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Roger Bacon's Life and Ideas in Russian Historiography

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В статье рассматриваются тенденции и пути изучения жизни и идей религиозного философа и ученого XIII в. Роджера Бэкона в российской историографии. Личность этого выдающегося францисканского мыслителя привлекали внимание российских авторов в течение двух столетий, начиная с XVIII в.

В исследованиях биографии и воззрений Бэкона можно выделить несколько этапов. В XVIII в. он становится известен в России как маг и выдающийся алхимик. Такой образ сформировался под влиянием зарубежных публикаций XVII-XVIII столетий и оказался столь живучим, что просуществовал до начала XX века. Однако уже во второй половине XIX в. российские историки составляют общее представление о судьбе и идеях мыслителя, основываясь на зарубежных публикациях и изучая уже имеющийся в библиотеках Петербурга и Москвы "Великий труд" (Opus majus), главное сочинение Бэкона, в издании XVIII в.

В советской историографии необходимо отметить две важных тенденции: с одной стороны, активно развивалось появившееся в западноевропейской историографии XIX в. представление о Бэконе как о борце за свободу мысли и развитие науки, пострадавшем за свои убеждения, которые резко выделялись на фоне средневековой схоластической мысли. С другой стороны, в это время внимание историков привлекают частные аспекты взглядов Роджера Бэкона, прежде всего его алхимические и географические представления. Появляются переводы фрагментов трудов мыслителя. Кроме этого, труды Бэкона изучались в контексте более широких исследований.

Интерес к западноевропейской средневековой мысли усиливается в российской историографии в 1980-х гг. К этому периоду относится защита докторской диссертации и публикация статей Г.П. Елькиной (Алма-Ата, Казахский государственный университет), посвященных идеям развития научного знания и учению об "опытном знании" в сочинениях францисканского ученого.

В 1990-х – начале 2000-х гг. начинается новый этап в российской медиевистике. Для него характерны освоение широкого круга литературы и источников, усиление внимания к ранее не поднимавшимся проблемам и слабо освещенным вопросам, в том числе в истории средневековой мысли. Публикуются новые переводы сочинений Роджера Бэкона, в 2005 г. отдельной книгой выходит под редакцией И.В. Лупан-

дина перевод избранных трудов францисканца. Однако, за исключением нескольких работ, посвященных важным аспектам его воззрений, многие стороны бэконовской мысли остаются слабо освещенными в российской историографии.

Roger Bacon, a Franciscan philosopher and scientist who lived in the 13th century (the actual dates of his birth and death are unknown, but it is possible to calculate that he was born around 1210 and died in 1294), was one of the outstanding medieval thinkers. His life and views have attracted the attention of Russian historians for two centuries, and the aim of this paper is to review the impact of Bacon and his ideas on Russian historiography.

Until recently, religious and philosophical thought of the 13th century had featured very little in Russian historiography, partly due to the difficulty of working with the sources. Until the early 20th century, there were no critical publications of many of Bacon's important works. There are, however, two complete editions of the *Opus Majus* [The Great Work], the philosopher's principle writing. Samuel Jebb published the first and best edition of this work in 1733, in London, and it was republished in 1750, in Venice¹. Between 1897 and 1900, J.H. Bridges published the second edition using different manuscripts with his own introduction². In spite of the low quality of the second edition, together with the fact that Jebb's edition was available in Russian libraries, most Russian historians only used Bridges' edition.

After the Russian Revolution, many Russian historians could not use the libraries and archives of Western Europe and the USA. The ideological factor was of great importance, too. Until the early 20th century, research about Catholic religious and philosophical thought was not very popular in orthodox Russia. Even the widely-available works of Thomas Aquinas have not received worthy mention in the works of Russian historians.

In Soviet Russia, the official atheistic and anti-clerical ideology did not cause the total interruption of the research of medieval thought, although the investigation of many very important problems was suspended and only resumed in the 1970s.

