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Spanish Renaissance High Culture in Soviet Historiography: Interdisciplinary Aspect

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Abstract

The tradition of studying Spanish Renaissance in Russia is quite a complicated phenomenon, which requires a detailed analysis. The main questions which arise when referring to the issue are those of developmental patterns and interdisciplinary aspect of the letter. Spanish Renaissance culture is traditionally the subject to scrutiny for historians, philologists and art historians. The present article aims to outline a preliminary picture of interdisciplinary interaction, which gained momentum in the Soviet period of Russian Hispanism. Special attention is paid to the imminent figures of Spanish Renaissance historiography, as well as their ideas and concepts. The evolution of Spanish Renaissance studies is described against the background of the principal research areas. The present paper will be of interest to both intellectual historians and scholars investigating Renaissance and medieval history.

Keywords: History, Spanish renaissance, Russia, Historiography, World cultural heritage, History of theatre, Soviet era, Interdisciplinarity.

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Introduction

Spanish Renaissance is a subject to multiple disciplines, therefore there are numerous interpretations and methods to study this phenomenon. In this paper we intend to provide an overall scheme of the basic stages in investigating Spanish Renaissance phenomena by Soviet scholars. We aim to analyze Spanish Renaissance and its interpretation by representatives of various fields of knowledge, including philology, history, and art history. Spanish Renaissance is represented as an element of Soviet Renaissance study in general. Being closely connected with medieval era, Spanish Renaissance should be studied in relation with this epoch, therefore works by Soviet medieval scholars are of paramount importance.

The present paper covers the period between the early 20th century and the 1980s, which became crucial in Russian tradition of studying Spanish Renaissance culture.

The most significant studies on historiography of Spanish Renaissance were conducted by such Russian historians as A.V. Morozova, V.A. Vedyushkin, I.S. Pichugina, V.E. Bagno (Antonova, 2016; Antonova et al., 2016). All of them cover different areas. A.V. Morozova is interested in the history of studying Spanish Art history (Morozova & Malitskaya, 2011), while V.A. Vedyushkin (2011) focuses on general history of the epoch. Soviet historiography of Medieval Spain was addressed by I.S. Pichugina (1958), V.E. Bagno (2001) being engaged in literary aspect. Talking about the issue we cannot neglect the contribution made by O.L. Vainshtein and E.V. Gutnova who laid the basis for investigating the history of Russian medieval studies.

Since historiographic scrutiny can be considered as a sub-field of "new intellectual history", the research work conducted by L.P. Repina (2014), L.A. Sychenkova (2015 and 2016), A.I. Kluev (2013) and S.B. Krikh (2014) can be estimated a genuine source of inspiration for this paper.

Methods

Carrying out the study we adhered to the main principles typical of "new intellectual history" as well as the basic principles of historical study, namely, the principle of historicism, the principle of objectivity, the principle of integrity, etc. The methods implemented in the course of the study include those of structural, comparative and retrospective analysis.

Discussion and Results

The Bolshevik revolution in 1917 brought about dramatic changes to spiritual life in Russian society, including its intellectual tradition (Sychenkova, 2016; Repina & Myagkov, 2014). The 1920s stand out for the increasing authority of the Marxist doctrine in Russian historical studies (Sychenkova, 2015; Kluev & Sveshnikov, 2013). Political history is inevitably analyzed through the prism of class struggle, general history being understood as "politics capsized into the past". The textbook case of this epoch is the study on medieval Spanish history by A.E. Kudriavtsev (1937). This work belong rather to popular style reflecting the peculiarities of intellectual thought of the 1930s (Pichugina, 1958). It was the first general research on Spanish history after V.K. Piskorsky's (1902) fundamental study. In his research Kudriavtsev includes geographic descriptions of Spain, and covers its historical development from the Primeval era, through the Ancient times, up to the 17th and partly 18th centuries. A.E. Kudriavthsev also addresses some aspects of medieval folk culture as Spanish Renaissance culture without concentrating on this problem. The national idea is the key concept of his study (Krikh, 2014). "Nation" symbolizes creativity, natural and positive spirit, which moves the history, and demonstrates itself through struggle with the exploiting social classes. It is this notion that makes Spanish medieval history so very appealing for A.E. Kudriavtsev.

It is quite natural that social and political historiography of the 1930s is incomplete without special focus on cultural issues. However cultural studies neglect symbolic or psychological methods. The scholars are

forced to pay special attention to social relations, located beyond the artistic life, as well as the leading classes which determine the dominating ideology.

This cultural gap of the 1930-50s was filled by a cluster of art and literature historians based in Leningrad University, the State Hermitage, A.S. Pushkin Art Museum and Moscow State University. These scholars address various aspects of Renaissance epoch, including literature, theatre, drama, arts, etc.

A shining example is the "Literary encyclopedia", released between 1929 and 1939, which comprises numerous articles on Spanish literary history, its representatives and their creation. Many of those articles were written by V.S. Uzin, an outstanding translator and literary critic, who started his academic career even before the revolution. His paper on Spanish literature is typical of his times especially by the exceedingly socialist-oriented introduction (Uzin, 1930). The author focuses on the class struggle issue and the way it is represented in the art, namely the balance between aristocratic and middle-class trends.

