

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) and St Maximus the Greek (1470–1556): Two Authors on the Edge of Two Epochs (Pre-case Biographical studies for the Comparison of the Author's Creative Vision – The Triangle Composition)

Neža Zajc¹

¹ ZRC SAZU, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

Abstract

Dealing with two complex and decisive authors that have been important for humanistic encounters, the research in this paper presents an in-depth study of two attempts at biographies. With two different methodological approaches to the life and work of the poet Dante Alighieri and the humanist and theologian St Maximus the Greek, we introduce the complexity of the author's creative process as well as of the historical moment of the period when each lived. We also addressed the problem of the valuation of the Medieval and Renaissance period, because we considered the presented authors to be valid examples for the beginning of the new era of thinking in the history and culture of mankind. Further, the article seeks a precise graphic solution for visualizing the relationship between the creative process and the biographical data. Moreover, for deeper understanding of the theologically inspired and conducted poetic works of the authors, a triangle structure is proposed within which the basic idea of the authors' will and their artistic vision could be expressed.

Keywords

St. Maximus the Greek, Dante Alighieri, Introduction
Poetics, Biographies, Renaissance, Individualism, Creativity, Humanism, Artistic visionary.

1. Introduction

First The paper will present two examples of older biographies as preliminary pre-case studies. The first is a Dante biography that is an instance of a medieval biography that was among the first harbingers of professional biographies, which began to take shape in the early Renaissance. The second example will present the biography of man who lived at the height of the Renaissance, but whose own works determined the end of this period and announced a completely new era for comprehending an individual's work.


1.1. Authors


1.1.1. Dante Alighieri

This example of a poet's biography [cf. later Dante biographies: 1, 2] raises key questions about the meaning and role of eyewitness in biographical testimony. This example will raise key questions about the meaning and role of the biographical testimony of eyewitnesses, as the first biography came from the pen of Giovanni Boccaccio. Though he never met the poet, he was acquainted with Dante's daughter Beatrice, his nephew, two of his close friends, and a near relative of Dante's great love, Beatrice "Bice" di Folco Portinari. As a result, he could gather much more personal information about the poet's life than anyone before.

The Life of Dante (*Trattatello in laude di Dante*) by Giovanni Boccaccio [3], who was Dante's contemporary, represents a typical biography of this prominent man of the high medieval period. In other words, it serves to establish a unity between Dante's personality and his life destiny. In

BD 2022-DH 2022: Workshop at the International Conference on Biographical Data in a Digital World 2022 (BD), 25 July 2022, online

 neza.zajc@zrc-sazu.si (N. Zajc)

 0000-0001-5220-3553 (N. Zajc)



© 2023 Copyright for this paper by its authors.

Use permitted under Creative Commons License Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

https://doi.org/10.3986/9789610508120_02

this context, it favorably builds the aura of the poet Dante, who was fully involved also in the most important events of his age, especially in Italy: he served in the military, in the cavalry at the Battle of Campaldino, near Arezzo, in 1289, in Florence was Dante at the very center of its political and civic life and served on various governing councils, and from June 15 to August 14, 1300, as he was one of the Six Priors—the highest political office in Florence [4].

Specifically, in Boccaccio's eyes Dante was the crucial personality of a very sensitive time, when the medieval world was already slightly on the decline. Moreover, Dante, although he had knowledge also of the Eastern (Byzantine) world, asserted himself in the center of the Italian lands that he considered to be the significant focal point of the Christian universe. The problem of national interests and universal subjects arose.

At the same time, the provided obligatory comparisons with classical, Roman, and Greek antiquity made in Boccaccio's text posit Dante, who wrote in the Italian vernacular, as being the first secular poet and most talented Italian poet since ancient times. The integrated nature of his character is shown to be an embodiment of the European past.

However, Boccaccio's biography, which preserves a uniquely personal portrait of the poet through a detailed account of his appearance, habits, and inner being, lacks the obligatory chronological pieces of evidence, periodization, investigation, introspective notes, and an objective biographical overview. In addition, it offers little possibility to function as a research tool as the work does not contain any systematic structure or tangible body. In this aspect Boccaccio's work could be properly compared to the hagiographical approaches of Byzantine historiography. From another aspect could be seen as "romanticised and mysticising approach" [5].

Somewhat later, the first Renaissance biographies appeared: by Leonardo Bruni, Giovanni Villani, and Fillippo Villani, whose *De Origine Civitatis Florentiae et ejusdem Famosis Civibus*, Florentine Chronicle, is a document that was preserved among Boccaccio's manuscripts. These were still early biographies of the poet, and characteristic for such texts was that they considered Dante's knowledge not only as being encyclopaedically brilliant, which resulted in his being understood as more than a theological poet but also as a philological poet who was crucial for the determination of the expression of human individuality. The latter assessment spurred, and worked in the context of, the myth of Florence as the "new Athens" or "New Rome." In the early Renaissance period, also the first editions of Dante's work were soon printed.

Leonardo Bruni, in his *Vita di Dante* (1436), included also a critical overview of Boccaccio's work [2]. Bruni took also a deeper look into Florentine matters, revealing some manuscript sources and expressing his doubts as to their being original, claiming that they were an act of forgery. Bruni also considered Dante as an emigrant/immigrant or refugee, pilgrimaging through Italy from Florence to Rome, and Siena, Bologna, Pistoia, and finally to Ravenna, which was indicative of a new author's compassionate sensibility of the Renaissance age. Bruni tried to introspectively gain a deeper view into Dante's theological intentions and his nobleness. Additionally, Bruni in his *Dialogues to Pier Paolo Vergerio* (1401), in which he criticized Dante's inferior Latinity [6], recognized the linguistic superiority of Petrarch and Dante's role in the birth of Florentine humanism.

But, like Boccaccio, also Bruni paid much attention to defining the poetic skill of the poet. For Bruni, Dante was a poet of a second type, since through the study of philosophy, theology, astrology, arithmetic, and geometry, as well as by reading histories, Dante acquired the knowledge he used to adorn and expound upon in his verses.

Giovanni Villani included Dante's social, political, and public involvements in Florentine Chronicle. He mentioned Dante's scrupulous "Embassy to Venice" in his service of the Lords of Polenta. He connected Dante's exile with the entrance of Charles of Valois into Florence in 1301.

