

Humanism, the Renaissance and Russian Culture between the 15th and 17th Centuries: Preliminary Thoughts

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1. Premise

This topic is vast to the point of making it impossible to approach it within the confines of a brief contribution essay. Therefore, we restrain ourselves to summarizing a few preliminary observations by offering practical examples while we wait for future research developments. We find this approach useful to map out a few ideas and suggestions for study, especially in view of the creation, in the future, of an atlas mapping the relevance of Humanism and the Renaissance in the Slavic world.

When it comes to this topic, studies generally focus on Central-Eastern Europe, on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and its eastern territories in particular, or on the relationships between the Western world and Muscovy where medieval culture would have been maintained its dominant position until the Baroque period. Based on the most current research, we will try rather to introduce new perspectives in interpretation showing how the entire East Slavic world – albeit in different ways – participated in European cultural transformations from the very start, and not just by sharing some of this new trend's characteristics, but by building a new identity in tune with the changes of the times.

The following reconstruction sheds light on a fundamental phase in the process of assimilation of the Mediterranean culture within the Slavic world, and at the same time tries to define more consistently the very dynamics within European

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Humanism and the Renaissance. A unified panorama of these historical processes will emerge, within which the participation of the Slavic world will be re-evaluated¹.

2. Main approaches and prejudices in Humanism and Renaissance studies

To better address this complex topic, we believe we need to step away from dominant interpretative avenues and free ourselves from those prejudices (in the etymological sense of the word) that characterize Humanist and Renaissance scholarship, generally influencing research on Eastern Slavic culture. The most evident of these avenues is the national-driven interpretation, which views all cultural manifestations as part of a separate linguistic, literary and artistic canon, following the dominant paradigm of the 19th century².

We need to realize that, just by taking the Italian peninsula into consideration, the new social models, from the figure of the Humanist intellectual down to that of the Renaissance artist, are models that stemmed in very different forms from the Renaissance courts between the 15th and the 16th century. It does not seem enough to highlight the unity of Italian culture and emphasize the adoption of vulgar Florentine promoted by Pietro Bembo in his *Prose della Vulgar Lingua*. It is extremely limiting to interpret all of these complex realities under the umbrella of a national, unified expression, most of all if we think of the invaluable contribution from the Roman curia – from its ‘exile’ in Avignon to its return to Rome – and the subsequent transformation of the capital of medieval Christendom into a brand-new *Caput Mundi*, following classical paradigms. During this time of *renovatio*, aimed at uniting the renewal of the arts and the universal mission of the Roman Church (symbolically represented by the building of the basilica of St. Peter), the fact that individuals might belong to a state, a nation or an ethnic group did not really matter. Indeed, what truly mattered was their ability to be active members of this process of rebirth while Europe had been deprived of ‘an eye’ by the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople³.

There is an important key factor we need to re-examine in the context of the Turkish menace in the Balkans and in the Eastern Mediterranean regions: the presence and action of Greek intellectuals in preserving and perpetuating the legacy of the Eastern Roman Empire, starting from the central place held by

¹ For an overall account of this topic, see our introduction to the cultural history of the Slavic world in the volume *Gli slavi* (Garzaniti 2019f: 296-330). For a reflection on terminology and interpretation vis-à-vis Humanism and the Renaissance in the Slavic area in literature about Russia and other Slavic countries, see the illuminating study by S. Graciotti, although he seems to focus mainly on the typological and analogical character of such definitions (Graciotti, 1988). For a recap of the state of scholarship on the Middle Ages and Humanism in the Muscovite area, especially in Germany, see the vast study by V. Tomelleri (Tomelleri 2013).

² For a radical criticism of the dominant national approach in literary studies, see Guillén 1993.

³ In his letter to Cardinal Juan Carvajal (6 April 1453), Enea Silvio Piccolomini writes “Alterum Europe oculum in manu infidelium devenire” (Wolkan 1909-1919, IV: 129).

Cardinal Bessarion⁴. Unfortunately, when it comes to these intellectuals' crucial role, studies tend to focus mainly on retracing the Greek refugees' or expatriates' contribution to the rediscovery of the classical culture, focusing their research on the Greek and Hellenistic heritage and on the translation from Greek into Latin. The aim is to rebuild the contribution of emigration to the broadening of Western Middle Age knowledge which was taught in the universities⁵. This way, the Patristic, theological and philosophical legacy continues to be left aside, if not forgotten altogether, a legacy promoted by those scholars of the Byzantine world, which preserved not only the classical heritage.

