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Франциск Ассизский:

предмет медиевистических исследований и художественный персонаж

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Аннотация. Цель исследования – решить проблему восприятия и осмысления личности итальянского средневекового мистика Франциска Ассизского в научной и художественной литературе XIX-XX вв. Для достижения этой цели автор анализирует большой пласт научной и художественной литературы XIX-XX столетий, объединенной личностью и наследием Франциска Ассизского, рассматривая работы известных историков, философов, писателей и поэтов, а также образ Франциска в кинематографе и музыке. Автор подчеркивает тот факт, что в силу его яркой необычной личности даже научные работы, посвященные Франциску, приобретают черты художественного произведения. Научная новизна исследования заключается в том, что впервые в литературоведении автор в процессе изучения источников создает полную картину восприятия францисканского наследия научной и художественной литературой XIX-XX вв. Полученные результаты показали, что каждая эпоха и нация воспринимает личность великого итальянского мистика по-разному и в соответствии с собственными культурно-историческими установками и морально-этическими проблемами.

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Francis of Assisi: The object of medievalist studies and a literary character

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Abstract. The aim of the research is to resolve the problem of perception and comprehension of the personality and heritage of Francis of Assisi, an Italian medieval mystic style writer. To attain this aim, the author analyzes a large stratum of the 19th-century and the 20th-century research and fiction with the focus on the personality and heritage of Francis: the works of famous historians, philosophers, writers and poets, as well as the image of Francis in cinematography and music. The article places an emphasis on the fact that by virtue of his bright and unusual personality, even scientific works devoted to Francis acquire the features of belles-lettres. The research is novel in that it is the first in literary studies to create a comprehensive picture of the perception of the Franciscan heritage by scientific literature and fiction of the 19th and 20th centuries. As a result, the author concludes that each historical period and nation perceives the personality of the great Italian mystic in different ways and in accordance with its own specific cultural and historical settings, moral and ethical problems.

Introduction

The relevance of this study pertains to the unfailing interest of both researchers and ordinary readers in the personality and spiritual heritage of Francis of Assisi; Franciscanism has always belonged to the most popular areas of medieval studies; in recent years, this interest has been increasing with the approach of the landmark octocentenary of the death of the outstanding Italian mystic, poet and reformer in 1226.

Franciscan studies can be largely regarded as interdisciplinary for they exceed the limits of ‘narrow’ literary studies to involve works on the history of Franciscan literature that covers eight centuries of its existence. These include the works by Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) and those by his closest followers who created ‘Franciscanism’ per se; also works on the history of religion and philosophy, on social development and economic teachings, on art history and, moreover, studies on history and language. The range of issues considered in all the works on Franciscanism is extremely broad. The very concept of ‘Franciscanism’ is difficult to define; it captures not so much a doctrinal teaching but rather a certain self-expression and self-determination in the world, which implies some sustained relationship between the world and man, man and God. This is the reason why works on Franciscanism view the ‘Franciscan man’ in various relations with the world or, according to J. Le Goff (1998, p. 110-175), with the cultural and ideological models of his time and day.

Hence the relevance of this study is the following: Franciscan literature and philosophy have been for several centuries a certain 'reflection of the epoch', and in the previous and present centuries, due to dramatic changes in the spiritual life of Europe, the interest to the personality and heritage of the great Italian mystic was and has been increasing.

This is indicative of the fact that Francis of Assisi, while continuing to be a subject of numerous medieval studies, is increasingly becoming an artistic character.

The tasks of this study include the following, i.e. to identify the reasons for the long-term and persistent appeal of the 19th and 20th centuries authors to the personality of the medieval mystic monk; to determine which aspects of Franciscan spirituality attracted the authors and researchers of various historical epochs; to review changes in the perception of the image of Francis over two centuries.

This research has been conducted in line with the comparative-historical method developed by Academician A. N. Veselovsky (Веселовский, 1989), which appears a most reliable in this context; also the method of descriptive poetics and typological and cultural-historical methods of literary studies have been applied.