Notwithstanding this, the situation regarding research of Bacon's ideas was comparatively fortunate as historians took more of an interest in his thought in Soviet Russia than in Tsarist Russia. Even so, the number of publications dedicated to Bacon does not compare favourably against the hundreds published about him in American and Western European historiography. Despite this, the research in Russia regarding Bacon's views is of interest for its own sake, and for its appearance at all in Russian medieval studies.

Russia's first acquaintance with Roger Bacon took place in the 18th century when papers about European philosophers and mystics began to be published in the journals *Truten'* [The Bumble-Bee], *Zhivopisets* [The Painter] and *Utrenniy Svet* [The Morning Light], edited by the famous N.I. Novikov. At the same time, European publications began to

appear in Russian private libraries, and Bacon was mentioned among the famous medieval thinkers. However, the information about him portrayed Bacon as a mythological character, and this image as a magician and famous alchemist spread in Russia. This was caused by the portrayal of Bacon in French and English historical works such as *The Famous Historie of Fryer Bacon* published “at London by E.A. to Francis Groue in 1630”. The tradition of this image had begun in the 14th century when Bacon’s alchemical and astrological ideas, together with the burning mirrors and other admirable things described by him in his writings, gave rise to such fantastic representations of the man. For centuries, Roger Bacon grew as a legendary person with ludicrous details attached to his life. The appearance of these representations in Russian popular publications began to occur at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, one unknown source even proclaiming that Bacon died in an explosion in his laboratory. N.A. Morozov, a famous writer and author of alternative and incredible approaches to world history, who was held prisoner in the Petropavlovskaya fortress, portrayed Bacon as an expert alchemist, and noted Bacon’s alchemical achievements in his work *V poiskakh filosofskogo kamnya* [In Search of the Philosopher’s Stone]. Morozov concluded that Bacon’s alchemical books were the first texts in medieval alchemical tradition, “authenticity of which is undoubted”³.

This more rational point of view had already begun to gain popularity in Russia by the middle of the 19th century. By studying unpublished sources, some European researchers, such as E. Charles⁴ and his followers, showed Bacon’s views as being unique in medieval thought and that Bacon was one of the few medieval thinkers who supported the experimental investigation of nature and the wide practical inculcation of scientific achievements. In his *Pis'ma o Prirode* [Letters about Nature], A.I. Gertsen⁵, a famous Russian writer and publicist, maintained that Bacon was a unique, outstanding phenomenon in the general development of scholastic thought, although unable to change the general intellectual situation in 13th century. Overall, these one hundred and fifty years may be considered to be a united period when the representations of Bacon in Russia were echoing what had happened previously in West European historiography.

At the end of the 19th century, Russian historians had better information about Bacon’s life and his views. At this time they made acquaintance with the newest European publications (a few general works were translated into Russian and were published in the late 19th and early 20th centuries⁶) and with some sources edited in the 18th and 19th centuries. Russian medieval studies had been developing actively, and a good illustration of this process can be found in papers in different dictionaries. In the first papers dedicated to Bacon in Brockgause and Efron’s *Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar'* [The Encyclopaedic Dictionary] and *Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar'. Biografi* [The Encyclopaedic Dictionary. The Biographies], the main facts of Bacon’s life and works were detailed, together with a description of publications and their translations.

Noviy Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar' [New Encyclopaedic Dictionary] also placed K.M. Miloradovich’s lengthy paper about the philosopher with a list of publications about him. At the same time, some very successful research was produced into the Franciscan

Order of the 13th century and medieval religious and philosophical representations. We also need to note the works of S.A. Kotlyarevskiy, such as his monograph *Frantsiskanskiy Orden i Rimskaya Kuriya v XIII i XIV Vekakh* [Franciscan Order and Roman Curia in the 13th and 14th Centuries]⁷. The relationship between the Franciscans and the Pope was described in a vast historical, cultural and intellectual context in this work, but Kotlyarevskiy did not attract attention to Bacon. With the exception of the dictionary papers, there were no works dedicated to Bacon's ideas.

The next period is from 1917 to 1950. At this time, few special publications appeared about Roger Bacon, and there were no sound works among them. It is possible to identify two main trends.

