

OPINION

By

Prof. DSc Valeria Fol

Institute of Balkan Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Director of the Institute for Research in the Organization, Management and
Protection of Cultural and Historical Heritage at UniBIT

On the dissertation

THE METROPOLITAN CHURCH

ST. STEPHEN IN NESSEBAR AND ITS ART CIRCLE:

CULTURAL CONTEXT, INTERTEXTUALITY AND INTERVISUALITY

By **Prof. Dr. Emmanuel Moutafov**, presented for awarding the academic degree
Doctor of Sciences, specialty *Art Studies and Visual Arts*, professional filed

8.1 *Art Theory*

The opinion was commissioned by a decision of a scientific jury (minutes of the meeting on 03. 12. 2021), appointed by order № 615-PD/30.11.2021 of the Academic secretary of the Institute of Art Studies Assoc. Prof. Dr. Radostina Neykova.

Presentation of the candidate and his professional experience

Prof. Dr. Emmanuel Moutafov graduated from the National College of Ancient Languages and Cultures "St Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher" with a gold medal for excellent grades in 1987, in 1996 he graduated from the The National and Kapodistrian University of Athens as a Master of Archaeology and Art History. The candidate's scientific career began as a researcher at the Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies "Prof. Ivan Dujčev" at the Sofia University "St.Kliment Ohridski". After that he worked at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, where in 2001 obtained a PhD degree in New and Recent General History at the Institute of Balkan Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Since 2001, he has successively acquired the degrees of Research Fellow I and II, Senior Research Fellow II and Professor (2019) at the Institute of Art Studies - BAS. Prof. E. Moutafov actively participates in the management of the Institute of Art Studies as Scientific Secretary and Director, member of the Scientific Council of the Institute, a number of editorial boards, including abroad. Since 2010 he has been a member of the General Assembly of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Vice-Chairman of the CMEC and member of the Mandate Committee of the Bulgarian

Academy of Sciences, of the Board of the "Heritage BG" Association (since 2018), of the Art Council of the National Gallery in Sofia (since 2018) and of the expert working group for the preparation of a national strategy for the development of culture at the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria. The candidate's work as a manager and team member of a number of scientific projects (including national and international) is impressive. Some of the individual projects he has implemented have received international awards. Prof. E. Moutafov is a founder and member of the Association of Byzantologists and Medievalists in Bulgaria (since 2004) and of the Society of Researchers of the 17th Century (since 2000). He was a foreign project evaluator at the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of Romania (2011-2016).

Evaluation of the dissertation

Prof. Dr. Emmanuel Moutafov took part in the procedure for acquiring the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences at the Institute of Art Studies - BAS with the monographic work "The Metropolitan Church "St. Stephen" in Nessebar and its Art Circle: Cultural Context, Intertextuality and Intervisuality". The manuscript is 407 pages long. The main text contains a Preface, 5 Chapters, a Conclusion, a List of Illustrations, 3 Appendices, an Iconographic Index and a Bibliography (21 pages of references). The monograph is illustrated with 118 photographs, 4 plans and 13 diagrams of the frescoes in "St. Stephen". The authors of the illustrative material are correctly indicated.

The preface begins with a description of the path of research that the author took in order to write his work on the Metropolitan Church of "St. Stephen" in the town of Nessebar. The historiographical review is not a traditional presentation of publications about the Metropolitan Church. The author states the four main problems he explores in the monograph, and logically begins with the development of ideas about the Logos in its entirety from Antiquity through the Middle Ages (especially in theological literature) to contemporary literature. Emphasizing the theological concept of the Logos and drawing on contemporary understandings of intervisuality and intertextuality, Prof. E. Moutafov proves that written texts are an equal component of images in church art. This thesis of his, put forward for the first time in Bulgarian scientific literature, is systematically developed in the second, third, fourth and fifth chapters of the text. The epigraphic data from the metropolitan church itself, as well as those from the church on the island of "St. Anastasia", "St. Spas" and "St. George Mali" in Nessebar (with clarifications and new readings), are presented in the text in their entirety and in the appropriate pictorial context.

