

REVIEW

on the dissertation for acquiring the academic degree Doctor of Science

at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS

Academic field 8. Art and Fine Arts,

Academic specialty: 8.1. Theory of Art

Author Prof. Emmanuel Stefanov Moutafov, PhD

On the subject:

THE METROPOLITAN CHURCH

ST. STEPHEN IN NESSEBAR AND ITS ART CIRCLE:

CULTURAL CONTEXT, INTERTEXTUALITY AND INTERVISUALITY

Reviewer: Prof. DSc Diana Atanasova Radoynova

Burgas University "Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov"

Academic field of study – 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences

1. Data on the academic biography of the candidate

Prof. Dr. Emmanuel Moutafov has qualification in the following fields: Art History, Archaeology, Byzantine Studies, Balkan Studies, Epigraphy, Paleography, Lexicography, New and Modern History.

Graduate of the National College of Ancient Languages and Cultures "St. Cyrill", Sofia and the National Kapodistrian University of Athens in 1996 with an MA in Archaeology and Art History.

Fluent in 4 European languages, two classical languages and Old Church Slavonic.

In 2001 acquires the academic and educational degree "Doctor" in world history of the 15th century.

Since 2010 he is an Associate Professor on Mediaeval and Revival Art.

From 1999 works at the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Member of a number of editorial boards of scientific journals in Bulgaria and abroad. Participated in 8 large scope academic-research projects. Managed and coordinated 4 of them. Four of his individual academic-research projects have been awarded by foreign academic institutions.

Lectures at Sofia University "St Kliment Ohridski" on the following subjects: Greek Studies, Practical Greek Language, Introduction in Greek Language, Problems of Post-Byzantine Archaeology (at NBU), Late Antiquity and Byzantine Art, Modern Greek Art during the period from 1996 till the present day.

Mentor of three PhD student while one of them has already successfully defended the scientific and educational degree "Doctor".

2. Data on the dissertation and the abstract.

Emmanuel Moutafov's dissertation "The Metropolitan Church "St. Stephen" in Nessebar and its Art Circle: Cultural Context, Intertextuality and Intervisuality" cover a volume of 407 pages.

The structure of the dissertation is balanced: a short preface in which the author clarifies his personal commitment to the chosen topic of the study, an introductory chapter "Historiographical overview of the issues, principles and tasks of the study", a large-scale fragment of the exposition, which is divided visually and logically into four chapters: "Intertextuality," "Intervisuality," "Intervisuality, Intertextuality, Reception, or the Logos in a Metropolitan Temple and its Art Circle," and "Problems in the Interpretation of the Monument and its Context". This is followed by a "Conclusion", as well as several additional informative fragments: a "List of Illustrations", "Appendices", an "Iconographic Index" and a "Bibliography", which contains 335 titles, as well as a summary of the thesis in English.

In its entirety, the dissertation represents a close and precise scientific focus, which analyzes the epigraphic culture of one of the emblematic sites of Ancient Nessebar, included in the UNESCO World Heritage List - the Metropolitan Church of "St. Stephen". This locutionary precision is combined with valences to multiple cultural, philosophical, theological, ethnological and anthropological spheres, and in this way Moutafov achieves a semantic-interpretive multilayered presentation of textual analysis.

In addition to interpreting the rich epigraphic empirics in a multidimensional hologram of historical, artistic, and theological context, he also handles multiple temporal fixations of the main subject of his work. The fact that drawing comparative axes to other similar architectural and epigraphically rich Orthodox

monuments in Greece, Albania, Serbia, Turkey and in other Bulgarian regions allows the author to create a general Balkan cultural model in which each site of this type has its regular relations with other similar ones, but also its unique specificities, that should not be overlooked.

In the INTRODUCTION, the main range of issues that will constitute the focus of the author's scientific interest in the text is synthetically presented:

1/ The Logos - one of the most complex philosophical concepts, also valorized in art, embodying the interrelation between word and image as essential ontological manifestations of the spiritual. The author transcends the multitude of (some of them quite contradictory and mutually contradictory) conceptions of the Logos, succeeding in avoiding its narrow, unambiguous interpretation, discovering its relationship to the addressee and the environment, and interpreting it through the prism of modern notions of intervisuality and intertextuality.

2/ The new diocese of St. Stephen" as an emanation of the high culture of Nessebar - a city which the most established specialists in medieval history treat as "the second most important ecclesiastical and religious center after Constantinople in the Balkan dominions of Byzantium" (acad. V. Gyuzelev) or as "the Bulgarian Ravenna" (P. Stefanov).

3/ Interpretation of the rich cultural history of Nessebar during the Ottoman period on the basis of both already known and exploited in science and new, unpublished inscriptions and sources that allow the reconstruction of the unique religious culture of the southern Bulgarian Black Sea coast and the enormous role of centers like the New Metropolitan in Nessebar, emanating sanctity and regulating the cultural identity of the local population.

4/ Scientifically substantiated hypotheses about the existence and use of hermeneia of the type of Daniel's in the Balkans as early as the 16th century, which also appear in earlier publications by Moutafov, but are here proven beyond doubt.