Firstly, as in the previous fifty years, dictionary papers continued to be published, using European works and previous Russian publications⁸ as a basis, and popular information was often repeated in them. At the same time, in accordance with active atheistic propaganda and general ideological influence on historical studies, interest was limited to medieval religious and philosophical thought.

Secondly, in parallel with this trend, some researchers studied particular aspects of Bacon's views in greater depth. V.P. Zubov, an outstanding historian and philosopher, was among them, though unfortunately only part of his work was published. In 1924, for the first time, Zubov addressed Bacon's heritage when he made a report about optical representations⁹. Furthermore, Zubov used Bacon's writings (first of all, *Opus Majus*) when learning of the atomistic representations in medieval calendars – computes, medieval architectural theory, optical concepts and magnetism. The same author wrote a paper about Bacon for *Filosofskaya Entsiklopediya* [The Philosophical Encyclopaedia]. Zubov's works are distinguished by their solid study of sources, although Bacon's ideas were not the subject of special interest for Zubov. Bacon's name was noted in general works about the history of chemistry, too.

In previous periods, Bacon's works were accessible to Russian researchers only in Latin and in English translation by R. Burke, but now the first Russian translations began to appear. In 1932, M.P. Alekseev included a small part of *Opus Majus* with a short introduction in his compendium of medieval texts on the theme of Siberia¹⁰. In the introduction, he repeated the popular point of view of the time. As Alekseev wrote, Roger Bacon, "who had the misfortune to join... the Franciscan Order, lived in the terrible struggle for the right to scientific thought" and tried to illuminate the "obscurity reigning at that time in European science"¹¹.

By the middle of the 20th century, the situation with the edition of Bacon's texts was better than a hundred years previously. During the last century, *Opus Tertium* [The Third Work], *Opus Minus* [The Minor Work] and other works were published by J. Brewer, E. Charles, R. Steele, A.G. Little and other editors. However, Russian historians during the first half of the 20th century mostly did not use these editions.

From the fifties to the seventies, the trend which had started in Soviet historiography in the first half of the 20th century developed enormously, and Bacon's name continued to be used for the aims of atheistic propaganda. This point of view, introduced into European historiography in the 19th century, had been developing. In papers published in Soviet popular science journals, Bacon was shown as a fighter for freedom of thought and the triumph of science, as well as a thinker who suffered for his ideas.

These publications, which had little in common with the scientific works, presented extraordinary facts about him. These facts are found even in dictionaries. An example of such material was printed in the 400,000 copies of *Filosofskiy Slovar'* [The Philosophical Dictionary], which was edited by M.M. Rozental and P.F. Yudin¹². It included the paper about Bacon¹³ in which he was named as "the thinker-innovator, the predictor of the experimental science of modern times, the ideologist of the urban working classes", who "detected the feudal morality, ideology and politics" and "was distanced in 1277 from the teaching in Oxford University because of his views, and was held in the monastery prison in accordance with the orders of the Church authorities". The author of the paper said Bacon was "atheistic but inconsistent" and asserted that Bacon's aim for all sciences was "the extension of human power over nature".

The same characteristics of the philosopher appeared in other publications such as V. Khinkis' childish book about Bacon and his papers, the popular A. Belov's book *Obvinenie v Eresi* [The Condemnation of Heresy], and in the papers *Doctor Mirabilis* ("Admirable Doctor", as Bacon was named in late-medieval Europe) by K. Reydemeyer and *Rasskaz ob Angliyskom Monakhe Rodzhere Becone* [The Story of the English Friar Roger Bacon] by V. Lunkevich¹⁴.

Of course, we cannot look upon these publications as scientific works, but they formed the image of Bacon. A more solid and objective characterisation of Bacon's views was given by O.V. Trakhtenberg in his *Ocherki po Istorii Zapadnoevropeyskoy Filosofii* [Outlines of History of West European Philosophy]¹⁵. This period produced the most informative and representative review of Bacon's life and views for a vast readership. From the list of Bacon's published works and the studies about him, O.V. Trakhtenberg could only use *Opus Majus* and two works – the popular Bacon biography by F.W. Woodruff and E. Charles' work of 1861. In spite of these limitations, O.V. Trakhtenberg shed light on Bacon's views, including the concept of the experimental study of nature and the perspectives of scientific progress used for the good of the Church, the State and society.

