

## **THE DISEASE THAT HAS DIVIDED THE WEST CULTURAL HISTORY IN THE CONTEXT OF HISTORIC AND GRAPHICAL RE-THINKING OF CULTURAL EPOCH BORDERS**

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Relevance of the studied problem is caused by necessity of reconsideration of the existing approaches to a periodization of the history of Western culture. Search of new approaches assumes consideration, the experience of a non-conventional periodization of the cultural past in the Russian and foreign historical and cultural knowledge which is saved up to the moment. The purpose of the article is to reveal the originality of a historiographical image of Plague of the XIV century interpretations that exist at the moment, representing it as one of important borders in cultural history of Western Europe. The leading approach to research this problem is the system and cultural method which allowed interpreting the heritage of the western and Russian medievalists within all complex of historical and cultural knowledge (cultural anthropology, art culture, daily culture). The main results of research include the expansion of ideas of possible cultural history periodization criteria. The existing experience in the West European and Russian historiography in this problem is comprehended in the article. Advantage of the iconographic sources which convincingly show the changes that followed after Plague epidemic in mentality of the Europeans is shown. The cultural phenomenon of "Danse macabre" allows verifying changes in consciousness of Europeans after Plague towards Life and Death concepts. Such approach allows rethinking borders of cultural history. Materials of this article can be useful for teaching history, cultural history of the Middle Ages, cultural anthropology.

**Keywords:** history, cultural history borders, Plague, iconography of "Danse macabre", P. Bitsilli, I. Ioffe.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The problem of cultural borders or problem of history periodization was a subject of studies of the Russian medievalist Pyotr Bitsilli (Bitsilli, 1919, 1925, 1934, 1996) and the French historian Jean Le Goff (Le Goff, 1964, 2014). This problem was studied based on concrete historical and cultural material of the western Middle Ages represented by the European historiography (Heyzingoy, 1988), F. Aryes (Aryes, 1982), Zh. Delyumo (Delyumo, 2003)) and Russian historians of art and culture (Ioffe, 1937), P. Bitsilli (Bitsilli, 1919, 1925, 1996). Division of cultural history (and it is necessary to recognize it) is rather conditional in a modern historiography tradition. So it needs to make essential amendments. At the same time there are studies devoted to the culmination events which made an impact on the West European attitude the world.

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The periodization problem of cultural history has the major methodological value for development of historical science in general. It is known that throughout the history of a mankind a lot of attempts to structure and systematize a cultural picture of the past were made. The closer to our time, the more attempts of full revision of the developed stereotypes about the borders of cultural eras are made. For example, the discussion about borders of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance is still actual in modern science. The Netherlands historian of culture Y. Heyzinga (Heyzinga, 1988) in the 1930 warned that as a result deleting of a side between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance “the image of the Renaissance threatened to thaw and disappear as a snow doll” (Heyzinga, 1997).

In 1934 the Russian medievalist emigrant Pyotr Bitsilli (1934) wrote about complexity of periodization of history in general and cultural history, in particular (Bitsilli, 1934). The question of history periodization and existence or lack of borders between separate historical eras was central for P. M. Bitsilli (Bitsilli, 1919, 1925, 1934) throughout all his professional activity. In one of the first works “Falling of the Roman Empire” (1919) the historian throws down a challenge to the developed statements about “an initial periodization”. In the book “Elements of Medieval Culture” by P. Bitsilli (Bitsilli, 1919), he considers the ideas of eschatologists and Joachim Florski (Florski, 1981) and warns future theorists of historical process about danger to perceive the “initial periodization” fixed by textbooks as unique. In later works such as “The Renaissance: place in the history of culture” (Bitsilli, 1934) and “Essays on the theory of historical science” (Bitsilli, 1925) P. Bitsilli came back to the subject of periodization of history again. In 1933 he wrote that “in “Experiences” of the French scientist of the late Renaissance Michel de Montaigne the criticism of historical periodization is already given” (Bitsilli, 1996). P. Bitsilli (Bitsilli, 1934) suggested that the doctrine of the French philosopher of the beginning of the XX century A. Bergson about “durée réelle” is concluded in “an amazing formula of “Experiences”. Everything is changeable, borders are mobile. “The specific person doesn’t remain absolutely identical to himself even for a second. He is changing constantly...” (Bitsilli, 1996).

A bit later, in a year, in the letter to A.V. Florovsky of February 5, 1923 P. M. Bitsilli (1925) explained that there was a plan about “Essays of the theory of historical science”, the book where the problem of understanding of historical periodization takes the central place: “Without having opportunity “to write stories”, I wrote “about stories”, which is a theoretical work”. (Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, fund 1609, inventory 2, business 140). The special place of judgments on how P. M. Bitsilli (Bitsilli, 1996) realized the necessity to investigate a question of historical periodization, is occupied by two books which were of great interest to the scientist. The first of them is “the Decline of Europe” by Oswald Spengler (here it is necessary to remember that Bitsilli was the first reviewer of this edition being in emigration) and “Europe and mankind” by N. S. Trubetskoy

