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Tatiana Kaptereva and Her Contribution into Spanish Renaissance Studies in Russia

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Abstract

Nowadays history of studying various historical phenomena by local scholars is of paramount interest. The present article aims to analyze the contribution made by T.P. Kaptereva into studying Spanish Renaissance art by Russian historians. It also provides background information on Russian historiography of the Renaissance epoch in Spain. The methods used to address the issue include the method of systemic and retrospective analysis. The approaches and instruments employed by T.P. Kaptereva are viewed in the historical context of the epoch, thus presenting her notion of Spanish Renaissance art integrated into the general historiographic background. This paper will be of interest for any historians who study Russian historiography or the ways of representing Spanish Renaissance by various scholars.

Keywords: History, Spanish Renaissance, Historiography of art, Soviet era, Spanish art.

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Introduction

A famous French art historian J. Bazaine once called Spanish art as "Cinderella" for art historians, since Spain had been widely discussed but no one ever endeavored to penetrate deep into the nature of its art. The reason why Spanish Renaissance culture appears such a complicated issue to analyze and interpret does not lie only with the complexity of this phenomenon as it is. Another reason consists in the variety of methodological approaches used by researchers to study Renaissance culture in Spain. A century and a half of Russian Hispanism has been marked by coexistence of mutually exclusive trends in philosophy and methodology. Pre-revolutionary Russian historiography of the turn of XIX and XX centuries was almost identical to general European traditions. The leading positions were undoubtedly occupied by positivism. Russian philosophical providentialism with its well marked mysteriousness, was also rather common in those years. A.F. Losev's concept and its evolution is of particular interest as an example of Russian religious philosophy during the "Silver age". A.F. Losev conducted a grandiose study into Renaissance culture and wrote a book called "Renaissance aesthetics". In this work he looks at the end of the Renaissance epoch as it is represented by Cervantes in his novel "Don Quixote".

However it would be wrong to call these decades the cradle of Russian Renaissance Hispanism. In fact, Spanish culture was addressed quite scarcely in those years. It was in the 30-50s of the XX century that V.P. Botkin's famous "Letters on Spain" were first published, but it was the first serious attempt to make Russian audience acquainted with this country more closely. De facto, before V.P. Botkin's notes, Spain had only been represented in Russia through fictional literature, such as *Stone guest* by A.S. Pushkin, and music culture, e.g. *Aragon hunt* by M. Glinka. Being devoted to positivism, V.P. Botkin tried to create a sort of "social physics" of contemporary to him Spain. However this interest did not prevent him from creating colourful descriptions of Spanish character and samples of Spain's cultural heritage. It is clearly seen in the following examples: "What makes one believe in the future of Spain is its exceptional national wit; if people are often mistaken about Spain and if it is so hard not to be, is it not because Spain is looked upon not from inside, from its own history, but from the point of view of European history in general?" (Botkin, 1976: 25).

A well-known Soviet hispanist A. Zvigilsky points out that the problem of sources of "Letters on Spain" is quite a complicated one (Zvigilsky, 1976). Nevertheless at a closer acquaintance with the notes one can easily identify V.P. Botkin's reference to cultural and historical authentic sources, such as "Don Quixote" by Cervantes, works by Lope de Vega and Calderon, Celina Audalla's romances, etc. What is more, V.P. Botkin employed a group of historiographic researches and notes by French and Spanish authors, including F.A. Mina,

Juan de Rivera, Ginés Perez de Hita, I. Conde, etc. Researches also indicate aspiration to "essayical description of daily life" (Zvigilsky, 1976: 293), typical of Botkin, which testifies to the influence on him of such a literary movement as "costumbrismo", common in late XIXth century Spain. This point can be explained by the fact that it was V.P. Botkin who translated into Russian the essay dedicated to Mariano Jose de Larra, one of the most eminent representatives of Spanish costumbrismo (Zvigilsky, 1976).

Methodological framework

In the course of the study, the implemented methods were those of structural, comparative and retrospective analysis. The authors followed the basic principles of historicity, integrity and objectivity.