The introductory part also correctly states the aims and objectives of the study, as well as the basic scientific principles and methods to which the author intends to adhere. The basic notions of *intertextuality*, *intervisuality*, *high culture (art)* for the work are properly and correctly clarified with references.

Initially, the author's research aims and objectives are set to be accomplished within the broad coordinate framework of the triangular complex of methods so welcomed (and imperative and obviously fruitful) in recent scholarly methodology: the method of historical-anthropological research, of historical-cultural reconstruction, epistemological analysis, descriptive-inductive method,

interpretative approach, retrospective research, the complex use of which allows to achieve a cross-cultural meta-analysis of the essence, role and place of the Metropolitan Church of St. Stephen and other similar objects of high Christian culture in the Balkan world for the preservation of Christian identity and the self-confidence and overall reproduction of the type of regional community culture.

I find Moutafov's decision to orientate the **first chapter - "Cultural Context"** - to the tracking of the historiographical data about the truly glorious past of Nessebar to be extremely appropriate and necessary. In addition to tracing the historical chronology of important events in its millennial existence, of its administrative, demographic, political and economic changes over the centuries, one of the most important sources for its past, the Mesembrian Chronicle, is examined innovatively and with an excellent knowledge of the medieval language used in the city. This historical overview includes retrospective moments in the more distant past, but this is necessary in order to achieve a logical coherence of exposition and to understand the particularly important role of a number of cultural, educational and religious institutions in the life of the city's social community. In fact, the new reading of the Mesembrian Chronicle offered here is the only one since the early twentieth century and opens up many new horizons for future research.

The **second chapter, "Intertextuality"** is an extensive and very comprehensive comparison of the epigraphy and iconography of "St. Stephen" with other similar architectural and religious sites in the Bulgarian lands and the Balkans. The author's research efforts are also innovative because they consider the empirical field data as a *pictorial language* through which the individual, but also subordinate to certain religious prescriptions, "expression" of iconographers and inscribers of the particular era and region takes place. Interpreting this "expression" as an iconographic program that does not exist "for its own sake" but is actively influencing and interacting with the particular community-recipient is extremely productive and original. This way of examining the source material multiplies the focus of the research: not only and not exclusively on the creative outcome, but also on the process of artistic creation itself, which remains marginal in many previous studies of this type. The questions that Prof. Moutafov (himself) asks: who makes the choice and the action of writing the epigraphy in the religious scenes of the temples, who "controls and corrects" the writer, receive logically sound hypothetical answers about the level of education and culture in general in the studied terrain.

The third chapter, "Intervisuality" draws parallels with art workshops and creators of religious art and inscriptions that have become, in a sense, the standard

in the Eastern Orthodox world. Here again, the author's appeal to a vision not often exploited in art studies - from the work - to the artist, to his individual and specific abilities, preferences, level of training, and desire to translate aesthetic, emotional, and cognitive values to his presumed audience is striking.

For me as an anthropologist and ethnologist most impressive is **chapter Four – "Intervisuality, Intertextuality, Perception or the Logos in a Metropolitan Temple and its Artistic Circle"**. Here the author manages to very tangibly "transcend" the narrow frame of interpreting the object only as a complex of decorative and canonical artistic solutions and to fit it into a broad anthropological and cultural horizon by creating a "virtual" model of a community of local recipients, who were able to "decode" the complex and, as the author calls them, "sophisticated" messages of the iconographic vision and epigraphy of the New Metropolitan of Nessebar.

The historical creation and the role of the individual elements in the overall artistic text, as the New Metropolis in Nessebar can be interpreted, are analyzed, continuously looking for relations with the social significance and important cultural emissions sent by the building, its exterior and interior elements, the depicted religious scenes and the epigraphic inscriptions. The history of the holy relics preserved in the temple is also traced, the information about which is published and commented for the first time in this scholarly work.

Chapter Five "Problems in the Interpretation of the Monument and its Context" represents a kind of meaningful continuation of the previous dissertation fragment, as the concentric circles of artistic, cultural and anthropological semanticization extend to other emblematic religious-cult buildings in the uniquely outlined ethno-specific region around today's Burgas - the churches of "St. Spas" and "St. George Mali" in ancient Nessebar and "St. Anastasia" on the nearby island of the same name. This chapter interprets the specifics of the iconographic program of artists and commissioners at various religious sites, and looks for valences to other representational solutions in the Balkan world. The author hypothesizes that the artists based their choice on Hermeneia, whose prototype was probably created in Crete at the end of the 15th century and perhaps copied and exploited by artists in the Balkans at the end of the 16th century. Within the framework of scientific correctness, Prof. Moutafov expresses his hypotheses carefully, taking into account the "tax" that the artists paid to the specifics of the local parish, its preferences and its cultural horizon.