(Trubetskoy, 1920), expressing the rise of eurasianism. (Galcheva, Golubovich, 2015). Discussing this statement with the above-mentioned authors, P. M. Bitsilli (Bitsilli, 1925) developed the “sketch of the plan, the new historical scheme” which was “in a conscious contradiction with well-known historical Vulgate according to textbooks and with some emerging attempts of its transformation from time to time “. This theoretical problem posed in almost forgotten heritage of the Russian medievalist and culturologist P. Bitsilli (Bitsilli, 1996) whether gained relevance in connection with the publication of the latest work of one of the most authoritative French historians of our time Jean Le Goff “Is it worth splitting history into pieces again?” (Le Goff, 2014) which became actually peculiar scientific will of the historian who devoted all his life to studying of the West European Middle Ages.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Methodology of this research is the system and cultural method that allows interpreting the heritage of the western and Russian medievalists as an open mobile system, within the complex of historical and cultural knowledge (cultural anthropology, art culture, daily culture): their formation was originated within the socio-cultural space of the XX century both in Russia, and in the West. The research methods are socio-cultural, comparative methods and comparative analysis, and also a method of personal and biographic, and more generally – simply substantial parallels between various scientists, doctrines and ideas. Personality approach allows to reveal, first of all, the forgotten concepts of the Russian history of culture, and to show their ability to anticipate the statements of the major theoretical problems of modern historical and cultural knowledge.

### **RESULTS**

Historiographical reconsideration of an iconography of “Dancing of death” in the West European and Russian humanitarian knowledge, allows speaking about the sweeping changes which occurred in consciousness of Europeans after epidemics of Plague in 1348 - 1350. So not only important political events (disintegration of empires, wars, revolutions, hunger, invasion of barbarians, death of the carrier of culture) can act as borders of cultural eras but diseases (Plague in the XIV century, AIDS in the XX century), change of forms of communication (the invention of printing by I. Gutenberg in the XV century, creation of the Internet at the end of the XX century), global humanitarian disasters, etc. It is possible to claim that the standard borders of the West European history need essential adjustment on the basis of the carried out analysis. The main results of research involve expansion of ideas of possible cultural historic periodization criteria. The analysis of historiographical heritage of the Russian medievalists and culture experts, such as P. Bitsilli (Bitsilli, 1919, 1925, and 1996) and I. Ioffe (Ioffe, 1937), shows that they anticipated the problems of modern medieval studies. They presented concepts

that are not less original, than their West European colleagues' concepts of "Danse macabre" (I. Ioffe), offered theoretical justification of alternative principles of initial periodization of cultural history (Bitsilli, 1925). Recognition of their concepts in the world scientific community was prevented by time condition they lived in (Sichenkova, 2010). I. Ioffe's opening (Ioffe, 1937). They turned out to be unknown as he lived in full isolation of the Soviet humanists from world science. Works P. of Bitsilli (Bitsilli, 1925, 1996) were known only to a special circle of the Russian emigrants - medievalists.

### **DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION**

The cultural phenomenon of "Dancing of death" was considered in the western historiography in works of E. Malle (Malle, 1908). Y. Heyzingi (Heyzingi, 1988), A. Tenenti (Tenenti, 1952), J. Delyumo (Delyumo, 1978), J. Le Goff (Le Goff, 1965). Original concepts of these scientists allowed a historiographical image of "Danse macabre". So, the Dutch historian Y. Heyzinga (Heyzinga, 1988) saw the fact of appearance of "dance of death" plot as reflection of deep layer of mood of the late Middle Ages – fear of life, fear of beauty because pain and suffering is connected with it. F. Aryes (Aryes, 1982), on the contrary, saw some kind of counterbalance to that thirst of life and material riches in demonstration of images of skeletons and the decaying corpses which found expression and in the increased role of the will providing a solemn funeral and numerous requiem masses (Aryes, 1982). In his conclusions F. Aryes (1982) was much more categorical than Y. Heyzing (1988), he swept aside any socio-political and ideological motives in "Danse macabre" (Heyzinga, 1988). (F. Aryes, 1982) considered that the love to life, to people was combined in the person of "the second Middle Ages" with unreasonable love to things, to benefits and pleasures of common life. Therefore a bright illustration of aspirations of the person of this time is his hope to carry away the good even to a next world.... The medieval person couldn't leave the sewed good in death... Never the person loved life so much, as in the end of the Middle Ages "(Aryes, 1982).

