

Giuseppe Frank, *Memories*. Third volume (translation, introduction and notes by Giovanni Galli), Como, Lariologo, 2021, pag. 336.

Now, edited by Giovanni Galli who is also its translator and commentator, the third volume of the “Memoirs” of Giuseppe Frank, after the publication in previous years of other volumes (I, II and VI) of the same memoirs with the same curator. Joseph Frank, born in 1771 in Ratastad in the Grand Duchy of Baden and died in Como in the Austrian Lombard-Venetian region in 1842, was a leading figure in European medicine in the late nineteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Son of Johann Peter Frank (1745-1821) illustrious doctor and university professor, he had hospital and university assignments, also carrying out an intense and affirmed private activity. In particular, he was primary at the Vienna General Hospital for nine years and nineteen years professor in the medical faculty of the University of Vilnius in Lithuania, then belonging to the Russian Empire. Joseph Frank not only had interests in the medical-scientific field but was also a passionate lover of classical music, organizing and sometimes interpreting musical events; perhaps because conditioned by his melomania, he married an appreciated opera singer, Cristiana Gerhardy (1780-1849), who was his life partner for more than forty years. In his will, he also ordered the construction for his burial of a monument of Egyptian inspiration: a pyramid still visible in the small cemetery of Laglio on Lake Como.

Joseph Frank, after moving to Como in the mid-twenties of the nineteenth century, began to write his memoirs by putting his hand to the numerous notes he had compiled and meticulously preserved during his life, in addition to the autobiographical writings already published by his father or in any case in his possession. The “Mémories Biographiques de Jean-Pierre

Frank et de Joseph Frank son fils, Redigé par ce dernier” took shape (as the manuscript now preserved in the library of the University of Vilnius states). The notebooks, handwritten by the author and collected in six volumes, cover a period of about one hundred years (from the forties of the eighteenth century to the forties of the nineteenth century). The author, of German mother tongue, but master of the Italian language for the long period (from 14 to 25 years of age) who lived in Austrian Lombardy, had decided to write his memoirs in French (he still knew well), which was then considered the international language par excellence. The third volume of the “Memoirs”, now published, concerns the years between 1806 and 1811 during which the author resided continuously in the Lithuanian city of Vilnius, while his father, after a short period spent in Petersburg, returned to Austria, settling between Vienna and Freiburg.

The volume is largely dedicated to the university activity of Joseph Frank, who remained without the professional support of his father (who moved to the Russian capital in 1805) shows in a short time great organizational skills in the academic and health fields. The young Austrian professor not only undertakes to give regular lessons to students and to participate in scientific meetings with the other teachers but also tries to improve the sanitation conditions of the population in Vilnius and its surroundings. To this end, it favours the creation, alone or with the involvement of local authorities, of various institutions such as the “Society of Charity”, the “Home Aid Institute”, the “Walking Clinic”, the “Maternity Institute” and the “Institute of vaccination”. Moreover, thanks to the collaboration with the Russian Ministry of the Interior, it

creates the “College for medical officers maintained at the expense of the Crown”; he then renews and gives new impetus to the local “Medical Society”. The pages of the memoirs also find Frank’s more strictly medical and curative activity, both in the university clinic he directs and in the private profession (numerous clinical cases more or less brilliantly resolved by the author are reported). We learn that in those same years Frank also found time to work on the drafting of his main work, the “Precepts of practical medicine”, and to edit two editions of the “Acta Instituti Clinici Caesaree Universitatis Viniensis”. The memoirs also document the author’s activity as an incurable music addict and tireless organizer of musical events, ready at any time to promote singing or dance performances together with his wife (always in favour of the charities he directs). The volume also describes the conclusion of Johann Peter Frank’s academic and professional career, troubled by poor health (which forced him to abandon the rigid climate of Petersburg) and also by some family misfortunes (the death, still at a young age, of the two daughters Elisabetta and Carolina).

Overall, the third volume of the “Biographical Memoirs of Giovanni Pietro Frank and his son Giuseppe Frank, written by the latter” constitutes a vivid and varied fresco of European society and culture of the first decade of the nineteenth century. The volume also allows you to get to know closely not

only two significant medical figures of the time, but also the important characters with whom the Franks were in a relationship. Suffice it to mention among the doctors: Jean Nicolas Corvisart (1755-1821), Jean Dominique Larrey (1766-1842) and Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland (1762-1836). Suffice it to mention among the artists: the musician Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) and the writer Jan Potocki (1761-1815). Finally, it is enough to mention among the figures of historical importance: Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), Alexander I of Russia (1777-1825) and Ali Pascià di Joannina (1742-1822).

The volume is the result of the commitment and expertise of Giovanni Galli, essayist and researcher who in recent decades has been particularly interested in the figure of Joseph Frank to whom he has already dedicated several publications such as the Italian edition of three volumes of the “And the book” The pyramid of Laglio “. The translation of the original text is enriched by numerous annotations and by a final index of proper names that help the reader to better understand the events narrated, providing useful information on the historical, geographical and anthropological panorama within which the life of the two protagonists passed.

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