

CREATING A MEMORY OF A SAINT: FRANCIS OF ASSISI IN ITALIAN MONUMENTAL PROPAGANDA OF THE 19TH-21ST CENTURIES

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Abstract

Purpose: This article explores the mechanisms of constructing cultural memory in Italy in the 19th – 21st centuries on the example of the history of the erection of monuments dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi. They are interested only in the monuments placed in urban areas. This way they analyze “appropriation” of St. Francis by secular society. It is explained why this medieval saint became the hero of the national cultural pantheon of united Italy and in 1939 the holy Patron of Fascist Italy.

Methodology: We studied the monuments putting them in historical and cultural context, searching for information about customers, funds, sculptors, placement, and meaning

Result: There studied following questions: who was the customer of the monument, what was the main purpose of the customer(s), the historical and cultural context of monuments erection, the choice of the space for the monument, the composition of the monument, and others. Based on it step-by-step it is reconstructed the evolution of St. Francis’s monumental commemoration on the wide field of general changes in the cultural requests of Italian society and the state. The authors show the cultural aspects of commemorating.

Applications: This research can be used for universities, teachers, and students.

Novelty/Originality: In this research, the model of Creating a memory of a saint: Francis of Assisi in Italian Monumental Propaganda of the 19th-21st centuries is presented in a comprehensive and complete manner.

Keywords: *St. Francis of Assisi, Franciscans, the Italian culture of 19th and 21st centuries, monuments, monumental propaganda, anniversary celebrations, catholic sanctity.*

INTRODUCTION

St. Francis of Assisi is one of the heroes who are loved and revered throughout the world, regardless of political beliefs, religious, ethnicity, education, historical and cultural background. He became one of those who has been claimed in the 20th century and defined cultural reference points for different generations. The reasons for such popularity and the ways of active “appropriating” him by modernity are many; quite often it is determined by regional characteristics (for example, the cult of St. Francis in Latin America). In this article we will focus on one of the main ways of popularization the saint - monumental commemoration in secular, urban areas ([Eremeyeva, 2015](#)). In this article we will only consider those monuments that are located outside the church, monastery, i.e. are not religious sculptures of saints of ecclesiastical art. This study does not pretend to be complete since the process of searching and discovering new monuments is ongoing, but the material already collected allows us to come to some temporary conclusions.

METHODS

The tradition of studying St. Francis of Assisi is wide. Up today published several works about his biography, life, creativity, philosophy. But even though there is no special research dedicated to the erected monuments that commemorated him. We studied this process according to “memory studies”. The principal works are the research of Aleida Assmann Paul Ricœur ([Assman, 2012](#); [Dusaeva, 2013](#)).

In analyzing the monuments, we use the monograph of Eremeyeva and the article of Enzhe Dusaeva, where she studies verbal and visual ways of constructing the national saint in Fascist Italy ([Antúnez, 2016](#)). We studied the monuments putting them in historical and cultural context, searching information about customers, funds, sculptors, placement, and meaning. [De Jong, F. \(2016\)](#).

RESULTS

The first known monument to Francis of Assisi was the statue of J. Dupree, installed on the Assisi’s square in 1882, in honor of the 700th anniversary of the birth of the saint. In fact, it was the first monument to the saint. Before that, there were only religious sculptures inside the churches and ecclesiastic artistic images, but the monument was not used as an instrument. There had been created other memorable places connected primarily with his life and work. At the beginning of the 19th century there was a sign event - the transportation the relics of Francis (under the order of the Pope) to the Sacro Convento Crypt, which marked the growing interest to the figure of the saint, as well as the need to create “memory spaces” ([Maharani, & Subanji, 2018](#)) for themselves and for others. Monuments as an instrument of propaganda commemorating became a powerful tool in the XIX century. The squares of Europe were filled with heroes of the Past and the Present, which have to be remembered. This process is strengthened by the end of the century and was close to the

tradition of celebrating the anniversaries of great ancestors. So there had been installed monuments to C. Linnaeus in Stockholm, Joan of Arc (Jeanne d'Arc) in Paris, M. Luther in Eisenach, and in our case to Francis in Assisi.

Unfortunately gathering information about the process of creating the monument, searching for funds was not successful. However, it is known that the author was famous at that time Giovanni Dupre, who created sculptures in a classical manner. It can be assumed that the customer probably was the Franciscan order, or precisely the commemoration committee and Sacro Convento, as the center of Franciscanism. Exactly the Committee together with Sacro Convento, who published a special magazine for the anniversary, coordinated the celebrations in united Italy, solemnly opened the monument. The opening was accompanied by festive celebrations, attended by the Highest Church Hierarchs, representatives of Franciscans, perhaps ordinary citizens, but there was nothing said about the average man in the special issue devoted to the 700th anniversary ([Muyambiri, & Chabaefe, 2018](#)).