Today we can retrace the dissemination and fruition during Humanism and the Renaissance of this legacy coming from Romània, a legacy that should be observed not only from the perspective of re-discovering its classical roots, but also in relation to the Church Fathers' thought, which had been the subject of discussions at the Council of Ferrara and Florence (1437-1439). For many, the unity achieved in the Tuscan city should have opened the door to a renovation within the medieval Christian Church. Greek exiles believed that this unification would have its first manifestation in a Crusade against the Turks aimed at freeing Constantinople and at reinstating the Eastern Roman Empire⁶.

Because of this complex cultural and political context of the rediscovery of antiquity, it seems difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between a "secular" and a "religious" culture, following an idealized separation still alive in contemporary scholarship⁷. A number of critiques to this approach have already appeared, and we want to remember the fundamental contribution of V. Zabugin, a major Russian scholar of Italian Humanism⁸. Moreover, the most recent publications clearly show the reality of the facts that emerge above all in studies on the Patristic legacy during Humanism and the Renaissance⁹.

We do not mean to deny the existence in that time of philosophical research that tended towards greater autonomy from theology¹⁰, determining the defini-

⁴ See, in particular, the collection of studies on this famous character dubbed "the most Latin of the Greeks, the most Greek of the Latins", Bianca 1999.

⁵ See the useful historiographical contribution by C. Bianca, written on occasion of the International Seminary dedicated to Maximus the Greek, Bianca 2010.

⁶ See in particular the important cultural and political-diplomatic influence, still today completely neglected, of Janus Lascaris (1435-1534), who grew up in Bessarion's shadow, Ceresa 2004.

⁷ See for example R.G. Witt's essay where, following a consolidated line of studies, we can recognize the roots of the Italian Renaissance in the secular thinkers of the 13th century (Witt 2012).

⁸ We are referring to his *Storia del Rinascimento cristiano in Italia* (Zabugin 1924). For a brief introduction to him and his permanence in Italy, see Tamborra 1993; for an introduction to the abovementioned essay, interpreted in the light of his mentor's through, A.N. Veselovskij, see Rabboni 2010-2011.

⁹ See the classic *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum* (CTC). For a contemporary review of the reception in Russia of religious controversies of the Italian Renaissance, see Bragina 1993.

¹⁰ Consider the importance of Renaissance Aristotelian thought and the central figure of Pomponazzi (Bianchi 2003).

tive separation between the two fields of study. We also do not mean to deny the development of a political science that frees itself from moral precepts¹¹. These tendencies, though, were confined to an elite of scholars, developed strictly in confessional societies. Albeit at alternating phases both of a historical-social nature and on a personal level, in these societies the intertwining between a recovery of antiquity and the renewal of Christianity remained inextricable. The one constant, above and beyond the different philosophical and theological approaches, is a new concept of the individual.

Only the Protestant Reform will bring forth truly different aesthetic ideas that will oppose a new iconoclastic approach to the rebirth of classical mythology. In any case, both instances are expressions of a new cultural paradigm of modern times, taking a step away from the Middle Ages. It is thus possible to leave behind the interpretation that reads the theological contributions, especially of evangelical descent, as a mere continuation of the Middle Ages, while only the renewal of antiquity (through his aesthetic trends) would have been a budding new culture¹². This juxtaposition crystalizes progressively around the creation of the myth of Rome, Pagan and Christian, met by the violent anti-Roman response of the Protestant world. In modern times the Protestant cultural paradigm deeply influenced Russian cultural history, especially during and after the times of Peter the Great, favoring the process of secularization¹³.

Modernity, beginning with its very pre-humanistic roots, not only shares a passion for pagan antiquity juxtaposed to the heritage of the medieval and Byzantine Christian world, nor is characterized by the re-discovery of the classical Greek language and of Cicero's Latin as opposed to scholastic Latin. More than that, though, it is characterized by a new approach to written culture and to art production, determining in effect the beginning of both modern philology and the history of art. By concentrating on the former, but with an eye on the latter, we can recognize the very heart of Humanism in a study of sources aimed at retracing their actual origins, above and beyond the crystallizations left by the passing of time, identifying styles and themes from classical and Christian antiquity, and in doing so, laying the foundations for classical and biblical philology (or, better yet, biblical-liturgical philology). Aldo Manutius's work is a prominent example of this approach to sources. Thanks to his academy and his press he not only rediscovered the classical pagan world and perfected the art of printing, he also contributed, together with his Greek and philhellene col-

¹¹ At Five Hundred Years from the publication of Machiavelli's *The Prince*, there is a renewed attention to the political thought of the Florentine Humanist. See the rich catalogue of the exhibition *Machiavelli, il Principe e il suo tempo* (Machiavelli 2013).