In a separate appendix at the end of the text is a catalogue of the inscriptions on the stone of the Metropolitan Church with original writing, translation and commentary. This comprehensive presentation of the epigraphic material is an indisputable contribution that provides opportunities for future researchers to develop their interpretations of the intertextuality-intervisuality relationship in the Metropolitan Church, and in other immovable cultural monuments. From the proposed monograph

it is evident that the already established methods for the study of intervisuality and intertextuality in architecturally modelled sacred spaces in ancient cultures are gradually expanding their chronological scope and being adopted in the Bulgarian scientific literature. The detailed analytical historiographical review of the scholarly literature on high art in Nessebar at the beginning of the 17th century is clearly elaborated in the text of the book.

In the first chapter, "Cultural Context", the author presents a synthesis of the political, demographic, economic, educational, ecclesiastical (metropolitan) and cultural history of the city up to the 20th century. This chapter as well as the theoretical analysis in "Intervisuality and Intertextuality as Logos" opens the door for the author's interdisciplinary approach in the study. In it Prof. E. Moutafov accepts and develops with new evidence the thesis that the inhabitants of the town of Nessebar, are part of a Black Sea cultural zone, in which the idea of and the behavior inherent in the urban culture, formed already in Antiquity, was preserved during the Ottoman period. Special attention is paid to the contents of the important for the history of the Black Sea region Mesembrian Chronicle. The author's proposed new reading of the text brings this valuable source back into scholarly circulation with new historical data.

The second chapter "Intertextuality" summarizes the epigraphic material, comments on the quality, artistic and creative process during the period under consideration, links the texts to the specific images, i.e. creates the image-text relationship in a unified pictorial language. The author is interested in the 16th -17th century recipients who could read and understand the inscribed sacred words because, as he himself notes, this is a prerequisite for the creation of high art. This chapter pays special attention to the artistic process of creating images with texts and to the use of hermeneia of the type used in the Book of Daniel. The text logically moves on to the following third chapter, "Intervisuality", which could also be defined as a history of cultural influences and interactions with an emphasis on the artists' creative expressions. The historical background woven into the text and the outlined artistic context in which the decoration was created in different periods solidifies the evidence and explains the existence of high art in Nessebar during the period under consideration. The author rightly notes that there is no reason to look for Western European influence in church art until the first half of the 18th century.

These three chapters are followed by a detailed presentation of the building of the Metropolitan Church of "St. Stephen" with the changes, reconstructions and paintings in different periods in the fourth chapter "Intervisuality, Intertextuality, Reception, or the Logos in a Metropolitan Temple and its Artistic Circle". In this largest chapter, as in the preceding ones, historiographical references to various opinions and hypotheses are woven into the text with a personal opinion expressed. A further development of the analysis of the iconographic program, following the analysis of the inscribed texts with some corrections to those proposed in the literature so far, is presented in Chapter

Five, "Problems in the Interpretation of the Monument and its Context." In the paragraph "The Sources" Prof. E. Moutafov confirms his already stated thesis that the iconographic program of the New Metropolitan in the 16th century used an iconographic manual of the type of that of the Book of Daniel, which was based on an older hermeneia, probably created in the 15th century on the island of Crete. Also used, according to the author, are the Protoevangelium of James and the Ancient Extensive Hagiography of the Most Blessed Lady and Mother of God by St Maximos the Confessor, other liturgical books. The author specifies in which scenes these sources served the icon painters, pointing out the other hypotheses in the scientific literature. He concludes that "the inscriptions in "St. Stephen" of the 16th century is amazingly faithfully inscribed", which speaks of the high literacy of those artists writing the scribes or the leading icon painters. E. Moutafov rightly concludes that the combination of high art of drawing, literacy, knowledge of the texts and free handling of the subjects are some of the characteristics of "high" art. I accept his hypothesis that the long inscriptions outside the iconographic program play an illuminating role and help to reconstruct the functions of "St. Stephen".

