

OPINION

On

On the dissertation

Of Prof. PhD Emmanuel Moutafov

On the subject:

THE METROPOLITAN CHURCH

ST. STEPHEN IN NESSEBAR AND ITS ART CIRCLE:

CULTURAL CONTEXT, INTERTEXTUALITY AND INTERVISUALITY

for acquiring the academic degree

Doctor of Science

The research of Prof. Moutafov's study is 364 pages long. They are accompanied by a list of illustrations (pp. 365-370), an iconographic index (pp. 377-383) a bibliography (pp. 384-399), deciphered texts of inscriptions on stone, etc.¹; and an English summary (pp. 399-407).

In addition to the text, the proposed work contains 118 illustrations (most of them photographs) and 13 diagrams². Some are the work of other researchers (always accurately cited) and others belong to the author.

The study can be viewed as the conclusion of the research of Prof. Moutafov's work on iconography and temple epigraphy, begun at least 12 years ago in connection with his work on the editing of inscriptions in churches included in the "Corpus of 17th century mural paintings".³

The main material and center of the research is the complex of frescoes, icons and inscriptions in the Nessebar church "St. Stephen", called "The New Metropolis".⁴

Emmanuel Moutafov's first task, with which he has performed excellently, is the comprehensive description of the available frescoes and icons, most of which were created during the renovation of the temple, which took place at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries.⁵

Repeatedly and in different ways, the author expresses the conviction that a pure description of an artistic monument is only a condition and a beginning of its understanding. Iconographers knew this; they therefore provided images with inscriptions indicating the identity of the figures and expressing the message that their visual presence conveyed to the Christian.

Along with what is written next to the images on the icons and on the open books and scrolls they hold, in "St. Stephen", other inscriptions are also found, some of them of relatively large size - such as the full text of the Creed. ⁶

They are all deciphered and offered to the reader in accordance with the rules for the publication of such epigraphic material. First, the inscription is reproduced in a manner close to the initial one (capitalizing and noting abbreviations); then it is normalized (capitalized and lowercase, punctuation marks are inserted, and additions are made where the text is difficult to read or implied); finally, a translation is offered.⁷ If the inscription has been published and commented on, the author refers to the research and indicates the improvements he suggests.

This large artistic and textual material requires corresponding commentaries. First of all, the dating of the frescoes and icons, and the question of the organizers of the work on them, should be discussed⁸. Then explain why the images were created in this particular form. This includes assumptions about the sources of the iconographic program (handbooks/manuals for icon painters)⁹; and also comparison with others like them.¹⁰

These comparisons, to which the author has devoted a great deal of attention, include first of all relatively distant monuments (frescoes and icons from the interior of our lands, from Mount Athos, present-day Serbia, Greece and Albania)¹¹; and then turn to a closer artistic circle, which includes monuments from the city and the surrounding area. We are talking about the Nessebar churches "Ascension of Christ" ("St. Spas"), "St. George Mali"¹² and the church on the island of "St. Anastasia"¹³.

The existence of such a remarkable monument of ecclesiastical art as "St. Stephen" cannot be explained without an overview of the history of Nessebar as a commercial, ecclesiastical and cultural center of the southern Black Sea coast. It enjoys this position both because of the peninsular shape of the coastline, making it a convenient port, and its proximity to the capital of the Empire. This is Constantinople, the capital and also the seat of the Patriarchate, which during the Ottoman period was able to take over the spiritual care of all Greek-, Slavic- and non-Greek-speaking Christians of the region.

Emmanuel Moutafov introduces the reader to this context and does so with the ease and precision of a professional historian.¹⁴

So far as the technical work expected of an art historian is concerned, it is done in an exemplary manner. Further, as stated in the title and then in the introduction¹⁵, Prof. Moutafov aspires to something more.

He discusses not just the individual artifacts that make up the interior of an Orthodox temple, but also their overall meaning and the general impression they produce on the Christian. In his opinion, this whole ensemble of images and written texts seeks to

give a sense of the presence of the Logos, the pre-eternal Word that appeared in history in human form and assumed human nature without losing the divine nature.

The sense of this presence is the purpose of the architectural and artistic work in the temple, to which the selected textual material is added.

Therefore, if the researcher of an architectural and artistic ensemble, such as any Orthodox temple, wants to understand the design of its creators, he must deal with it in its entirety. He must work simultaneously as a historian, an art historian, and a philologist: he must have an awareness and understanding of the architecture of this type of building, of church art, of the history of the area and the region; he must be an epigraphist and an expert on the artistic education of the period.

Such competence and the corresponding to it method of research has in mind Prof. Moutafov when he introduces the words "intervisuality" and "intertextuality" in the title.

These are terms referring to the interrelationships between works of visual art and monuments of verbal literature. These the researcher must seek out and uncover in order to explain the presence and type of artifacts available; and then bring together what is known about imagery and verbosity in order to point out how they relate to the ultimate purpose of the temple ensemble, the recall of the existence and presence of the Logos.¹⁶

Such is the point of the dissertation with which I have had the privilege to get acquainted and for which this opinion is written.

I have read the research contributions mentioned in the abstract and I do not object to anything said.

I propose to my colleagues of the esteemed scientific jury to support the thesis of Prof. Dr. Emmanuel Moutafov and to award him the degree of *Doctor of Science*.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nikolay Gotchev

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

¹ See pp. 371 and 375

² Abstract, p. 63

³ Abstract, p. 7

⁴ "This text is engaged with the New Metropolis ("St Stephen") in Nessebar and its art circle as an example of the high art on the Bulgarian lands at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th c. in a wider Balkan context (p. 9)

⁵ Pp. 100-225. The next pages 225-251 the icons and murals from the 18th c. is described.

⁶ Pp. 222-223

⁷ See for example p. 178 with the image of the prophet Isaiah

⁸ "The key reform is connected with the personality of the Messembrian Bishop Christophorus (1593-1607)" (p. 97)

⁹ „В иконографската програма на Новата митрополия в Несебър през XVI в. е използван иконографски наръчник от типа на този на поп Даниил. Вече съм изказал тезата, че Даниил е преписал в Иерусалим по - страта ерминия, която е била в обращение на Балканите още от края на XVI в.“ (p. 39).

¹⁰ See also *ibid* (стр. 178): „този [липсващият на изображението в „Св. Стефан “] текст е изписан на свитъка на същия пророк в манастира Патерон, а той от своя страна е почерпан от иконографския наръчник на поп Даниил“.

¹¹ Трапезария на „Ставроникита“, „Св. Никола“ в Ново Хопово, католикон на манастира „Патерон“ в с. Литино, Янинско и др. (стр. 371).

¹² И двете изписани в началото на XVII в., малко след „Св. Стефан“. „Св. Георги Мали“ е разрушена след ВСВ, стенописите са пренесени в Народния археологически музей през 1948, част от тях се съхраняват в криптата на „Св. Александър Невски“ (стр. 323-324).

¹³ During the time of Socialism known as the island "Bolshevik"

¹⁴ *Cultural context*, pp. 19-43

¹⁵ See pp. 9-13

¹⁶ "This unified and divine 'reality,' realized through intertextuality and intervisuality, I will here call the Logos" (p. 10).