¹² Graciotti 1988: 242 and following.

¹³ A great promoter can be found in Teofan Prokopovyč, juxtaposed to another ecclesiastic personality, Ruthenian as well, albeit of Catholic orientation, Stefan Javors'kyj (Shevelov 1985).

laborators, to the dissemination of the biblical and Eastern liturgical tradition while at the same time supporting Savonarola's Reform trends¹⁴.

It was precisely this critical approach to sources, an approach obviously still far from 19th century philology, that allowed for not only a renewal in the arts, but also, a renewal in scientific and technological knowledge. This overview approach is one our contemporary times seem to have lost. A clear example can be found in a recent study reconstructing Leonardo's library, with its volume ranging from classical poetry to the Patristic to architecture and military art treatises¹⁵.

We should not interpret the very use of language – classical Greek and Latin or the vulgar idioms – with adaptations from different works or in originals, not just through the prism of aesthetic juxtaposition in contemporary terms between the original and the imitation. We feel that these categories are not useful to the interpretation of the literary (and artistic) production at that time since imitation of ancient and modern authors does not prevent the readers from perceiving those works as original¹⁶.

Additionally, we should not focus our analysis only on poetry, painting and sculpture as fundamental manifestations of the Humanist and Renaissance spirit. Above and beyond these categories, more often than not a product of 19th century aesthetics elaborated after philosophical idealism, it is important to reflect on artistic and literary works investigating the ways in which, starting in the Italian peninsula, this cultural paradigm took shape. This new approach manifested itself in the rediscovering of the sources via a philological method well in use in the Italian courts, but also in universities and schools, and expresses itself in Latin and Greek languages as well as in vulgar idioms. This gave life to perpetually novel hybrid phenomena and linguistic contaminations contributing to the establishment of a multifaceted European culture.

In the Western world, this happened thanks to common medieval Latin and to a web of universities and schools that helped in shaping an intellectual class tied to the courts – where the papal curia had a very special role. A *Respublica litterarum* was born, that is a community of learned individuals with a common cultural background based on the pagan and Christian classics regardless of their national, ethnic and even religious origins. This community centered their

¹⁴ Of all his works, for example, we should take into consideration not only his precious editions of classic literature, the ones scholarship usually refers to, but also important publications of religious and liturgical character (Flogaus 2005-2007).

¹⁵ See Vecce 2017.

¹⁶ We should return to reflect, as specialists are doing, on the debate on imitation between Pietro Bembo and Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola at the beginning of the 16th century (McLaughlin 1996). It is worth remembering that Maximus the Greek, the most important Russian writer of the 16th century, was for some time the secretary of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (see below).

research on human beings, their yearning for happiness, their freedom, thus determining a radical shift in European culture¹⁷.

Starting from these essential bases we will now describe the progressive involvement of the Eastern Slavic world in the development of Humanism and the Renaissance, not only through the mediation of Ukrainian culture (where the Polish language and culture served as a model) within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, but also in Muscovy and in the young Russian Empire, to this day considered altogether marginal to these processes at the dawn of the Modern era. The constitution of an image of Russia in the Western world is outside of the scope of this research, as well as the idea of Humanism and the Renaissance in contemporary Russia¹⁸.

3. The Eastern Slavic world and its cultural dynamics between the 15th and 17th centuries

When it comes to the Eastern Slavs, it seems necessary to take a similar step back from interpretations that force events and main actors within the constraints of strictly national cultural, artistic and literary canons. This seems all the more true for the eastern Slavic regions that, especially in recent decades, thanks to the formation of an independent Ukraine, have witnessed a lively debate concerning Kyivan Rus's legacy and the continuity of the medieval tradition in Kyiv, as opposed to the idea of a separation caused by the medieval translation of its prerogatives in northern Russia¹⁹.

Aside from this controversy, and keeping in mind the totality of the European cultural development, we deem necessary to focus our investigation first and foremost on the role played by the Balkan-Slavic world, with its strong links to Byzantium, in the religious, cultural and literary process encompassing the entire eastern Slavic region between the 14th and 15th centuries, known as the "Second southern Slavic influence". The debate originated in the 1950s by D.S. Lichačev on the idea of a "pre-Renaissance" remains essentially open. We have an extensive illustration of this concept in his vast investigation about late medieval literary productions and artistic traditions²⁰.

