

Review

By Prof. Dr. hab. in History Ilija Georgiev Iliev, Institute for Historical Studies, BAS (History and Archaeology: Medieval General History/Byzantine Studies, 2.2.)

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. (State Gazette, 35/30 Apr 2019), for the purposes of the **Institute of Art Studies, BAS**

The sole entrant into the competition, Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov from the Institute of Art Studies has attached all required documents under the Academic Degrees and Academic Ranks Act of the Republic of Bulgaria and the relevant Regulations for the implementation of the Act. The scientific jury, appointed under the same Act, verified that the set of documents was complete and found Assoc. Prof. Moutafov apparently eligible to compete for the position of professor. Consequently, the jury admitted him to the competition and the procedure for holding the competition for the purposes of the Institute of Art Studies, BAS, was initiated.

I also took the trouble to examine the set of submitted papers and I am fairly confident that the members of the jury have scrupulously performed their task. At the risk of digressing from the subject of the competition for a professorship, I would like to start by making it clear that even formally, Assoc. Prof. Moutafov has gone far beyond the requirements, at both national and international level (pardon me not for my irony). I do not broach the substantive aspect of the matter as the text below deals with it.

Assoc. Prof. Moutafov has submitted a prestigious selection of monographic and partial studies in his field of art research. I would mention only in passing that what he has acquired over the stages of his studies is now yielding really striking results: several dead and modern languages have been mastered, teaching experience has been gained, implemented projects have been successfully, and he has 18 years of research at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS. Assoc. Prof. Moutafov has become a recognisable name in art studies, enjoying international prestige, which explains the reason why he has been invited on many occasions to contribute for foreign scientific institutions and/or to collaborate with foreign experts.

His submission to the competition for the academic rank of professor is a habilitation thesis on the Byzantine Chora Monastery to be published in 2020, titled *The Chora Monastery of Constantinople (Kariye Camii)*. Cambridge Elements – Cambridge University Press, London 2020, 119 pp. The candidate's submission includes also 15 studies and articles published in peer reviewed journals and books and as many, in non-peer reviewed editions, though such a division is quite conditional in Bulgarian science and, in some instances, even misleading.

What is more important here is the establishing of two problematic areas, where his research efforts are concentrated: Byzantine and post-Byzantine art. Drawing a line between them with sufficient certainty, as is well known, is not always possible, yet this gains additional prestige for the already developed research potential. While publications C 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 14 and 15 in Assoc. Prof. Moutafov's submission can be classed as definitely relating to the Byzantine problematique, publications 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11 and most of the E group unquestionably deal with the post-Byzantine period. Viewed, however, from a different angle, these works reflect a natural continuation of the processes and phenomena that emerged in the early centuries of Byzantine art and developed long after Byzantium disappeared from the political map. In this context, they should be treated and assessed collectively, rather than split into groups.

As mentioned above, Assoc. Prof. Moutafov's habilitation thesis deals with the famous Constantinopolitan Chora Monastery and is an exhaustive analysis of the church, both

architecturally and decoratively, as an art monument and a source for research on a long period of Byzantium's history. The stages in the construction of the building and the people related, directly or indirectly, to it, are traced. Interesting is the spatial approach to presenting the murals by leading the reader from the naos to the narthexes to the burial chapel, following the logic of the liturgical calendar. In this way, the researcher has made successful, in my opinion, suggestions about the identification of some images of saints that have even been off the radar of research assumptions. Assoc. Prof. Moutafov's efforts in this direction are also supported by drawing successfully on written monuments—both inscriptions on the church walls and texts from Byzantine manuscripts such as the brief menologion in Cod. Dujčev Gr 177, kept at Prof. Ivan Dujčev Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies, University of Sofia.

Assoc. Prof. Moutafov's habilitation thesis illustrates very well his method of work when formulating and justifying his hypothesis, a method of an orderly and non-aggressive piling on arguments of various nature, but invariably relevant to the subject of the research. In this context, being versed in work with Byzantine texts composed in the bosom of the Orthodox Church, I was strongly impressed with the author's considerations concerning the associating of the Chora with the Most Holy Mother of God rather than with Jesus Christ. I do expect that it would take some time for this hypothesis to be widely accepted, but the research potential it holds, presents the author in the best possible way as an adequate (for quite a while now, I would say) to the position he aspires for by his habilitation thesis dealing with the Constantinopolitan monastic cloister.

