

**Opinion by Prof. PhD Ingeborg Bratoeva-Darakchieva**

**On**

**the dissertation of Prof. PhD Emmanuel Stefanov Moutafov**

**THE METROPOLITAN CHURCH**

**ST. STEPHEN IN NESSEBAR AND ITS ART CIRCLE:**

**CULTURAL CONTEXT, INTERTEXTUALITY AND INTERVISUALITY**

**For acquiring the academic degree *Doctor of Sciences***

The dissertation of Prof. Dr. Emmanuel Moutafov "The Metropolitan Church "St Stephen" in Nessebar and its Art Circle: Cultural Context, Intertextuality and Intervisuality" is an in-depth and contributive study of the New Metropolitan Church ("St Stephen") in Nessebar and its art circle as an example of high art on the Bulgarian lands at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> c. The author presents and analyses all the material related to the monument in a very broad historical, artistic and theological context.

Based on Moutafov's in-depth knowledge of epigraphy and art history, his research has four main focuses: 1. The Logos in its entirety, i.e. the consideration of the problem beyond the elementary relationship between image and inscription, and its relationship to the addressee and the environment, as well as in terms of modern ideas of intervisuality and intertextuality; 2. The New Metropolitan Church ("St. Stephen") in Nessebar and its artistic circle, interpreted in a broad Balkan context and as an example of high art in the Bulgarian lands in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries; 3. The cultural history of Nessebar during the Ottoman period, enriched with new unpublished inscriptions and sources that contribute to the reconstruction of the past of our Southern Black Sea coast; and 4. An attempt to prove the existence and use of a hermeneia of the Book of Daniel type in the Balkans as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Prof. Moutafov formulates his tasks clearly and also clearly states his interdisciplinary research methodology, which reflects adequately on the structure of the dissertation. It is this interdisciplinary method that predetermines the importance of his work far beyond the spheres of epigraphy, media studies and pure art analysis. In this work, for the first time in Bulgarian academic literature, intervisuality and intertextuality are placed in the context of the theological notion of the Logos, proving that the text is an equal component of the image in church art, and that the reading of inscriptions is a tool for reconstructing artistic life and for delineating in more detail the profile of the recipient. The most significant contributions of this work are precisely the revelation of the interrelation between word and image in a unified and divine "reality", the Logos, realized through intertextuality and intervisuality, and the highlighting of the

role of intertextuality as a "generator of meaning", a visual discourse that manipulates the value of the image.

The study, which consists of a preface, main text (structured in five chapters) and a conclusion, covers over 364 pages. To which are added appendices (List of the most frequently compared non-Bulgarian monuments in the text, lists of inscriptions, Iconographic index of terms, names, titles of scenes, etc.), 407 pages in all, which also contain 118 illustrations. The text is referenced to 760 titles in six languages (Bulgarian, Russian, Croatian, Greek, English and French).

From the point of view of the interdisciplinary significance of the proposed work, of particular interest are the first three chapters ("I. Cultural Context", "II. Intertextuality" and "III. Intervisuality"), which reach their logical culmination in chapter IV. "Intervisuality, Intertextuality, Reception, or the Logos in a Metropolitan Temple and its Art Circle". Referring to D. Alexander<sup>[WU1]</sup>, R. Nelson, M. Alfaro, M. Camille, etc., as well as the work of E. Bakalova *Aspects of the Verbal Text-Image Relationship in the Bulgarian Middle Ages*, Moutafov explains the dynamics of intertextuality-intervisuality as "the understanding of the word through which the image is understood" (p. 11).

The description of the iconographic program of the Metropolitan Church "St. Stephen" in Nessebar and commentary abound with a search for parallels from Greece, Albania, Serbia, etc., as well as with the latest publications of material inaccessible to previous researchers. Moutafov's text provides a sweeping panorama of Balkan art, culture, and the processes that defined them in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The history of Nessebar is portrayed comprehensively, with a critical reading of the sources. Moreover, a new reading of the contents of the so-called Mesembrian Chronicle is offered, revealing new information about the spiritual, cultural life and level of education in late medieval Nessebar, as well as the history of our southern Black Sea coast during the Ottoman period. The work brings into scholarly circulation hundreds of ktetors and dedicatory inscriptions from icons, church utensils and lapidary monuments. The text, built with an enviable logic, enters into the specifics of the monument always after clear theoretical qualifications and precise historical references. Moutafov has chosen this structure in order to be able to propose and defend his hypotheses most convincingly, since such an approach allows the problems to be explored in depth.

The author also set himself the goal of solving a scientific and applied problem by making a complete corpus of the inscriptions of the four main churches under consideration, with their commentaries and translations, which is lacking in Bulgarian publication practice and which can be used by students and specialists who do not know Greek and have no experience with the epigraphy of the particular era. Moutafov succeeds by starting from a correct presentation and citation of the efforts of the researchers who studied before him Greek and Church Slavonic inscriptions from the

period of the Ottoman rule - I. Galabov, S. Smyadovsky, K. Popkonstantinov, H. Andreev, Ts. Vassilev, etc. Particular attention is paid to the publications of Georgi Gerov on the subject, as well as to the inscriptions that appear in the Corpus of the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century frescoes, which the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences has been publishing since 2008.

Moutafov's work mainly contributes to the clarification of some functional features of inscriptions, i.e. besides the informative and decorative role of inscriptions (epigraphy), the dissertation speaks for the first time about their enigmatic function, thus making a theoretical and terminological contribution (Contribution No. 3). All the epigraphic elements in the study are presented in their original, normalized form and with a translation into New Bulgarian, offering the original names of the scenes and compositions and how they appeared in the hermeneia used during the period. The text thus emerges as an important reference for students of Christian art and iconography who are not fluent in Greek and Church Slavonic (Contribution No. 6). Also noteworthy is the clarification of some previously misread inscriptions and the definition and convincing proof of the hypothesis of the existence of "high" art in Nessebar in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, by reference to and study of the socio-economic, demographic and religious prerequisites for this

The abstract adequately reflects the content of the thesis. The listed scientific contributions of the thesis are the author's personal work and are well highlighted.

Written with enviable precision and clarity of expression, the work is characterized by communicative and distinct authorial style and is a significant scientific work for Bulgarian art studies, an achievement of high rank that charts new directions for our art studies and cultural studies. In terms of content, scope of research and volume, Emmanuel Moutafov's work "The Metropolitan Church "St Stefan" in Nessebar and its Art Circle: Cultural Context, Intertextuality and Intervisuality" complies with all national requirements of the LASRB and the legal acts of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Taking into account all the above-mentioned academic and scientifically applied qualities of the submitted text, I confidently propose to the esteemed Scientific Jury to award Prof. PhD Emmanuel Stefanov Moutafov the academic degree of *Doctor of Science*.

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