Villani interpreted also three noble letters of Dante penned in Latin. Written in a lofty style, one was addressed to the Government of Florence, complaining of his undeserved exile; the second, to Emperor Henry; the third to Italian cardinals, after the death of Pope Clement, praying for them to be united in electing an Italian Pope. Similarly, Filippo Villani, in his *Life of Dante* in *De Origine Civitatis Florentiae et ejusdem Famosis Civibus*, mentioned Venetian matters, their lack of eloquence and that fact that the Venetians lacked a poetic tradition (that is, history had seen no good Venetian poets).

Also worth mentioning is the first literary “exegetical” work of Cristophoro Landino (*La Divina Commedia*, Florence, 1481, with 19 illustrations by Sandro Botticelli). Landino ranked Dante’s poetic contribution to the history of human thought as the highest achievement of the human mind because he lauded Dante’s poetry, saying it sprang from Divine wisdom [7]. With these words, he designated Dante the leading Florentine patriot, scholar, and thinker, a true forerunner of the humanistic era but also the catalyst of the modern era, as his verses influenced all European movements in the shaping of the importance of personal individuality. However, he was recognized by followers, scholars, thinkers, philosophers, theologians, and literary critics as the first man to denote the fall of the medieval world and announce the beginning of the Renaissance period. This is one of the reasons why it is questionable that his biography could have been written at all during his lifetime. On the other hand, the later biographies are mainly not enough speculative and not enough imaginative, only the refrain of what Boccaccio lucidly denote as poet’s biographies in the novelistic sense [cf. 2].

Understandably, we can find many biographical attempts from the following centuries, namely, in the form of subjective contributions. Significantly, these partial or “conditional” biographies of Dante are often placed as the prolegomena to later editions of his works, that is, as prefaces or introductions to his poetry. Another question that Dante’s biography poses pertains to the role of national biographers and biographies, among which are crucial contemporary national biographical bases, with the Italian online one being among the most valuable – <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/dante-alighieri> [8]

1. 1. 2. St. Maximus the Greek

The second example of this case study is based on the biographical knowledge of St Maximus the Greek (ca. 1470–1556), the renowned man who lived in more than three different countries, changed (and learned) three different languages and also changed his name – three times. Consequently, he went through the metamorphosis of three identities (today he has three different Wikisources, in three different languages: English, Russian and Greek). Not only was he changed through being immersed in three different cultures, he also experienced many different occasions of cultural ethical encoding. He, for example, also became close to three different Christian religions – Catholic, Western (Latin), and Eastern (Orthodox) – but with the peculiarities of Slavic or Slavonic in that age. However, this was the period of complexity known as the Renaissance.

He was born Michael Trivolis around 1470 in the Greek Epirus town of Arta, into the Trivolis family. His youth education corresponded to the Byzantine system of the wide branched perspective of classical knowledge. His uncle Demetri Trivolis was a well-known bibliophile and a collector of ancient manuscripts. With the Greek colleagues and scholars Ioannos Laskaris (1445–1535), Marko Mousouros and members of Moschus, he travelled to Corfu, Crete and, alongside Croatian islands, to northern Italy. First, he resided in Florence, where the scholar and grammarian (prominent philologist) Ioannos Laskaris, and at that time also Michael’s supervisor, lived. In Florence, he started his philological work as a professional copyist, when he was already acknowledged as a skillful creator of manuscripts. He was introduced to an elite community of scribes, translators, and professional calligraphers, who were carefully carrying out the process of transmitting ancient manuscripts into a new, printed form. He was probably invited into the circle of the scholars who were involved in the shaping of the Medici library. He met Florentine intellectuals such as Marsilio Ficino, Angelo Poliziano, Cristophoro Landino, etc. Michael also

visited other northern Italian cities: Milan, Ferrara, Bologna, and Padua. Twice, for a longer period, he lived at the Mirandola castle where he taught Greek to Gianfrancesco Mirandola, the nephew of the famous Pico. At that time, he was already critical towards Aristotelian thought, but he also started to study mystical theological writers such as John the Ladder and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. In 1492 Michael met Aldo Manuzio in the Florence apartment of Ioannos Laskaris. Within a few years he was already in touch with the newly established printing house of Aldo Manuzio in Venice and with Greek colleagues Ioannos Grigoropoulos, Zacharias Kalliergis, Cretan calligrapher and founder of the Greek Press in Medici Rome, Nikolas Vlastos, and Scipion Carteromach, the correspondence with whom is most widely preserved from that period. At the end of 1490s, he returned to Florence where he regularly listened to the public sermons of Girolamo Savonarola, which affected and touched him greatly; he was present at Savonarola's public execution. Michael Trivolis, who was a friend also of the Camaldolese monk Pietro Candido (Leuceimon), entered San Marco Monastery in Florence in 1502, exactly four years after the death of Girolamo Savonarola (1498), but he remained there less than a year. He left the monastery before being ordained as a priest, remaining a novice. Indeed, he was one of the members of the second generation of the Greek diaspora, as in Venice precisely at that time the first Orthodox community was taking shape. But as a spiritual refuge he was seeking intellectual support similar to that he had found before only in Aldo Manuzio's printing house in Venice.

Nevertheless, Michael Trivolis decided to return to his native Greece, where in 1506 he joined the Holy Mount Athos the Vatopaidi (Vatopedi) Monastery, dedicated to the Annunciation of Mother of God. He was ordained and given the monastic name Maxim (the monastic example of the Saint Maximus Confessor). In the Vatopaidi Monastery, Maxim developed his extensive writing, translation, and transcribing activities, to which he added his acquisition of the knowledge of Slavic languages. He also wrote several hymnological works in verses and edited the hagiographical manuscripts. As an experienced scribe, with calligraphic and linguistic skills, the Athonite monk Maxim was chosen for the mission to the Orthodox lands. During the monastic period in the Vatopaidi Monastery he carried out several Orthodox missions with the Constantinople Patriarch Niphont II, whose faithful discipline Maxim was at that time. They visited also lands beyond the borders of the Holy Mount Athos, Ochrid, and others places in Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria (Melnikov) and Moldo-Vlachia (Wallachia). The monk Maxim was sent, therefore, as a translator from Greek to Old Church Slavonic, from Athos to Moscow, at the invitation of the Russian emperor Vasili III. But in Russia, although he was immediately recognized as one of the wisest men of his age, he was spreading a mindset opposite to that of the prevailing church-governing authority since he defended non-privatization and non-ownership of church property (particularly monastic property). Crucial in this sense was, therefore, his opposition to the tendency of the Russian Orthodox Church (autocephaly) towards independence from the church of Constantinople; he sensed in this imperial ideology serious contradictions with the basic Eastern Christian Orthodox doctrine. He was unjustly punished with more than 27 years of imprisonment in the monastery cell at two Moscow church councils.