Fundamental works on medieval Italian literature serve as a theoretical basis of our research, that is the important study by V. F. Shishmarev (Шишмарев, 1972) on the development of Italian literature and the monography on Latin medieval literature by I. N. Golenishchev-Kutusov (Голенищев-Кутузов, 1972).

The practical value of this work is that the obtained material can be used both in the course of the history of foreign literature and language and in the course of the history of European culture and studies.

Discussion and Results

The unique characteristics of the development of Franciscan studies in the past several centuries of their existence imply that some works written over the said period have not lost their relevance to date. These studies have outlined the most important aspects to be reviewed within Franciscanism and have served as an impetus for further modern research. In old days, important ideas were expressed in their primary form to be elaborated and substantiated in our time. Concurrently more and more often the image and personality of Francis of Assisi seem to be addressed not only by historians, linguists, philosophers, but also by writers and poets. More and more often, owing to this man's bright and amazing personality, a scientific work on medieval mysticism becomes a true literary work at the same time. This phenomenon is, in particular, the research task of this study: to review the most outstanding works about Francis written in the 19th and 20th centuries which give an idea of Franciscan spirituality perception in specific historical periods.

Among the fundamental works of the past, there is a short, however, important 1826 study on the poetry of Francis by the German Medievalist and Romanticist J. von Görres (1826). In this study, the Italian mystic is described as a wandering troubadour poet; in doing so, the author makes a sharp observation by drawing a parallel between Provençal poetry and the Romantic spirit of Franciscanism.

During his short life, the French Catholic scholar A. F. Ozanam wrote two seminal works on Dante and the 13th-century Catholic philosophy (Ozanam, 1840) and on Franciscan poets (Ozanam, 1854). In those works, he developed a whole range of fundamental ideas about the role of Franciscan spirituality in preparing Renaissance culture. He regarded the origins of Franciscan literature in the context of literary relationships and mutual influences. This idea was subsequently taken up and adopted by many scholars.

It is not surprising that the prominent positivist historian of religion E. Renan turned to study Franciscanism in a similar historical and cultural context. The result of his research was a short but extremely profound work on the personality of Francis (Renan, 1884, p. 323-352). Later on, E. Renan commissioned his student Paul Sabatier (1893) with writing substantial research on Francis.

Francis, as the originator of a new relationship between the world, man and God, as the person who gave the strongest impetus to the development of Renaissance art, was in the focus of a famous study by the German cultural historian H. Thode (1885), whose study served as a research landmark in Franciscanism.

Following A. F. Ozanam, H. Thode emphasized the importance of the 13th century and Francis in triggering the formation of a new worldview. According to the well-reasoned opinion of the German historian, the activity of Francis of Assisi marked the culmination of the great spiritual movement of the Western European world, a movement that opted for the culture of modern civilization. Thode's (1885) work, not devoid of a certain scent of the decadence of his time, also contains a very interesting idea of the mystical pantheism of Franciscanism, which would later turn into a cause for scientific discussion.

Among the scientific works of this period, it is reasonable to recall the widely acclaimed book by Emile Gebhart *The Mystical Italy* (it was through this work that many Russian authors of that period perceived Francis). In Gebhart's study written in a fascinating and artistic way, Francis is seen as one of the main figures of Italian culture, where religion, the fine arts and literature appeared inseparably linked within the mystical tradition, since in those centuries it was religion that was 'the chief and most perfect creation of the Italian national genius' (1924, p. 5).

More than a hundred years have passed since the most famous study on Francis, the famous 1893 book by Paul Sabatier, *Vie de S. François d'Assise (The Life of Francis of Assisi)*, severely criticized and still one of the best loved, appeared. The book is still the most widespread and popular Francis's biography which successfully combines a scholarly approach with a good narrative.

Francis, as Sabatier (1893) sees him, was first and foremost a dramatic and suffering individual at odds with society and himself. Sabatier's undoubtedly tendentious portrayal of Francis is a result of his religious views and his affiliation with a certain school of history. A pupil of Renan (hence his extreme subjectivism and a certain modernization of social phenomena), he was also a convinced Protestant and was even called the Pope of Christian modernism.