¹⁷ See the reflections of V. Branca who considers the *Respublica litterarum* as a continuation of *Respublica christiana* and traces its origins to the Venetian Humanism and in the special place held by Venice in between East and West (Branca 1998: 141).

¹⁸ Both issues deserve a more in-depth analysis, especially in light of more recent publications (Tonini 2012, Kudrjavcev 2013). This is a relevant issue, since in general historiography scholars of Humanism and the Renaissance focus primarily on German and American historiography – as we read in the introduction to *Il Rinascimento italiano e l'Europa* (Fantoni 2005).

¹⁹ For a study on the historiographic debate on Kyiv's legacy in the 19th century see Toločko 2012.

²⁰ For an introduction to this debate see Garzaniti 2019a.

Without discussing the details of this complex debate, we can say that contemporary scholarship now accepts the fact that this religious renewal within the monastic Hesycast movement – developing well beyond the philosophical and theological instances of Palamism – wanted to turn back to the sources of eastern monastic tradition and, at the same time, reclaimed the most ancient Byzantine and Slavic-Byzantine expressive forms with very close attention to words and style. In the Balkan-Slavic tradition this tendency resulted in a renewal of the art of translation, advocating for the revision of old translations and the production of new ones, responsible for a significant growth in the writing tradition of the *Slavia Orthodoxa* while, at the same time, starting an important reflection on the concept of “correction” (*pravka*).

The interest in a continuity of the most ancient monastic traditions, inscribed within the renewal of classical Byzantine culture (defined today as Palaiologan Renaissance²¹), carved its place in the re-discovery of the central position of the human being and of his psychology, albeit expressed in different ways compared to western individualism. The fundamental idea of a deification of the human being emerges clearly from ascetic literature to the highest theological thought of Palamism, which develops Neoplatonism reflections.

These are, obviously, very different backgrounds from those of the Western world deeply influenced by the development of the courts and of the figure of the courtesan poet. In Byzantine and Byzantine-Slavic culture there are indeed western influences that can be retraced to that world, although they remained alien to the concept of courtly and chivalric love so crucial for the development of Humanism and the Renaissance. In the Slavic orthodox world one can recognize both in the southern and, later on, in the eastern Slavic writing tradition an implicitly polemic reaction to influences from the Western culture, believed to be as dangerous as Islamic expansions. We can see this response in action in the eastern Slavic world between the 14th and 15th centuries within the context of the time-changing transformation at the root of the progressive geopolitical shift of the Lithuanian grand duchy to the Western world after the establishment of the Jagellonian dynasty. At the time, the process of centralization of the grand principality of Moscow was taking place, whose welcoming of Kyiv’s metropolitans determined transfer of the ecclesiastical seat to the capital. In the field of historical narrative, it is important to consider from this point of view the Kulikovo literary cycle. The most mature works focusing on this battle against the Tartars (1380) cannot be considered simply the first Russian epic narration, although they represent the progressive affirmation of a renewed monastic culture in competition with western influences. These are the origins of the idea of an orthodox Christianity able to oppose the Islamic world, a battle built on the bases of an iconographic and celebratory representation with clear influences from the Balkan Byzantine-Slavic world, and, lastly, the figure of the

²¹ In reference to this Renaissance, P. Lemerle referred also to a “Byzantine Humanism”, already present during Photius’s time in the 9th century (Lemerle 1971).

warrior-martyr, a figure that would then generate the figure of the monk-knight, which is understandable only in the perspective of a dialogue, albeit a polemic one, with the Western world²².

These were times marked by the presence of metropolitans of southern Slavic origin, such as Kiprian Camblak (1330ca-1406), and characterized by the assimilation of the southern Slavic writing tradition, by the recovery of Kyivan heritage, and by the production of revised and new translations. Even when considered through the prism of different interpretations, such as R. Picchio's idea of an "orthodox Slavic renaissance (*rinascita slava ortodossa*)" or Lichačev's "monumentalism"²³, we have to recognize that the 15th century represents a fundamental junction both for the Western world and the Italian peninsula as well as for Eastern Europe marked by a progressive shifting of its gravitational center to Moscow²⁴.

