

REVIEW

On the academic works of Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov,
competition for the academic rank of Professor,
Specialty Art Studies and Fine Arts
(Medieval Art and Art of the National Revival Period)
By Prof. DSc Elisaveta Moussakova

Emanuel Moutafov is the only candidate in the competition for the academic rank of Professor in the specialty Art Studies and Fine Arts (Medieval Art and Art of the National Revival Period), professional field 8.1. Theory of the Arts, announced in SG 35 / 30.04.2019 for the needs of the Research Group "Medieval and Art of the National Revival Period", sector "Fine Arts" at the Institute Art Studies at BAS. The candidate has submitted the documents required by the ZRABB, the procedures for announcing the competition and admission to participation have been followed.

After graduating in 1996 The National and Kapodistrian University of Athens as "Master of arts in archaeology and art history", E. Moutafov worked as lecturer on Modern Greek at the NGALA "St Cyril the Philopope", (1996-1997), researcher at the Centre for Slav-Byzantine Studies "Prof. Ivan Dujčev" at Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski (1966-1997), lecturer on Modern Greek (1997-1999) and as researcher in the Visual Arts Department of the Institute of Art Studies – BAS (1999-2000). In 2001, he obtained his PhD in Modern History at the Institute of Balkan Studies. Since 1999 up to now he works in the Institute of Art Studies passing through the academic titles of "Research Associate II" and "Research Associate I". In 2010, he received the title of "Senior Researcher II" from the HAC (equated to "associate professor" according to the 2012 AISB). He is currently Director of the Institute of Art Studies with a second electoral mandate after successfully completed the first.

In his teaching activity since 1996, the courses of lectures on Byzantine art in the department "Classical Philology" at the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (from 2009) and on contemporary Greek art in the department "Modern Greek Philology" at the same faculty (from 2018). Since 2017 he has been director of studies of doctoral students at the Institute of Art Studies.

Emmanuel Moutafov has participated of has managed eight important projects, such as the management of the Bulgarian-Greek project "Greek Icon Painters in Bulgaria after 1453", sponsored by the A. Onassis Foundation, Athens (2000-2008) and his present function as member of the Governing Board and Coordinator of NIRD in the consortium "Heritage BG" on the project BG05M2OP001-1.001-0001 „Building and Development of Center of Excellence "Heritage BG" with a leading partner SU "St Kliment Ohridski". Since 2010 up to the present member of the General Assembly of BAS, deputy chairman of the commission for International and European Collaboration and member of the Mandate Commission. He is also member of the Editorial Board of three academic periodical publications.

The complete scientific production of Emmanuel Moutafov up to the time of the competition is presented in the relevant appendix to the competition documentation: two books; 95 independent publications in various academic publications, of which 53 are referenced and / or indexed in the world system, 13 are in representative encyclopaedic on-line publications and 21 are catalogue-type descriptions; 12 co-authored publications, five of which are in the general list of 58 refereed / indexed publications). Added to them are 7 academic compilations and academic editorial work (five of them with more than one compiler). 191 citations have been found in representative Bulgarian and foreign publications. E. Moutafov was a Fellow of prestigious international scientific

institutions. His academic biography fully covers the requirements for the occupation of the academic position of "professor".

E. Moutafov's scientific interests and achievements are located in several major fields of art studies, understood in its contemporary multidisciplinary scope: epigraphy and cryptography, iconography, artistic and cultural contacts in Balkan art from the late medieval and pre-modern period, artistic practices of the icon painters, Christian Orthodox art. The wide range of his scientific activities encompasses Byzantium with its metropolitan and peripheral monuments, monuments of icon-painters and mural painting in medieval and Renaissance Bulgaria, as well as on the Balkans from the 15th -19th centuries.