It was Sabatier who outlined the reputed 'Franciscan problem', i.e. the problem of sources, which is a paramount philological problem of purifying the early Franciscan texts from later strata. As a historian of the Franciscan movement, Sabatier left a truly diverse heritage. Not only did he write extensively on the history of religion and literature of the Middle Ages, but he also began an in-depth review of the problem of Franciscan sources. Researchers and ordinary readers owe him the publication of the major Franciscan texts, a rather comprehensive collection of accounts of Francis and his closest associates, as well as the Latin original of *Fioretti*. At the beginning of the 20th century, he founded the International Society of Franciscan Studies, which still exists today.

It should be noted that many Russian writers of the Silver Age perceived the figure of Francis in the light of Sabatier's book and, naturally, found themselves captivated by his assessments and emphases. Such was, for instance, D. S. Merezhkovsky who wrote much about Francis in various genres, for example, his famous novel about the Assisi Saint (Мережковский, 1997).

Sabatier's book can rival in popularity only a study by the Danish writer and symbolist poet J. Joergensen (1866-1956), the latter study being both scholarly and fascinating (Jørgensen, 1907). It was its French translation published in 1912 that Russian readers of the Silver Age were familiar with. Of all the Danish literary heritage, Joergensen's book published in 1907 has been the second most often published after the books by H. Ch. Andersen, the reason being that it draws unforgettable images of medieval heroes and pictures of medieval life. Joergensen was the author of a number of studies on the religious history of Italy and on European Catholicism. His book is a novel about the Saint of Assisi; it is the evocation of the author's devotion to the Italian land, which he sang of in his poems influenced by Francis's *Cantico delle creature* (the reference is made to the 1902-1903 collections *Laudes Italiae* and *Ave, Italia*) and his religious convictions – Joergensen converted to Catholicism in 1894. The success of this book was so great that the writer was awarded the title of the honorary citizen of Assisi, and one of the central streets of the city was named after him. In 2002, the *Johannes Joergensen International Association* was founded in Svendborg, the writer's hometown; his book on Francis has been translated into several languages and run through numerous editions.

Among the many 20th-century publications on Franciscanism, it is definitely reasonable to mention the most famous ones.

The book by the English Catholic G. K. Chesterton (1923) is still the best of all that has been written about Francis (Честертон, 1991, p. 13-93). It occupies a very special place among other works about Francis and it is almost impossible to define its genre; Chesterton, a classic of the English detective story, a master of a fascinating and paradox style of narration, transcends from both a treatise and an essay.

A study on the medieval monk captures the reader as much as his famous tales of the amateur detective Father Brown. The accessibility, ease, and even a certain 'unscientific nature' of Chesterton's style are deceptive – the treatise abounds in deepest ideas, such as, for instance, Francis's 'eschatological ease' (Трайберг, 1991, p. 10).

The decadent, scandalous political figure (a Freemason and fascist) and a great adventurer Gabriele d'Annunzio (1863-1938), the author of many novels, poems and dramas, and also the one whom Mussolini appointed head of the Royal Academy of Sciences in 1937, held on to the image of the Assisi Saint throughout the course of his creative work both in poetry and prose. It is surprising how sincere the author of such views was attracted by the medieval monk.

D. S. Merezhkovsky's famous 1938 philosophical and publicistic novel about Francis (Мережковский, 1997) serves as the best illustration of Russian decadent perception of the Italian saint.

The author, a professional historian and philologist and a many-time nominee for the Nobel Prize, shows in the novel his broad erudition, knowledge of historical material and profound knowledge of the Italian Middle Ages. However, this work cannot be considered historical research in the full sense of the word, as the author, a prisoner of his own historical concepts, believed it possible to freely and subjectively interpret the characters of the great men he portrayed and the events that took place. Francis in Merezhkovsky's portrayal differs dramatically from his conventional image: he is much more mournful, tragic and experiences a painful split personality.