Essential adjustment in reconsideration of a cultural phenomenon of "Dancing of death" was brought by the Soviet art critic I.I. Ioffe (Ioffe, 1937) who offered the original approach to interpretation of the name of the engraving series "Danse macabre". Considering the history of penetration of the term "macabre" into French language as soon as the word "death" in French will be "la morte", but not "macabre", is an interesting fact for the West European researchers. But I. Ioffe in 1937 (Ioffe, 1937) paid attention to the first word in this phrase – "la Danse". He was interested in emergence of the phenomenon, the action including connection of two incongruous phenomena – "death" and "dance", and, as a result, emergence of combined notion "dancing of death". Ioffe (1937) proposed that the word "la danse" makes initial sense of fight, but not peaceful march. It was a round dance,

spinning, pastoral. The new interpretation of the concept of “la danse” allowed I. Ioffe to explain differently the hidden symbolism of iconographic “Danse macabre” plot, and to treat it as a form of a social protest (Ioffe, 1937). It should be noted that modern researchers Le Goff (Le Goff, 1965), F. Aryes (Aryes, 1982), Delyumo (Delyumo, 2003) excluded any socio-political motives in a plot of “Dancing of death”. It is an important fact for us that in 1937, the worst period of Soviet humanities, I.I. Ioffe (1937) became not only one of the first scientists in domestic culture who came entered into the world science absolutely independently. After a big breakthrough in the 1980 in studying of a cultural phenomenon of “Dancing of death”, it was continued in a domestic historiography in works of Nesselshtraus (Nesselshtraus, 2013), A.Ya. Gurevich (Gurevich, 1978), M. Yu. Reutin (Reutin, 2001).

In the second half of the XX century a problem of medieval culture periodization was discussed in works of Zhilson (Zhilson, 1958), Le Goff (Le Goff, 1965), Delumeau (Delumeau, 2003). B. Gene (Gene, 2002), M. Shulakevich (Shulakevich, 2008). So, Delumeau (Delumeau, 1978) calls great epidemic of plague in 1348-1350 the most dramatic among unforeseen shocks, fallen to lot of people of the Middle Ages. “For some decades the way of life of the Western world considerably changed “. (The History of private life, 2015). The problem of borders of cultural eras was continued in a domestic historiography of a periodization of the Middle Ages in works of A.Ya. Gurevich (Gurevich, 1999), N. V. Braginskaya (Braginskaya, 1999). I.N. Danilevsky (Danilevsky, 1999). So, in the preface to the section of “Dancing of Death in the European Culture” in the collection “Arbor mundi. World tree” (2001) Plague is compared with “tectonic shift in consciousness” of people of the late Middle Ages. (“Arbor mundi. World tree”, 2001). It should be recognized that even those scientists who are skeptical about traditional periodization (or periodization in general), nevertheless recognize its didactic advantage (Gilson, 1958; Braginskaya, 1999).

Thus, comparative analysis of the “Danse macabre” concept which is carried out by us in domestic and West European history and culture allows saying that such illness as Plague can introduce amendments to traditional periodization of cultural history. On the other hand, it is necessary to admit that periodization, both stories in general and cultural history, in particular, it is the “ideas of historians”, artificial construct, the instrument of thinking.

Discussions on the possible principles of cultural history periodization are conducted in a historiography throughout the XX century. It is standard that the culture of the western Middle Ages begins with collapse of Rome and comes to an end with falling of Byzantium and the capture of Constantinople by Turks. These events separate the culture of the Middle Ages from Antiquity and the modern culture which are different in perception of the world, have the different world outlook (mental) beginnings, ideas of time and space, meaning of life and beauty,

different style of behavior, etc. Of course, no exact borders between eras can be established. Actually people living in those days could not always realize the happening changes.

In spite of the fact that modern historians recognize convention of “borders” of cultural eras, nevertheless, throughout all history of mankind attempts to structure, systematize a cultural picture of the past were made. The closer to our time, the more often the attempts of full revision of the developed stereotypes about the borders of cultural eras arise. For example, today at the French universities the students are taught history, relying on such principle of periodization: the Empire of Antiquity finished in 476 with falling of the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages finished in 1492 with discovery of America by Columbus and the Modern time (le temps modern) ended in 1789 with the Great French revolution. In the French historiography it is considered that 1789 is the start date of the “latest” or “modern” history (l’histoire contemporaine) (Yatsyk, 2015). Discussion about borders of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance proceeds in modern science.

Unfortunately, that part of the concept of the Russian medievalist P. Bitsilli (Bitsilli, 1919, 1925, 1996) remains meaningless. P. Bitsilli (Bitsilli, 1919, 1925, 1996), also as well as Le Goff (2014), didn’t urge to refuse the history periodization in general. The Russian scientist considered that exact borders are necessary for convenience of teaching and studying of history, exactly for this purpose they are thought up by historians. Such coincidence of approaches to the problem of a periodization of cultural history of Russian and the French medievalist – Pyotr Bitsilli (Bitsilli, 1919, 1925, 1996) and Jacques Le Goff (Le Goff, 1964, 2014) who are divided by almost a century, is another evidence of insight of the Russian historian, and the general logic of development of science. It should be noted with regret that from all scattering of ingenious opening of domestic historians of culture only three names are mentioned in the newest western reviews of “cultural history”: M.M. Bakhtin, Yu.M. Lotman and A.YA. Gurevich (Byorg, 2015). Difficulties of socio-political development of Russia in the XX century led to the present ignoring by world science of a rich heritage of the Russian cultural studies. Materials of the article may be interesting to experts who are engaged in teaching of cultural anthropology, cultural history, history of the Middle Ages, common history, methods of studying of culture, history of cultural science, visual culture at the universities.

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