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CATCHING THE CONTEXT: THE FIRST GENRE-DETERMINED READING OF FRANCYSK SKARYNA'S PORTRAIT

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ЛЕМЕШКИН, ИЛЬЯ / LEMEŠKINAS, ILJA / LEMEŠKIN, ILJA, *ПОРТРЕТ ФРАНЦИСКА СКОРИНЫ. К 550-ЛЕТИЮ СО ДНЯ РОЖДЕНИЯ КНИГОИЗДАТЕЛЯ* / PRANCIŠKAUS SKORINOS PORTRETAS. 550-ĄSIAS GIMIMO METINES MININT / *PORTRAIT DE FRANCISK SKORINA. EN COMMÉMORANT LE 550^e ANNIVERSAIRE DE SA NAISSANCE (1470–2020)*, (THE PORTRAIT OF FRANCYSK SKARYNA. TO MARK THE 550TH ANNIVERSARY [1470–2020] OF THE PUBLISHER), TRAVAUX DU CERCLE LINGUISTIQUE DE PRAGUE, NOUVELLE SÉRIE, VOL. 10. VILNIUS-PRAGUE: LIETUVIŲ KALBOS INSTITUTAS (INSTITUT NATIONAL DE LANGUE LITUANIENNE), CERCLE LINGUISTIQUE DE PRAGUE, 2020, 298 P.; LA 2^E ÉDITION, REVUE ET AUGUMENTÉE, 2021, 314 P.; THE 3RD EDITION, IN LITHUANIAN, 2022, 310 P.

There are rare cases when a reviewer has the opportunity to write a review of the same book several times. It is even more remarkable that I had a chance to review I. Lemeshkin's book, re-edited two times since my first assessment¹.

- 1 SHUTOVA, Olga. Beyond the Symbol: A Ground-Breaking Study of the Portrait of Francysk Skaryna. In: *Senoji Lietuvos Literatūra*, 2020, vol. 50, p. 317–325.

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Despite my sincere admiration and great respect for I. Lemeshkin's works, reviewing his research insights and personal involvement turned out to be not an easy task. The two years that have passed since the first publication of *The Portrait of Francysk Skaryna* made it possible to develop more reflections on this monograph. It seems to me that this is the first and unconditional success of the pioneer work of Lemeshkin: he raised problems and made assumptions that would not have been comprehended otherwise for a long time. This success has brought forward another effect: Lemeshkin's monograph has laid the foundations for renewal in Skaryna Studies, thereby changing their perspective, so that to reassess the legacy and life of F. Skaryna in the only possible, but still elusive for many researchers, context: the context of the Renaissance (and Bohemian-German portraiture painting in particular).

It is in this perspective that Lemeshkin proposes to consider Francysk Skaryna's portrait, today largely diffused for the great audience, highly politicized and instrumentalized, but still paradoxically rigid and filled with stereotypes. This woodcut printed twice, in *The Book of Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sira* on 5 December 1517, and in *The Four Books of the Reigns* on 10 August 1518, was not only the first European full-length portrait of a book publisher, but it was also easily 'read' by the Renaissance audience, yet incoherent for the contemporary researchers – distant in time and context – who are trying to interpret it from *their own, contemporary, perspective*.

The complexity of my text lies precisely in this 'duality' of perspective – the problems that arise when comparing the pros and cons of Lemeshkin's research (below, we shall evoke some objections and inaccuracies), the responses of scholars (especially the Belarusian ones), and the intensity of insights that his work has opened for Skaryna Studies.

The monograph contains ten chapters (the final, tenth, chapter was added in the second and third editions). They are concentrated around four main themes: (1) source problems and historiographical metamorphoses of the interpretation of the portrait of F. Skaryna (*Review of Sources and Pseudo-Sources and A Portrait Genre in the Context of an Illustrative Apparatus of the Ruthenian Bible (Бувлюя руска)*); (2) the portrait and the entire *Bivlia Ruska* in the theological context of Skaryna epoch (*The Motivation for the Publication of the Portrait in the "Book of the Wisdom of Jesus, the Son of Sirach" and in the "Four Books of Kings" and The Genesis and Morphological Characteristics of F. Skaryna's Portrait. The Biblical Context of its Use*); (3) interpretation of Skaryna's portrait in the context of the realities of the Czech and German portrait tradition (*The Alphanumeric Combination мз in the Context of the Portrait Genre, Musca depicta on F. Skaryna's*

Portraits, The Portraitist of F. Skaryna, and The Location of the Printing Shop); (4) the polemical part (*Problems in the Visualization of the Image of the Publisher, or Why it is Worth Renouncing the Orders of F. Skaryna and Methodology and 'Demology'*), which, although, seemed to be, at the first sight, not related to the scientific argumentation of the rest of the text, yet were directly connected to both its terminology and the interpretation of the portrait of Skaryna *within* the Renaissance context of the late 15th – early 16th centuries and the significance of this interpretation for the present.

The two initial chapters furnish an integral analysis, a classification of sources and disclosure of pseudo-sources accumulated in Skaryna Studies during the last centuries, and historiographic transmutations of Skaryna's image echoing in today's reality as it is eloquently argued in the two concluding chapters. The author immerses the reader into the key problems of Skaryna's historiography: the history of imprints of Skaryna's portrait, their versions (with МЗ, with a five- or a six-legged fly, and without these elements), and their dissemination. The historiographic and source study chapters clarify the long history of *quiproquo* associated with the copies of the portrait and the subsequent mistakes in Skaryna Studies (as an example, we could cite the letter 'а' artificially added by the copyist Alexandr Florov). The fact of the author's conscientious attention to detail is also noteworthy: for example, in the second edition of his book, in the passage about the possible crypto-portraits (Chapter 2) in the *Bivlia Ruska*, Lemeshkin rectifies the mistake concerning the alleged image of the Highest Czech Chancellor Ladislav ze Šternberka, 1480–1521, (p. 92), which, as it turned out, does not correspond to his real portrait. This sets a precedent for greater caution regarding the other alleged crypto-portraits in the *Bivlia Ruska*.