For the competition the candidate presents two habilitation theses: the monograph *The Chora Monastery of Constantinople (Kariye Camii)* and an article in the collection: *The Testimony of Inscriptions in Their Iconographical and Historical Context*. – In: *The Church of the Transfiguration at Sotera (Famagusta District, Cyprus) and Its Context: History – Architecture – Murals*. Ed.by Maria Parani. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2020. The publication of the monograph in 2020 with some reduction of the volume is foreseen as part of a new series of publications of the Cambridge University Publishing House and a copy of the first page of the contract with the publisher has been submitted. The book suggested to publishing house Brepols has to be published by the end of 2020 according to the certificate (a copy), signed by the editor Maria Parani. In both cases, the author is invited to participate, which is an attestation for the recognition of his scientific merits by the experts on European Byzantine studies.

The list of publications for the competition is followed by 13 published articles, 5 of which have been referenced and indexed in Web of Science; 2 author sections from scientifically published catalogues (one with a co-author), an introductory text and 9 catalogue descriptions in a catalogue of an exhibition of Bulgarian Christian art in Moscow (2018). The published works are from the period following the habilitation of E. Moutafov as an Associate Professor, but the publication with an important methodological contribution (No. 9 from the section "Articles" in the list) is covered by a planned task from the period of the previous habilitation. The main subject of the review will be the two rehabilitation works of Moutafov.

The history of the monograph *The Chora Monastery of Constantinople* begins with a scholarship from the Getty Foundation Fellow at the American Research Institute in Turkey, as part of the Visions of Byzantium research program (2012) for Moutafov's individual project "How to "understand" the Chora Monastery ". His endorsement is the 2016 refereed article (*Contest Publications*, section "Articles", No. 5). The monograph faces the difficult task of competing with the works of distinguished experts on Byzantine studies, and seeking a scholarly text for a larger audience, but also of being limited to the volume required by publishers, suggesting some sacrifices, especially as full quoting and commenting on the impressive volume of literature about the monument. To this end, E. Moutafov has oriented himself towards presenting the remarkable monument in a wider synchronous and diachronic plane, looking for new aspects in its life.

Following the mandatory presentation of the decorative program, the author problematizes - and in this aspect his own contribution is revealed - the existing discussion on two major topics in the history of the monastery and its church. The first is their dedication to the notion of "people", to its ambiguity and, accordingly, to its symbolic play through the images and texts in the decoration of the church. The second concerns the memorial function of the church, above all its chapel, realized by its architecture and iconography. Regarding the first problem E. Moutafov continues a further develops the direction, drawn out by earlier authors which lead to the utmost importance of the cult for Virgin Mary in the decorative program conceived by Theodore Metochites. As a result of linguistic and iconographic observations, the author reaches a summary of the overall interpretation

of the temple with its chapel as the side of the living and a side of the dead, in which he outlines why the leading his views as to why the leading thread passes through the interpretation of the Virgin as the "repository of the Incompatible", why hence, Christ is called with the rare epithet "Place of the living" and why "people" is not a toponym, as this has been accepted in many studies. In this connection it is worth mentioning the interpretation of the model of the church in the ktetor's portrait of Theodore Metochites, represented with three entrances and three domes: according to E. Moutafov they designate the land of the living, the land of the dead and the "incompatible" (p. 109). In the same vein, he extends the grounds for the dual consecration of the church to the Virgin and Christ, as was the opinion of - Robert Ousterhout and other authors. An interesting detail, introduced by Moutafov to the history of the consecration of the Virgin, and more specifically to the historical memory of the Monastery of Metohit, is the appearance during the Ottoman period of Theotokos in the same area of the city and, in particular, the stone relief of the "Church of the Virgin [wider] from heaven". In it, the author sees an image of three Virgin Mary's churches, the central one of which he associates with the Metohitova Church and brings out the hypothesis of "syncretism of the local cult and Greek nostalgia for the glorious past of Constantinople" (p. 109).

