

**The reception of Giorgio Vasari's "Vite" in Russia:  
M.I. Železnov and his "vasarian" approach to the biography of K. Brjullova<sup>1</sup>**

The article focuses on the relationship and on the cultural interaction between the Slavic (Russian) and the Mediterranean world, proposing a study of the Italian Renaissance perception of the *Vasarian* approach to the History of Art in XIX century Imperial Russia. The study of this issue deals with two parallel historical themes: 1) Vasari as a biographer of the main Renaissance figures, and the first reception of his work in Russia, including the perception of the Renaissance tradition in Russia through translation and interpretation of «Vasarian» ideas and texts. 2) The work of Michail Ivanovič Železnov (1825 - 1891) as he was the biographer and secretary of the famous painter Karl Brjullova (1799 - 1852), who was an appreciated artist throughout Europe, and one of the favourite of the Russian Imperial *élite* of the first half of the 19th century. Michail Železnov accompanied Brjullova during the last years of his life in Italy (1849-1852), recording the artist's interaction with Italian culture and involuntarily assimilating his own perception of Italian cultural and historical tradition. In fact, Michail Železnov will be the first Russian translator of Vasari's *Vite* (Leipzig, 1864), undertaking this colossal work just few years after his master's transpassing in Italy. In a context of a brilliant artistic and cultural exchange between the great painter Brjullova and Italian artists, especially in the city of Rome, whose artistic circles "Karl the Great" had attended also in his youth for many years, and on which he had nourished his art and his talent, the young disciple Železnov found the *fil rouge* between the art and technique of Brjullova and his southern European and Italian influences. When Brjullova died, Železnov, now mature, published in the magazine "Otečestvennyye zapiski"

---

<sup>1</sup> To be published in: "Mare nostrum". Sbornik naučnych statej Instituta Vseobščej Istorii RAN, a c. d. Afinogenov D.E. , Moskva: Institut Vseobščej Istorii RAN, 2020.

(1856, no. T. CVII) an important article of historical-artistic criticism on his master's view and technique, comparing the innovative artistic language of Brjullof in the Russian art of early nineteenth century, to the brilliant innovations of the Italian painter Cimabue at the end of the Middle Ages. Thus analyzing this entirely "Vasarian" rhetorical artifice, in our paper we shall point out the importance of this reflection in a Russian historical-artistic perspective, also motivated by the Vasarian parallelism that Železnov made on his master Brjullof, just shortly before starting his major and difficult translation work of Giorgio Vasari's "Vite". In this way Železnov demonstrated how the complex work of translation of the great painters' lives was linked to the precise intent of laying the foundations for a new concept of the history of modern Russian art, in which Briullof could have the role of innovator and brilliant initiator.

**Key-words:** The Russian reception of Vasari; Vasari in Russia; Karl Brjullof; M.I. Železnov; Italian and Russian cultural relationships; Russian artists in Italy; Karl Brjullof and Italy. Cultural Dialogue among Russia and Italy. Italian Renaissance in XIXth century Russia.