It is only logical that the poetry of the Russian Silver Age did not ignore the appealing image of the Italian saint. The Silver Age was characterized by a true cult of the Italian Middle Ages and, in particular, of Francis of Assisi. The Italian saint was the object of the most passionate debates in literary and philosophical communities. Here is just a list of the authors who were impressed by the magnitude of the saint's personality and his work. Those were M. Voloshin, A. Blok, B. Pasternak, M. Kuzmin, L. Tolstoy and, of course, Vyacheslav Ivanov, the spiritual leader of Russian decadence.

It seems most likely that of all the literary figures of the Silver Age, P. P. Muratov, a passionate Italianophile, the author of the well-known book of 1924 called *Images of Italy* (the essay *Assisi*), 'felt' most acutely the historical figure of Francis in the context of the Silver Age (Муратов, 1994).

For P. P. Muratov, the hagiography of Saint Francis was an aesthetically integral phenomenon of Italian culture. Muratov revealed an excellent knowledge of his contemporary Franciscan studies. No doubt, in all Russian literature, there is no image of Saint Francis more sincere than that portrayed by P. P. Muratov. His observation about the 'eerie mystery of the sanctity' of the Franciscan movement, its abysses and depths, is extremely accurate. 'Of the phenomena available to our imagination, the phenomenon of holiness is undoubtedly one of the eeriest. The ecstatic Christianity of San Francesco must burn and incinerate anyone who tries to come close to it' (Муратов, 1994, p. 376).

V. I. Guerrier's book about Francis of Assisi (Герье, 1908) was a great event in the study of the Franciscan heritage in Russia. The depth of penetration into the spirit of the historical epoch, the broad scope of historical and cultural material, and the 'biographical' method of perceiving a historical epoch by way of studying a personality make this book probably the best scientific work on Saint Francis in Russian. In his studies on the history of the Catholic Church, Guerrier also devoted much attention to the history of the emergence and development of the Franciscan order (Герье, 1913).

At approximately the same time in Germany, one of the most influential modernist poets of the 20th century R. M. Rilke, a great connoisseur of Italy and Italian culture, dedicated the final third part of his 1905 mystical and religious poetry collection *Das Stundenbuch* to Saint Francis.

Hermann Hesse, the Nobel laureate in literature and one of the most widely read writers of the 20th century, inspired by the culture of his beloved Italian Switzerland, wrote the 1904 essay *Franz von Assisi (Francis of Assisi)*, as well as two stories about the history of Franciscanism.

The Greek writer and translator of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the International Peace Prize winner Nikos Kazantzakis, a man who was deeply suffering his personal inner conflict between Nietzscheanism and Christianity, wrote the novel *Il Poverello di Dio* about Francis of Assisi (1956).

The Portuguese writer and poet, the Nobel laureate in literature and a convinced Marxist, communist and atheist, Jose Saramago wrote a 1986 drama, *La seconda vita di Francesco d'Assisi*, about the life of Francis of Assisi.

A few years after Saramago, another Communist, Marxist and also the Nobel Prize winner, an Italian Dario Fo wrote the drama *Lu santo jullare Francesco* in 1999.

F. Cardini's famous 1989 book, which has already been published several times, is one of the few complete biographies of Saint Francis and is aimed at a rather erudite reader familiar with the problems of that turbulent epoch. The author portrayed the figure of Saint Francis against a broad cultural and historical background. Particularly interesting are the parts describing Saint Francis as a participant in the Crusades and a preacher of Christianity in the Islamic environment. In doing so, the author was absolutely right to emphasize such sides of Saint Francis's personality as his commitment to chivalry and the understanding of his mission as a chivalrous ministry.

Cardini's (1989) thoughts about Saint Francis's high chivalric and religious service correlate to a certain extent with the particularly important 1992 article by Academician D. S. Likhachev on the typological correlations and parallels between Francis of Assisi and Sergius of Radonezh (Лихачев, 1992).