Well, no book review should be just encomium, and this one is not an exception. The very innovative nature of Lemeshkin's monograph creates conditions for further questioning. This is especially true of the chapters related to the problems that are 'sensible' for many researchers: the solar-lunar symbol of Skaryna, the so-called 'monogram' МЗ, as well as the fly which has so far been deprived of serious attention.

Lemeshkin quite rightly points out that the "so-called 'signet of F. Skaryna' on the woodcut *The Coronation of the Mother of God as the Queen of Heaven* must be considered in the context of the iconographic canon." However, he associates the solar-lunar image with the iconographic type Assumption and/or victory of the New Testament over the Old as a possible symbol of Skaryna's publishing project (pp. 77–82). Moreover, Lemeshkin claims that this image of "the apocalyptic Madonna became widely popular because of the 1511 frontispiece to the

reprint of *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* (A. Dürer – O. Sh.), which is iconographically closely connected with the engraving of 1497 *The woman of the Apocalypse and the seven-headed dragon* from the same edition” (p. 77).

Nevertheless, we could not find any significant resemblance in those Dürer’s engravings with Skaryna’s sun-moon image (at least, not in the ones indicated by Lemeshkin; otherwise, there are two Dürer’s engravings where the anthropomorphic sun and moon do actually appear: *The opening of the fifth and sixth seals* and *The opening of the seventh seal and the eagle crying ‘Woe’*).

It is necessary to note that the anthropomorphic sun/moon images became widespread well before A. Dürer as they had been quite common at least since the 1470s; we find them in *scientific texts* of Johannes Regiomontanus (e.g., for the volvelles in Regiomontanus’s calendars² reprinted in Latin, German, Italian at least 14 times from 1474 to 1500³), in the *perpetuum* calendar printed in Venice in 1488 and widely re-edited thereafter, where we find not only these celestial anthropomorphic bodies, but also the image of Solomon as a scholar explicitly similar to Skaryna’s portrait⁴, Lucas Gauricus’s compendium of the works of Archimedes, Boethius and Campanus of Novara edited in Venice⁵, the Frieze of the Liberal and Mechanical Arts presumably by Giorgione of 1510 in Castelfranco, or, again, in the treatise on Architecture by Francesco di Giorgio

- 2 *Kalendarium. Calender des Magister Johann von Kunsperk*, Nuremberg: H. Sporer, 1474, f. 30r.; *Kalendarium, Venetiis*: E. Ratdolt, 1485, f. 26r.; *Epytoma Joannis de Monte Regio in almagestum Ptolomei*, Venetiis: Johannem Hamman de Landoia, 1496, frontispiece.
- 3 The authorship of the woodcuts in the first editions of Regiomontanus has not yet been exactly established; however, the researchers suggest the famous Nuremberg artist Michael Wolgemut, 1434–1519 (see ZINNER, Ernst. *Regiomontanus: His Life and Work*, translated by Ezra Brown, Amsterdam, New York, Oxford, Tokyo: Elsevier, 1990, p. 173-176). This is the same Michael Wolgemut who later on made himself immortal with the engravings in Hartmann Schedel’s *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493), where the anthropomorphic sun and crescent appear frequently.
- 4 *Kalendarium*, Venetia: Nicolo de Balager (Nicolaus dictus Castilia), 1488. ЧОСКА, Shutova.
- 5 Gaurico, Lucas, *Tetragonismus idest circuli quadratura per Campanum, Archimedem Syracusanum atque Boetium: mathematicae perspicacissimos adinuenta*, Venetiis: J. B. Sessa, 1503, frontispiece. This type of images was widely disseminated, especially after the Venice edition (1488) of Johannes Sacrobosco’s *De sphaera* by Joannes Lucilus Santritter and Hieronymus de Sanctis (with variable personages depicting Urania, Astronomy, and Ptolemy). They were copied and reproduced in numerous Italian editions of Hyginus’s (probably Caius Julius Hyginus, the 1st or the 2nd century AD) treatise *Poeticon astronomicon* focused on the description of the north constellations in connection to the Greek and Roman mythology (e.g. in Erhard Ratdolt’s Venice edition of 1512).

Martini (1439–1502)⁶, and, definitely, in the *Liber de Intellectu* of Charles de Bovelles⁷. Numerous other examples of suns and moons with human faces in incunables, the earliest-printed books and art works testify to their dense circulation in the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento both in Italy and to the north of the Alps.

The anthropomorphic ‘solar-lunar’ images were overwhelmingly present in the cultural space not only in religious (whereas Lemeshkin considers them as an integral part of Francysk Skaryna’s portrait exclusively in the context of the *Bivlia Ruska*) but also in philosophic, scientific and profane segments, and even evidently in the ‘purely’ scientific context.

Initially, celestial bodies in the Middle Ages were an ‘adaptation’ of the pagan ones to the canonical story of the crucifixion of Christ. Lemeshkin refers to this Biblical passage: “It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining” (Luke 23: 44–46). Nevertheless, in the time of the late Quattrocento, the medieval ‘humanized’ sun and moon were actualized in accordance with the new philosophic and aesthetic trends connected with the Neoplatonic discourse, in the spirit of representation of the Divine mind and the world soul, accordingly⁸.

Symbolically, this ‘shift of meanings’ (of course, they remained Christian, as they were merely modernized in view of the search for the deeper sense of Christianity enriched by the more ancient teachings) were reflected in the emblematic bestseller of this epoch: the Nuremberg Chronicle.

