

# OPINION

By Prof. Dr Elisaveta Moussakova

On the dissertation work of Tereza Bacheva

THE ROMAN POPES IN THE MURAL PAINTINGS PROGRAM OF THE  
CHURCHES IN THE BULGARIAN LANDS (15TH-18TH CENTURIES)

On the procedure for acquiring the educational and academic degree doctor

Tereza Bacheva has submitted a dissertation of 240 pages of text with the bibliography, accompanied by a catalogue of the studied images and an album. The content of the work is divided into five chapters, with the obligatory introduction and conclusion. The introductory part meets the usual requirements and in their order the aim, objectives, methodology, chronological scope, state of research are argued and comprehensively stated. The lack of studies on the chosen range of images is an obvious reason for the development of this topic as a new one in Bulgarian art history, but it is still not sufficient justification; the important question is how it merits attention, given that, as is evident from the work itself, images of Roman popes are in rather limited number. The justified answer is given on p. 2: the memorials of the Roman bishops are maintained in the liturgical calendar of the Orthodox Church and are an integral part of the general repertoire of episcopal images, dependent on “the dogmatic, liturgical, and historical functions of the iconographic programs of the Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches.” The choice of the topic is therefore relevant not only to the history of the Orthodox Church, and in particular that of dogmatics, but points to an even larger and more difficult topic, which would be the functioning of episcopal images in the decorative programs of churches, and not only of the so-called post-Byzantine period, and which, it seems to me, has not been the subject of supposedly fundamental research. From this point of view, the merits of the work proposed for defense are further enhanced, even if, as the exposition shows, the iconography of the Roman bishops is largely standard and at the same time insufficiently specific to solve the problem of the identification of Pope Clement of Rome and Pope Leo in the mural repertoire of the monuments. The introductory section also delineates the conceptual field in which the images fit - the scenes of the Adoration of the Sacrifice, the Communion of the Apostles, the church councils, and the mural menologies, which further organizes the research section itself.

As far as the choice of monuments is concerned, Tereza Bacheva has limited them to those located in the present-day Bulgarian territories, and although the arguments are not particularly detailed on this point, the decision is understandable, especially

considering that monuments from the time of early Christianity, the entire Byzantine period and Balkan monuments from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards are covered. For the specific objects of study, she has relied on the data in the corpora of paintings published and prepared by the Institute of Art Studies, which we have reason to believe are fully documented, and this means that the work covers all the images known to date, including the controversial ones.

The chapters follow in a logical order, beginning with a general exposition on the episcopal institution in East and West and its hierarchical pictorial representation in church programs (Chapter I), followed by a detailed analysis of the overall context, in which the three most frequent, or traditionally present, images of Roman popes in Bulgarian monuments function - Clement of Rome, Sylvester and Leo of Rome (Chapters II-IV) and concludes with the less frequent and problematic in terms of their identification (Chapter V). The only remark, or rather question, referred to the structure is the order of presentation chosen, in which, in my opinion, a graduation from the most common to the rarer images would have been more appropriate, i.e., those of Pope Sylvester should have been dealt with first.

In the first chapter, special mention should be made of the doctoral student's erudition, acquired from the impressive amount of literature studied, including the most recent, which determines the quality of the analyses in the following parts. This part also deals with the essential question of the possible influence of the Catholic Church, whose propaganda was active in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, but, somewhat surprisingly, (some of) Krassimir Stanchev's publications are not used.

The subdivisions in the three key chapters consistently exhaust the aspects that reveal the motivation for the inclusion of a given episcopal (papal) image in the Orthodox ecclesiastical tradition, respectively its function and peculiarities. At the beginning is the "biography" of the personality, revealed by the source data and the evidence of the cult of the saint in liturgical literature and liturgy. This is followed by the iconographic description, the distribution of the images, their positional variations in the temple space, in the three main compositions, and in the general sequence of the saint's images and signifying inscriptions. The images are thus analyzed in juxtaposition with each other against the background of the entire preceding tradition, with a wide range of analogies drawn, thereby at the same time establishing a solid attribution method, indispensable in the identification of images with unstated visual characteristics resulting from the mixing of cults in saints with identical names. I would highlight in these chapters, as well as in the last one, not only the new information that they present, but the very systematic and clearly laid out analytical approach, the excellent orientation in the scientific literature on the dogmatic and liturgical premises for the legitimation of these particular saints-popes as part of the composition of the Orthodox Church calendar, resting on the idea of the unity of the Church, the moderation in the conclusions. Of value are the hypotheses, and in appropriate cases the assertions proposed in Chapter V, about the appearance of rarely

encountered images of Roman bishops and of those for whom there are only guesses as to whom they represent. The analysis of the group of bishops in the church at Dolna Beshovica with the considerations put forward for the identification of Pope Adrian I or II must necessarily be highlighted here.

The conclusion synthesizes, rather than simply repeats - as is common practice - the essential conclusions and is yet another example of the rational, straight-to-the-point way of working that seems to be inherent in Tereza Bacheva's research mindset. Perhaps, to the extent that the source data permit, it would be useful at least to identify possible correlations between the choice of the personalities depicted, the areas in which the monuments were concentrated, and the ecclesiastical and administrative structure in the relevant periods, as well as to define more explicitly the role of Catholic propaganda.

The catalogue of images included and the album of excellent quality of most of the photographs (including those taken by the author) equally add to the scholarly value of the study. I find it would have been appropriate to have an "identification" section in the catalogue, indicating the reasons for identification of the difficult-to-distinguish iconographic types.

The abstract is fully in line with the content of the dissertation; the list of scientific contributions is in fact exhaustive of what is implied by its first point, while the following ones rather list the applied approaches and undeservedly do not include specific achievements. Therefore, I would add the contributions already identified above: the completion of Balkan church history in the period of the 15<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the successfully applied identification method and the field of analogical research opened by it as a model and perspective.

The publications on substantial parts of the work, two of which are in refereed journals, are valuable and in number exceed the required minimum.

Individual notes of a general nature refer to rare instances of obscure meaning, probably overlooked in the editing of the text; on p. 20, in the section which authoritatively discusses the complex issues surrounding the idea of a united Church prior to the Schism, with the unifying and dividing dogmatic and ecclesiastical-political lines between Rome and Constantinople, a chronological inconsistency appears in the examples with depictions of Western and Eastern bishops of Roman churches assigned to the period of the "Greek popes" of the seventh and eighth centuries. The accepted dating of these monuments is mainly from the following century, so it seems that reference in this case to Maria Grafova's publication alone was not sufficient.

In conclusion, Tereza Bacheva's dissertation is a complete, independent scientific study, introducing new data, new interpretations and corrections of opinions and statements expressed in the previous literature. The scope of scientific knowledge acquired, and its use are qualities deserving the highest evaluation. To the analytical methods, which are fully adequate to the object of study, I would add the heuristic,

probably intuitively used, but providing an open view of the whole evidential process with its conclusive results.

The evaluation of the materials presented in the defense leads to the conclusion that all the conditions are in place for Tereza Bacheva to be awarded the educational and academic degree doctor.

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