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**ELIADE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF
RENAISSANCE**

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Abstract: Review of Mircea Eliade, *Contribuții la filosofia Renașterii; Itinerar italian* [Contributions to the philosophy of the Renaissance; Italian itinerary], București: Editura Cartea Românească Educațional, 2021.

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The year 2021 greets us with a new edition of the bachelor's thesis of the historian and philosopher of religions Mircea Eliade. The book has been edited by Oana Camelia Șerban, assistant professor at the Faculty of Philosophy within the University of Bucharest. The bachelor's thesis of Mircea Eliade is one of his least known works due to the fact that it was not published for a long time. The first edition appeared only in 1984 as an annual supplement to the *Journal of Literary History and Theory* [Revista de istorie și teorie literară]. In addition to the scientific text, the edition contains under the title *Italian Itinerary* some of the articles written in diary mode by the young Eliade during the two study journeys made in Italy between March-April 1927 and April-July 1928. The articles originally appeared in the Romanian revues *Cuvântul*, *Univers literar* and *Sinteza*. This first edition was edited by Constantin Popescu-Cadem who also writes a note on the edition, to which is added a preface written by Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga. The new edition of 2021 keeps the note on the edition and the preface and adds an introductory study with several sections signed by Oana Camelia Șerban.

The bachelor's thesis was defended by the young Eliade in October 1928 at the University of Bucharest in front of a commission whose chairman was Petre P. Negulescu and whose members were Constantin Rădulescu-Motru and Dimitrie Gusti. The candidate graduated *magna cum laude*.

The Italian epic and the project of this bachelor's thesis (the initial plan remained unfinished, he managed to completely write only three chapters out of the ten planned) represent a preparatory stage for the other personal epic, the journey to India, which will end with a doctoral thesis published in 1936. Eliade's lack of interest in continuing and publishing his undergraduate work can also be understood by its secondary importance in relation to the thesis project on yoga that occupied him for many years and helped him develop his personal perspective on the history of religions at a higher level. Thus, his thesis on the Renaissance, remaining unpublished, was ignored for a long time. In general, the research that has been done over time on Eliade's work have focused mainly on his mature or better-known works. Its publication in 1984 and its re-edition in 2021 is an important step in completing the image we have of his research in his youth and of his formative period.

Oana Claudia Șerban's introductory study begins with an introduction about the symbolic encounter mediated by the legendary land of Italy between James Joyce and Giovanni Papini under the sign of eternal return. Eliade's bachelor's thesis is appreciated as an interdisciplinary approach to the intersection between metaphysics, religion and art, a hermeneutic study that wants to circumscribe the

general coordinates of the epoch, without getting lost in details. Regarding the Italian Itinerary, she mentions the unique synthesis between the style of the diary and the aesthetic discourse. The critical analysis of aesthetic taste has a central role in the Italian travels.

The bachelor's thesis is the scientific part, drawing conclusions from research during college and travel to Italy. The Italian itinerary represents the subjective journey, imbued with fantasies and youthful daydreaming that surrounds with an exotic chromaticism the inner cultural journey. This duet represents a double access to Eliade's youth, the period of formation of the future historian of religions, for which the contact with the fascinating Italian and Spanish Renaissance represented a training for the journey to India, much more adventurous and exotic. The importance of the edition is also twofold. On the one hand, it reveals a scholarly work on the thought and culture of the Renaissance, even if Eliade's research is today overshadowed by the evolution of research and the wider and more diverse panorama in terms of information. On the other hand, these two texts are the best foray into the life and thinking of young Eliade. The difference between them reveals in a nutshell the duality of the spirit of the historian of religions, on the one hand the objective and knowledge-obsessed researcher who tries with the eyes of an archaeologist to rigorously understand the history of cultures and religions, on the other hand the writer who asserts his subjectivity to give meaning to his own existence in the world. The two perspectives complementary to Eliade's spirit will determine his entire multifaceted work.

If we refer to the current research situation, Eliade's thesis on the Renaissance remains rather a sketch of an integrative overview. Studies on the Renaissance have evolved enormously since then, not only through the documentary richness, but also through the complexity of the approaches that have tried to circumscribe all the more or less hidden faces of the age. However, it is not without originality. The young historian of religions changes the perspective specific to the era in the way of understanding Italian humanism especially by emphasizing the importance and originality of the Spanish Renaissance which was not just a satellite without originality of the Italian Renaissance as often considered. At the same time, he criticizes the prejudices that still exist about the Spanish Inquisition that would have suppressed the philosophical and scientific movement in Spain.