Literature review

The tradition to study Renaissance culture in Russia was initiated long ago and in the first decades it was full of contradictions as compared to European tradition. It is not a secret that unlike Europe Russia did not have a Renaissance. May be it was the reason why it had a nostalgic affection for this phenomenon. M. Sokolov even compared this interest to an unrealized dream, which both attracted us (Russians) and frightened us away by its abyss (Sokolov, 1999). This stage coincided with the pre-revolutionary decades and could be called the cradle or the first step of Russian Renaissance study.

The following period of Russian Renaissance study might be called Soviet by the dominant political order (1917-1980s). This era is characterized by a full dissonance with European tradition in historical studies due to the leading positions that Marxist ideology and philosophy occupied in Russia in those decades. Marxist influence resulted in development of some specific trends in Soviet historical studies. As one of the main aims Soviet scholars had the identification of cause-and-effect relationships between the state policy and cultural development. They were trying to identify the connection between any cultural event and its political and economic background. Such a concept might be rather reasonable and result in curious studies, had it not been so much exaggerated. In fact, being misinterpreted, it can even lead to a real decay of history as a field of knowledge. In the case of Soviet Russia, history lacking any critical evaluation of the new ideology and increasingly focusing on economical aspect, this trend led to the co-called "economical determinism". This tendency prevailed in Soviet Russia up to the 1950s and affected both the line and the quality of research.

The fall of Stalin's personality cult resulted in certain relief of restrictions imposed by the Marxist doctrine. Such a turn boosted appearance of new remarkable research works on cultural history and art history in Russia and motivated Russian scholars to forge relationships with European historians. These changes, however, did not imply adaptation of European methodology and mentality. The studies of that period had the following common features:

- 1) clearly negative attitude to monarchy, expressed both in works on general and art history;
- 2) increased focus on the problem of class struggle and exploitation;
- 3) negative attitude to church and religion.

The above-mentioned features do not cover all the characteristics of Soviet historical studies but they are the most evident and significant.

Despite certain degree of ideological stability, Soviet historical tradition was far from being homogeneous and steady. The first two decades (from the revolution in 1917 up to the early 30s) were the years of search and experiment. Pre-revolutionary trends still existed along with the new approaches based on Marxist doctrine. Later on, between 1930s and 1950s, when the repressions were at the peak, Marxist doctrine was dogmatized and the studies became utterly ideologically oriented. The late 1950s and early 1960s brought the so-called "thaw" to Russian policy, which affected historical research. Ideological relaxation to some degree liberated Soviet historians from strong ideological tinting. It was then, when the first works on art history were published, including researches into Spanish Renaissance art. Early 70s and 80s, the last years of Soviet era, known as the years of stagnation, affected historical tradition as well. Although this period was not rich in bright studies, neither was it fully deprived of them.

The years following the Soviet period in Russian Renaissance Hispanism can be called Post Soviet and are associated with post modernist ideas penetrating into Russian historical research. This stage is closely connected with the Perestroika. On the one hand these years brought about many positive changes to historical knowledge, such as increased interest to cultural and social history, attention to European traditions, new methods adopted from European historians, expansion of research horizons, vivid discussions on various cultural phenomena, mobilization of academic circles. On the other hand, this era in academic life is usually associated with instability, and crisis. Although this stage provided touch points with European traditions in historical research and helped adopt new methods and ideas, Russian historiography still possesses certain individual features driven by its mentality and specific historical background.

The term "Renaissance" has been a controversial one both in Russian and European historical tradition in the last century and a half. As A.A. Zaitsev points out, "the interpretation on Renaissance very much depends on the field of knowledge and method applied" (Zaitsev, 2012). The existing controversies gave rise to multiple debates between scholars who were trying to get a more profound understanding of this phenomenon in European culture.