Regarding the second circle of problems, the funeral function of the chapel and the people buried in it, E. Moutafov uses the prozographic method, directed at identifying the burials in the archosols, where inscriptions have not been preserved (p. 75-86). Tracing the ties between the late ancestors of the Assen dynasty with the Byzantine court, with Theodore Metochites himself and with the poet Manuel Fill and, based on the monogram of the family depicted, Moutafov hypothesized that it was their members who could have been laid in the place intended for aristocratic funerals. The hypothesis can be of course subject to discussion but offers an explanation that has not been given in the works of other researchers. Also, based on the architectural features of the chapel and a number of direct and indirect testimonies, the author concludes where the monastery's donor himself should have been buried. Contrary to popular belief, and arguing with other assumptions, he assumes that the most appropriate place is in the room designated as a diaconicon, in the northeast part of the chapel, to the left of the altar.

Another thematic circle that has received more attention includes the images of the saints. Contribution in this area is another, cautious and difficult-to-prove hypothesis that in the two repeated images of saints Flora and Laver may have been encoded the names of the painters (p. 95). I would call the identification of an unknown saint-stylite - but not a dendrite - from a chapel such as St. John of Rila (p. 74) quite bold. It was apparently originated by the idea of the buried in the chapel members of the Assen dynasty, but if the stylite was an attribute of the saint, he would be relevant for the moment from the "Nameless vitae" of the saint, describing his residence on "stone" / rock, and such an iconographic type is still unknown and is unlikely to have been drawn up from a Byzantine monument. With regard to this part of the work, I do not fully accept the self-assessment of the contributions (items 2, 3) relating to the direct dependence that Moutafov sees in the coincidences between the Menologium in the Gospel donated to the monastery by Maria Paleologina (cod. D. gr. 177), and the selection of saints in the decoration: the short Menologium in the manuscript has rather standard content and matches would be indicative only if they were complete or very specific.

E. Moutafov's book offers generalization of the important and yet debatable and not exhausted perusals of the complex intentions in the iconographic program of the ktetor Theodore Metochites, without fearing to evince extravagant hypothesis, challenging his readers of the academic and wider circles. The comparison with the previous publication mentioned clearly shows the development of the identified directions in the study. That is why I believe that before the book is printed some omissions will be cleared, such as the placing the frescoes in Kurbinovo in the 13th century (p. 12), or the dated 1310/11, unsupported by quoted literature or argument, for the murals in the Church of

Our Lady of Perivlepta in Ohrid (p. 88) - it has appeared in some other of the presented publications as well.

The second habilitation work is part of a publication intended as the end result of a scientific project exploring in full the Church of the Transfiguration of God in the village of Sotira (Famagusta area), Cyprus, dated 13th century. The text of E. Moutafov presents the unpublished up to now inscriptions in the church in the obligatory paragraphs: submission of the text in its original form and in contemporary (diplomatic) transcription; spelling analysis; deciphering captions and identifying sources for the larger text entities. Parallel to that, identifying scenes and individual images, the author reconstructs the iconographic program of the church and puts forward several hypotheses: the name of the donor, the doctrinal accent (Christ's incarnation) in the iconographic program, and its connection with Cyprus (images of local saints) and with political events on the island during the 13th century. Judgment on the deciphering of the inscriptions is beyond my competence, so I will point out Moutafov's distinction between two hands in their inscribing, the identification of characteristic decorative elements and more peculiarities which he uses as an argument for the earlier dating of the murals compared to those murals in the church "St. Virgin Mary" in Mutula of 1280. In the specificities of the inscriptions he discovers also close ties between the painters that have worked in these two churches, and *terminus post quem* he sees in the popular essay by George Akropolites, describing the role of St Demetrius in the defence of Thessaloniki and the events till the end of 1261, which according to E. Moutafov has caused the established by him double presentation of the saint in Sotira.

For the sake of scientific discussion, I would note that parallel to the hypothesis about the name of the ktetor – Costas, Costis, it would be appropriate to mention the existing opinion that the rendered is a beardless Frank¹, in order to make E. Moutafov's arguments more clear, and the figure of an equestrian saint, to which he draws attention and is also related to the donor's portrait, would lead, if we follow the above considerations, for another name of the donor.