The only benefit from the second trial against him was that the punishment (to silence, total privatization in the dark and starving conditions, without permission to talk, to communicate, to write, and even to read books) was permitted to be slightly milder: he was allowed to write. From then, around 1536, he began to write his own apologetically marked, and polemically involved theological works, most of them also imbued with a highly distinct monastic attitude. The character of prayers and the humble position he was evoking were formally framed also by the hymnographical and liturgical quality of his texts [9]. However, he was writing in his own personal form of the Old Church Slavonic language (idiolect), which was hard to understand not only for his Russian contemporaries but also for modern scholars. Consequently, many modern treatises do not properly perceive the value and the meaning of his Orthodox writings (often there are one-sided ideological or purely linguistic treatments mainly from Russian and other

pro-Russian scholars). Thus, it was not until 1988 that Maksim Grek was canonized by the official Russian church.

So, as mentioned, as Michael Trivolis he travelled through Greek lands, the islands of Crete and Corfu, and, northern Italian cities, to the multicultural Holy Mount Athos, where he became a monk. Now Maximus (Trivolis), he travelled to Moldo-Vlachia (Wallachia), Albania, Macedonia, Constantinople and finally to Muscovite Russia, where he was called Maksim Grek. Maximus the Greek, as a unique humanist, met people from different social levels and the highest intellectual milieu. Today his manuscripts are housed in the manuscript departments of various European libraries, in Rome (Vatican Apostolic Library), in Florence (Biblioteca Lanurenziana), Cremona, Milan (Biblioteca Ambrosiana), Oxford (Bodleian Library), Russian (Saint Petersburg, Russian National Library-RNB; Moscow: State Historical Museum, Russian Government Library-RGB).

2. The synthetic treatise

These two case studies are represented from two different points of view. The first, on the life of Dante Alighieri, is shown in terms of the authors of his biography. His most important life work was doubtless his Poetics (e.g. all works expressing his personal view on poetic literary submissions) by which he, indeed, passed through times, and was in his vision created for the eternal.

The second, on the life of Maximus the Greek, is presented through different sources in a reconstructive attempt to provide a full picture of his biographical destiny. The first that have to be mentioned are the hagiographic Russian sources from the beginning of the seventeenth century, followed by secondary sources authored by scholars from Russia [10, 11], Italy [12], Slovenia [13, 14], etc. The seminal analysis in terms of synthetic recognition between the three different historical personalities was made by French scholar Elie Denisoff [15] during the Second World War (1943). He managed to identify and to clear up the fact that humanist and philologist Michael Trivolis, Athonite monk Maxim (Trivolis) and Maximus the Greek – alias Maksim Grek in Muscovite Russia – were one and the same person.

3. The symmetrical comparison

To provide the most updated data from reliable sources as the research progresses, the two presented methodological approaches have to be combined. The same procedure is demanded also to address the peer-review process for the researched subject. The basic method necessarily pertains to the reconstruction of the biographical data, but in order to best follow the intention reconstructing the past of an individual's life, the researcher has to be extremely careful in dealing with the selected type of sources. Each of the methodological approaches presented here must include possibilities for allowing a wide range of viewpoints, from introspective attempts at capturing the historical moment during which the subject of the biography lived, to critical consideration of contemporary and other secondary sources. Further biographies from primary sources could prove decisive in terms of valid testimonies.

In fact, autobiographical literary samples, which are decisive in the context of the author's works, have to present the basic material along with, for example, manuscript forms of supplementary biographical sources. For example, Dante's Vita Nuova is considered the author's "autobiography of sorts, since it is a first-person narrative that purports to tell of things that actually happened in the life of the narrator" [4].

By doing this, the researcher must often search for the historical achievements from various historical disciplines, such as epigraphy, onomastics, heraldry, numismatics, paleography, and prosopography. Thus, it is necessary to evaluate also different linguistic (dictionary, lexicographical) possibilities in revealing biographical data. It is also important to pay attention to different cultural values and the reasoning that stems from them. Not surprisingly, this means that the research is interdisciplinary; nevertheless, it remains, in fact, a thoroughly dedicated study. In other words, the researcher often must devote himself to this kind of examination.

Both biographies reveal the complexity of biographical structure and the problems of reception of the individual. Dealing with the identification of the author and the person of the subject, the concretization of the birthplace, the role of names, the distribution of the facts, and the place in the social structure, however, often leads to very different interpretations. Both biographies represent the life of creators-authors (artists, writers), which the biography could render more problematic, because the obligatory perception of them as the author has to be permanent and constant, and subtle as well. These are valid examples of biographies that cross countries and cultures and address also the different historically decisive contexts of awareness. Both presented case studies – the first of the world-famous poet Dante, and the second of a saint who was extremely important for the establishment of the Russian language of literature, original philosophy, and theology – are examples of the problematic historical canonization of people in the history of humankind.

In the age of digitalization, it is, therefore, necessary to be even more careful about what we accept and what we accept as true versus what is only probable, as well as to judge what is relevant at all. The biographical visualization could be accepted only under a condition that could provide deeper insight into or a better understanding of the author's work. Other benefits must be neglected since we are in an age when the brief acknowledgment of the masterpieces of historical personalities does not bring the perhaps expected intellectual comprehension. Unfortunately, the years of digitalization and visualization have not yielded many advances; rather, they have given rise to many misunderstandings and merely superficial, rash insights founded on superficial contact with authors, without great awareness of the proper historical context and background.

Similar analytical topics should only reveal the cultural memory and the author's heritage that need to be carefully investigated and properly presented.

I. Both authors were connected to the same tags/targets/topics/motifs/themes:

- 1) "Pilgrimage" (though neither of them in the literal meaning); both were exiled and died in exile, not in their own homeland; their great (only) wish was to be buried in their homeland.
- 2) both were unjustly accused of something they considered themselves to be not guilty of
- 3) both very critically minded (Dante in *Vulgari eloquentia* opened the "first scientific literary criticism in the modern world" [16] and early modern literary history [17]; both were connected with the ecclesial and government circles of their ages
- 4) Humanists; highly engaged thinkers of their age; Renaissance men, one a harbinger announcing the European Renaissance, the other expressing the collapse of the Western European "old" world.