The author skillfully reveals the specific cultural distinctiveness of Nessebar, which in addition to Orthodoxy and contacts with leading cultural centers of the Mediterranean world are the factors that contributed to the creation of the Metropolitan Church of "St. Stephen" and the presence of "high" art in the town in the 16th – 17th centuries. Convincingly defended is the thesis that the decipherment of inscriptions is a tool for the reconstruction of artistic life, as well as for learning more details about those present at the services. The arguments of Prof. E. Moutafov about the leading place of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as a point where models from different parts of the Orthodox world meet and the formation of teams for the execution of important and significant commissions for the faith gather.

The conclusion summarizes the suppositions reached by the author about the importance of the New Metropolis of "St. Stephen" in Nessebar for the Balkan art in the late 16th and early 18th centuries. The author outlines the historical role of Nessebar as a communicative city and emphasizes that this is logically reflected in its churches and their decoration. The role of the town as a kind of bridge between Constantinople and the rest of the peninsula and a link with the leading artistic centers of the era is clearly highlighted.

The author concludes that "St. Stephen" was a typical metropolitan temple of a cosmopolitan maritime city with a rich and itinerant population, satisfying the tastes of literate priests and worshippers. The decoration of the 16th-century "St. Stephen" Cathedral is "a kind of completion of the 'Greek' Late Middle Ages, as well as of Byzantium itself, through its reminiscences of Palaiologos models and, Constantinople." The inscriptions are a glimpse "into the pre-modern era and into the Modern Greek

language" through which the Ottoman Empire's non-Greek speaking Christians were assimilated.

The proposed dissertation has serious contributions, which are correctly reflected at the end of the abstract. The author makes serious steps forward after the fundamental work of Corr. Member E. Bakalova "Aspects of the "verbal text - image" correlation in the Bulgarian Middle Ages", changing the point of view and commenting "which written word and in what form reaches the images" of the church cultural heritage, "in what form, by whom, when and for whom it was written and how it complements the image, as well as what are the message levels of the inscription and why it appears in a particular monument and historical moment". The interdisciplinary approach, based on the study of intertextuality and intervisuality of the Metropolitan Church of "St. Stephen" in Nessebar, of its art circle in a broad cultural and historical context allow for a number of new identifications of icon painters, reinterpretations of scenes, for a comprehensive portrayal of the place of the temple in the spiritual life of the inhabitants of the city and its place in the history of church painting in the Balkans. The proposals of Prof. E. Moutafov's original titles for the scenes and compositions, as they appear in the iconographic manuals relevant to the period, complement the ideas of the mindset of those that made the paintings, of the commissioners and worshippers.

Publications on the dissertation topic

The candidate declares a total of 7 publications on the topic of the dissertation, two of them in English (one of which is in print), two co-authored.

Conclusion

The work presented by Prof. Dr. Emmanuel Moutafov is an achievement with serious contributions to Bulgarian historiography in the research of the Metropolitan Church of "St. Stephen" and other temples in Nessebar and develops the methodology for research of Christian cultural monuments. Light and darkness, color decoration, sacred texts, and chord line are indispensable elements of religious mysteries and form the totality of faith and ritual. The study of Prof. E. Moutafov on the metropolitan temple of "St. Stephen" and its artistic circle clearly explain why the town of Nessebar is a plaque tournante in church painting between Constantinople and other centers of the Balkans.

Taking into account all that I have stated above, I believe that the thesis meets the legal requirements for the successful defense of the degree "Doctor of Science" in professional field 8.1. Art Theory. I have not noticed any plagiarism in the text. The abstract reflects the content of the dissertation and the contributions it makes. Prof. Dr. Emmanuel Moutafov meets all the scientific requirements for the awarding of the degree of Doctor of Science.

I vote in the affirmative (Yes) to award the degree Doctor of Science in the professional field 8.1. Art Theory to Prof. PhD Emmanuel Moutafov.

Prof. Valeria Fol, DSc

23. 02. 2022