The intellectual Western world's energies, as we know, were devoted to internal struggles concerning Conciliarism and the papacy, while the reformist, schismatic and heretical tensions were gaining ground and gave way to the constitution of the first nations. The Italian peninsula was transformed by the return of the papal seat to Rome, which contributed decisively to the discovery and the *renovatio* of antiquity, but also by the menace of expansion in the eastern Mediterranean of Ottoman power that permanently changed the equilibrium established during the Middle Ages and pushed towards new routes to the Orient.

The Grand Principality of Moscow had to confront these transformations, but took part in the process, maintaining its main orientations defined in the Byzantine-Slavic areas during the 14th century. If, on the one hand, the grand Prince strongly opposed the Florentine union proclaimed in Moscow by the metropolitan Isidore right after the Council of Florence (1439), on the other he had a clear perception of the economic and technological divide separating Russia from the Western world²⁵. A key role in this Muscovite orientation was certainly played by the fear that the grand duchy of Lithuania – with its vast domains in the Eastern Slavic area, up to Kyiv and now with its own Metropolitan seat – could become even larger on the basis of the Ecclesiastic union.

In the following years the marriage between Ivan III and Sophia (Zoe) Palaiologina (1472), descendant of the Byzantine imperial house, was promoted by cardinal Bessarion in preparation for the ecclesiastic reconciliation and a new crusade against the Turks. But for the above reasons, this marriage couldn't be successful in this respect, except in making the now autocephalous Moscow

²² For an interpretation of this literary cycle, especially in regard to its most important text from an ideological and religious point of view, *The Tale of the Rout of Mamai*, see Garzaniti 2016.

²³ See Garzaniti 2019a.

²⁴ Our reflection on the division into periods of "ancient Russian literature" follows this very perspective, with a review of the canon of the Eastern Slavic and Russian literature (Garzaniti 2012, 2019d).

²⁵ See our contribution on the anonymous tale *The Journey to the Florentine Council*, Garzaniti 2003.

Church even more rigid. Important concrete results nonetheless took place: the arrival of architects and engineers from the Italian peninsula offered a decisive contribution to the modernization of the grand principality, and not just in its religious architecture, but especially on the technological and military level²⁶.

It is very difficult to overestimate the importance of the arrival of the Byzantine princess on the political and diplomatic level as well. The effects of this marriage went beyond establishing a new relationship with the Italian peninsula during Humanism and the Renaissance and determined the consolidation of the Byzantine legacy in Moscow. With Palaiologina's arrival, Moscow no longer based her legacy solely on the liturgical religious and cultural tradition, but also attained a dynastic basis. This opened the doors to the creation of a central state modeled after the Byzantine empire, a state where, inevitably, the budding court and diplomacy played a central role, just like the ones Sophia had the opportunity to see while growing up in the papal curia, a diplomacy that had a decisive contribution from Greek-origin ambassadors²⁷.

Those were the years of the first coronation in the Kremlin for the grand principality modeled after the coronations held in Constantinople (1498). Among the insignia of the grand prince there was also the crown with the characteristic hat, which according to tradition, the Byzantine emperor Constantine Monomachos donated to Vladimir, the prince of Kyiv, therefore called Monomach (1053-1125). This precious crown not only formalized the Kyivan heritage, but more importantly illustrated from where the reigning house took inspiration: the universal Eastern Roman horizon²⁸.

During the 15th century Muscovy, in fact, was still characterized by multiple administrative centers and powers, more or less autonomous, making them look more like the Western world than the Byzantine imperial model. Among them, the city of Novgorod and its vast northern territories had a particular characteristic. The so-called Novgorod Republic played a fundamental role because of its prosperity and its strong connections with the west, since it was part of the Hanseatic league. The city, with its mercantile aristocracy led by the archbishop, saw its autonomy gradually fade till it became the Muscovite outpost of Slavic-Orthodox Christianity opposed to the western world. The grand principality of Moscow, notwithstanding all of its modern technologies – like the very artillery that cost Novgorod its independence – still lacked cultural resources, indispensable to oppose the fierce western influence. The problem was not just the influence of Latin Christianity or the

²⁶ For a first approach to Italian architects who worked in Russia at that time, see Karpova Fasce 2004 and Batalov 2013. To the more notable personality of Fioravanti, see the proceedings of a conference held many years ago, Aristotele Fioravanti 1976.

²⁷ See a recent biography of Sofia curated by T. Matasova (Matasova 2016). On the role of Greek-origin diplomats see Garzaniti 2019e.