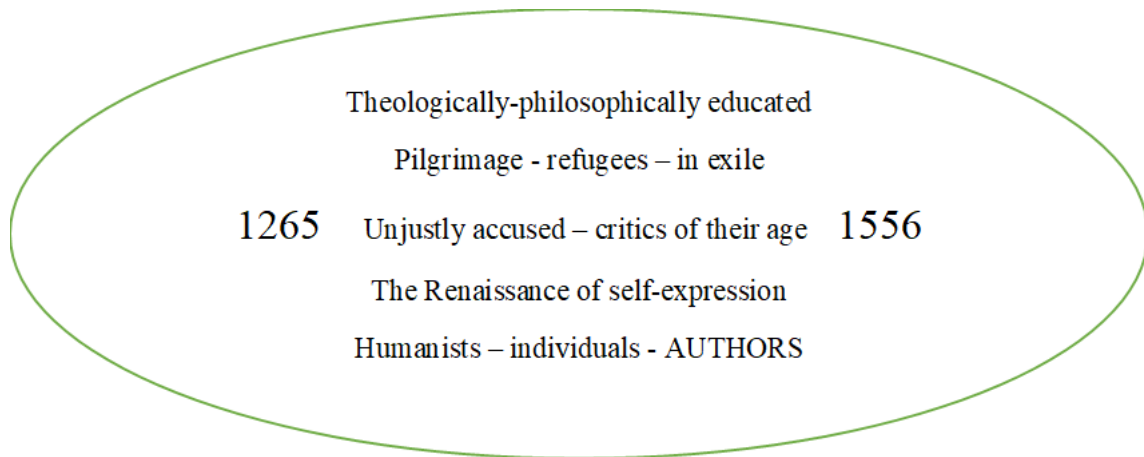


Figure 1

The years 1265 (the birth of Dante Alighieri) and 1556 (the death of Maximus the Greek) could represent the beginning of the collapsing of the medieval world and the final clash in the middle of the sixteenth century to denote the margin of the Renaissance period and the gradual onset of the modern era in the history of human thought, when the European intellectual was able to express his creativity in more isolated, deeply personal, secluded and clearly anthropocentric circumstances. Their deeply personal spiritual vision of the lonesome and poetic destiny of the pious human being came to the fore. Exactly this principle is what Dante was already following, according to the words of Boccaccio: "Studies, and especially those of speculation, to which our Dante [...] entirely surrendered himself, tend to demand solitude, liberty from anxiety and tranquillity of mind." [3]

Indeed, Dante was one of the crucial authors who denounced the transitional period, namely, between the aesthetic theories of the thirteenth century and the Renaissance. During this time artists were aware of their individuality, which they expressed in a new sense, adding to the history of aesthetic feeling and theory [cf. 18, p. 91]. With embryonic 'medieval' humanism of Dante Alighieri [19, p. 224] begins a period which and terminates in the early sixteenth century, when Italian humanists ceased to form part of the mainstream of creative literature in Italy and Europe.

Both Dante and Maximus the Greek searched for a new language of the individual and they dedicated themselves to this apologetically enlightened appeal all their lives

4. The diametrical evaluation

II. Dante Alighieri and Maximus the Greek:

- 1) were talented and extensively productive writers; theologically and philosophically educated.
- 2) were very sensible authors as auctores.
- 3) were prominent individuals.
- 4) had an intellectual heritage that might apply for/to all humans; were known for the transnational character of their works.

The relation between their creative processes and the biographical facts, therefore, presents the main challenge of these biographical case studies (the similar attempt by the usage of the Cushman's PolyCub framework one could find recently [20]). The biographical presentations should thoughtfully and discretely show that neither the external repression from the governmental authorities nor the pressure from the misunderstanding of their enemies

suppressed their inspiration. In fact, the biography of Dante and St Maximus the Greek must lead to recognition of the entire spiritual positioning of their literary work, because they as authors were looking at it only in terms of future circumstances. The increasing literary appeal for the author's creation, in both cases, even ameliorated over time, becoming significantly stronger.

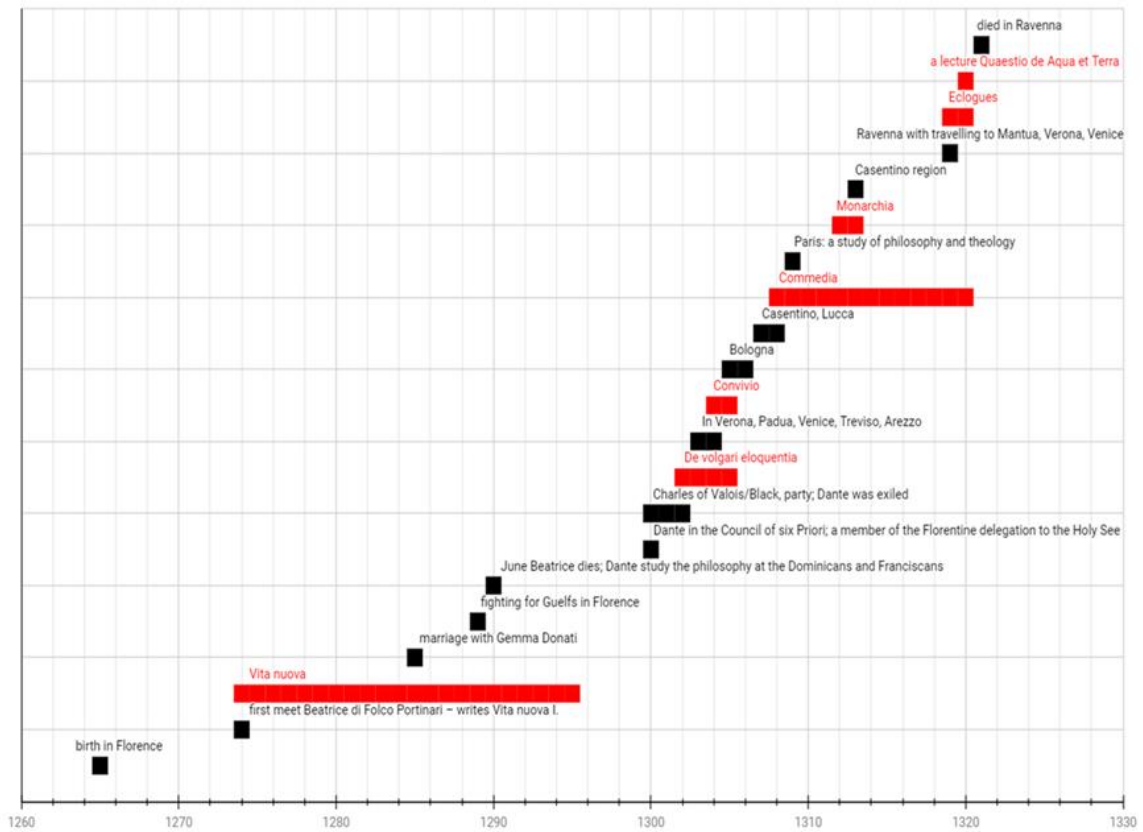


Figure 2

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321)

Dante defined such trans-temporal attempts and investigations in *Monarchia*, but also in *De vulgari eloquentia*, when he reflected on the etymology of the word author: “And inasmuch as ‘autore’ derives from this verb, it is taken to refer to the poets alone, who with musical art have bound together their words: and with this meaning, we are not concerned at present (4, 6)” [21].