- 6 Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Trattato I* (1479-1481), Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, MS Ashburnhamiano 361, f. 28r, in: A. Nanetti, Andrea; Benvenuti, Davide; Bigongiari, Matteo; Radzi, Zaqee & Bertocci, Stefano, “Animation for the Study of Renaissance Treatises on Architecture. Francesco di Giorgio Martini’s Corinthian Capital as a Showcase”, *SCIRES-IT*, 2020, December, vol. 10(2), p. 19-36, [accessed 20 June 2022]. Access online: <<https://engineeringhistoricalmemory.com/FGM.php?page=1§ion=361>>
- 7 Bovelles, Charles, *Liber de intellectu. Liber de sensu. Liber de nichilo. Ars oppositorum. Liber de generatione. Liber de sapiente. Liber de duodecim numeris. Epistole complures. Insuper mathematicum opus quadripartitum. De Numeris perfectis. De Mathematicis rosis. De Geometricis corporibus. De Geometricis supplementis*, Parisiis: Henrici Stephani (Henri Estienne the Elder), 1510.
- 8 Marsilio Ficino explicitly wrote two treatises *About the sun. About the light* where he states: “the Sun in the middle heaven represents the Good itself, and the divine intellect, or rather the plenitude of ideas manifest through the firmament full of stars, and finally the world soul through the mutable light of the Moon”, in: Ficino, Marsilio, *Liber de sole. Liber de lumine*. Firenze: Antonio Miscomini, 1493, cap. XI; Rees, Valery, *Seeing and the Unseen: Marsilio Ficino and the Visual Arts*, in: *Iconology, Neoplatonism, and the Arts in the Renaissance*, edited by Berthold Hub, Sergius Kodera, New York: Routledge, 2021, p. 65.

Nuremberg at that time became the arena of intensive humanist activity strengthened by the arrival in 1471 of I. Regiomontanus with a project of his own printing house specializing on scientific books. This event aroused the keenest interest among Nuremberg intellectuals in astronomical studies (including their practical part, i.e., astrology), and, in general, in 'Italian' innovations like *studia humanitatis* (e.g., *Poetenschule* under the patronage of the famous humanist, Paduan alumnus, Hans Johann Pirckheimer, 1440–1501), father of Willibald Pirckheimer (1470–1530, a correspondent, the closest friend and confidant of Albrecht Dürer). The Neoplatonic humanist circle after that of M. Ficino's and Bessarion's academies in Florence and Rome, was at the heart of the project of the universal world chronicle (with the participation of Sebald Schreyer (1446–1520), Sebastian Kammermeister (14??–1503), Michael Wolgemut (1434–1519), Wilhelm Pleydenwurff (c.1458–1494), and others⁹. The result of this project is known today under the name of Hartmann Schedel (1440–1514), an alumnus of Padua University, a hellenophile and a follower of M. Ficino¹⁰, about whom the Nuremberg Chronicle also says "a prince among Platonic doctors"¹¹.

It is perfectly logical that the images of 'sun-moon' naturally passed from Regiomontanus's astronomical works into H. Schedel's *Chronicle*, while also allowing to place the portrait of Regiomontanus himself, which, as certain researchers suggest, unlike other 'typical' illustrations of the Nuremberg Chronicle, was authentic¹².

In this context, the anthropomorphic 'solar-lunar' symbolism was not just an abstract allegorical personification of Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary, or an "integral part of Assumption," as Lemeshkin suggests (p. 77), but also the reference to the *contemporary to Skaryna* spiritual quest to create the Christian holistic knowledge combining the ancient doctrines, Neoplatonism, and Christianity. Being present in numerous engravings in Skaryna's Bible, and, as in case of Skaryna's portrait, in combination with the armillary sphere (and other scientific

9 E.g., the famous Conrad Celtis (1459–1508), who at that time was teaching at the University of Ingolstadt.

10 On philosophic and aesthetic ideas of H. Schedel: KIKUCHI, Catherine, La bibliothèque de Hartmann Schedel à Nuremberg: les apports de Venise à l'humanisme allemand et leurs limites, *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Moyen Âge*, 2010, vol. 122/2, p. 379-391; ZINNER, Ernst. *Regiomontanus: His Life and Work*, p. 31.

11 Schedel, Hartmann, *Liber Chronicarum*, Nuremberg: Antonius Koberger, 1493, f. CCLIV.

12 ZINNER, Ernst. *Regiomontanus: His Life and Work*, p. 213-214. Regiomontanus's portrait: Schedel, Hartmann, *Liber Chronicarum*, Nuremberg: Antonius Koberger, 1493, f. CCLVI.

attributes: books, the hourglass), the anthropomorphic sun and moon should be considered in the context of his proper time. The same is applicable to Dürer's art which was greatly influenced by the Neoplatonist ideas¹³.

Despite this missing philosophical dimension, Lemeshkin's convincing argument (p. 82, 269) finally made it possible to move over the notorious theory of 'personal eclipses' which was introduced into historiography by M. Shchakatzikhin in 1925 with the allusion to the possible eclipse in Polotsk when F. Skaryna was born¹⁴.

In this sense, the work of Lemeshkin examining Francysk Skaryna's portrait in the context of the Czech-German portrait painting/graphics of the epoch as an artifact and a sign regulated by the same type of 'rules', is a major breakthrough. It was this semiotic approach that made it possible to see in the combination of letters MZ (= 47), located in the lower left corner, the numerical meaning of Skaryna's age.

As Lemeshkin convincingly shows, the Czech-German portrait paintings of the epoch stipulate the following standard formulas: "(1) the year of the creation of the portrait; (2) the age of the portrayed person at the moment (year) of the portrait; (3) the important information of the person being portrayed: his name(s), demonym (where the person is from) and occupation" (p. 130). All these elements, standard in the Czech-German portraits of this time, are pres-

- 13 During this period, "Florentine Neoplatonism [...] achieved a success comparable only to that psychoanalysis in our own day", wrote E. Panofsky, the maître of Christian iconography and researcher of A. Dürer's oeuvre in 1960, in the heyday of psychoanalysis. We would like to emphasize here that modern scholars consider even Albrecht Dürer's oeuvre as deeply immersed in the Neoplatonic discourse. See: PANOFSKY, Erwin. *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, New York: Harper and Row, 1972, p. 187 (first edition: New York: Harper & Row, 1960); DOORLY, Patrick, Dürer's "Melencolia I": Plato's Abandoned Search for the Beautiful, *The Art Bulletin*, 2004, vol. 86, № 2 (Jun.), p. 255–276; PANOFSKY, Erwin, KLIBANSKY, Raymond and SAXL, Fritz. *Saturne et la Mélancolie. Études historiques et philosophiques: nature, religion, médecine et art*, traduit de l'anglais par Fabienne Durand-Bogaert, Louis Évrard, Paris: Gallimard, 1989, 738 p. (first published in Edinburgh: Nelson, 1964); PANOFSKY, Erwin. *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955; GIEHLOW, Karl, *The Humanist Interpretation of Hieroglyphs in the Allegorical Studies of the Renaissance. With a Focus on the Triumphal Arch of Maximilian I*, translated by Robin Raybould. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015 (first edition: *Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance*, Vienne-Leipzig: F. Tempisky, G. Freytag, 1915).
- 14 SHCHAKATZIKHIN, Mikola. Kali radziusja Francishak Skaryna. *Polymia*, 1925, № 5, p. 148-151; *ibid.*, Gravury i knizhnyja ozdoby u vydannjah Frantzishka Skaryny, in: *Tchatyrohsootlezje belaruskaga druku: 1525–1925*. Minsk: Navuka i tekhnika, 1926, p. 194.