However, this work was not free from ideological influence. With limited sources and the use of old research, Trakhtenberg's estimations of Bacon's thought lacked objectivity, leading him to conclude that Bacon characterized the aggressive politics of the Church which viewed "infidels" negatively. Bacon actually spoke about the excessive energy of "servants of God", but in *Opus Majus* and other writings he also insisted on the conversion of infidels to the "true religion" and said that in the near future, all infidels who persisted in their ways would have to be destroyed. Moreover, Bacon proposed

to the Pope different ways and means not only for conversion, but also for the destruction of infidels, including the burning mirrors, powder and poison gas¹⁶.

During this period, Bacon's views were groundlessly modernized, but we have to bear in mind that it was a time of great scientific and technical progress, and the desire to find in Bacon a prophet of this progress was normal.

During the 1970s, Soviet historiography had two ways of studying special aspects of Bacon's views, which were interesting and would be developed in the 1980s. They were the studies of the alchemical medieval traditions and Bacon's geographic representations. V.L. Rabinovich looked at Bacon's alchemical views in the context of medieval alchemical tradition, but it is possible to dispute some of his conclusions¹⁷. Also, he used works ascribed to Bacon, although their authorship by Bacon is very unlikely.

We need to note the *Istoriya Printsipov Fizicheskogo Eksperimenta* [The History of Principles of the Physical Experiment] by A.V. Akhutin¹⁸, in which the Oxford scientific school's ideas were contemplated, and problems which were discussed in this work are related to Bacon's concept of experimental science and to his views in general, because he was a follower of many of the ideas of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln and outstanding representative of the Oxford school.

New translations continued to be published. In 1979 V.I. Matuzova included several fragments of *Opus Majus* in her reliable compendium of sources of the 11th to 13th centuries¹⁹ (including the fragment which was translated by M.P. Alekseev). This publication was accompanied by an introduction, a parallel Latin text, based on J.H. Bridges' edition, a list of the bibliography from the early 19th century up to 1969, an index of publications and Russian translations of *Opus Majus*, sources, manuscripts and a commentary. Matuzova's introduction was short, but most objective and trustworthy.

There were some other translations of Bacon's works. Several important fragments of *Opus Majus* were included in the second part of the first volume of the *Antologiya Mirovoy Filosofii* [The Anthology of World Philosophy]. The translation was made by A.Kh. Gorfunkel', based on J.H. Bridges' edition²⁰. The small fragments of *Opus Majus* and *Opus Tertium* [The Third Work], in which Roger Bacon described his ideas about music, were included in the compilation *Muzykal'naya Estetika Zapadnoevropeyskogo Srednevekov'ya i Vozrozhdeniya* [The Musical Aesthetic of Medieval and Renaissance Western Europe]²¹.

In the next period, the eighties, the trends which characterized the previous period, such as the using of Bacon's ideas (often in a distorted manner) for anticlerical propaganda continued. For example, in the work *Svobodomyслиe i Ateizm v Drevnosti, Srednie Veka i v Epokhu Vozrozhdeniya* [The Freedom of Thought and Atheism in the Ancient World, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance], not only were Bacon's life and writings described with serious errors, but also the conclusions regarding Bacon's views reminded one of the noted *Filosofskiy Slovar'*. Bacon was named as one who "fought against Catholicism" and, as if he was an author of the concept, "caused the negation of Church

and Christianity". Moreover, the work claimed that Bacon's natural studies were "quietly contradictory to the medieval religious image of mind".

However, these historiographic myths were a thing of the past. In works of this period, Bacon's thought was characterized in the context of the medieval intellectual situation. Among the most important works is V.V. Sokolov's textbook *Srednevekovaya Filosofiya* [The Medieval Philosophy]²², which includes a review of the problems of the Franciscan thinker's life and the character of his views. Sokolov describes Bacon's social ideas and the relationship between theology and philosophy. The historian used J.H. Bridges' edition of *Opus Majus* and the translation by A.Kh. Gorfunkel. Although the textbook isn't the place for discussion, Sokolov was able to illustrate the disputable topics in the study of Roger Bacon's thought.