²⁸ A narration of this legend can be found in the *The Tale of the Princes of Vladimir* and in the *Letter of Spiridon of Savva* which inspired the bas reliefs around the so-called "Monomach's throne" (*carskoe mesto*) completed at the time of Ivan the Terrible and on which the tsar sat during the liturgy at the Dormition Cathedral (Garzaniti 2013: 134).

actions of the opposing metropolitan of Kyiv, bound to Rome, but it was also the rampant heretical currents within merchants and artisans who were averse to ecclesiastical and monastic hierarchies. Hussite Bohemia was not that far away, and it was linguistically and ethnically close to the Eastern Slavic world²⁹.

We can frame within this context the activities of Archbishop Gennady (†1505) and of his entourage in Novgorod, including the mysterious Croatian Dominican friar (?), Benjamin. The Archbishop's notable social and cultural action, recently the subject of monographic studies, did not just concentrate on fighting heretical factions. He also strived to acquire a series of resources from the Latin tradition, spanning from grammatical analysis to exegesis. Most importantly, he was the promoter of the first complete codex of the Bible in Slavic language, known today as the *Gennady Bible* (1499). The work on this Bible was the prelude to the introduction of the printing press in Muscovy. This text, based on searching for the best manuscripts in Slavic language and, whenever not available, on new translations from Latin³⁰, was – on the one hand – the continuation of the revisions and corrections dating back to the era of the second Southern Slavic influence – and on the other – the embodiment of a new sensitivity able to re-evaluate external sources, like the Latin ones, well known and widespread in the West also because of the printing press³¹.

This newfound awareness, however, would meet resistance from the conservative monastic world, suspicious of any innovation – especially when coming from the West – and the Athonite monk Maximus the Greek, the greatest writer of Muscovy at the time, was one of its victims at the beginning of the 16th century. His birthname, Michael Trivolis, evokes the Greek origins of a figure deeply linked to Italian Humanism. In fact, his Florentine education and his participation in the Humanist circles, especially the grecophile ones and those who leaned towards the new thought promoted by Savonarola is well known. Of particular importance were his relationships with notable figures such as Gianfrancesco Pico, nephew of the more famous philosopher Giovanni, and Aldo Manutius, with whom Trivolis collaborated in Venice for a few years³².

²⁹ See De Michelis 1993. In Soviet times the historiographic studies generally tried to interpret the formation of heretical movements (*strigol'niki* and Judaizing ones) as a failed infiltration attempt on the part of the Western culture with its Humanist and Reform tendencies. See the exhaustive collection of studies curated by N. Marcialis in the abovementioned volume (ibidem: 155-171), or the remarkable synthesis by G. Stökl (1959).

³⁰ On translation from Latin in Archbishop's Gennady's circle, see Tomelleri 2006.

³¹ Among the most recent studies on the topic of translations from Latin of Gennady's Bible see I. Verner, who suggests that Benjamin might have taken into consideration also the Italian vernacular version (Verner 2010). V.A. Romodanovskaja, studying the sources for the Gospel of John, proposes that the curators adopted most probably the margin glosses from the Bible by J. Amerbach, printed in Basel in 1479 (Romodanovskaja 2010). The apparatus of these glosses is present in the Slavic version of this Bible in Cyrillic, but in the codex GPB Kir. Beloz.51/56 it is still in Latin characters (Romodanovskaja 2013).

³² For a preliminary introduction to this figure following the new interpretation that we offer, see Garzaniti 2015, 2019b.

The works of Maximus the Greek constitute one of the main cultural intersections that can help us better understand the cultural relations between Muscovy and the West. Moreover, his opus allows us to reconsider the penetration of Humanism and the Renaissance in Russia. After spending ten years on Mount Athos, Maximus the Greek arrived in Moscow (1518) carrying with him the philological and classical knowledge he gained during his time in Italy. At the same time, he was influenced by Savonarola's religious preaching advocating for Ecclesiastic reform. All this was, in fact, far from the Eastern Slavic cultural tradition. His short writings, brief treatises and letters, together with his translations, allowed him to leave a significant mark on orthodox Slavic culture and bring it into the new era with the rediscovery of its most ancient roots, notwithstanding persecution from the most conservative religious authorities.

Starting anew from the most ancient Eastern Byzantine and Christian roots, Maximus strived to gather the most appropriate resources on the basis of the sacred scriptures and of the Patristic tradition in order to give Russia weapons to confront the neo-pagan movements from the West, the Lutheran Reform with all its iconoclastic tendencies, and the Islamic expansion. All of this could have been accomplished, in his mind, by retracing the strength coming from the monachism of the origins.

