

Opinion

By Prof. Dr habil. Arts, Elena Popova

On the competition for the academic rank of professor in research area '8. Arts', professional field 8.2 'Fine Arts', for the purposes of the Institute of Art Studies, BAS

1. The competition for conferring the academic rank of professor was promulgated in the State Gazette, 35/30 Apr 2019. It is held in conformity with the Bulgarian law, the Regulations of BAS and Annex 2 to the Rules of Procedure for conferring the academic degrees and ranks at the Institute of Art Studies. Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov, whose principle place of work is the Institute of Art Studies, BAS, is the sole entrant.

2. Information about the candidate:

Emmanuel Moutafov was born in 1968, in Sofia. His academic credentials are impressive, including degrees, training programmes, certificates of academic career development, creative achievements, projects, lectures and publications; I could only group these in three stages, outlining the upward trajectory of his research interests. *The first stage (1999–2000)*: Before he joined the Institute of Art Studies, Emmanuel Moutafov was given a sound classical background, studying classical languages, archaeology and history at the National High School for Ancient Languages and Cultures, Sofia, and the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens; he worked with manuscripts at Prof. Ivan Dujčev Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies, University of Sofia, translated scientific literature and taught Modern Greek (which he continued with over the next decades). Until the end of this period, he evolved into a philologist working in various areas (folklore, ethnography, history and art). *The second stage: the 2000s*. Emmanuel Moutafov joining the Institute was a very fortunate circumstance for both parties. By that time the efforts of Prof. Elka Bakalova (who is also a philologist) over the years to instil in researchers of Orthodox art the idea of looking more carefully into the textual/verbal aspects of imagery, determining the latter's function and semantics, have yielded results. Due to the apparent shortage of experts in Greek texts and especially after the publication of his doctoral thesis on *Europeanisation on Paper. Treatises on Painting in Greek during the First Half of the 18th century* (2001), Emmanuel Moutafov was immediately included in all the teams working on research projects. Meanwhile, he initiated and led a Bulgarian-Greek project, *Greek Icon-painters in Bulgaria after 1453* (2000–2008), funded by Onassis Foundation, thus setting a growing in the next period trend towards the Institute's opening up to international research collaborations. Since then, his academic career has been definitely on the rise. Finding his comfortable niche in the field of art studies, in collaboration with his colleagues, he embarked more and more actively on such specific areas as iconography and attribution of artefacts only to encounter a number of 'gaps', open to his unconventional interpretations. A series of training programmes at prestigious international institutions (mastering an increasing number of languages) instilled in him confidence to experiment and apply the ever growing body of knowledge of various subjects (from the Balkan art of the Revival period to the Palaeologan monuments), marginal at times or, more often than not, of global significance, for which he has been long recognised and appreciated by the international scientific community. *The third stage: the 2010s*: this habilitation thesis showcases some of the results of his research activities over this decade.

3. Description of the submitted academic works:

Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov presents as his habilitation thesis a monograph, which is to go to press at Cambridge University Press, London, *The Chora Monastery of Constantinople (Kariye Camii)*; a study on the murals at the Church of the Transfiguration, in the village of

Sotera, Cyprus, expected to come out in 2020: *The Testimony of Inscriptions in Their Iconographical and Historical Context* in a multi-authored monograph: 15 studies in peer reviewed journals and books; a chapter in a book in Greek in: *Manuscripts, Records, Incunabula, Rare and Valuable Books in Foreign Languages*, voll. 2, National History Museum, 2017, ISBN 978-954-2953-78-4, 16, 89-105); a bilingual catalogue (*The Age of King Samuel as Treated by Bulgarian Artists*. IoAS, Sofia. 2014, pp. 70. ISBN 978-954-8594-47-9); 9 studies, articles and catalogue entries published in journals and books that have not been peer reviewed.