Dante’s Poetics were created hand in hand with his life destiny. For Landino and Marsilio Ficino the goal of the soul’s journey in Dante’s *Commedia*, allegorized in the pilgrim’s journey, was precisely consideration as the highest contemplation of divine matters [cf. 5]. Already in the Renaissance period, echoes and reminiscences of Dante’s verses were evident in many writers, including Petrarch, Boccaccio, Angelo Poliziano, Girolamo Savonarola, Ariosto, Trissino, Folengo, and Michelangelo Buonarroti [cf. 5]. Later we could find “his voice” in the poetry of such prominent and contemporary authors as (also) English-language authors of nineteenth century, Ugo Foscolo, Giosuè Carducci, Mary Shelley, John Ruskin, George Eliot, Charles Eliot Norton, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Leigh Hunt, Byron, Coleridge, Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Keats, etc., and in the twentieth century, T. S. Eliot, Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, etc.

Maximus the Greek contributed much to the transmission of Slavonic, linguistic, etymological, grammatical and philosophical topics, alongside the hagiographical, liturgical, patristic terms that permitted him to express the most refined, sophisticated and complex theological expressions in the adequate linguistic form. But since many of his texts reflect his personal monastic prayers and Byzantine hymnography [9, p. 285-318], they are consequently touched by a significant poetic effect. The further result was that St Maxim the Greek made not only an important revision of the Russian liturgical language; in addition, his grammatical surveys and linguistic decisions about the Church language were included in the first printed books on Russian Grammar by M. Smotriskij in the eighteenth century. Consequently, the linguistic types that St Maxim the Greek used in his personal writings and biblical translations appeared in the normative language of the Russian literature of the nineteenth century in the most respectable literary works of A. S. Pushkin, F. I. Tiutchev, and especially in F. M. Dostoevsky, N. V. Gogol, A. P. Chekhov, L. Leskov [22]. He also quite good denoted the problem of the crisis of the modern humanistic consciousness in the Western (European) philosophical and theological investigations, connected with such movements as are the phenomenology and the existentialism.

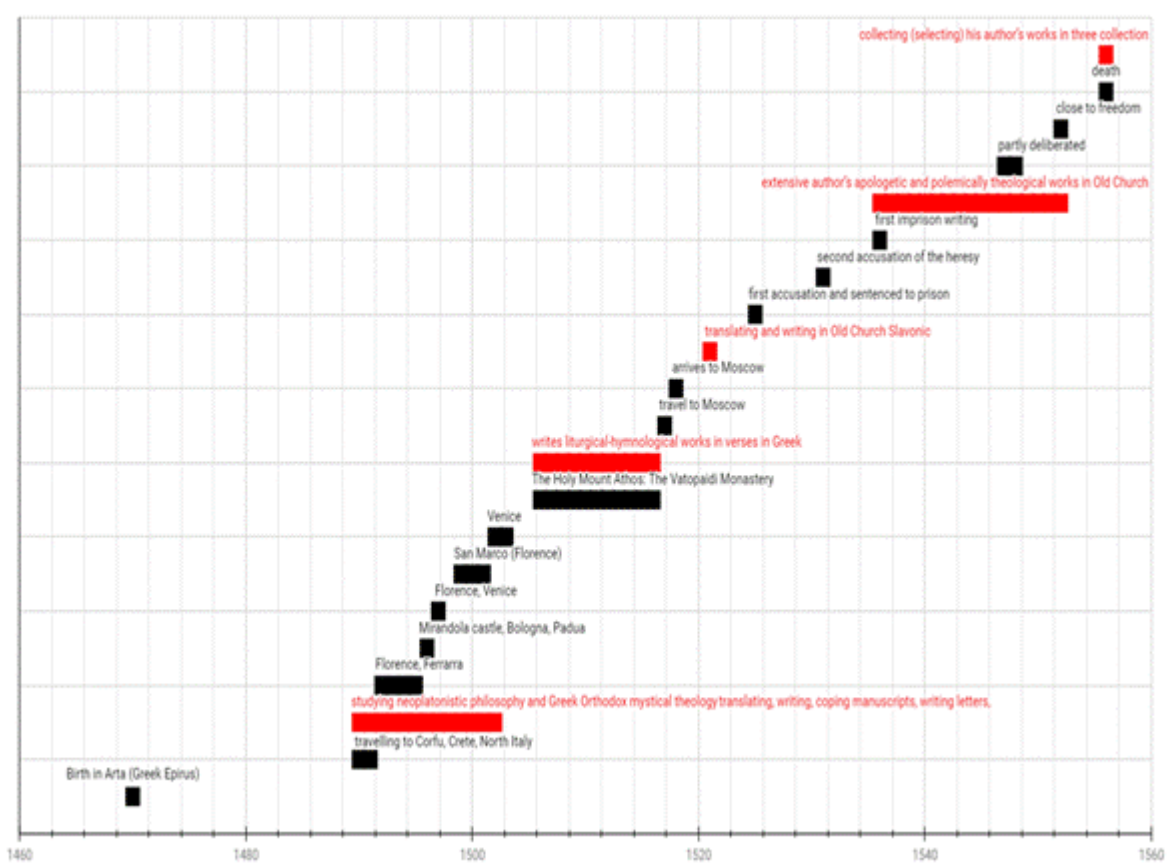


Figure 3

St. Maximus the Greek (cca. 1469/70-1556)

5. The author's (theological) view of (the source of) inspiration

Both authors were intrigued by the theocentric worldview that had entirely shaped their vision of the human being in earthly time. Since this is crucial for the reception of their written word, the researcher must be aware of providing a highly prudent evaluation of each “man of letters.” However, although Dante had man in mind, a poet, perhaps himself, was, in his opinion, addressed by the Highest to create poetry that was subsequently not written by his own will. He thought that he was doing something in service to God. The reason? The writer is ever aware that the Highest Instance demands this from the individual: that he creates throughout his lifetime, for as long as he is capable of doing so. This could be, not accidentally, compared to their Christian belief in the Second Coming of Christ and standing before the Last Judgment. Moreover, Dante saw the individual work as the only proper solution for keeping a man humble (and here he was thinking of his own faith and obedience) in the act of ascending to the (earthly) Paradise, which he characterized as a new form of nobility - one that meant individual value (in contrast to ancient nobility, cf. [21, p. 54]. However, this viewpoint was tacitly linked to his contemplation of authorship. In fact, Dante, when he is defining the role of the *autore*, is doing so in impersonal terms, placing himself in the role not of the *auctor* but of one who humbly believes and obeys authoritative words. In other words, he defines himself as a very individual author [21, p. 57].