The books of recent years by the famous Spanish historian of philosophy J. A. Merino on the Franciscan school in philosophy translated into many languages contribute greatly to the understanding of the very spirit of Franciscanism, i.e. its tortuous search for God, a man as the image and likeness to God, and man's place in the universe. His 1984 work, *Franciscan Humanism. Franciscanism and the Modern World*, which won the Spanish National Prize, provides the analysis of the similarities between the two historical epochs – the 13th and the 20th centuries – which reveal themselves first and foremost in the deepest crisis of the religious consciousness and in the absolute wish of the society to overcome it. J. A. Merino believes that the figure and teachings of Saint Francis, addressed to nature and to the inner world of man, gave a new impetus to the spirituality of the medieval society. Francis of Assisi is portrayed as a 'new man', an embodiment of the civilization of the new epoch. Of particular importance here is the Franciscan 'cultural optimism' (Merino, 1993, p. 151), which strives to bring the human race to perfection.

The work by the Italian scholar Chiara Frugoni (1993b) illustrates another aspect of the Franciscan heritage, i.e. iconography. Of particular interest is her study of stigmatization in the pictorial representations of Saint Francis (Frugoni, 1993a).

In the 20th century, the image and personality of Saint Francis had a great impact on film-making industry. The first black and white film about Saint Francis, *Frate Sole*, was made in 1918 by Ugo Falena to be followed by about twenty films. The most famous of them are a 1950 film by Roberto Rossellini, the founder of neo-realism, *Francesco Giulare di Dio*; a 1966 film *Uccellacci e uccellini*, based on Pasolini's script of the same name presenting an adaptation of one of the most famous Franciscan legends, in which Saint Francis is preaching to the birds; a Franco Zeffirelli's 1972 aesthetic classic film *Frate Sole, Sora Luna*; a Michael Curtis's 1961 American film *Francesco d'Assisi*; a Liliana Cavani's 1998 heavy naturalistic film *Francis*, starring the equally scandalous Mickey Rourke; a 2002 television film *Francesco* (directed by Michele Soavi) and a 2007 series *Chiara e Francesco* (directed by Fabrizio Costa).

O. Messiaen's opera *Saint Francis of Assisi* (premiered in 1983), several musicals (*Chiara di Dio* by Carlo Tedeschi, *Forza venite gente* by Michele Paolicelli) and many songs (Angelo Branguardi) were written on the Franciscan theme.

Therefore, it is obvious that the fairly profound impact that Francis of Assisi had on the European spiritual culture of the 19th and 20th centuries refers to a wide variety of areas, i.e. to scientific research, literary works, including both prose and poetry; it also refers to iconography, cinematography, and musical compositions. Each of these areas provides ample material for a separate study.

Conclusion

Therefore, the following conclusions can be made: the attention of historians, philologists and literary scholars of the past two centuries to the image of Francis of Assisi, as well as to his spiritual heritage is entirely logical. The reason for this phenomenon lies in the depth of the penetration of Franciscan spirituality into the intellectual life of the European cultural space. It should be also noted that each historical epoch introduces a new aspect to the perception of the medieval Italian monk, and his image is presented each time in a new way.

It is obvious that the personality and heritage of Francis of Assisi continue to be the object of diverse research of all types, and with all the variety of works, none of the problems of Franciscanism can be considered resolved currently. The reason for this is not only the multifaceted and ambiguous personality of the Italian saint. Francis of Assisi is a representative of the Middle Ages, an era long in the shadow of the harmonious Antiquity and the brilliant Renaissance and only recently beginning to emerge from the oblivion and neglect of historians, an era to a greater extent

impenetrable and inaccessible to modern consciousness than other historical epochs. Saint Francis (despite his timeless characteristics and importance for the spirituality of all mankind) as a man of his ambiguous time has all the right for the scholarly and artistic interest alongside with the interest in the medieval West, which is largely a terra incognita to date.

The analysis of the sources allows drawing the following conclusion: the appeal of historians, philologists, poets and writers to the image and heritage of Francis of Assisi over the past two centuries is absolutely natural owing to the deep penetration of Franciscan spirituality into the intellectual life of the European cultural environment; at the same time, each historical epoch introduces a new aspect to his perception, and the medieval Italian monk each time appears in a new light.

The prospects for further studies of Franciscanism are largely conditioned by the need to synthesize scholar and artistic approaches to this large-scale and multifaceted phenomenon.

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