I believe that the restrained style of presenting his hypotheses is Assoc. Prof. Moutafov's forte as the college becomes deficient in such manner of work. It is quite a challenge to refrain from sensational assumptions (which, if repeated often enough, become assertions), when encountering interesting findings or being the first to look from a different angle at an object of research, explored earlier by many. But then again, the maturity of a researcher shows also in that he/she systematically and unflinchingly steers clear of hyper-interpretations. There are enough examples of such a line of action in Assoc. Prof. Moutafov's studies, and I will content with that of the spelling variation of the nickname of Byzantine Emperor Basil II (BOYΛΓAΠOKTONOΣ/BOYΛΓAΠOXΘONOΣ), a variation that, on the face of it, strongly suggests the ethno- and toponymic rows Bulgaria/Bulgarians and offers an excellent opportunity, which many would readily take advantage of to parade their classical learning. But not Assoc. Prof. Moutafov, which does him credit, of course.

By these perhaps more emotional than supposed in a review considerations, I would like to draw the attention of the esteemed jury to the depth and finesse, I would say, of the research texts submitted by Assoc. Prof. Moutafov, which have gained him popularity among that part of the scientific community who are generally interested in the same research area. Maybe this is how it should be with any analysis of monuments of art; yet, skilful use of language and of specialised terms can't fail to impress.

Another feature, typical of the candidate, is his striving to formulate hypotheses where, with the existing source material, it is impossible to find satisfactory solutions. The operative word here is 'hypotheses', which by no means struggle to become scientific theses without sufficient evidence! Such assumptions occur in locating the interment of Theodore Metochites and the epitaph for Byzantine Emperor Basil II, and the decipherment (or the suggestions for decipherment) of a number of acronyms contained in murals and belonging to the Byzantine or post-Byzantine church art.

I would mention here only in passing Assoc. Prof. Moutafov's accuracy in writing Greek texts which, judging from my experience, is in itself not an easy job, requiring additional time and attention. Correct translation and interpretation of the content of the monuments is another story, but I have said enough on this matter and do not want to repeat myself. I would only

summarise that for now I have not found anything in Assoc. Prof. Moutafov's renditions or interpretations of Byzantine written sources to disagree with. With all the conditionality of this contention in view of my relatively little knowledge of art history.

Perhaps at this point great emphasis should be laid upon the interdisciplinarity in the works submitted by Assoc. Prof. Moutafov, made possible not only due to his knowledge and excellent expertise in art history and linguistics, but also owing to his interest in history and other auxiliary historical disciplines without which such issues as the one raised by what is extant in the Chora is impossible to address. This versatility of my colleague Moutafov is indirectly confirmed by the fact that he is a much sought-after author and collaborator on art, philological and historical, in essence, projects, a fact, easily verifiable in the documents attached to the submission for the competition.

All that said, what remains to be done by the reviewer is to observe and point out the rest, non-essential and even minor, I would say, requirements under the Academic Degrees and Academic Ranks Act. With regard to the amount of the submitted works, as mentioned earlier, it is more than enough, and published in both Bulgarian and foreign prestigious specialised journals and books, in both Bulgarian and foreign languages at that. The candidate submitted a habilitation thesis making an original contribution to a major problem, significant to the history of Byzantine culture. Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately for certain attitudes towards Bulgarian scholarship), abroad and in English. I couldn't help but raise here the question about its publication in Bulgarian language or at least in a more accessible to this country scientific series, so as not to further rob Bulgarian Byzantine studies of viability.

As for the citations the candidate has accrued, the requirements have also been met, thus eliminating any possible bureaucratic barriers to his candidature for professorship. Moreover, Assoc. Prof. Moutafov, as mentioned above, is a recognisable name in the field of the international, in terms of its members, Byzantine college of our times. He has on many occasions participated in, led and implemented national, international and inter-institutional projects and he is a member of a number of specialised commissions and committees guiding research in his area, which is yet another indirect recognition of the high degree of his proficiency and research integrity.

Taking a detached view, his workload including duties and responsibilities untypical of a researcher makes us admire his research productivity. I include here his responsibilities in his capacity as the director of an institute within BAS, which in itself makes too many demands on a researcher's invaluable time. Still, these things are measured by others, who are using a different yardstick regardless of the opinion contained in this review. The reviewer is after all supposed to eventually state clearly whether or not he supports the conferring of the academic rank of professor on Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov, and YES, I hereby declare that I support my colleague Moutafov's candidacy and I do believe that this would also be a compliment to the researchers and experts at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS, which is why I would vote for this scientific jury to propose to the Institute's Academic Council to confer the academic rank of professor of art studies and fine arts (medieval art and art of the National Revival period), 8.1., on Assoc. Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov.

Prof. Dr. hab. in History Ilia Iliev
Institute for Historical Studies
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Sofia