Maximus the Greek, as an Athonite monk, was not acquainted with contemplating himself as the author, though he remained highly aware that it was only through the written word that he could justify his voice. As long as he was realistic, he also knew that, in fact, his only addressee was God the Son. This is why he refers precisely to “the theology of Jesus Christ” [23, p. 194] – what could be compared to Dante’s Christological view [24, p. 174-175] - alongside establishing the fare mostly sincere, cosmologically shaped, and immutable relationship with the Orthodox Trinitarian system (opposing Lat. Filioque and including also the Holy Virgin Mary and only the Mother of God in the Trinitarian circle [see more 25, p. 399-429, 26]. His humble monastic position enables him to create the purest poetically inspired works, directly from the Holy Spirit (exactly as in the liturgical moment of the invocation of Epiclesis), and to understand God as “the One, Who is mild and essentially Philanthrope,” (lit. one who loves man/men) as can be noticed on the last page of the Liturgical Psalter that Maximus translated four years before his death, in 1552 (fig. 5). Similarly, we could see in his personal prayer “To the Most Holy Spirit Paracletos,” in which the ending in the inverted triangle form contains words that humbly appeal for the redemption of the human soul (fig. 4). His manuscripts often end with a visual recognition of the script in the inverted triangle form, while his literary expression has a single perspective – of, gradually and with full awareness, ascending only as far as the “bottom of Mount Tabor.” Indeed, it could be said, that the basic idea – at both authors - was lying in the specific understanding of the sacred time [27, p. 329-368].

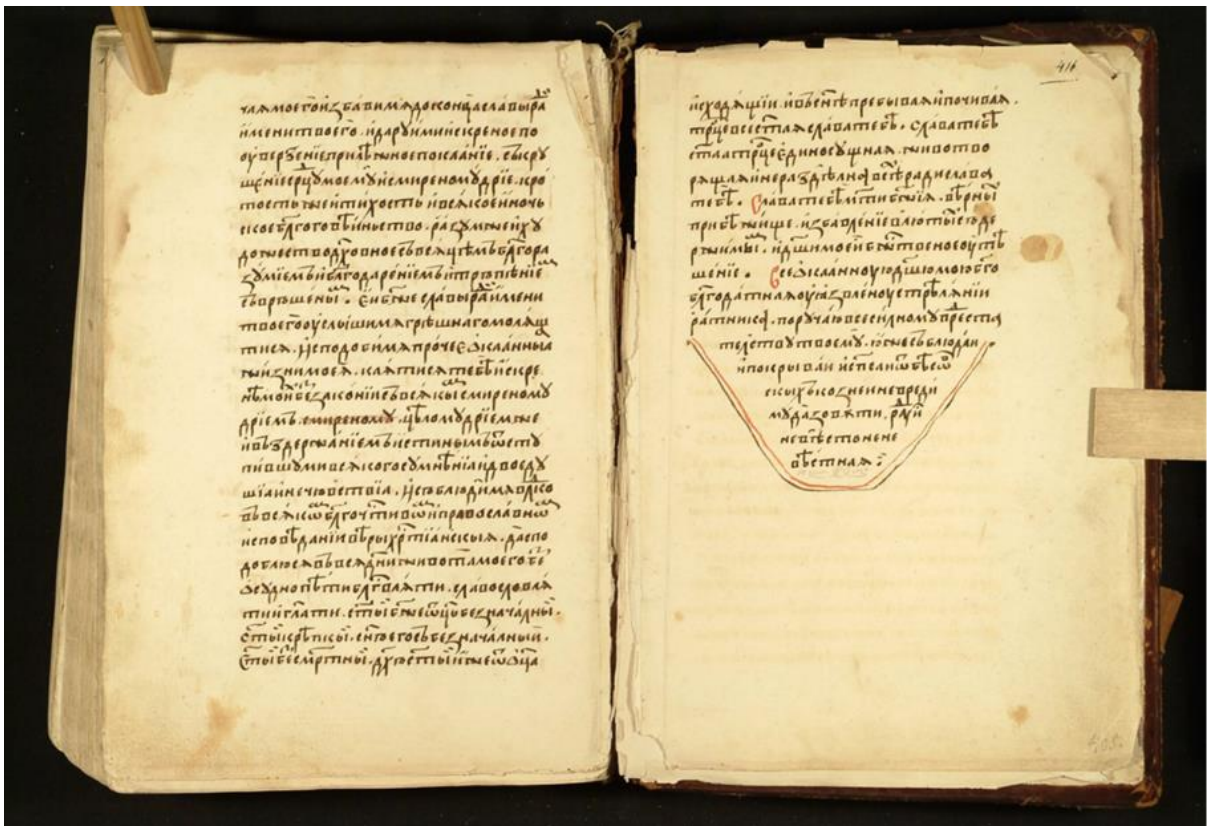


Figure 4

The last page of the manuscript of St. Maximus the Greek's prayer "To the Holy Divine Spirit Paracletos"



Figure 5

The manuscript of the last page of Psalterium, translated by Maximus the Greek in 1552.