Within our own reflections on Humanism and the Renaissance, Maximus's thoughts on freewill are of great consequence, especially those inscribed in the controversy against the ever-growing circulation of astrology coming from the West to Moscow³³, and those on religious and social life in the West, connected to the issue of poverty and usury³⁴. His constant criticism of the excesses of the rationalist western thought, generally interpreted within the frame of the traditional Byzantine polemic against Latin culture, should more appropriately be studied within the frame of Savonarola's and Gianfrancesco Pico's critical approach against rationalism in the context of the debate on the role of ancient philosophy³⁵.

Even though his disciples were repressed and exiled, from Vassian Patrikeev (1470-after 1531) to Prince Andrej Kurbskij (1528-1583)³⁶, Maximus and his work became a recognized authority. Thanks especially to the foresight of the metropolitan Makarius (+1562), he became a champion of orthodoxy. It was during Makarius's time, the first years of the reign of Ivan the Terrible, that the canon of an orthodox Slavic culture took shape, with Moscow at its catalyst center. This was not only because of the appointment of a special synod in order

³³ On the topic of astrology, see Akopjan 2013, Romoli 2015.

³⁴ On the topic of poverty and usury, see Garzaniti 2021. For the relationships between Savonarola and the Dominicans, see Garzaniti 2019c.

³⁵ We plan to work in the future on the very relationships between the philosophical positions of Savonarola and Gianfrancesco Pico with those of Maximus, trying to go beyond the schematic juxtaposition between the Medieval theological reflection and the recovery of ancient authors in the time of Humanism and the Renaissance.

³⁶ See again Tomelleri's essay and bibliography (Tomelleri 2013).

to tackle the most pressing issues – the so-called Hundred Chapter Synod³⁷ – but also due to the creation of works that were supposed to concentrate all the traditional knowledge, like the *Great Menaion Reader* (ca 1530-1560), based on unprecedented research and gathering of sources³⁸.

The awareness of being part of the Eastern Roman tradition finds a specific evolution during the 16th century through the development of the idea of Moscow as the third Rome, a concept that has galvanized the attention of historians and jurists, but it must be placed in a primarily religious and theological context, in the widest sense of the term³⁹. In the *Letter of the Monk Philotheus of Pskov, from the Eleazar monastery, to Dyak Mikhail Grigorievich Misyur-Munekhin* the author used Patristic commentaries to elaborate his own interpretation that took into consideration the first *translatio* from Rome to Constantinople to propose a second one, from Constantinople to Moscow, in the frame of a providential view of history avoiding any reference to astrology. The idea of Rome, so central in 16th century Europe, was used by Philotheus to illustrate this providential design in an eschatological key, where the center of authentic Christianity moved from the river of the Mediterranean, under Ottoman occupation, to the forests of Northern Russia⁴⁰. This idea, imposing a final judgement on Constantinople itself, already contested by Maximus the Greek, determined the social and cultural development of the Russian empire. We can see its consolidation in the constitution of the Moscow patriarchate (1589) and its clear manifestation in the Russian protection of Eastern Christianity.

During Philotheus's times, classical heritage remained strictly mediated through the Byzantine culture of monastic tradition as the historical narrative shows, starting with the *Greek and Roman Annalist*⁴¹ and the persistent imitation of the patristic school models. At the same time, a real court culture did not truly develop, and the printing press was slow to flourish, publishing primarily liturgical books.

During the 16th century, the Russian empire remained completely removed from the figurative Western culture and from recovery of ancient art forms and styles that characterize Renaissance art, just like in the previous century. Already at the time of the Council of Florence, the short travel accounts we mentioned above, did not display any real inclination towards the movement for the renova-

³⁷ For his canonical positions, see the recent edition curated by E. Emčenko (2016). There, in defense of Ecclesiastical power, we can find a reference to the *Donatio Constantini*, revamped in Russia at the time (Garzaniti 2013: 137).

³⁸ The publishing of this work has a very troubled history and it is still underway. For the most recent publications, see VMČ 1997-2009.

³⁹ We are referring to the scientific project "Roma-Costantinopoli-Mosca: tradizione e innovazione nella storia e nel diritto" (Roma "La Sapienza" and Institut Istorii SSSR) that delivered a rich anthology of original texts and translations on the idea of Rome in Moscow (15th-16th century) (Catalano, Pašuto 1993).