ent in the Skaryna's portrait: the year of creation (1517 in Cyrillic letters with *titlos*); Skaryna's name and doctoral position; his age (indicated in his 1517 portrait with the Cyrillic letters мз, where the upper crossbar of the letter z apparently served as a diacritic sign *titlo*).

This coherent Lemeshkin's explanation of the мз is perfectly endorsed by the fact that мз, if it was a 'monogram' of some artist or engraver, as most researchers had thought, cannot be found anywhere else in the *Bivlia Ruska*.

Lemeshkin's systematic contextual approach uncovers another 'mysterious' object (sign) in the Skaryna's portrait – the strange insect located in the lower right corner (roughly opposite to the мз) that haunted Francysk Skaryna's scholars for centuries.

The previous versions, based on *our today's perception* of the Skaryna's portrait, invariably encountered a problem: a stereotype according to which, a banal fly simply "could not be" on the portrait-message of a book publisher. Lemeshkin 'decorticated' the artistic and entomological affiliation of this insect from the portrait of F. Skaryna – the fly that is far from being banal – the painted fly, *musca depicta*.

At the same time, despite doing this impressive discovery, Lemeshkin leaves non-elucidated another facet of the painted flies in this epoch. In his chapter on the genesis of practice of *muscae depictae* (pp. 161–193), Lemeshkin speaks exclusively about the "evidence of artist's skill" (pp. 161, 168, 173, 184, 196), "student surpassing his teacher" (pp. 177–178) or "the game of double reality and illusion" (whether the fly was depicted *inside* or *on* the portrait – pp. 162, 168, 173). Meanwhile, the curious practice of 'painted flies' (*muscae depictae*), as well as the images of snails, beetles, butterflies and other representatives of 'lower' animals, was definitely widespread in 1440–1515 among the Dutch, Italian and German artists¹⁵, which left a shadow of perplexity to the future art historians. It has long tradition and takes roots in the process of the assimilation of the heritage of the Antiquity.

15 E.g.: P. Christus, A. Montagna, G. Bellini, F. del Cossa, G. Schiavone, C. Crivelli, G. Santi, L. Lotto, "The Master of Frankfurt", artists of Swabian, Tyrolean, South German schools, A. Dürer and others. Of the 23 such cases known to us, 8 are secular portraits, 13 are small paintings on religious themes, and 2 are works intended to be shown to the general public: PIGLER, A. La mouche peinte: un talisman. *Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts*, 1964, vol. 24. p. 47-64; EÖRSI, A. Puer, abige muscas! Remarks on Renaissance Flyology. *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*. 2001, tomus 42, № 1–4, p. 7–22.

Beginning with the revered Plato and Aristotle, the questions of what beauty is¹⁶, and what is the mimetic nature of art¹⁷ were essential in the curriculum of the Renaissance. The texts of other ancient authors, translated and published in large numbers during the Quattrocento period, on the one hand praised the *idea of the progress in art as approaching the nature in realistic way*¹⁸; on the other hand, it introduced *the theme of elusive and impudent fly*¹⁹ into the humanist discourse. The assimilation of the ‘fly theme’ during the Renaissance created a certain ‘atmospheric pressure’ with its critical point at the late Quattrocento²⁰.

- 16 Albrecht Dürer has illustrated this unanswered question in his famous *Melencolia I* (1514) where all the key elements of Plato’s dialogue *Greater Hippias* (*Hippias Major*) are present: the millstone; ‘whatever is useful’: dog, instruments; ‘pleasant in sight and hearing’; ‘number, weight and measure’; purse and keys hang from the belt of the female figure; a ladder rising from the mathematical ‘platform’ which hopelessly failed to define the beautiful – the irregular solid itself. Cf: Panofsky, *Saturne et la Mélancolie. Études historiques et philosophiques*; DOORLY, P., *Dürer’s “Melencolia I”: Plato’s Abandoned Search for the Beautiful*, p. 255–276.
- 17 Aristotle (*De Poetica*) talks about the mimetic character of art: “Though the objects themselves may be painful and ugly to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art [...], the *lowest animals* and of dead bodies, in: *Aristotle. Poetics*, 4. Transl. by I. Bywater, *Complete Works of Aristotle*, Volume 2: The Revised Oxford Translation Aristotle. Ed. by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 2316–2340.
- 18 In the 35th book of the *Historia Naturalis*, in the chapter *On Painting*, Pliny talks about the Greek artists, Zeuxis and Parrhasius. Zeuxis painted bunches of grapes so realistically that birds tried pecking at them. When Zeuxis asked Parrhasius to remove the curtain that hid his creation, it turned out that the curtain was painted. Thus, Zeuxis admitted his defeat: he managed to fool only the birds, but Parrhasius deceived himself. Talking about the *progress of painting in the transfer of reality*, Pliny gives other examples of competitions. Pliny the Elder, *Historia naturalis*, XXXV, 66, 79, 88.
- 19 Philostratus’s work *Imagines* (*Eikones / Εἰκόνες*) and the *ekphrasis* of Lucian from Samosata, edited and reedited in the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento numerous times, continue this line of the progress in art due to more and more realistic rendering the reality, contains many passages about artistic competitions, deceptions and tricks as well as about insects conveyed particularly realistically. After Guarino da Verona’s translation of Lucian’s *Muscae Encomium*, Leon Battista Alberti issued his own version to become another principal text of the Renaissance: “I can say that the fly, if I know it well, has taught good morals and fine arts all schools of philosophers”, in: BONARIA, M. *La Musca di L. B. Alberti: osservazioni e traduzione. Miscellanea di studi albertiani. A cura del Comitato genovese per le onoranze a Leon Battista Alberti nel quinto centenario della morte*, Genoa, 1975, p. 60.
- 20 The assimilation of ‘fly-inspired’ ideas did not proceed in an instant, but through the multiple networks of conjunctures. As A. Chastel puts it: “The novelties of art do not spread like lightning in a vacuum, but – at least in a country with an old cultural heritage like Italy, and especially in the Quattrocento – like an irradiation in a saturated space”. CHASTEL, A. *Renaissance Méridionale: Italie, 1460-1500*, Paris: Gallimard, p. 10.