This moment of the Lord's Transfiguration could be connected to the same contemplation of Dante (*Paradiso*, Canto 24–26) [28, p. 116] because both authors were thinking a great deal about the vision of the three apostles, Peter, John, and James (which were also the names of the three sons of Dante) as the three biblical *auctore* [21] who were privileged witnesses of the Transfiguration. In the opinion of both authors, this was the only vision that could properly be named theological. In fact, Maximus considered all patristic authors, Church fathers, and the other nine apostles – only three apostles were at the bottom of the mountain – as being very much distant from the insight of the proper theological understanding of God the Son [23, p. 133]. Moreover, one could find, specifically, that both Dante Alighieri and Maximus the Greek spoke not literally but implicitly about the Jesus Prayer in one's heart – Maximus when he placed "the inner man" in literature, Dante when "he is translating" the Lord's Prayer in the opening seven tercets of Canto 11, *Purgatorio* [29]. In the so-called "Monastic cycle" Maxim described the prayer activity of the inner man (Ms. Slave 123, fol. 81 r.), which could be associated not only with the original words of Apostle Paul (Ef 3, 16; 2 Cor 4, 16), but also with the hesychastic and Byzantine patristic practice of the Jesus Prayer in human's heart.



Figure 6

A) Dante's **poetic* theological**** vision: the Highest descends to man.

B) The **theological poetic** vision of Maximus the Greek: ascending toward the Highest.

* the "poetic" here is used in the sense of "creative".

** the theological is meant here as "theocentric and philosophical".

This kind of evaluation criteria was constructed also in Boccaccio's biography of Dante when the author was seeking for the definition and consequently the difference between the Poetry and the Theology [3, p. 45]. Later examinations of Dante's poetry were also unable to forego juxtaposition with theological aspects [30].

Nevertheless, we could see in the following picture that also Dante in Purgatorio was following the inverted triangle construction as it is ascending. One could argue that the medieval world was mentally constructed in such a triangular manner of thinking. One could also object that palaeographic researchers quite well know that many ancient manuscripts end with such a conclusion. Indeed, all that has been mentioned supports our proposal that these are valid typological pre-case studies (Prototypes) of the biographical approach to the intellectual mindset of the medieval and Renaissance periods.

The triangle form could offer a visual aspect of the Poetics of deeply personal faith. This could represent the structure of the creative process of human thought, ascending to the Highest Instance – and achieving the mysterious and highly mystical messages from the Highest himself (all these could be easily found in the writings of the Eastern Church fathers, in the hagiography, monastic scriptures, the hymnography of Western and Eastern Churches, in the (liturgical) hymnological species, homilies, etc.). This could be a visual rendering of the internal aspect of the individual who strongly believes. Such circumstances finally allowed the human to become more independent, which led to the humanistic period and the Renaissance approach. Consequently, the proposed triangle form could appropriately represent the scheme for one's pious creative process. Only through this kind of understanding of individual creative work could one begin to comprehend the author's artistic vision which shaped his deeply personal Poetics.

This is why we are calling for further examinations of the personal archive, of the author's manuscripts and of personal collections that the author collected and assembled throughout his life.

This is the relationship in between the creative process and biography.

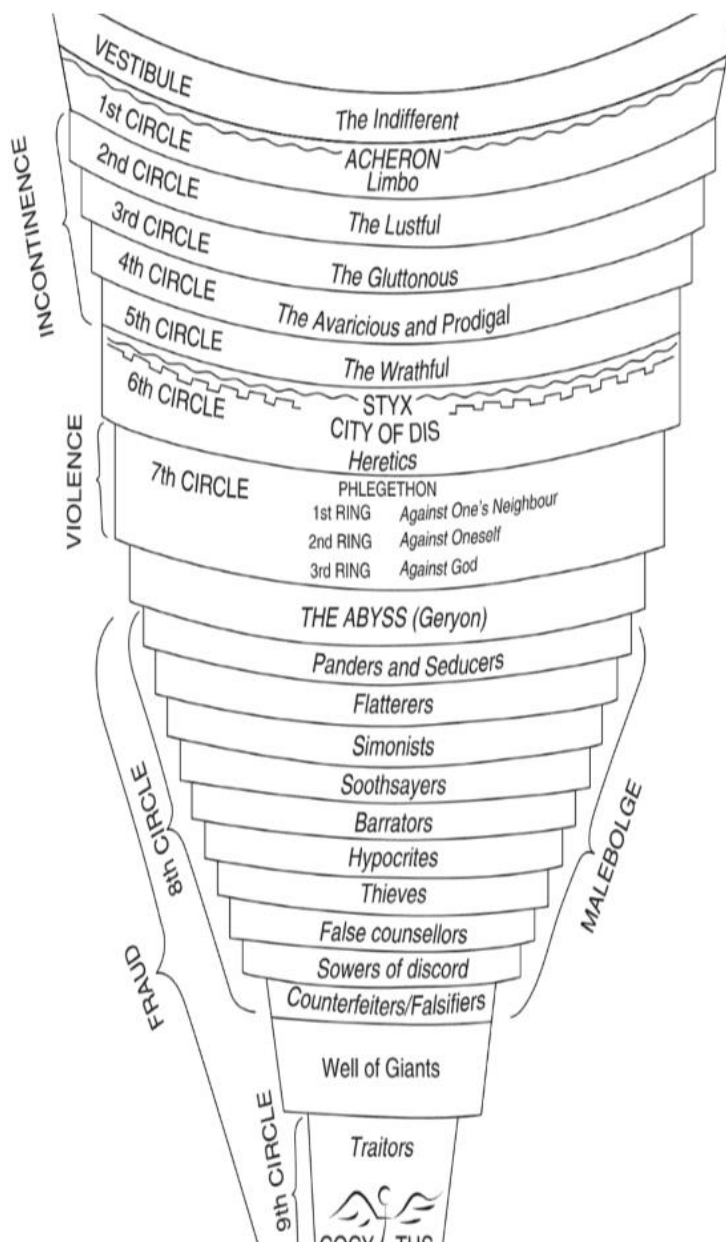


Figure 7

Dante's Hell (Schematic representation of Dante' Hell, source: The Cambridge Companion to Dante' *Commedia*, 2016, ed. Baranski, xix)

6. Further researching

A special challenge, however, of such biographical studies could be the project of the visualization in the frame of the following issues: A) visualization of the poetic vision of full spectrum, related to the corpus of works of Dante Alighieri. The enigmatic question: not a single interpretation of Dante's poetry survived as the only valid one. Plus: the source of Dante's individual vision of the Comedy. B) three personal collections of manuscripts of St Maximus the Greek that he collected by his own hand. The enigmatic question remains until nowadays: His own Slavonic idiolect (how could be properly understood) [31] Plus: although there are written

documents (correspondence, copied manuscript, epigrams, short poems, liturgical poems, epitaphs, notes in marginalia od manuscripts) in Greek, and some notes even in Latin, no single page in Old Church Slavonic and fully written with his hand survived until today.