Just here in 13th century Francis publicly undressed and returned his clothes to his father. Thus, he symbolically parted with his former life and had chosen a new father - Divine. It is noticed that the monument was installed on the square outside the church. Francis stood with his back to the church and faced to the crossing people. In this case, we are talking about placing the monument in secular space, although the closeness to the religious is obvious. Within the borders of a medieval city it is difficult to imagine placement of something far from the churches. Every day people could observe St. Francis even passing by the central square, because for this it was not necessary to enter the church. This fact is confirmed by the transportation of the monument inside the Cathedral in 1888, for reasons of its safety. The phrase on the pedestal of the monument “qui fu trasferita l'an 1888 perchè meglio conservata durasse (here was transferred in 1888 for it best preserved)”. Francis had been returned “home”, eliminating an unfortunate misunderstanding ([Varghese, 2016](#)).

Jubilee of 1882 was marked by the installation of the monument of Stanislao Lista in Naples. He was a well-known sculptor in Naples and Salerno. If in the case of the monument of J. Dupree we are dealing with a classical interpretation of the figure of the saint (both in style and in subject), in Naples the monument is represented by three figures of Great Italians - Dante, Giotto, and Columbus, whom St. Francis of Assisi symbolically embraces. They became one of the main heroes of the Italian Pantheon. (Indeed, the place of Giotto was quickly occupied by Leonardo da Vinci, which combines in itself such two important areas as art and science, but this did not stop the pompous fascist exhibition devoted to the work of Giotto in 1937). Here united two symbols - the Great Italians and the Great Franciscans. A monument has erected a back to the facade of Monastery-refuge for sailors. It is located in Posilippo that was the outskirts of Naples in the 19th century. Francis was placed face to the road which brought along the picturesque coastline in the center of Naples. With obvious physical closeness to the wall of the monastery, we note the simultaneous incorporation of it into the urban area. The monument seems to accompany the townsman during their journey. Later, on the territory of the monastery had been installed an iron fence, that partly closed (the fence had the iron bars) and made impossible to access the monument. So, perhaps, again for security reasons, marking their own space, Francis again had been separated from the inhabitants of the city.

In the case of the monument in Posilippo, the fact of the representation of its collocation in the special Franciscan publications dedicated to the jubilee. is important, as well as in the subsequent work of Agostino Gemelli, when he characterized the fund-raising process: “the Franciscans moved from one door to another, gathering some money for a statue” ([Ardakani, Lashkarian, & Sadeghzadeh, 2015](#)). Thus, it is constructed the national nature of the event and everyone's participation in creating a memorable sign to the revered saint, as well as to other “Great Italians”.

But the process of bringing the image of Francis to the masses has already begun, perhaps, the church craved for it, not quite understanding the scale and the forms of secular “appropriation”, “domestication” of the saint.

The setting of the St. Francis's monuments took on special importance in the next jubilee of 1926 (the 700th anniversary of the death). The pompous celebrations of October 4, 1926, demonstrated that the anniversary as a cultural practice has already finally established itself in Europe, and from purely religious holidays it became really popular and this time the Fascist state took the most active part in its preparations. B. Mussolini allocated funds for celebrations, restoration works, competitions, etc., as well as his messages ([Barreto, & Alturas, 2018](#)). Opened all the festivities, in some of which he directly participated. During the period from 1926 to 1936 (we think that until the mid-1930s can be heard the echoes of “national anniversary” in the collocation of monuments) in Italy appeared 16 monuments. The geography of their location is amazing, as it is a question of expensive projects. Monuments were erected in Rome, two in Milan, Turin, Naples, Bologna, Foligno, Reggio Calabria, Cagliari, Ostuni, Barbieri, Rieti, Casale Monferrato, Avellino, Modena, Civitavecchia.

Perhaps there were more. But even the list of cities is indicative because a number of them are not only the administrative centers of their regions but also has a symbolic significance for the history of Italy. All the monuments established at this time can be conditionally divided into several groups. [de Saint Laurent, C., & Zittoun, T. \(2017\)](#).