The medieval fly as a reminder of the futility of existence and death (*memento mori*), shifts its meaning to the insect represented in its real size, not ‘fitting’ to the scale of the picture and creating a real *trompe-l’œil*. A realistically depicted fly, *musca depicta*, as fast and elusive as a moment of life, becomes a symbol in the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento, signifying *the artist’s skill who managed to ‘capture’ the life itself, adding reality, momentum* to the drawing.

This facet of ‘muscarological’ discourse is fixed, for example, in *Trattato di Architettura* of Filarete (Antonio di Pietro Averlino), also cited by Limeshkin, overlooked the very reason of Filarete’s narration. In fact, in Filarete’s updated version²¹ of Pliny’s anecdote about the competition of Zeuxis and Parrhasius, Lemeshkin sees only the lesson that a pupil surpassed his teacher (pp. 178–179), but omits its philosophical and aesthetic context. Filarete changed the main Pliny’s character (Parrhasius) to the Florentine Giotto di Bondone, who was famous exactly for *his great talent to imitate the nature*²², attributing to him the creation of painted flies – *muscae depictae* – which by that time had become a kind of a ‘meme’ of Quattrocento.

The first in the history of book printing *muscam depictam* in 1488 Venetian incunabula²³ appears at the woodcut *Triumph of Time* as an effect of presence; it is depicted in full size, alongside with Saturn’s head. In the subsequent editions (1490 and onwards²⁴), both the *musca depicta* and the statue of Saturn, the god of time, disappear simultaneously, thus emphasizing their links with *a momentum of time*.

It seems to me that the analogy between the mechanisms (*inside or on the image*) of functioning of *muscae depictae* in F. Skaryna’s portrait and in Dürer’s *Festa del Rosario* (*Rosenkranzfest*, 1506) given by Lemeshkin should also take into account this aspect: *the effect of temporary presence*. Such temporary di-

21 FILARETE, Antonio Averlino. *Trattato di Architettura*. Tractat über die Baukunst nebst seinen Büchern von der Zeichenkunst und den Bauten der Medici. Wien: Verlag von Carl Graeser. 1890. Book XXIII, p. 629.

22 “The other, whose name was Giotto, was of so excellent a wit that, he with his style and pen and pencil would depict the Nature, mother of all, that it looked not as alike, but rather as the thing itself, insomuch that the visual sense of men did often mistaken for real that was but painted”, in: *The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio* faithfully translated by J.M. Rigg, London, 1921. Day 6, novella 5.

23 Petrarcha F. Triumphi e Soneti, Canzoniere (Venitia: con gra[n]de diligentia per Bernardino da Nouara nelli, M.CCCCLXXXVIII (1 Part – April 1488; 2 Part – 12 July 1488).

24 ESSLING, V., Masséna. Les livres à figures vénitiens de la fin du XVe siècle et du commencement du XVIe: *Études sur l’art de la gravure sur bois à Venise*, t. 1, Florence: L. S. Olschki ; Paris : H. Leclerc, 1907, p. 86.

mension is also evidenced by the work published literally just one year later after Dürer had accomplished his *Rosenkranzfest*, in 1507. In the poem of George Sibutus, two flies are flaunting on the frontispiece (the woodcut was based at the drawing by Lucas Cranach the Elder) at once – the first blot fly showed incompetent attempts to search for the true realism by an amateur, whereas the second (*musca depicta*) indicated a *realistically conveyed nature* by a master artist²⁵. Sibutus's poem, while citing Pliny's *Natural History* competitions for realistic rendering of nature²⁶, praised Lucas Cranach who "hardly dared to draw *audacem muscam*, and also mentions A. Dürer as the winner of the competition for creating a painting based on the *Festa del Rosario* plot for the German community in Venice: "Albert, called Dürer / He who have now beaten / the artists of Venice"²⁷. This point firmly confirms Lemeshkin's thesis based on later copies of the painting that the fly in A. Dürer's *Feast of the Rosary* in 1506 really existed. Also, Sibutus's text shows *why, for what reason* Dürer put the fly on the knee of Madonna (or, rather, *on the panel*). *Musca depicta* was not only (as Lemeshkin claims) a sign of "the outstanding skill of Dürer, who, with the help of modest artistic means, created a double illusion of reality" (p. 168), but it also symbolized and highlighted the fact that Dürer defeated the Venetian masters "on their own territory"²⁸.

This appearance of *musca dureriana* in 1506, as a symbol of Dürer's victory, happened in the singular context of the Venetian art greatly influenced by the Paduan workshop of the famous Francesco Squarcione (ca. 1394–1474). Based on antique models, Donatello's decorative style, 'Squarcianism' was characterized by its bold imagery and sometimes macabre but irresistible humorous penchant²⁹ ...and numerous *trompe-l'œils*. Squarcione's students (A. Mantegna, M. Zoppo, G. Schiavone, C. Crivelli, G. Santi and others) competed *to catch the life itself* and are known for their use of *trompe-l'œil* and *muscae depictae*³⁰.

25 CHASTEL, A. Addendum muscarium. *Revue de l'Art*, 1986, № 72, p. 24–25.

26 Sibutus G. Georgij Sibuti Daripini Poete et Oratoris Carme[n] in tribus horis editum de musca Chiliana. Lips[iae]: Martinum Gerbipolesem, 1507. F. 2, 2v.