The rest of the presented publications would be evaluated in groups. First of all these are the articles connected with epigraphic monuments and cryptograms. Among them I would like to point out № 4, dedicated to the texts, inscriptions and images in the church "St Nikola in the Bachkovo Monastery". The whole monument has been studied with detailed observations on the process of work of Zahari Zograf and his assistant. An important contribution is the characteristic of the Greek inscriptions made by Zahari with their specific, even comic mistakes and the revealing of yet another side of his creative personality – his inclination to play with words. This article is important for the resonant outlining of the creative "profile" of the great Bulgarian Renaissance artist in view of the pre-modern Bulgarian culture.

The other articles (№ 7, № 10, № 11, № 13), the third of which was co-authored with a prominent specialist in Byzantine epigraphy and Byzantine epigrams; Byzantine epigraphic material has been interpreted. In the first article, E. Moutafov proposes reading a previously not deciphered until now monogram on the Louvre capital as "Helena [Former Despot]" and suggests, as he puts it, a "bold and fantastic hypothesis" for Helena Dragas's donorship; accordingly, offers a new date for the capital, nearly a century later than it has been given dated. The contribution of the next article is in the analysis of the inscription and the cryptograms of an unpublished monument – stone plate from a watermill in Molos (Cyprus), dated 1690. Besides the reading itself, Moutafov interprets the image of the cross and the cryptograms in the context of a salvation of defensive function of the inscription and appropriately drawing biblical quotations. At the same time he places the studied monument in a wider context, including the history of images of crosses with cryptograms and, in

¹ See Snelders, Bas and Mat Immerzeel. From Cyprus to Syria and Back Again: Artistic Interaction in the Medieval Levant. – Eastern Christian Art, 9, 2012-2013, 83 (note 11).

particular, their distribution in Cyprus, as well as the tradition to use them in monastic environment - as was the accessory of the mill in his opinion. Here it is appropriately suggested that the inscription was intended to protect the mill from the advent of the local river, which may have carried away the earlier edifice. In co-authorship with Andreas Robbie, E. Moutafov, as the lead author - as he declares - proposes a new reading of a cryptogram from the church "Panagia Asinou" (Phorbiotissa) on the island of Cyprus. It is placed after the last verse in an epigram, which forms the inscription from the 14th century above the earlier (12th century) image of the Virgin. According to Moutafov's analysis, the cryptogram is deciphered as a text with a liturgical connotation. I leave the evaluation of the linguistic argument to the reviewer linguist and I will only note that new points in the article are the interpretation of the origin of the "Phorbiotissa" epithet and the suggestion, based on the proposed reading of the cryptogram, that the image of the Virgin in the church is probably the earliest representation in the church this iconographic variant - I assume that the author implicates the later painter's knowledge of the primary dedication of the church. The ext article in the group is directly related to the author's previous publications (including the one cited above with No. 9) and reflects both the author's lasting interest in the subject and his contribution to cryptogram terminology and the study of a phenomenon, not yet fully explored. E. Moutafov focuses on mural paintings of a "blossomed cross" with cryptograms from the Paleologan Age, with a key witness, according to the author, the Church of Our Lady of Perivlept in Ohrid. A number of the cryptograms have been deciphered for the first time by Moutafov. If we include monuments from present-day Greek and Bulgarian lands, we can assume that building on Gordana Babic's founding article, which covers (the designated as) Serbian monuments, he shows the scale of one, albeit more marginal, but demonstrably artistic phenomenon. It features the "fashion" introduced by the masters Michael Astrapas and Eutykhios, the monastic tendency for verbal mysteries and the bilingualism inherent of the cultural contact between the Byzantine and the two powerful Slavic states - the Serbian and the Bulgarian ones. With the example of the church "St Archangel Michael" in the Bachkovo monastery E. Moutafov demonstrates the possibility for dating its murals as 14th century exactly by the image of the cross and the cryptograms. However, I would like to note that, judging by the monuments described in the literature, the beginning of this artistic phenomenon, which Moutafov places entirely in the 14th century, appeared only at the end of the previous century.