One of the most arguable issues in Russian historiography has long been the problem of transition in the Renaissance, which was initially raised by J. Burckhardt and G. Thode. In the pre-revolutionary era Burckhardt's ideas dominated among Russian historians. They gradually flew to Soviet historical studies taking a specific shape due to the influence of Marxist philosophy. For several decades the situation remained stable, but in the 1970s a new issue was put forward which brought about many changes. It was the concept of the Northern Renaissance which implies existence of the new culture in the countries lying to the north of the Alps.

There was almost no attention to the phenomenon of Spanish Renaissance in Russian historiography up to the so-called "cultural turn". This turn took place in the 1960s when cultural issues received increased attention of Russian historians. The legacy of Cervantes and El Greco had certainly been considered a part of the new tendency in Spanish culture long before, but Russian scholars had never interpreted Spanish Renaissance culture as an integrate epoch. Only in the years following the 1960s did the new concept of Spanish Renaissance spread in Russia. The adherents of new trend tended to interpret Spanish Renaissance as a part of European phenomenon and not as a vestige of the Middle Ages as it had always been.

Discussion

One of the scholars who contributed greatly into this process was T.P. Kaptereva. She is one of the best known Russian hispanists, active member of the Academy of Arts, full professor and a Honored Artist of the RSFSR, has a PhD in art history, and headed the Department of Art history in the Research Institute for Theory and history of art (Academy of Arts) for 20 years. Kaptereva's legacy includes an impressive number of works, the most significant of which are the following: Velazquez and Spanish portrait of the XVIIth century (1956), El Greco (1965), Spanish Art, Middle Ages, Renaissance (1989), Ancient Spain, Iberian art (1992), Spain. Art history (2003), Spain's gardens (2007), Walks around Madrid (2009). She also wrote several entries for General Art History, an ambitious encyclopedia project comprising chronologically arranged entries on painting, drawing, sculpture, architecture and crafts of all times and nations, from primitive art up to modern times. According to the co-

authors, "all Kaptereva's works are distinguished by soundness and thoroughness in studying features of national arts under scrutiny, full integration into cultural atmosphere, sophisticated approach to artistic manner and style of the artists" (Russian Academy of Arts, 2017).

One of Kaptereva's most significant spheres of interest is Spanish history, with a special focus on art and culture. The problem of Renaissance in Spain was continually raised by Kaptereva throughout her academic career. She presents Iberian Peninsula as a specific world which "from the ancient times was perceived as a different world, a heart of pristine natural beauty, tranquility and eternity" (Kaptereva, 2009). The most interesting for studying Kaptereva's concept of Renaissance culture is her work *Spanish art. Middle Ages. Renaissance*, a result of direct observation of pieces of art followed by her personal interpretation. An unusual "essayic" form of narration, which resembles Botkin's *Letters on Spain*, is well grounded in this case. As Kaptereva herself comments, it reflects the mosaic structure of Spain's art: "Such an uneven, a sort of pulsing, rhythm of development distinguishes both Spanish art in general and its various branches" (Kaptereva, 2009).

Kaptereva gives a positive answer to the question of existence of Renaissance in Spain, pointing out that this cultural movement did not develop as intensively in Spain as it did in Italy, on many occasions "mixing up with the old, moribund trends" (Kaptereva, 1962). The lack of stylistic uniformity in Spanish culture, so commonly mentioned in disputes on the issue, Kaptereva explains by military background and the resulting decelerated development on the first stages, which provoked further acceleration while adopting new forms, and therefore "confusion of various stages and coexistence between the old and the new" (Kaptereva, 1962). The influence of Marxist doctrine can be seen in Kaptereva's approach to identifying the principal factors which obstructed development of Spanish Renaissance. She mentions the following reasons:

- 1) Political immaturity of Spanish cities;
- 2) Church, which, according to Kaptereva, "suffocated any freedom of thought, cruelly enchaining the living soul of the nation" (Kaptereva, 1962).
- 3) Monarchy: "the absolutist regime which settled in the 1520s could not be fertile ground for vast artistic development" (Kaptereva, 1962).

