

REVIEW

On the dissertation

PREPARATORY DRAWINGS IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF THE LATE 18th AND
19th CENTURY ICON PAINTERS (USING MATERIAL FROM BULGARIAN COLLECTIONS)

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For receiving an educational and scientific degree *Doctor*

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Elena Genova

The thesis consists of 323 pages and includes: an introduction; six chapters; a conclusion; a bibliography with 464 titles; an appendix; and a 190-page album with 247 images.

The very choice of the topic for the dissertation is extremely relevant and contributes to the work. The commonly accepted term for "drawing" lags in Bulgarian scientific research, and the publication of this text is timely. In Western European studies, it has been extremely relevant for a long time. The author himself analyzes the differences between the meaning, content, and functions of drawing in Catholic and Orthodox art.

Until now, art studies have lacked a comprehensive and in-depth study of the preparatory stages, referred to by the general term "drawing," in the work of Renaissance iconographers. That is why the author has taken on an extremely difficult task.

First, to locate and identify a vast array of collections of drawings from the main Renaissance schools and centers or from independent icon painters, preserved to this day, mainly in museums, galleries, libraries, archives, etc. Secondly, to familiarize oneself with and study the same huge volume of information contained in individual publications on the subject, reflecting different aspects of the problem. These are concentrated in foreign publications in several languages, judging by the number of titles in the bibliography. It also includes titles by Bulgarian authors, which are quite numerous and reflect different aspects of the study of drawings in the iconographic archives. They mainly deal with the presentation of individual unpublished collections and the attribution of their authorship, but do not go further, for example, with the study of their place in the creative process of the Renaissance iconographers, their role as models, or the search for and identification of their models.

The dissertation covers all known collections. Simeon Tonchev also searches for collections that were previously unknown, such as the one in the Regional History

Museum in Kyustendil. This collection is notable for its preservation of drawings by various icon painters, identified by the author as being from Samokov, Bansko, and elsewhere. This is the case in almost all collections. For example, the collection of the Dospeski family in The National Art Gallery contains materials not only by Samokov icon painters, but also by other unknown masters, who probably ended up there by accident. This often happens when the location of the collection changes over time. That is why the author deals with quite a few misunderstandings and mistakes of misattributed materials, for example, of the icon painters from Elena. He also attributes quite a few previously unknown collections to independently working and lesser-known icon painters such as Ivan Dimitrov from Kocherinovo, Hristo Yovevich, Vasil Popradoykov. There are also some small examples of icon painters such as Yanachko Stanimirov from Breze, drawings, sketches, and architectural plans by builders and woodcarvers, drawings by self-taught artists, etc.

Not included in the dissertation are only a few smaller collections to which the author did not have access, such as that of Theodosius, a monk from the Rilla Monastery, or the drawings of Bansko masters, kept in the Historical Museum in Bansko. As he states himself, these archives still need to be studied, and some poorly illuminated aspects of the large archives presented in the dissertation need to be clarified.

The structure of the dissertation is very well developed to cover and examine even the smallest aspects of the problem with drawings in Bulgarian Renaissance art. It contains an introduction, which includes an analysis and contribution of publications on the subject by Bulgarian authors, which highlights the growing interest in this field of art history over the last decade.

The first chapter provides an overview of the known drawings from the 15th to 17th centuries and those from the 18th and 19th centuries. The third chapter examines in detail the paper, other materials, and techniques used in the creation of the "drawings." Attention is also paid to the watermarks on the paper, with specific ones identified that are not found in Ottoman documents or Slavic printed books from the Bulgarian lands. The section on materials examines the materials used for writing, such as inks and tints, followed by charcoal, tempera, and watercolor-type paints, as well as pencils and sanguine. The text on materials included in the well-known hermeneias is also examined.

The third paragraph is longer and deals with the techniques described in detail in the iconography manuals – hermeneias but interpreted and clarified by the author in modern Bulgarian for the contemporary reader. The various techniques for copying images and the production and use of tracing paper are presented.

The next three chapters, which we can define as the central part of the dissertation, are devoted to the paintings of the iconographers from the largest Renaissance schools and centers: the Tryavna, Bansko, and Samokov. The chapter on the Tryavna

school contains three paragraphs examining the drawings of the three main families – Vitanov, Zahariev, and Minev. First, the researcher's task is to describe in detail the contents of the notebooks with drawings or individual sheets stored in the archives of the Tryavna Museum or the National Church Historical and Archaeological Museum. This is when some inaccuracies or missing descriptions from other authors' publications are corrected. To attribute the drawings in the so-called Tryavna Illustrated Hermeneias from the National Museum of History, the author performs a comparative analysis of the cycles of the Passion of Christ and finds parallels with icons by Simeon Tsonkov and Yoanniki papa Vitanov. The main method used by the author is to search for parallels and other drawings from the notebook with signed or attributed icons by two of the most famous icon painters from Tryavna, which proves that it belonged to them. In the text, the author also addresses another important point—the search for and identification of a specific model for some of the drawings or cycles found in engravings in old foreign books originating from Kiev or Lviv.

Other sketchbooks belonging to Tryavna icon painters of this family are also examined, with the author correcting some inaccurate statements made by other scholars. The studies on the sketchbooks of other icon-painting families are based on the same principles. The sketchbooks of Zacharia Tsankov are dated with the author's inscriptions or by their watermarks. Again, parallels have been found for many of the drawings in icons signed by the iconographer or in works by other iconographers from Tryavna. This section also analyzes drawings by lesser-known icon painters from the numerous icon-painting families in Tryavna. Archival documents have also been studied, revealing new information about the latest well-known icon-painting ateliers in Tryavna.

