of a guiding concept that is highly controversial in the modern and postmodern eras. It puts the concept's religious (and pseudo-religious) elements and implications back into the spotlight, while making the deeply European, Western character of the dominant understanding of the concept clear without embarking on a post-colonial debate, let alone paying homage to a naive post-colonialism. Instead, it conveys critical knowledge in the tried and tested classical way by soberly attempting to capture and illuminate its subject's historical depth and range.

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