The first one includes classical examples as from the artistic point of view (manner of sculptors), and symbolic - these are monuments located on a high pedestal that divides the space of the monument from the human space. There are the statues in Milan on the Risorgimento Square, Bologna, Naples. They are located in the urban area, in squares, in newly created

parks for them, often away from the churches, in the case of Milan, there is not a single church within a radius of 2-3 km. (what can also be explained by the scale of the city itself, for example, in the case of Bologna this is not possible).

The next group includes monuments located in the same symbolic space as the human being. The first is in Rome, on the opposite side of the Lateran Basilica. There is Francis with his raised arms to the sky with his three followers. The size of the monument does not allow us to say that it corresponds to the physical dimensions of people, but a granite hill with steps that there is a sort of pedestal makes it accessible to humans in the literal sense. As in the 1920s, so today you can see people located close to the figures of the Franciscans, as well as children who use the monument for their games. The next interesting example is the fountain in Milan of 1927, made by J. Castiglioni. Here, Francis stands surrounded by birds and looks at the water. Such composition made a real sensation, both among the Franciscans, and among the artistic intelligentsia of the 1920s. Here the figure of Francis is comparable to human dimensions, you can come near, touch it, drink water from the fountain. The solution found by the young sculptor was gradually used in other cities, apparently, as the most adequate and meeting modern urban needs. We mean the monuments – fountains in Ovada, Modena, Alassio, Salerno. [de Saint Laurent, C., & Zittoun, T. \(2017\).](#)

A 6 high meter monument to St. Francis, set in 1926 on the 25-meter-high bell tower of Foligno stands apart. The idea of placing Francis outside of human space will be used later in the 1980s, when in honor of the next anniversary, first in Agropoli, on a huge lighthouse, and later on the roof of the municipal hospital of San Giovanni Rotondo, with the help of a crane, figure of a saint was installed. In that case who is the reader of this memorable sign?

Subsequently, the process of collocation of the monument, as in the very beginning, is connected with anniversaries and for each of them, as a rule, there was a concrete person who was engaged in Francis's promotion. But if for the monuments of the end of the 19th - 1920-30 was important the idea of a people's general whip-round, then in the second half of the 20th century for this fact do not pay attention at all. Francis goes out into the square, into parks, like in Salerno, looks at the sea like in Cagliari, Monterosso, Gaeta, symbolically guards the automobilists placed in the center of the original circular road in Bologna, Gaeta.

In conclusion, we focus on the curiosity that characterizes the cultural process of the monumental propaganda of St. Francis. In 1974 Venturino Venturi created the monument of Francis of Assisi talking with a wolf (in Naive style) that has been collocated in front of the Pio Borri primary school in the heart of Arezzo, where he stayed until 2007. The press states that for many generations of schoolchildren and their parents this the monument became a kind of "starting point". Since 2007, it has been transferred to the bypass road, beyond the historical center, and now is located in relative proximity to the church, but not Franciscan. In this case, we note the changing of the symbolic function of Francis's statue as a cultural, commemorative sign. Actually, like in other cases, the monument was placed along the road or looking at the road. [de Saint Laurent, C., & Zittoun, T. \(2017\).](#)

DISCUSSION

Unfortunately, it is not possible to discover information about all the monuments dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi, since the monuments located in the urban area were not the subject of close attention neither the Franciscans nor the researchers. Statues are established through various initiatives, which were manifested in the ignorance of the existence of certain monuments, even within the Franciscan order. In addition, some of the projects remained unrealized; others suffered from the bombing during World War II. Attention is drawn to the number of monuments of the 1920s, about which it was possible to gather information. It seems that Francis became a kind of Pushkin, a monument to him have many Russian cities.

RESUME

The process of Francis monumental propaganda begins precisely by the Catholic Church, although the monuments immediately fall into the urban area, becoming the property of all people. The situation of the mass installation of 16 monuments from 1924 to the 1930s is due to the Mussolini's and the Catholic Church's policies, the apotheosis of which was the proclamation in 1939 St. Francis the holy patron of all Italy.

CONCLUSIONS

The second half of the XX century was marked by the initiatives of the Franciscan Order and the artistic intelligentsia in the installation of monuments.

Although the celebration of October 4 - the day of St. Francis and its announcement as the nonacademic day for primary school until the end of 1970 may correlate but not directly with the number of monuments installed for the saint. Practically for the young Italian Francis of Assisi as a memorable sign practically none exists. The less religious population of the cities do not always know whose fountain is, who elevates in a green square or on a lighthouse. The figure of St. Francis, having been disappeared from the textbooks for primary school, has been moved from the center to the periphery as in Arezzo, ceases to be a "memory space". Perhaps he was never so despite the efforts of the Franciscans and Fascist propaganda.

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