Eliade's perspective is general, without going into too much detail about the authors mentioned. More important is the overall vision than the specifics and thinking of each author. However, the most important authors are assigned several pages of comments such as Lorenzo Valla, Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Tommaso Campanella, Leon the Hebrew (Judá Abravanel), Luis Vives or Francisco Sánchez. Instead others are barely mentioned. The main theses on Renaissance culture

and thought mainly involve changing the perception of nature and replacing the theocentric criterion of existence specific to medieval man with the anthropocentric criterion, through which man becomes the measure of things. Nature is no longer understood as an object of contemplation, but becomes the object of scientific study, and the fulcrum of the world and life passes from the plane of transcendence to that of human life. The scientific spirit and the concept of man, in a secular and autonomous sense, are the most important conquests of the era.

The first chapter deals with the first period of the Italian Renaissance, that of the humanist rhetoricians and philologists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but also of the councils. The culture of this era was more philological, the scholastic (conceptual) formalism of the late Middle Ages is replaced by a rhetorical and philological formalism. The scholars of the time were oriented only towards erudition and mannerist philological approaches. Literary and rhetorical texts dominated, with Cicero as the supreme ideal. It was a period of searching for manuscripts and codices, of recovering ancient works. Subsequently, ecumenical councils had a greater impact than the initial search for manuscripts. The most important was the Council of Basel / Ferrara / Florence (1431-1449). The direct contact with Greek thinkers and Greek manuscripts was an important factor in the effervescence and cultural development. Eliade also mentions the superficiality of the morals of the time, the inclination towards hedonism in life or the search for glory. The most important theorist of the rehabilitation of pleasure and voluptuousness was Lorenzo Valla. In this cultural context, the distinction between religion and morality is made for the first time by Giovanni Pontano, the second being conceived autonomously and thus being able to be isolated in the secular realm.

In the second period of the Renaissance, analyzed in the second chapter, the interest of scholars in the field of philology is replaced by the interest in philosophy and science. In parallel with this interest, magic and occult practices were reborn, which had disappeared during the secular and philological humanism of the first part of the Renaissance. The culture of the time becomes eclectic and syncretic, the development of science which will culminate in the development of mathematics and mathematization of physics (Galileo Galilei) is accompanied by the evolution of occult practices (alchemy, occultism, Kabbalah, theosophy) encouraged by the Neoplatonic Academy of Florence. Due to this, Plato's thinking became sovereign in late Renaissance Italy. Eliade presents on this occasion several general ideas from the works of Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Tommaso Campanella or others.

The third chapter is the most original in the thesis. It presents the

Spanish Renaissance, emphasizing its originality and specificity. The myth of the Inquisition which became a commonplace in modern culture obscured the value of the Spanish thinkers of the time, considering that the Spanish Renaissance was only a satellite of the Italian Renaissance. The Spaniards tried a conciliation between Plato and Aristotle. Raymond Lull is mentioned as an important forerunner of the thinking of the age. The interest in Aristotle dominated for a while and under the influence of the Florentine Academy, Plato made his presence felt more and more. Spanish thinkers, especially Gomez Pereira, Raymund de Sabunde, Benito Pereiro, Luis Vives or Francisco Sánchez were forerunners of modern thought and values through their interest in reason and the experimental method in science. The nominalist approach triumphed, but Spanish scientific thought did not develop in the direction of modernity. Spanish culture has taken a different path specific to it and different from the modernity of Descartes, Bacon or Galileo.

The chapter on the Spanish Renaissance would have been a unique text for the Romanian interwar culture. This subject was largely absent in the research and controversy of the time. Even to this day little has been written about it in Romania.

The transition from the text of the bachelor's thesis to the Italian journal is abrupt, showing Eliade's literary multivalence. The first text shows the researcher and thinker of the history of religions during his student training. The cold analysis and understanding of the whole thinking of the Renaissance is then replaced by the literary and romantic spirit of the emotionally involved traveler towards the cultural vestiges with which he comes into contact in the texts of the *Italian Itinerary*. The emotional and sensitive impact produced by the real presence of the great plastic creations of Venice and Rome delights him. Travel impressions adopt a descriptive and vivid style, different from the analytical and erudite approach in the thesis about the Renaissance. The itinerary contains pages of great plastic expressiveness. For example, visiting Tivoli Castle is a pretext for daydreaming and imaginary transposition into other epochs to understand the spirit of the old Italian culture and aristocracy. Eliade prefers solitude when walking through museums, castles or palaces. The social agitation and the noise made by tourists took him out of his dream and aesthetic contemplation. The Italian itinerary helps you to enter into the mental intimacy of the student Eliade, with his cultural and existential fantasies, with obsessions and passions specific to his youth and age. The meetings with Giovanni Papini, one of his cultural masters, but also with Ernesto Buonaiuti and Giovanni Gentile are also interesting. Encounters between people of culture were in the past a factor not only of cultural inspiration, but also of existential importance.

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