Four publications (Nos. 2, 3, 8 from list of "Articles" and No. 7 from the non-refereed publications list) address general theoretical issues of Christian art in Bulgaria and the Balkans. The publication that discusses extremely important issues, concerning the terminology, periodization and ideological contexts in the studies of the Byzantine, and the so called "post-Byzantine" art, instead of which the term "Christian Orthodox art from the Ottoman period" (No. 3), is co-authored, the mechanism of which, at the end of the article, makes it difficult to identify the individual authors. The subject matter, as well as its relationship with the other three publications, nevertheless make it possible to distinguish the "post-Byzantine part" and to include it in the overall positive assessment of this part of E. Moutafov's scientific production, which takes into account his contribution to the generalization and the systematization of the artistic processes in the Balkans after the fall of Byzantium until the beginning of the modern era, which are different for countries in this part of Europe. Concerning the field of theoretical studies on Orthodox art, there is a publication with issue № 14 (list of "Articles"): under the provocative title there is a content that discusses a very intriguing question that is not addressed in the Bulgarian academic literature - how are personal prayer texts constructed in front of certain icons. By reaching the conclusion that by the 19th century - in view of prayer practices in Bulgaria - no church sanction was formulated in respect to a personal prayer for a particular icon, and that for a long period the Byzantine Church was a mediator and guarantor of the canonical in personal prayer, the author covered a wide a range of problems of doctrinal, literary, religious, folk-apocryphal and socio-cultural nature.

The next thematic group form publications on various iconographic topics (№ 6, № 12 and the series of catalogue descriptions), which are another evidence of E. Moutafov's research range. Here

I will highlight the first two, inspired by the research of other authors, but addressing topics that are not covered in Bulgarian art studies. In modern Byzantine studies, the topic of eunuchs in the Byzantine Empire is quite well represented, but Moutafov brings new nuances to it through examples of monuments on Mount Athos and in Bulgaria, presenting the patriarchs-eunuchs of St. German and St. Theophylaktos. It is important to note the extended discourse on the semantic differences in the designations of this category of saints as “beardless” or “eunuchs” in later iconographic manuals, whose images the author also analyzes through the etymology of the respective Greek names. The contribution in the article that examines images on the backs of icons is in the semantic analysis introduced by Moutafov, which distinguishes between the meaning and function of icons with images on both sides and icons that have other, figure images on the “back side”. Starting with images of the cross, which - as Moutafov rightly argues - do not appear on the other side only of processional icons, he gives examples with other types of signs on icons standing in the temple or in iconostasis, seeking an explanation of their meaning. The article opens a new direction for Medieval researchers, introduces new material, and contributes to the theory of the semantics of the icon and its cultic functions, which determine the iconography of the “two-sidedness” depending on how the person viewing / praying interacts with it in private and public ritual.

The last two articles with almost identical content (№ 1 and № 15 in the list “Articles”) confirm E. Moutafov’s tendency to study complex and unresolved cases, in which case the publications can be referred to the “genre” of text linguistics. Reviewing the data from written sources of different nature and from different times, which refer to the so-called Epitaph of Basileios II and using his deductive methods, the author brings out the thesis about the appearance of the nickname “Balgaroubietz (The Bulgar Slayer)” not in the 13th century, as a number of researchers consider, but since the time after the death of the emperor, when his brother Constantine VIII most likely placed the epitaph on the sarcophagus.

In addition, the exhibition catalogue, which was part of the celebrations for King Samuil, reveals E. Moutafov’s competence in the field of contemporary Bulgarian art.

In conclusion, the candidate's scientific work in the announced competition highlights him as the only Bulgarian expert in the field of Bulgarian and Balkan art, who combines his knowledge of Greek language with art analysis to present the diversity in the perception of Byzantine culture, including up to this day.

In view of the distinguished contributions to the scientific papers submitted for review, Emmanuel Moutafov deserves to be honoured with the academic position of "Professor" of "Art Studies and Fine Arts" (Medieval Art and Art of the National Revival Period), for the needs of the Fine Arts Department at the Institute of Art Studies.

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(E. Moussakova)