⁴⁰ On the interpretation of this *Letter*, see Garzaniti 2014: 121-158.

⁴¹ See the recent edition with ample comments LER 1999-2001.

tion of ancient art spreading from Florence to the rest of Italy. The same happened in architecture, where Italian architects in Russia created works substantially alien to the rediscovery of ancient forms and styles, limited to the recovery of a few elements from the Western tradition, overall faithfully following the Byzantine tradition. In all probability, the new iconographic regulations imposed by the Hundred Chapter Synod really pointed towards the safeguarding of the traditional Byzantine-Slavic heritage opposing any and all external influences⁴².

During the crisis of the ruling dynasty, and especially after the Time of Troubles (1598-1613), a series of transformations took place via the mediation of Kyiv, where the new cultural European trends were deeply rooted. After the foundation of Kyivan College, later Kyivan Academy, during Peter Mohyla's time (1596-1647), the cultural tendencies, tying Kyiv to the Humanism and Renaissance tradition, albeit in Baroque form, became stronger. The knowledge of the classics and the use of rhetoric testify to it. This helped in creating the orthodox cultural tradition, in turn able to limit the expansion of the Counter-Reformation⁴³.

At the time of the first representatives of the Romanov dynasty, this model entrenched itself in Moscow thanks to the Ruthenian tradition, determining the reunification of the Eastern Slavic culture and, at the same time, the development of a new synthesis of the orthodox culture, capable of giving way to classical styles and subjects. This hybrid cultural product, in philosophical and theological circles referred to as orthodox "pseudomorphism"⁴⁴, extended its influence on the Ottoman controlled Balkans thanks to Moscow and its empire. At this time, though, the Counter-Reformation had already tamed or expunged all Humanism and Renaissance tendencies more alien to Christian traditions, in effect making easier, although still somewhat traumatic, the definitive inclusion of Moscow and her empire in the cultural dynamics taking place in the West.

4. Conclusions

This synthetic overview of the relations of the Eastern Slavic – and especially the Russian – world with Humanism and the Renaissance, allows us to step away from the interpretative paradigm of cultural influences to open the way for new research avenues on the construction of Muscovy and Russian empire identity.

⁴² The rejection of figurative art of pagan origins was present in the Humanism and Renaissance tradition as well, as we can see from the critical approach of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola. From here later on, especially on the wave of the Protestant Reform, Counter-Reformation positions would develop. The Jesuit Possevino had similar positions as regards the strict approach of the Russian embassy in Rome vis-à-vis pagan art and its display of naked bodies (Rusakovskij 2013).

⁴³ As regards the field of *studia humanitatis* see the recent works by G. Siedina, in particular Siedina 2011, 2012.

⁴⁴ See Florovsky 1987. For a critical reflection on this concept, see Garzaniti 2008.

If, from a certain perspective, it is evident we cannot really talk of an organic presence of this historical process in the Eastern Slavic area, like in other European areas, we cannot deny the presence of a series of fundamental traits that originate in the culture of Humanism and the Renaissance. The cultural identity of Russia indeed developed in relation to or in some cases in opposition to them. Always taking into consideration the structures and specific manifestations in which these traits were realized, this process highlights firm European bonds based on shared origins. These common roots gave way to interesting typological analogies manifesting themselves in dialectical relations we should not underestimate.

Overall, these characteristics are not just mere glacial erratics devoid of any particular meaning, but new trends revealing how much the grand principality, and later the Russian empire, built their identity in relation to and by opposing the new cultural paradigm that was establishing itself in the West, acquiring and transforming their interests and competencies in order to highlight the differences from the Western world, even though they were well aware of the same cultural roots. In other words, our path should not be limited to pointing out and identifying the influences and the dissemination of individual aspects or characters, but it should understand that in Russia the same phenomenon of breaking with the past occurred and a new identity developed, alternative to the Western world, generated by transformations of modern European culture.

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Abstract

This study offers a synthetic view of the relationship of the Eastern Slavic world, in particular Russia, with Humanism and the Renaissance, indicating new paths of research on the identity formation of Muscovy and the Russian Empire in the European context. In particular, we focus on the arrival of Sophia Palaiologina in Moscow, on the activities of Maximus the Greek in Russia, and on the idea of Rome and Moscow in the 16th century.

Keywords: History of Russian culture, the European Renaissance, Maximus the Greek, Idea of Rome in Moscow.