4. Contribution to science

The prehistory of the habilitation thesis is in itself an attestation to a high commendation: the monograph on the Chora was preceded by 2 publications on the subject that have drawn the Byzantinists' attention (Μονή Ζωοδόχου Πηγής (Μπαλουκλί), Εκτός Τειχών (*The Monastery of Virgin the Life Giving Fountain (Balakli) Extra Muros*). – In: Εγκυκλοπαίδεια της βυζαντινής Κωνσταντινούπολης, Αθήνα 2009; *How to 'Read' the Chora Monastery*. – In: *Medioevo Greco*, 16, Torino 2016). As early as working on the encyclopaedic entries on Constantinopolitan churches and monasteries in 2009, the author has explored in depth the sacral topography of the city; as for the Chora catholicon, he interpreted the origins of the epithet 'χώρα' to find the site's association with the cult of the Theotokos. Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov has now added new hypotheses to this earlier assumption about various aspects of the history, architecture, painted decoration and its relation to Byzantine liturgy, as well as about the activities of the art workshops in the 1330s Constantinople. The Chora is, indeed, the most significant and perhaps the most thoroughly explored monument of the Palaeologan art of the age. Putting, however, the monument 'into a broad synchronic and diachronic context' (p. 7), Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov treats it as a philologist and Hellenist, an expert in the art practices of the post-Byzantine Balkan Orthodoxy, whose assertions are grounded in the firm basis of the texts (of the Greek inscriptions on the church walls and their specifics; of documentary sources and liturgical books used in the liturgical practices of the age; of the annals and even of poetry found in archival records). This approach is, in itself, highly contributive and guarantees convincing results, especially as the author's wide range of interests covering a whole gamut of phenomena of Europe's cultural history, allow him to establish unexpected connections, that have fallen off the radar of more narrowly focused subject matter experts. Another specificity of his research method is the chronological exploration of the painted decoration, following the construction of the architectural areas and their respective liturgical functions rather than the traditional iconographic order. The epigraphic information presented for the first time consistently and exhaustively and complemented with comments on the iconography in a historical-political context with impeccable accuracy (in which the author has had a long practice) is a major contribution. Here Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov comes to important conclusions on, for example, the diplomatic mission of Theodore Metochites to Cyprus and consequently, on the analogy between the mosaic decoration at the Chora and the Church of Panagia Phorbiotissa Asinou in Cyprus; or on the poem by Maria Palaeologina dedicated to the Chora (Cod. Dujčev Gr 177, kept at Prof. Ivan Dujčev Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies, University of Sofia), analysed 'live' for the first time, which gave him the idea to use the manuscript to shape the iconographic programme of the church (as well as the selection of some of the saints in medallions at the narthexes, inspired by a menologion from the same codex). His analysis of examples of Byzantine poetry propels him to a new interpretation of an epitaph/ekphrasis by Manuel Philes, until now deemed to belong in the decoration of the Fethiye Camii: Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov established its connection with the decoration of the Chora. He offers a radical rethinking of the church burial topography, on the basis of which he advances

an ingenious hypothesis about the place of the supposed interment of the donor, Theodore Metochites. The palaeographic analysis leads him to unexpected conclusions on the art workshop that has made the mosaic and mural decoration (led by two masters conditionally named 'Florus' and 'Laurus') and specifies that they have worked at the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki *after* decorating the Chora, thus establishing the grounds for his thesis of their Constantinopolitan origin. (Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov offered a similar chronological 'time shift' in 2010, in his article *Cryptograms and Bilingualism in Paleologian Art*, putting forward the idea that the decoration of the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos in Ochrid preceded that of the Church of St Nicolas the Orphanos in Thessalonica.

Strangely, though reduced in size to meet the requirements of the publishers, the work abounds in compelling hypotheses, encompassing all possible aspects and problems relating to the monument, which is, at the same time, presented as comprehensively as possible in a broad context and excellently illustrated with architectural designs, sketches and colour photographs. Academically precise and lapidary, the author's language is absorbing and readers imperceptibly find themselves engrossed in the turns of an intellectual adventure, replete with findings.

All Emmanuel Moutafov's projects and publications have this distinctive feature, explaining the broad scope of the subject areas they cover, because he would address subjects challenging his interest with their 'blank spots' and arguable or never broached by science problems, with intriguing interactions and hidden in the mists of time relations between people (historic figures, donors, saints and artists), texts and representations, irrespective of whether it is about compiling multilingual dictionaries, studies on painter's manuals, cryptograms, texts in scrolls and codices providing a basis for reconstructing the creative processes of long past periods, the relations between Emperor Basil II and the Bulgarians, the versos of Orthodox icons or the iconography of eunuch saints.

5. Teaching:

Emmanuel Moutafov has been teaching for over two decades now, first as a secondary school teacher and then as a university lecturer in Modern Greek, post-Byzantine archaeology, Byzantine and contemporary Greek art; he supervises graduates and doctoral students. Leaving aside, however, the quantitative indicators, I would like to stress that he possesses an outstanding talent for teaching: I can personally attest to this as his student when he taught for free Modern Greek to his colleagues at the Institute.

6. In conclusion:

All the above gives me cause to think that Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov's candidacy fully meets the requirements under the *Academic Degrees and Academic Ranks Act of the Republic of Bulgaria*, and that is the reason why I recommend with conviction a professorship to be conferred on him in research area '8. Arts', professional field 8.2 'Fine Arts', for the purposes of the Institute of Art Studies, BAS.

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Sofia