Throughout the whole of this period, from the 1960s to the 1980s, greater acquaintance with the foreign studies of medieval religious and philosophical thought was made. The Russian translations of works of famous medievalists such as E. Garin and reports of E. Gilson's works were published.

However, the most important appearance at this time was the first solid work dedicated solely to Bacon, the doctoral dissertation of G.P. El'kina, which was defended in 1985 at the Kazakhstan State University²³.

El'kina analysed the concept of the development of scientific knowledge in Bacon's philosophy. The undoubted merit of this work was the sources – *Opus Majus* and *Opus Tertium*. El'kina also used everything that was accessible for her foreign studies. In this dissertation, the focus was on the development of scientific knowledge in Bacon's writings, but the author also included a brief description of Bacon's life in the preface. She was interested in Bacon's concept of experimental science (*scientia experimentalis*), one of his most interesting concepts, and published three papers about it. In the first, El'kina thinks that for Bacon, the term "experiment" included all that could be gleaned by empirical observation of common life. The researcher believed that Bacon often used the term "experience" to mean observation. El'kina concluded that for Bacon, the term "experiment" meant the sensual experience and experience of life, although it seems to be improbable²⁴.

We can see that one of the trends in research during the fifties to the eighties was the representation of Bacon primarily as a philosopher and scientific theorist.

From the 1990s until the early 2000s, the problems of medieval religious and philosophical thought began to be studied actively. A.M. Shishkov published papers about Robert Grosseteste's concept of light metaphysics. O.S. Voskoboynikov studied the astrological, magical and scientific ideas in the court of Emperor Frederick II and in the Papal court²⁵. During this period, there was a resurgence of interest in medieval thought and history in general. This was caused, on the one hand, by the serious changes in Russian society which influenced Russian historical science, and on the other hand, from the seventies to the nineties, by an essential advance in the studies of the problems of medieval history in general and of medieval studies in particular. In this period, the

problems in the studies of intellectual, scientific and religious history were studied actively in research about ancient and medieval West European and Arab history. At first, there were the works of V.P. Gaydenko and G.A. Smirnov, P.P. Gaydenko, A.Ya. Gurevich, I.D. Rozhanskij, O.F. Kudryavtsev and A.V. Sagadeev.

In the brief period of the last fifteen years, progress seems to be being made in the studies of the problems of medieval intellectual history, an area which had been insufficiently studied in previous periods. However, as far as Bacon is concerned, these achievements are not very serious. At first, progress was in the publication of the Russian translations of Bacon's works. In 1999, Bacon's *Introductio* [Introduction], published by him in the treatise *Secretum Secretorum* [The Secret of Secrets], was translated by A.V. Vashestov with his introduction and commentaries²⁶. This translation was inserted in a compilation of texts about magic, gemitism and natural philosophy from the Ancient World to the Modern Time. Unfortunately, this translation was poor and it contained many serious errors. In 2002, in Saint-Petersburg, *Antologiya Srednevekovoy Mysli. Teologiya i Filosofiya Evropeyskogo Srednevekov'ya* [The Anthology of Medieval Thought. The Theology and Philosophy of Medieval Europe] was published, containing a translation of a large part of *Opus Tertium* by A.B. Apollonov. The most recent Russian translation is the edition of Bacon's selected works with the parallel Latin text, published in Moscow in 2005. The editor is I.V. Lupandin²⁷.

Among the research about Bacon, there are only introductions and commentaries for these translations and some other papers. A chapter about the Franciscan thinker was included in the popular review *Estestvennonauchnye Predstavleniya v Srednevekovoy Evrope* [The Natural Scientific Representations in Medieval Europe] by S.M. Marchukova²⁸. The philosopher V.V. Bibikhin wrote a paper about Bacon for *Novaya Filosofskaya Entsiklopediya* [The New Philosophical Encyclopaedia], which was published in 2001. In same year, a paper about Bacon's optical concept was published in the journal *Voprosy Filosofii* [Philosophical Questions]²⁹. In my two papers and the candidate dissertation on the problems of studying Bacon's concept of experimental science, the thinker's concept of ideal state, *respublica fidelium* [the state of truth] and his social and political views were examined³⁰.