V.S. Uzin was also a renowned theater critic. He was one of the authors who composed the two volume "Reading book on the history of theatre in Western Europe" (first edition – 1937, second edition – 1952). This work is a fabulous composition of valuable and diverse sources on history of Spanish and European medieval and Renaissance culture. In the introduction S.S. Mokulsky (1953) depicts the tragic history of new Renaissance society in Spain, its germination and evolution, opposing national and democratic ethos to courtier and academic one. Extracts from Lope de Rueda, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina and Calderon are elaborately selected with a view to demonstrate the epoch's key controversies and intensive transformation.

The first edition of the "reading book" became an invaluable complementation to the course-books on theatre history, published in the 1930s (by S.S. Mokulsky, A.K. Javilegov, G.N. Boyajiev et al.). However the genuinely fundamental study on European theatre history was still to be created. It was in 1955 that its first volume, dedicated to Renaissance theatre, was released. The chapter on Spanish theatre was written by V.S. Uzin. The author gives special place to dramatic art in Spanish culture, as the one which "advocated human rights and dignity, fought against tyranny, class prejudices, "rigidly patriarchal" moral norms, gender inequality, reaffirmed human faith in happiness, rejuvenating and invigorating the man's spirit" (Mokulsky, 1956). The author vividly described life and their legacy of the most outstanding Spanish Renaissance playwrights, from F. de Rojas to A. Moreto. Soviet scholars employed theatrical arts as a mirror to study society and its evolution, artistic development being analyzed against the background of acute social controversies. As V.E. Bagno (2001) points out, Spanish Renaissance theatre studies developed along with literary studies.

Medieval and Renaissance Spanish literature was addressed by Professor A.A. Smirnov, an eminent literary scholar from Leningrad University. Being A.N. Veselovsky's disciple, A.A. Smirnov continues the renowned pre-revolutionary tradition, however he cannot help being a typical soviet author (Smirnov, 1969). The same period (1930s) became the cradle for a new generation of purely Soviet scholars. For instance, a philologist and literary historian L.E. Pinsky, a Cervantes scholar Z.I. Plavskin, literary scholar K.N. Derzhavin, art historian A.L. Shtein and of course, M.M. Bakhtin. All these authors greatly contributed to Spanish Renaissance cultural studies.

An enormous contribution to researching medieval and Renaissance folk culture was made by M.M. Bakhtin (1965), a prominent linguist and philosopher. The key figure in his well-known work is Cervantes and his novel "Don Quixote", which M.M. Bakhtin attributes to folk "humor culture" as being structured "carnival"-like. National idea, typical of Soviet historical studies, is presented in an unusual and original way. Forming continuum with the pre-revolutionary tradition, M.M. Bakhtin opts for a creative elaboration of Marxist ideology, thus making his cultural and philosophical concept appealing not only to his Soviet contemporaries but also to some modern Russian scholars.

One of those positive references on Bakhtin's ideas was made by L.E. Pinsky (philologist). He focuses on the ratio between the Renaissance and Baroque trends against the background of cultural transformation (Pinskiy, 1937). His early article on the issue largely defined his interests for the subsequent decades (Lysenko, 2002). L.E. Pinsky's research was concentrated around Cervantes and his legacy with a special focus on realistic trends in the Renaissance literature and their distinction from realistic tradition in other epochs.

The overall trend to interpret the Renaissance, generally enforced in Soviet historiography between the 1930s and 1950s, consists in presenting this epoch as an integral phenomenon possessing its own characteristic features. This approach is represented by such historians as V.N. Lazarev, M.A. Gukovsky, etc. In a similar way L.E. Pinsky demonstrates the complexity and controversies of the Renaissance culture. To this end the author invokes the "time concept" as the core idea of the Renaissance and certainly the so-called "discovery of man" (Pinskiy, 1961). To follow the formation of new culture in Spain appeared much more challenging than it was when exploring Italian pattern. The features characterizing the "full" or "articulate" Spanish Renaissance could only be identified in high culture products. However the same cultural pattern might simultaneously symbolize a peak and a crisis, a loss of harmony. A brilliant example for L.E. Pinsky is provided by Cervantes who symbolizes the transition from idealistic, multilateral realism to the new era (Pinskiy, 1961).

The first monographic research on Cervantes was written by K.N. Derzhavin (1958), a literary critic and scholar, theatre historian and Doctor in art history. A.L. Shtein published a course-book on the history of Spanish literature.

The contribution made by Soviet literary scholar into investigating Spanish Renaissance culture is undeniable. They translated and analyzed numerous literary works, created joint studies, course-books and reading books. What is more, along with exploring verbal heritage, literary scholars addressed historical issues in their literary framework.

The sphere which presents particular interest for Renaissance history is undoubtedly visual arts, comprising painting, sculpture and architecture. It is at this stage that specialized analysis of Spanish Renaissance art is initiated in Russian historiography.