The drawings of the Minev family have been little studied, and the doctoral student is convinced that future research will clarify who their authors are.

The drawings of the icon painters from the Bansko icon painting center are kept in several notebooks in the collection of the Center for Slavic-Byzantine Studies “Prof. Ivan Duichev”. They cover five paragraphs with identified icon painters. In fact, the notebook with drawings by Toma Vishanov is signed and dated 1786, so there is no doubt about its authorship. In second place are the drawings by Dimitar Molerov / Cod. D. Slavo 48/, which he made on blank pages in his father's notebook. Third are the drawings by Mihalko Ivanov Golev /Cod. D. Slavo 45/, dated by the iconographer himself between 1860 and 1864. Next are the drawings in Cod. D. Slavo 47, identified as belonging to the Bansko iconographers. The drawings were copied from the notebook of Toma Vishanov. In the literature, Dimitar Sirleshtov is accepted as the author. Simeon Tonchev categorically rejects this thesis and attributes it to Dimitar Molerov, especially since they date from 1813 and 1845.

In the last section, dedicated to the icon painters of Bansko, the doctoral student examines the previously unknown notebook with drawings by Ivan Dimitrov from Kocherinovo, purchased by the master in 1869. The author establishes that this icon painter also copied icons from the Church of the Holy Trinity in Bansko, as well as icons by Stanislav Dospevski, into his notebook.

The sixth chapter is devoted to the largest Renaissance school, the Samokov school—as well as to the largest archive, already referred to in the literature as the Dospeiskif archive. The folder bore the name of Zachary Zograf, but the diverse content of the archive, in addition to drawings by the Samokov icon painters Zachary, his brother Dimitar Hristov, and their father Hristo Dimitrov, also included other drawings. It contains numerous foreign albums with engravings, clippings from Holy Mountain prints, etc. This state of the archive necessitated its precise study and attribution of all materials, the identification of individual authors from the school, and the indication of their works that are not dated.

There are eight sections in the chapter, and besides Hristo Dimitrov, Dimitar, and Zahari, the archives of Stanislav Dospevski, Yoan Ikonopisets, Nikola Obrazopisov, Hristo Yovovich, and Vasil Popradoykov are also presented. Specifically, in the section on Dimitar Hristov, parallels are sought and established between many of his drawings and his icons, and the models used are sought and proven. The same applies to Zachary Zograf and the identification of the models for his cycles of the Apocalypse, for example. The author devotes considerable space to Zachary's well-known period of training with French artists in Plovdiv and the traces of this in the related materials in the archive. Of particular interest are the paragraphs comparing the academic training of Stanislav Dospevski and Hristo Tsokev in Moscow and St. Petersburg, in which we discover unknown or little-known facts from this period.

The text also clarifies the history of the translation of Yoan Ikonopisets's hermeneias. The archive of Vasil Popradoykov, stored in several locations, identified by the doctoral student and attributed to this Samokov iconographer, is also of interest.

The seventh chapter of the dissertation can be classified entirely as a contribution to the development and chosen topic "Preparatory Drawings in the Creative Process of Icon Painters." It contains nine paragraphs that cover even the smallest detail of the problem under consideration. The author's ability to capture and identify all aspects of the creative process demonstrates his qualities as a researcher.

I find the first two paragraphs related to the study of terminology to be extremely valuable. To date, there has been no such comprehensive presentation of the problem of terminology in the field of drawing. In the paragraph on the applications of Renaissance drawing, the author focuses on the classification and types of drawings according to their technique of execution; copying as a method; drawing as a model; iconographic manuals and hermeneias; copies, preparatory drawings, the drawing

modello in the creative process. The author is extremely thorough in the text, easily handling the examples he gives with drawings, sketches, icons, murals and their authors/icon painters.

In the last paragraph on drawing as an autonomous work of art, Simeon Tonchev proves its existence and place in the creative process during the Bulgarian Renaissance.

Once again, I would like to emphasize the author's profound knowledge of all aspects of Renaissance art, schools, iconographers, and their works. He skillfully selects precise examples, draws parallels, and points out the foreign and domestic models used. I would also like to mention the rich album with 247 illustrations, which is an integral part of the author's argument.

At the risk of repeating the author's own contributions to the dissertation, I will confirm once again the originality of this work as the first attempt at a comprehensive collection, identification, and in-depth study of the archives of drawings up to the end of the 19th century, including those unknown until now. New proposals for the attribution of some of the collections of drawings or entire cycles within them. The studies of inscriptions and texts on the pages of the sketchbooks are valuable, as they provide additional, previously unknown facts about their authors. All terms used by the iconographers have been collected and commented on, and some opinions in the literature have been corrected.

The author also proposes a new classification of the drawings, based on the clarified technique of their production. A complete analysis of each collection/archive of drawings is also proposed, with a view to their use in the creative process.

In accordance with the requirements, Simeon Tonchev has presented three publications on the topic of the dissertation, included in scientific publications.

I believe that the ambitious goal set by the author has been achieved at a high academic level.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize once again the research qualities demonstrated by the author in the presented text. I would like to propose to the esteemed jury that Simeon Tonchev be awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

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Sofia

Reviewer:

/Prof. Dr. Elena Genova/