To conclude, although it is possible to see progress in the research into Bacon's life and views, the achievements are disproportional. Russian medievalists have only begun to research many of the problems of studying Roger Bacon's concepts.

NOTES

- ¹ S. Jebb (ed.), *Fratri Rogeri Bacon... Opus majus ad Clementem IV pontificem maximum* [Friar Roger Bacon, The Great Work to Pope Clement IV], London 1733 (reprinted in Venice in 1750). These two editions are in the Russian State Library in Moscow.
- ² J.H. Bridges (ed.), *The "Opus Majus" of Roger Bacon*, Edinburg 1897-1900, vols. I-III.
- ³ Н.А. Морозов, *В поисках философского камня* [In Search of the Philosopher's Stone], Saint Petersburg 1909, pp. 98-114.

- ⁴ See E. Charles, *Roger Bacon: sa vie, ses ouvrages, ses doctrines*, Paris 1861.
- ⁵ А.И. Герцен, *Письма об изучении природы* [Letters about Nature], in А.И. Герцен, *Сочинения* [The Writings], Moscow 1985, vol. I, p. 337.
- ⁶ For example, A. Stöckl's *Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* (Mainz, 1866) [The History of Medieval Philosophy], published in 1912 in Moscow.
- ⁷ S.A. Kotlyarevskiy, *Frantsiskanskiy Orden i Rimskaya Kuriya v XIII i XIV Vekakh* [Franciscan Order and Roman Curia in the 13th and 14th Centuries], Moscow 1901.
- ⁸ See В. Ивановский, *Бэкон Роджер* [Roger Bacon], in *Большая советская энциклопедия* [The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia], Moscow 1927, vol. 8, pp. 364-366.
- ⁹ We have no information about publication of this report.
- ¹⁰ *Роджер Бэкон о Сибири* [Roger Bacon about Siberia], in М.П. Алексеев, *Сибирь в известиях западноевропейских путешественников и писателей* [Siberia in Information from West European Travelers and Writers], Irkutsk 1941, pp. 23-27.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ¹² М.М. Розенталь - П.Ф. Юдин (eds.), *Философский словарь*' [The Philosophical Dictionary], Moscow 1963.
- ¹³ *Философский словарь*, pp. 59-60.
- ¹⁴ В.А. Хинкис, *Необычный монах. Страницы жизни Роджера Бэкона...* [Uncommon Friar. Pages of Roger Bacon's Life], "Наука и религия" [Science and religion], 1, 1971, pp. 73-83; 2, pp. 64-75; 3, pp. 75-84; Id., *Жизнь и смерть монаха Роджера Бэкона...* [The Life and Death of Friar Roger Bacon...], Moscow 1972; А.В. Белов, *Обвинение в ереси* [The Condemnation in Heresy], Moscow 1972; К. Рейдемейстер, *Доктор Мирабилис* [The Admirable Doctor], "Знание – сила" [Knowledge is Power], 6, 1955, pp. 12-18; В. Лункевич, *Рассказ об английском монахе Роджере Бэконе, который призывал к опытному изучению природы...* [The Story about English Friar Roger Bacon who called for the Experimental Study of Nature...], "Наука и жизнь" [Science and life], 11, 1974, pp. 131-135.
- ¹⁵ О.В. Трахтенберг, *Oчерки по Истории Западноевропейской Философии* [Outlines of History of West European Philosophy], Moscow 1957.
- ¹⁶ See, for example, J. Brewer (ed.), *Roger Bacon, Opus tertium*, London 1859, p. 46; *Roger Bacon, Opus majus*, vol. II, p. 221. For Bacon's condemnation of the Teutonic Order's aggression against infidels see: *Roger Bacon, Opus majus*, vol. III, p. 122.
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