The major contribution to artistic studies between 1930 and 1960s was made by K.M. Malitskaya (Pushkin's State Museum) (Morozova & Malitskaya, 2011). K.M. Malitskaya mainly focused on various aspects of Spanish art in the Golden Age, paying fragmentary attention to other issues. Her work "Toledo, the ancient Spanish capital" plays a significant role in developing integrated approach to studying Spanish Renaissance (Malitskaya, 1968). This exceptional work seems to resume the pre-revolutionary style of Botkin's (1976) notes. A descriptive narration evolves into a coherent and well structured cultural analysis of Toledo city. It is not mere art history, but rather history seen through art. Renaissance artistic trends, traditions and elements are correlated with social development and located in multidimensional context.

In the 1950s and the following years Russian Hispanism welcomes a whole cluster of gifted art historians, including T.P. Kaptereva, I.M. Levina, E.O. Vaganova, L.L. Kagane, O.I. Variash, etc. This new stage in Hispanic Renaissance studies stands out for its aspiration to reflect both the individuality of Spanish Renaissance art and its general image.

A substantial research on Spanish art between 16th and 17th centuries was implemented by I.M. Levina (1966) along with numerous articles covering exhibitions held by the State Hermitage. The author pays special attention to coexistence of national traits and realistic trends in art. Analyzing "The poem of the Cid", for instance, I.M. Levina places together the names of such persons as Juan Ruiz, Antonio de Montero, a tailor from Cordoba (1404-1480), Jaime Rocha, a satirist from Valencia (1401-1478) as

representatives of national culture and realism. "Celestina" by Fernando Rojas (1499) attracts Levina's attention by its vivid, authentic and even sometimes vulgar folk speech. As for sculpture and miniature, I.M. Levina mainly focuses on folk (i.e. realistic and comic) features.

The 1960s and 1970s brought about drastic changes to Soviet Renaissance studies, initializing fruitful discussions on ways and methods of understanding culture, conducting literary and visual analysis. It was in 1972 that the Academy of Sciences established a Committee for Renaissance cultural studies. Initially, it was plotted as an interdisciplinary project to encourage collaboration between specialists in history, philology and art history. Hispanists took active part in this project.

The art historian to be highly valued in those years was T.P. Kaptereva. According to A.V. Morozova, "she discovered Spanish Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance art to Russian audience" (2013). She started her academic career in the 1940s, the most celebrated being her monograph "Spanish art. Middle ages. Renaissance", published in 1989. T.P. Kaptereva herself estimates this work as the first generalizing work on Spanish medieval and Renaissance art in Russian historiography (Kaptereva, 1989). In effect, her forerunners' works, despite being fundamental in essence, do not aim to provide such large scale generalizations.

In accordance with the existing approach, T.P. Kaptereva studies medieval art against the background of political and social development. Exploring artistic works she recurs to the customary practice of analyzing their styles and images, peculiarities and development patterns. Thanks to extensive analysis of virtual and literary sources, involving research data provided by both historians and philologists, T.P. Kaptereva successfully reproduces the features of Spanish culture in that trying period. In spite of certain ideological tinting her legacy remains relevant, being an accurate and profound study on Spanish cultural issues.

The last three decades of the Soviet era (1960s–1980s) became truly prolific for Spanish medieval scholars in Russia. To name just a few: A.R. Korsunsky, E.E. Litavrina, L.T. Milskaya, I.S. Pichugina. Early medieval Spanish history is addressed by Yu.B. Tsirkin. O.I. Variash investigates medieval justice in Spain, while S.D. Chervonov describes daily life in Spanish medieval towns. However all these scholars mainly focus on political and economic structure of Spanish society. Cultural aspects, including visual arts and literature research data, remain neglected by these historians. At the same time the importance of medieval studies for analyzing Spanish Renaissance is evident due to the close ties between both epochs. Medieval spirit, Reconquista, Catholic Church largely affected Spanish Renaissance studies as compared to its Italian analogue.

Conclusion

Summing up, it is possible to infer that Spanish Renaissance was simultaneously the subject matter for multiple academic fields, including political history, cultural history, philology, art history, all varying in their objectives and methods. Nevertheless, their representatives maintained a permanent interdisciplinary dialogue.

All in all, soviet art history and literature studies had to exist in the Marxist ideological atmosphere in the realm of general history. Even when creating descriptive works they had to stick to the limitations imposed by political history, oriented towards class struggle and social problems. The influence of ideological component of Soviet Marxism is undeniable, especially before the 1960s. However Marxist system-based approach had some positive effect on studying Spanish Renaissance culture.

The concluding stages of the period under scrutiny display both conservative approach to investigating Spanish Renaissance culture and new trends, oriented towards renewed methodology and genuine interdisciplinarity. In effect, it was cultural history that gave rise to interdisciplinary approach in Russian

humanities. Therefore, the Soviet version of cultural history can be considered quite relevant to modern approaches to representing Spanish Renaissance culture.

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