27 Sibutus G. Georgij Sibuti Daripini Poete et Oratoris Carme[n]. F. 5.

28 Cristoph Scheurl in 1508 also testifies this Durer's victory in the Venetian competition in rendering reality: Cristoph Scheurl: *Libellus de laudibus Germaniae et ducum Saxoniae*, Leipzig, 1508, in: *Dürer. Schriftlicher Nachlass*, Hg. von H. Rupprich, 3 vols, 1, Berlin, 1956, p. 290-291

29 Chastel A. *Renaissance Méridionale*. P. 135.

30 Vasari G. *Le Vite de' più eccellenti Pittori, Scultori, e Architettori*, Scritte, e di nuovo Ampliate da M. Giorgio Vasari Pit. e Archit. 2nd edition. Fiorenza: Iacopo Giunti, 1568. Parte seconda: Andrea Mantegna, p. 488; Middeldorf Kosegarten A. *The Origins of Artistic*

The Renaissance intellectual Francysk Skaryna translated and published Holy Scriptures for his compatriots, as did many of his prominent contemporaries in Italy and north of the Alps³¹. The presence of a fly in his portrait, convincingly identified by Lemeshkin as a *musca depicta*, shows that he (or the artist executed his commission) also ‘followed the trend’ of the artistic and design fashions, and his *musca depicta* in the spirit of Quattrocento created the effect of realism which was conveying ‘here and now’.

This observation brings us back to Lemeshkin’s statement on the second use of the portrait of Skaryna as a paraphrase of Albrecht Dürer’s engraving of Saint Jerome (*Der heilige Hieronymus im Gehäus*, 1514).

The author’s groundbreaking decipherment of the two crucial elements of Skaryna’s portrait, Cyrillic letters мз (=47 years in letters Cyrillic) and *musca depicta*, deserves great admiration. At the same time, his idea that Skaryna introduced the mentioning of his own age and the *musca depicta* to ‘secularize’ the image of St. Jerome hardly seems convincing.

Dozens of *muscae depictae*, ‘painted flies’, are found not only in portraits of secular persons but also on the sacred images by P. Christus, G. Schiavone, C. Crivelli, G. Santi, L. Lotto, A. Dürer³². I emphasize this ‘on’ since Lemeshkin makes difference between the flies depicted *in* and *on* the image, and argues that the first case of Skaryna’s portrait use, the *musca depicta* being placed on the sheet of paper “secularized the image, which was especially important when printing a portrait of a private person in the Bible. With its presence, the artist said: this is not St. Jerome, as you could think [...]. This way the publisher relieved himself of suspicions and potential accusations of sacrilege, since, printing his portrait, he clearly separated the heavenly-ideal and di-

Competitions in Italy. Lorenzo Ghiberti nel suo tempo. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Firenze, 18-21 ottobre 1978) 2 vols. Firenze, 1980, vol. 1, p. 167–186; GILBERT, C. E. Why Still Life Painting? A Quattrocento Answer. In *Abstracts of Papers Delivered in Art History Sessions*, 64th Annual Meeting, College Art Association, 1976, p. 86.

- 31 Nicolo di Malherbi. *Biblia vulgarizata* [Bibbia italica]. Venezia: Vindelinus de Spira, 1471; another of his texts featuring engravings: *Biblia vulgare istoriata*. Venetia: Giovanni Ragazzo, 1490; *Biblij Czěská*, w Benatkach tištěná. Venetia: Petrus Liechtenstein, 1506; Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus. *Novum Instrumentum omne, diligenter ab Erasmo Roterodamo recognitum & emendatum*. Apud inclytam Germaniae Basileam: Johann Froben, 1516; William Tyndale. *The New Testament translated into English, with marginal notes*, by William Tyndale, assisted by William Roy. Cologne: Peter Quentell, 1525.
- 32 See on this subject: CHASTEL, André. *Musca depicta*, Milano: F. M. Ricci, 1994; EÖRSI, Anna. Puer, abige muscas! Remarks on Renaissance Flyology. *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 2001, t. 42, № 1–4, p. 7–22; PIGLER, Andor. La mouche peinte: un talisman. *Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts*, 1964, vol. 24, p. 47–64.

vine from the earthly and mortal-human with everything that the latter contains: dirt, excrements, fetid smell, rotting flesh and flies” (p. 192). Therefore, Lemeshkin states, in 1518, Skaryna removed *musca depicta* from the portrait, which meant to be the image of St. Jerome (inspired by A. Dürer). This statement is contradictory to the illustrations cited by the author himself representing numerous perfectly sacred images (and including Dürer’s *Feast of the Rosary*) with a fly on it.

The first time, in 1517 (*Book of the Wisdom of Jesus, the Son of Sirach*), ‘мз’, indeed, as Lemeshkin astutely remarks, meant ‘47 years’. Nevertheless, a year later, in 1518 (*Four Books of Kings*), Skaryna was already 48 years old, and these letters (мз = 47), ought to have been irrelevant. Ditto for the fly (*musca depicta*) which was also a symbol creating the effect of the living presence, *still-lives*³³. This genre was then in the embryo, and for Skaryna’s contemporaries, *still-lives* were really still-lives, representing reality so much appreciated by the ancient authors. In 1518, both the ‘мз’ and the fly had already lost their relevance, and, for this reason, would have been removed. Otherwise, how would one explain the fact that Francysk Skaryna, if he wanted to use his portrait for the second time as a portrait of St. Jerome, removed the fly and the age (‘мз’), which was expected to reveal his identity, but left his own name at the centre of the portrait?

We should also take into account *where* the portraits of 1517 and 1518 are placed. In both cases, they are on the recto folium, with the colophons on the opposite verso sheet (for 1517 – F. 81v and 82r; for 1518 – F. 241v and 242r). In the first case, the portrait is connected to the last words of the Prayer of Jesus of Sirach and the colophon “by the commandment, labour and translation of the chosen man, Doctor in medical sciences Francisk son of Skorina of Polotsk” dated 5 December 1517. In the second case, the portrait is in recto folium 82 and also just next to Skaryna’s words, at the verso folium 81: “translated by Doctor Francisk Skorina from the glorious city of Polotsk into Ruthenian and the colophon “*of the same* learned man Francisk Skorina, Doctor in medical sciences” dated 10 August 1518. Even supposing that the binding is not original and not made during Skaryna’s lifetime (Lemeshkin expresses the idea of the potential specific use of the portrait, suggesting its possible utilization separately³⁴, and/or its binding into a complete set just occasionally, pp. 53–58, 73,

33 EÖRSI, A. Puer, abige muscas! Remarks on Renaissance Flyology; Vancheri, Luc, *Cinéma et peinture. Présences de la peinture*, Paris: Armand Colin, 2007, p. 99–170.