7. Acknowledgments

This research was conducted in the frame of the H2020 project InTaVia (<https://intavia.eu>, 2020-2023)

First paragraph in every section does not have first-line indent. Use only styles embedded in the document.

References

The Manuscripts of St Maximus the Greek:

- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale: Mss. Coll. Slave 123.
- Moscow, Russian Government/State Library (RGB): Cod. Mss. MDA, fund. 173.I.042.
- The Historical Museum of Moscow (GIM): Mss. Coll. Uvar. 85/14.

Literature:

- [1] D. J. Snider, A Biography of Dante Alighieri. Set Forth as His Life Journey, St. Louis, 1922.
- [2] G. Mazzotta, The Life of Dante, in: R. Jacoff (Ed.), Cambridge Companion to Dante, 2nd. ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 1-14.
- [3] G. Boccaccio, Life of Dante. Appendices, L. Bruni, G. Villani, F. Villani, Manuscripts form Boccaccio, Alma Classics, Castle Yard, 2009.
- [4] A. Frisardi (Ed., transl., notes), Introduction, In Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nova*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 2012, pp. ix-xix.
- [5] F. Ciabattoni, Francesco, Dante Alighieri, In M. Sgarbi (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy, Springer, 2017, pp. 947-958.
- [6] D. Quint, Humanism and modernity: A reconsideration of Bruni's dialogues, *Renaissance Quarterly* 38 (1985): 423-445.
- [7] G. Holmes, Cristoforo Landino, in J. R. Halle (Ed.) Dictionnaire de la Renaissance italienne. Paris-London, Thames&Hudson. 1997.
- [8] <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/dante-alighieri>
- [9] N. Zajc, The Byzantine-poetic path of the works of St. Maximus the Greek (Mikhail Trivolis, Arta, ca. 1470 - St. Maximus the Greek, Moscow, 1556). *Studia Ceranea* (2018): 285-318.
- [10] N. V. Sinitsyna, Maksim Grek v Rossii. Nauka Moscow, 1977.
- [11] N. V. Sinitsyna, Maksim Grek. Moscow. 2008.
- [12] F. Romoli, Maksim Grek na Zapade. *Drevnjaja Rus'* (2020): 32-39.
- [13] N. Zajc, Krogozor slovanske besede, ZRC, ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, 2011.
- [14] N. Zajc, Some notes on the life and works of Maxim the Greek: (Michael Trivolis, ca 1470 - Maksim Grek, 1555/1556). Part 1: Biography. *Scrinium*, vol. 11, iss. 1 (2015): 314-325.
- [15] E. Denissoff, Maxime le Grec et l'Occident. Contribution à l'histoire de la pensée religieuse et philosophique de Michel Trivolis (Université de Louvain: Recueil de travaux d'histoire et de philologie, 3* série, 14e fascicule), Desclée De Brouwer, Paris, et Bibliothèque de l'Université, Louvain, 1943.
- [16] Purcell, Sally, The Introduction. In Sally Purcell, *Literature in the Vernacular*, Carcanet New Press Limite, Manchester, 1981, pp. 1-36.
- [17] Appelbaum, Stanley. Ed., Transl. 2006. Introduction. In *La Vita Nuova. The New Life. A dual-language book*. Pages v-xiii.

- [18] Eco, Umberto. *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*. Prev. Hugh Bredin. New Haven, London. 2002: Yale Nota Bene, University Press.
- [19] M. L. McLaughlin, *Humanism and Italian Literature*. In Jill Kraye (Ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Literature*, Warburg Institute, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 224–246.
- [20] E. Mayr, Eva, S. Salisu, V. A. Filipov, G. Schreder, R. A. Leite, S. Miksch, F. Windhager, *Visualizing Biographical Trajectories by Historical Artifacts: A Case Study based on the Photography Collection of Charles W. Cushman*, in *Biographical Data in a Digital World 2019, Proceedings of the Third Conference on Biographical Data in a Digital World 2019*, Varna, Bulgaria, September 5-6 (2019): 49–56.
- [21] A. R. Ascoli, 2007. From *auctor* to author: Dante before the *Commedia*. In *Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 2nd.ed., In Rachel Jacoff (Ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 46–67.
- [22] L. S. Kovtun, N. V. Sinitsyna, B. L., Fonkich, Maksim Grek i slavjanskaja Psaltyr' (slozhenie norm literaturnogo jazyka v perevodcheskoj praktike XVI v.), In *Vostochnoslavjanskije jazyki. Istochniki dlja ih izuchenija*, Nauka, Moskva, 1973, pp. 99–128.
- [23] Prep. M. Grek, *Sochinenija*, Volume I, Indrik, Moscow, 2008.
- [24] Davies, Dante' *Commedia* and the Body of Christ, In Vittorio Montemaggi (Ed.), Matthew Traherne, *Dante's Commedia. Theology as Poetry*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 2010, pp. 161–179.
- [25] N. Zajc, 2020. Prep. Maksim Grek i (slovesnyj) obraz Bozhiej Materi v ego sochinenijah. In Tufanova, Olga A. (ed.), et al. *Germenevtika drevnerusskoi literatury: Sbornik 19 = Germenevtika drevnerusskoi literatury [Hermeneutics of old Russian literature]: Issue 19*, IMLI RAN, Moskva, 2020, pp. 399–429.
- [26] N. Zajc, *The Veneration of the Holy Mother of God in the Theology of St. Maximus the Greek*. Analogia:, images, <http://pemptousia.com/2018/02/the-veneration-of-the-holy-mother-of-god-in-the-theology-of-st-maximus-the-greek/#1> (2018), pp. 1-8.
- [27] N. Zajc, *St Maxim the Greek (1470-1556): some notes on his understanding of the sacred time*, *Slavia Meridionalis* (2016): 329–368.
- [28] R. Jacoff. *Introduction to Paradiso*. In *Cambridge Companion to Dante*. Second edition. Ed. Rachel Jacoff. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 107-125.
- [29] J. T. Schnapp, *Introduction to Purgatorio*, in *Cambridge Companion to Dante*. Second edition. Ed. Rachel Jacoff. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 91–107.
- [30] G. Getto, *Poesia e Teologia nel Paradiso di Dante*, in: *Aspetti della Poesia di Dante*, Florence 1966.
- [31] N. Zajc, Neža, *Some notes on the life and works of Maxim the Greek (Michael Trivolis, ca 1470 - Maksim Grek, 1555/1556): Part 2: Maxim the Greek's Slavic idiolect*. *Scrinium*, volume 12 (2016): 375–382.