

## Opinion

By Prof. Dr. hab. in History Ivan Alexandrov Biliarski

On the competition for professor at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS, sole entrant Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov

I must explicitly say that I was moved by the invitation extended by the Institute of Art Studies to be a member of the jury of this competition. I am not an art historian and the main subject of my research falls not in this knowledge area, but apparently, my highly inquisitive mind has attracted the colleagues' attention. I did not know then that there would be a sole entrant, Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov. This explained the invitation for Assoc. Prof. Moutafov's research is interdisciplinary, transcending the limits of art history in the strict sense of the term. I knew of him when he studied in Athens, though we never actually met. Later, I had the opportunity to follow the development of his career. For this review not to seem too emotional and personal, let's get to the point.

I do not deem it necessary to expand on the education and the career path of the candidate, as we are all familiar with it. Besides, it is worth pointing out at the outset that his role in the Institute that offers the competition is not merely of a researcher. He has been at the helm of the Institute for years now and represents it at various academic institutions and events, which may not be disregarded as unimportant when it comes to the work done for the benefit of the entire staff, which is not necessarily (in fact almost never is) nice. Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov's research output is, nevertheless, impressive, which is seen from the attached materials. By 'impressive', I mean not only its amount, but also the versatility of his studies covering both purely art and philological, historical and theological—figuratively speaking—subjects.

As mentioned above, dealing with epigraphy suggests in itself research interdisciplinarity. An inscription is a linguistic phenomenon more often than not placed in an environment of visual images, which requires historical and theological interpretations. An inscription has to be fathomed out as a linguistic expression, but also to be purely technically deciphered using the knowledge of what is often incorrectly referred to as 'auxiliary historical disciplines'. In this regard, his studies in Greece have undoubtedly played an important role in Assoc. Prof. Moutafov's development along with his subsequent training in Old Slavonic language. I think that the Institute of Art Studies has a tradition in the development of this aspect of research, but Emmanuel Moutafov's presence gives it further strength and greater prominence.

I do not deem it necessary to enumerate here all the candidate's works on epigraphy. It is worth mentioning, though, that he has done research both on the old literature (directly or indirectly relating to art) and on problems of art historiography.

I would like to put a special stress on Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov's studies dealing with the post-Byzantine period. This was not pioneered by him, but he has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the development of knowledge of that period, which at the time has been disregarded to some extent. In this regard, the author has contributed not only to art history in particular, but also to the big picture of that period and the reason why it is called 'post-Byzantine'.

I would like to mention also that Assoc. Prof. Moutafov should be credited with exploring certain monuments or their elements as well as certain saints, cults and practices. These are presented in articles or in studies that are more extensive. The candidate's contribution to studying icon-painters and art workshops that have worked in different periods should be also mentioned.

I believe that all this provides a good basis for addressing the submitted habilitation thesis in English, titled *The Chora Monastery of Constantinople (Kariye Camii)*. I think that the

attached PDF file is part of a book prepared to go to press. I would like first of all to point out that a monographic study published by Cambridge University Press is undoubtedly an achievement of Bulgarian historiography and the author deserves congratulations for it. He has to be congratulated for yet another achievement: the Chora (Kariye Camii) is the most widely published Byzantine monument (as the author himself notes) and certainly one of the most thoroughly explored. It has got a long time stirred interest, which has significantly increased in recent years. In this context, it undoubtedly takes courage to make such a difficult choice and dedicate a book to this complex. The fact that he was invited by CUP (as he puts it) is an achievement in itself. Let us now look into it.

I would like first of all to point out that what we have is a comprehensive study on the monument, rather than on certain element or a concrete problem of interest to the researcher. The Chora is placed in its own historical environment. The donor, Theodore Metochites is well and interestingly represented in his personal, intellectual, administrative, political, cultural, etc., development and his significance to the Byzantine culture of the age is underscored. The building has, of course, a rich history consistently covered in the book along with an interpretation of the term 'chora', which is essential to the entire work. Of special interest is the author's drawing on information from manuscripts, and especially on the Greek book from the collection of Prof. Ivan Dujčev Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies, University of Sofia, along with other sources.

I will not go here into all of the author's achievements, found in the general presentation of the monument, in the exploration and publication of the inscriptions, in the interpretation and the novel moments in the identification of the interments (including that of Theodore Metochites), of the representational programme, etc. I think that some of them are evident and well covered in the required summary of contributions. What I would not, however, fail to focus on is a significant aspect of the study: the name of the monastery and its dedication. There is no doubt that Assoc. Prof. Moutafov makes an interesting interpretation of the term 'Chora' and its possible reference to the Most Holy Mother of God and Jesus Christ. I completely agree with Assoc. Prof. Moutafov's view of the attribution of the name to the Theotokos. He has a thorough knowledge of the literature on the monument and thus shares views that not only are in tune with the results of the study, but also with the entire Constantinopolitan cult of the Theotokos. In fact, as the candidate has meticulously traced, the understanding of the site's name has evolved over time, which does not necessarily preclude transition from a purely spatial-topographic to theological understanding of the term 'chora'. In any event, the result is undoubtedly worth accepting and approving of.

I would like to note also that it is a truly absorbing book; the style and the narrative are not heavy, free of unnecessary repetitions or redundancies and information overload. I would, however, take the liberty (making no pretence to fluency in English) to say that I noticed some unfortunate technical errors, which have possibly been corrected. There are also contractions and though it is not wrong to use contractions in formal writing, they are common in colloquial English and do not belong in such a book (if, of course, this is the final version). Such verb contractions are the shortened forms of words with apostrophes where one or more letters have been omitted and it will be better to 'unomit' them and use the longer forms.

Apart from my altogether positive opinion of the work, I would like to note some disagreements and several unconvincing passages. It may be a result of my erroneous impression, but it seems to me that associating the monument with the Asans is a bit overstated. I would not go into detail for this relates to other interesting conclusions made by the author, which should not be cast doubt upon. In any case, I think that the identification of the fragmentarily surviving image of a dendrite, bearing the letters I I, with St John of Rila is unconvincing. It is actually the author himself, who presents it as an act of courage.

Translating Romeic institutions using contemporary equivalents, half-equivalents or non-equivalents such as Theodore Metochites' positions as '*Prime Minister*' of Thessalonica and then as '*Prime Minister*' of the entire empire sounds somewhat jarring to me (supposedly, not only to me). The same is the case with *logothetes tou genikou* translated as '*Minister of the Treasury*'. I do not think that possible readers of this book would need an explanatory translation of the terms. Still, it should be noted that these are rather insignificant remarks about a side issue that do not have any bearing on the generally positive perception of the study.

The set of documents attached to the submission papers meet the legal requirements. The same holds true for the formal requirements for the applicant. As for his professional and research skills, I believe that he and his research output meet, without doubt the eligibility criteria for conferring professorship.

All the above along with the considerations omitted for the sake of brevity, give me cause to vote with conviction for conferring the academic rank of professor of art studies and fine arts on Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov and call on the members of the jury to follow suit.

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