34 Lemeshkin’s mention in 1522 Lithuanian edition of Jacques Sacon’s woodcut as an argument for using engravings as a separate work (P. 157) requires several clarifications: (1) Jacques Sacon, who was born in Piedmont, spent his whole life in Lyon (“Lugdini impressum per Jacobum Sachon piedemontanum de Romano ipporeginensis diocesis”);

283), the same composition of verso-recto folios and the word ‘the same’ signifies its appropriate location.

This argumentation contradicts Lemeshkin’s thesis about the ‘circular nature’ of Skaryna’s personal portrait in the *Book of Sirach* destined to illustrate his Preface to this book. According to the same logic, we could trace a parallel between the words of Skaryna’s Preface preceding the *First Book of Kings* about the trajectory of human knowledge (through Moses, Phoroneus, Hermes Trismegistus, the Evangelists) repeatedly adding: “so me, Francisko Skorina did all those writings separately”³⁵, with his portrait at the end of *Four books of Reigns*, exactly as for the *Book of Jesus Son of Sirach*.

Lemeshkin’s statement on the similarity of Skaryna’s portrait and Dürer’s *Saint Jerome in his study*³⁶, has a perfect right to exist, – all the more so as numerous Skaryna’s borrowings from St. Jerome. I would rather note that two images resemble each other only in the fact of working with a book, the presence of books, pillows and an hourglass. For the rest: the posture, the armillary sphere, the well-known symbols of St. Jerome (‘cardinal’ hat, a lion, a rosary, a cross), they are different. Lemeshkin’s observations that “the hat of St. Jerome, hanging on the wall, echoes the beret of the Ruthenian publisher; the halo is delicately replaced by a triumphal acanthus garland placed above the head of F. Skaryna”; “the gourd as a symbol of the Resurrection³⁷ semantically correlates with the emblematic image of the sun-crescent and the sign of the Calvary cross”; “ ‘migration’ of animals (a dog and a lion from Dürer’s St. Jerome) ‘into a bulky artificial decoration’, and their transformation into ‘two lions holding

(2) this engraving of 1524 depicting St. Jerome reuses Sacon’s earlier edition (*Biblia cum concordantiis veteris et novi testamenti*. Lyon: Jacques Sacon, 1512), and, like many others, based on the Venetian tradition (images and characters), it is a replica of St. Jerome engraving from the Venetian Vulgate by LucAntonio di Giunta, 1511, who, in his turn, used the same woodcuts from *Biblia vulgare istoriata* (Venetia: Giovanni Ragazzo, 1490, trans. by Nicolo Malermi).

35 The Four Books of the Reigns. Prague, 1518, f. 2 recto.

36 SHUTOVA, Olga. Izuchenie intellektualnogo prostranstva “Bivlii” Franciska Skoriny v kontekste Renessansa: suzhety, personalii, filosofsko-esteticheskie vliyania i oformlenie. In *Francysk Skaryna: daunia fakty – novyia idei*, edited by Alyaksandr Grusha, Minsk: Belaruskaya navuka, 2021, p. 66–117; Ibid. „Bivliya“ Frantsiska Skoriny i Italiya: istochniki, vliyaniya, vdokhnoveniya, in: *Berkovskiy chteniya. Knizhnaya kultura v kontekste mezh-dunarodnykh kontaktov: materialy Mezhdunar. nauch. konf.*, Pinsk, 29–30 maya 2019 g. Minsk-Moskva, 2019, s. 598–606.

37 Contrary to Lemeshkin’s suggestion, the gourd over St. Jerome’s head is rather a sign of Biblical Jonah signifying the frailty of life; it appears in Dürer’s engraving as a homage to St Jerome’s translation of this plant (Latin *cucurbita*) first caused by God to protect Jonah from the sun, and then destroyed by him to make Jonah plead to kill him (Jonah 4:5–11).

shields filled with Biblical-Christological content' ” (p. 149) seem to be questionable.

Such awkwardness in Lemeshkin's text seems to stem primarily from his urge to focus on the German-Czech material as *the main environment* in which Skaryna's Bible was conceived, while – therefore – generally excluding the Italian Renaissance culture from which Skaryna evidently borrowed the concept.

Nevertheless, the very focus on the geographical context of the creation of the *Biblia Ruska* is a visionary accomplishment that will be of great importance to Skaryna studies. Lemeshkin analyses the history of Prague agglomeration by superimposing this 'grid' on the usage of the adjectives 'old' and 'great' employed by Skaryna in relation to the "place of Prague" in his colophons. In this regard, it is extremely enriching to understand how the real political and cultural events in Prague were actualized in the *Bivlia Ruska* (pp. 211–215). Moreover, the author resolves a long-standing dispute about the place of the publication of the *Bivlia Ruska*, and concludes that Skaryna rented Severin's printing shop on 'Half Golden Crescent' (pp. 230–253)³⁸, while also revealing the consistent and often simultaneous use of the press by various publishers, including Skaryna.

This exploration correlates perfectly with another discovery by Lemeshkin: the semantic and syntactic connections between the colophons of the *Prague Bible* (1488), the first Prague incunabula *Psalter* (1487), and Skaryna's *Bivlia Ruska*. This well-grounded thesis significantly changes our view on the textual sources of Francysk Skaryna's inspiration, thus shifting the emphasis from his borrowings from *Biblij Czěská, w Benatkach tištěná* (Petrus Liechtenstein, 1506), previously put forward by Piotr Vladimirov and Anton Florovsky³⁹.