In the **Conclusion** the results of Moutafov's research, spread over almost 400 pages, are synthetically, precisely and essentially presented. In addition to the author's contributions duly listed in the final pages, I would single out as

particularly innovative and original the author's concept, which runs literally as an axis of meaning through the whole text - the presentation of the New Metropolis in Nessebar as a kind of bridge between ethnicities, cultures, worlds of competences, philosophical and religious concepts and emotions. Throughout the dissertation, the author searches for and locates not only the registrations of religious images and texts in St. Stephen's Temple in Nessebar and others like it in the Eastern Orthodox cultural circle, but also the social functions and cultural-anthropological impacts of the particular type of art.

3. Scientific contributions

The scientific contributions of the doctoral thesis of Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov "The Metropolitan Church of St. Stephen in Nessebar and its Artistic Circle: Cultural Context, Intertextuality and Intervisuality" are indisputable. They can be synthesized in the following points:

- Innovative is the interpretation of the notion of *logos* in the religious culture of the particular terrain under study, seen as an equivalence of image and text, the derivation of this notion from its philosophical and theological "self-sufficiency" and its address to the eventual community-recipient.
- For the first time in Bulgarian art history a comprehensive presentation of the epigraphic data recorded in the St. Stephen's Church in Nessebar is made and new readings of inscriptions in several other churches in the region are made, introducing into scholarly circulation a number of cryptic and dedicatory inscriptions from icons, church utensils and lapidary monuments.
- The hypothesis of the role of the so-called "high culture" in the socio-anthropological life of the Nessebar urban community is presented, and its proof is based on a broad base of economic, demographic and cultural facts.
- The presentation in the original and in translation into New Bulgarian language of epigraphic inscriptions interpreted in the text is beneficial, as is the naming of these inscriptions as found in the iconographic manuals typical of the period under study, rather than according to a later taxonomy.
- In the dissertation for the first time some theses of Prof. Moutafov, namely: that a text of the type of Daniel's Hermeneia was used by the Balkan scribes as early as the 16th century, that Nessebar did not become an artistic center in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, and more precise dating of the artistic interior solutions of some nearby local churches such as the island church of "St. Anastasia" and "St. George Mali" in Nessebar.
- The dissertation provides a contemporary reading of the content of the famous Mesembrian Chronicle, which is a basic source document for the

history and culture of the Southern Black Sea coast - something that has not been done since it was first introduced into scholarly circulation in 1906.

- The scholarly study of the accumulation and changes in the local martyrological tradition, accompanied by a pioneering visualization (photographs) of the relics of several saints exported in 1925, is a valuable contribution.
- For the first time, hypotheses related to the iconography and epigraphy of the New Metropolitan Church of Nessebar are expressed and proven, such as the thesis of the mediation of a Constantinople art atelier in the choice and stylistics of the images, as well as the specification of the cryptographers and icon painters of the temple.
- The dissertation also has didactic value, as all epigraphic elements in the study are presented in the original, in normalized form and with a translation into New Bulgarian, offering the original names of the scenes and compositions and how they appear in the hermeneia used during the period, making the text an important reference for students of Christian art and iconography who are not fluent in Greek and Church Slavonic; the clarification of some hitherto misread inscriptions is also educational; the introduction of hitherto uncited literature on some of the inscriptions (such as the publication of Sp. Lambrou of 1924) which has not hitherto been included in the Corpuses of the Institute of Art Studies.
- For the reconstruction of the history of the Southern Black Sea coast it is important, for example, the deciphering of the monogram of Ivan Alexander from the church "St. Theodore", as well as the clarification of the inscription from the marble cupola under the throne of the church "St. Stephen" in Nessebar (the appendix of inscriptions on stone part of the dissertation work is entirely contributory and goes far beyond the period stated in the title!), the relationship between the ancient Greek polis and the same city in the Ottoman era, etc.

4. **Publications and participation in scientific forums.**

Prof. Moutafov proves his lasting and deep academic interest in the topic identified in the dissertation with numerous scientific studies already published over the years. He has consistently and steadfastly researched Eastern Orthodox Christian iconography and epigraphy and its insertion into a broad cultural and socio-anthropological context as the author of 7 complete monographs or individual chapters in them, nearly 60 scientific studies, articles and reports published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals worldwide, 35 studies, articles and reviews in non-peer-reviewed scholarly journals, 15 representative online

scholarly publications, and is the compiler and scientific editor of several thematic collections.

5. Conclusion

The procedure of Prof. Emmanuel Moutafov complies with all the legal requirements of the LDASRB. His work is impressive for the originality of the chosen topic, the precise presentation of the theoretical concepts and the impressive volume of the accumulated facts, for the correctness of the scientific syntheses and conclusions, as well as for its scientific contributions to the general episteme of Bulgarian art history, to the history of Bulgarian and Balkan Eastern Orthodox Christian culture and to its social-anthropological understanding.

This gives me reason to recommend with conviction to the highly esteemed Scientific Jury to award Prof. Emmanuel Stefanov Moutafov the scientific degree DSc in academic field 8 - Theory of Arts, for his dissertation on "The Metropolitan Church "St. Stephen" in Nessebar and its Art Circle: Cultural Context, Intertextuality and Intervisuality"

16.02.2022 г.

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