

Opinion

On the competition for the academic rank of **professor** of art studies and fine arts (medieval art and art of the National Revival period), 8.1. at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS (State Gazette, 35/30 Apr 2019)

By Corr. Mem. Prof. Ivanka Gergova

The sole entrant into the competition provided by the Institute of Art Studies, BAS, is Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Stefanov Moutafov. The candidate has met the minimum national requirements and the scientific jury has found him eligible.

Emmanuel Moutafov submitted his habilitation thesis containing a typescript of a monograph (with an agreement with the publisher attached therein) and a chapter of a multi-authored monographic study to be published next year, 15 articles and studies along with several catalogue entries and an introduction to a catalogue. All these publications have been published after the previous habilitation thesis of the candidate. Two of the submitted articles (B 3 and B 12) are co-authored, which renders the identification of the candidate's contribution difficult. Two other articles (B 1 and B 7) are, in essence, identical.

Most of the texts are published in English, in prestigious academic peer reviewed journals and scientific books, while the monograph on the Chora will be published by Cambridge University Press.

Emmanuel Moutafov's studies cover a wide range of subjects relating to the medieval and late-medieval Orthodox culture and history. A special characteristic of this submission lies in that the reviewed works belong to different research areas: history of art, Greek epigraphy, history. My purview allows me to observe mainly the publications in the field of art studies, which make up the bulk of the submitted works. Still, I would note that the group of publications on cryptograms is an original authorial contribution, for such studies are a rare occurrence both in world and Bulgarian scientific literature. Emmanuel Moutafov's habilitation thesis for the academic rank of assistant professor was on the same subject, and he focuses on research in this area.

Emmanuel Moutafov is good at finding ingenious subjects and/or unconventional approaches to the interpretations of major monuments, facts and phenomena. I would point at such interesting subject as, for example, his publications on the iconography of eunuch saints and the versos of Orthodox icons.

His monograph on the Chora (Kariye Camii) is to some extent unusual as a habilitation thesis. This is one of the most significant monuments of Byzantine art with a very long history of exploration and a vast bibliography. His book is part of a series of short monographs on the history of Constantinople, which suggests not special novelties or authorial contribution, because the monument has been studied in detail. Still, the author, along with concisely presenting the specifics of the monument and its history, offers his won views and assumptions about new interpretations of theses adopted in the earlier literature. A novelty is the suggestion that the church's donor Theodore Metochites has himself prepared the place of his own interment at the diaconicon. New are also some of the interpretations of the term 'chora' as regards the dedication of the monastery. The observations of the interments of the Asans at the parecclesion will stir Bulgarian readers' interests, as they, though a branch of the Byzantine dynasty, related, in a certain way, the Chora to Bulgaria's history. Consequently, a stylite, whose signature is lost, was identified by Emmanuel Moutafov as St John of Rila. Unfortunately, I would not accept his identification since: St John of Rila is missing from the Byzantine liturgical calendar; the saint has never been represented as a stylite; the two iotas, which Moutafov sees on the pillar are rather decoration or stylised representations of embrasures; denoting the saint's name in this place and in such a way is unprecedented and

illogical; drawing the icon of St Jon of Rilla from the Rila Monastery for iconographic comparison is not acceptable due to the bad state of repair of the mural at the Chora. Another insufficiently substantiated idea is that the images of Sts Florus and Laurus occurring twice in the church denote the persons of the two icon-painters. A repetition of saints in different areas of the same church is not at all a rare occurrence and should not be interpreted in such a way. The text on the Chora needs some editing to remove the repetitions and correct some errors such as, for example, placing the church in Kurbinovo at the top of the series of the monuments of the Palaeologan art (p. 12). Strange is the dating of the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos of 1310–1311 in Ochrid. (p. 88), which is repeated in article B. 14 (p. 143). In both instances nothing is referred to concerning this date, which differs from the generally accepted, and if this is an author's finding in this regard, it would be proper to substantiate it, at least in a footnote. The same holds true for the dating of the murals at the church of Berende to the thirteenth century, (B.1, p. 14), unlike the cited Elka Bakalova's monograph on the monument, which dates them to the second half of the fourteenth century.

The second part of the habilitation thesis is a chapter of a still unpublished monograph on the Church of the Transfiguration, in the village of Sotera, Cyprus. The author has sought to present and analyse the inscriptions in the murals, but he goes further to comment on the iconographic programme and gives his opinion on the dating of the monument. An interesting though arguable assumption is the attempt to figure out the name of a layman depicted standing in prayer on the north wall, as Kostas or Kostis. I take it as a working assumption, not supported by evidence, and earlier literature (B. Snelders, M. Immerzeel, *From Cyprus to Syria and Back Again: Artistic Interaction in the Medieval Levant*, ECA 9 (2012–2013)) establishes the donor from Sotera as a Frank and if that's the case, colloquial Greek Kostas/Kostis is hardly his name.

Of the rest studies and articles, submitted for the competition, several can be grouped as being of a generalising and theoretical nature. Valuable is the study, co-authored with Ida Toth, *Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art: Crossing Borders, Exploring Boundaries*, where the terms used in scientific literature are specified.

The article on eunuch saints, which I defined above as ingenious and contributive, is of the rare large-scale studies of the iconography of this type of saints, and the only one in Bulgaria. Emmanuel Moutafov's publication on the murals at the Church of St Nicholas, Monastery of Bachkovo, made by Zachary Zograph, is undoubtedly contributive. This monument by the significant Bulgarian icon-painter of the National Revival period along with its inscriptions have never before come to anyone's notice. Here again, the author goes beyond purely epigraphic observations, makes a summary of the technological process, adding new strokes to the portrait of Zachary Zograph.

A subject that has interested the candidate for years now, is what regard an Orthodox Christian has for icons and their place in his own personal faith. His article, *How Central the Significance of Icons in the Orthodoxy Is?*, treats this interesting subject giving a foundation for building on in the future.

His catalogue entries, submitted for the competition, are not just Emmanuel Moutafov's contribution to the promotion of art monuments. Some of them offer new identifications, dates and attributions, which are scientific contributions; such critical problems are discussed as the function of icons or the reasons for and the meaning of combinations of saints.

A gradual evolution is discernible in the submitted for reviewing publications of Emmanuel Moutafov's views of some problems such as the term 'post-Byzantine', for example, used even in a title of his earlier publication (B 10) and contested in a later article co-authored with e Ida Toth (B 3).

Emmanuel Moutafov is an internationally recognised researcher, as seen from his publications in authoritative peer reviewed foreign journals, from his participations in international

research projects and from the citations he has accrued. Important to the Institute of Art Studies, BAS are his efforts to give the annual *Art Studies Readings* a new physiognomy making them a sought after international platform for medieval studies. I would emphasise the participation of the Institute of Art Studies under his leadership in the international *BYZART* project. Yet another important to Bulgarian art studies project, he led recently, was *Corpus of Murals of the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*.

In conclusion: Emmanuel Moutafov is a scholar with a wide variety of qualifications and a wide range of publication, organisational and lecturing activities. The submitted for the competition works are voluminous, exploring a variety of subject matters, covering a broad chronological span and containing a number of contributions. All this allows me to propose to the Academic Council of the Institute of Art Studies, BAS to confer the academic rank of **professor of art studies and fine arts** on Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Stefanov Moutafov.

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