Based on profound analysis of the vast artistic material of the time and the territory, comparing the artistic styles, plots and historical contexts, Lemeshkin

38 This allusion to the golden crescent is all the more impressive in the view of historical precedents for the use of the 'sun sign' by a number of book publishers, e.g., 'Soleil d'or', the marque of Paris publishers Martin Crantz, Ulrich Gering, Michael Friburger, Berthold Rembolt, and, later on, Charlotte Guillard who worked literally *under* this sign, or Wynkyn de Word's 'Sign of the Sun' in Fleet Street, London. Cf. Vnov portriet Franciska Skoriny, ili o nieobchodimosti «čitat» hraviury. *Krynicaznaŭstva i spiccyjalnyja histaryčnyja dyscypliny*. Red. O. L. Lipnickaja, S. M. Chodzin. Minsk: Vyd. Biełdziaŭžuniviersiteta, 2015); RENOARD, Philippe. *Répertoire des imprimeurs parisiens, libraires, fondateurs de caractères et correcteurs d'imprimerie*, depuis l'introduction de l'imprimerie à Paris (1470) jusqu'à la fin du seizième siècle. Paris: Minard, 1965; WALSBY, Malcolm. Les étapes du développement du marché du livre imprimé en France du XVe au début du XVIIIe siècle. In *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 2020/3, № 67–3, p. 5–29.

39 VLADIMIROV, Piotr. *Ibid.*, p. 128; FLOROVSKIY, Anton. Čěšskaja biblija v istorii ruskoj kultury i pismennosti. In *Specimina Philologiae Slavicae*, b. 77, ed. Olexa Horbatsch, Gerd Freidhot, Peter Kosta, Munchen: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1988, pp. 153–258.

puts forward the idea of the identity of the artist/engraver of the *Bivlia Ruska*. This idea is twofold giving the open solution and the choice of candidature between two main ‘candidates’, the Master of Litoměřice altarpiece and Bartoř Trnka (pp. 196–202) who also used in his work *muscae depictae*.

The two final chapters reflect the personal involvement of Lemeshkin the humanist and actualize the figure of Skaryna the humanist. The debates following the first edition of *The Portrait of Francysk Skaryna* in 2020 prompted the author to write an additional chapter for the two subsequent editions (2021 in Russian and 2022 in Lithuanian): *Methodology and Demology*. Here, Lemeshkin distinguishes the ‘ethnological’, national revivalist tendencies that are being observed today in Skaryna Studies, from the scientific methodology, in particular, thus revealing his approach based on the traditions of the structural functionalism in its updated version – the semiotically oriented holistic philology of the Prague linguistic circle. “Holistic philology [as Lemeshkin explains his methodology] consistently moves from the whole to the particular: the initial sign is the entire text (œuvre) [which] is a complex social and unique cultural-historical phenomenon [...] divisible into smaller ones” (p. 271).

This approach, which considers the portrait of Francysk Skaryna as an integral sign, allowed Lemeshkin to see its constituent parts in accordance with the genre canon (portrait painting of the Northern Renaissance), where the MZ function could not be any of “the coat of arms of a third person or patrons, a monogram of an artist, etc.” (p. 272), but only the component of the standard textual usage of Bohemian and German portraits of that time – an indication of age. At the same time, Lemeshkin argues that the objections about the presence in the documents of the Krakow and Padua universities of certain ‘indications’ at the age of Skaryna (the lower limit of entering to the university and the term *juvenis*) are in fact abstract-relative, while the only accurate document is the portrait of Skaryna (pp. 280–281).

The chapter *Problems in the Visualization of the Image of the Publisher, or Why it is Worth Renouncing the Orders of F. Skaryna* shows that the image of the Ruthenian cosmopolitan Francysk Skaryna⁴⁰, whose activities took place in the Western European vector (p. 255), in today’s Belarus is marginalized and levelled out, replicating blatant mistakes like the name ‘Georgij’ and the incorrect portraiture that has nothing to do with reality. The image of the Renaissance in-

40 After Lemeshkin, we use here the term ‘Ruthenian’ as it was widespread in the early-modern period in the Latin-speaking world, and still remains greatly accepted in the Western historiography. Any political, linguistic or cultural connotations and disputations around this term would divert and distract from the main issue of our study and lead to mythology and instrumentalization.

tellectual Skaryna, who dared to look at us (readers) directly in the eye (p. 264) is meeting us at the frontispiece, when opening Lemeshkin's monograph. Executed by the Czech maître of art Jiří Altman, the woodcut shows Skaryna who is directly looking at his descendants. (I should add in parentheses that the bibliophile version of Lemeshkin's book includes the double frontispiece, reconstructing the process of making xylography and a procedure of transferring an image from a cliché onto paper, with the manually included photography of the wooden block as well as its imprint in precious paper – always in the spirit of the Renaissance book printing).

The pioneering monograph by I. Lemeshkin, with its wide range of sources, abundant and exhaustively documented quotations and meticulous bibliographical apparatus, the first time considered Francysk Skaryna's portrait in the semiotic perspective, as an artifact and a sign among other signs in the historical and artistic context of the North Renaissance, is akin to the activities of Skaryna himself: this is a fundamentally innovative work about innovative work.

Lemeshkin's captivating text is geared to the forward-thinking reader with a taste for thorough reflections and artistic detail. The exceptionally rich illustrative material (87 illustrations and six appendices) and the coherent artistic style of the book follows Skaryna's innovative Renaissance spirit: "F. Skaryna's prerogative was to promote the development of contemporary art, often provocative, unconventional, overstepping the boundaries of provincialism" (p. 265). Likewise, the participation of the illustrious conceptualist and famous master of Soviet avant-garde Ilya Kabakov (with his glorified *Fly*, for decades provoking the official conservative art), unprecedented *per se*, helps us to see Lemeshkin's work on Francysk Skaryna as a sign of the vital and nonconformist character of his legacy. And, even beyond this, the author suggests to an astonished reader to 'watch' the fly, this emblematic creature of Renaissance, moving from page to page of his book (work of the Czech artist Teresa Unzeitigová), thus illustrating Lemeshkin's words about *musca depicta* on Skaryna's portrait: "it has been sitting here (1517) and had flown away (1518)" (p. 170).

With this hint of humor, I leave new editions of Lemeshkin's monography to its attentive reader who certainly will appreciate its tremendous research and artistic value (the book has already found its way to Skaryna's scholars as well as to the wide circle of history lovers with its first edition).