The two latter factors distinguished by Kaptereva present a shining example of Marxist ideological influence. The latter implies negative attitude to monarchy and religion, the first being considered a regressive form of state structure, and the second being called prejudice and a hindrance to free cultural development. Marxist ideological pressure manifests itself both in the choice of information and the manner of its evaluation. It can be clearly seen in

Kaptereva's unwillingness to focus on the royal image and its symbolism while describing Spanish painting. Her works lack any descriptions of court ceremonies and coronations. The only detail mentioned is the "morbid gloom of life in the Spanish court, dull and monotonously everyday life". Royal artistic patronage is also almost ignored. This gap was partly filled later by such scholars as O.I. Varyash, L.L. Kagane etc. Kaptereva is extremely critical about Spanish colonial policy, which she calls "a bloody saga of conquering colonies" focusing on "hard exploitation of the countries belonging to the Habsburg Empire" (Kaptereva, 1962). This trait is probably conditioned upon the dominating ideology.

Kaptereva creates a chronological classification of Spanish Renaissance. According to this gradation, the origin of Spanish Renaissance dates back to the mid XVth century and is closely connected with Flemish influence. Kaptereva reveals strong ties between Flemish and Spanish Renaissance, identifying the main touch points: realism, attention to detail, materialistic forms, individualistic approach to a human being, colourful palette. In agreement with the prevailing methodology, the author also pays increased attention to political and economic relations with the Netherlands. The second stage begins in the late XVth century. This is the period of reunification, when art faces a new mission and is intended to glorify "the power of the monarchy and dominance of the Catholic church" (Kaptereva 1962). However further classification is presented separately for different genres, due to variations in their development.

For architecture Kaptereva distinguishes two stages:

- a) generation of plateresco;
- b) maturity of plateresco, influence of gothic, Moorish and local culture.

There is no fixed position regarding the essence of plateresco. Kaptereva shares quite a common view, attributing this style to Spanish culture only without any extension to the North. Although her interpretation of plateresco has much in common with the position of modern Spanish scholars, she emphasizes different aspects. Defining plateresco as a style the author points out that "new Renaissance elements included into mainly medieval architecture do not produce an impression of an eclectic mixture of traditions but a harmonious fusion into an integral artistic image" (Kaptereva, 1962). Another interesting feature of Kaptereva's concept is her attitude to foreign artists at the court. Admitting presence of Italian masters in Spain she denies their influence and insists that it was the "local tradition and artistic taste" (Kaptereva, 1962) that dominated in their legacy.

The same national-oriented approach is evident in Kaptereva's analysis of Spanish sculpture. This is mainly because of intimate connection between architecture and sculpture in

Renaissance Spain. While acknowledging penetration of classical forms into Spanish art the author rejects the idea that these forms were fully assimilated. She declares that having adopted some classical patterns "Spanish artists perceived and depicted them in their own manner" (Kaptereva, 1962).

A similar connection exists for Kaptereva between sculpture and painting. In this respect she agrees with the majority of European and Russian historians who distinguish Spanish painting and sculpture for their tragic plot and emotional representation. However, unlike some of her counterparts, Kaptereva deprives Spanish mentality of the "Renaissance free thinking" (Kaptereva, 1962). What is more, aspiration of Spanish artists to depict human feelings and their expressive manner of painting Kaptereva considers a serious hindrance to adoption of classical traditions. Despite admitting their perfect mastery of Renaissance painting techniques she renounces correspondence of their mentality to the Renaissance ideas, a position very common in Soviet historiography. Characterizing Spanish painting Kaptereva declares that it is the internal religious feeling that makes the picture so expressive and tragic.

Conclusion

Nowadays when intellectual tradition of various epochs presents special interest to historians, Soviet historiography becomes a very promising field for study. Kaptereva's early legacy demonstrates a brilliant example of Soviet tradition and makes it possible to identify main trends and features of this period. The author provides original interpretation of Spanish artistic heritage following the development of the Renaissance culture in Spain from the very origin up its decline in the XVIth century. Vivid language and graphic epithets, very common in Soviet historiography, make the narration extremely expressive and dynamic.

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