

# OPINION

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On the dissertation for acquiring the educational and academic degree doctor, scientific filed: 8 Arts, professional direction: 8.1 Art Theory, on the subject:

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

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### *1. Data on the dissertation*

The dissertation topic presented to the attention of the scientific jury is very interesting and undoubtedly worthy of a dissertation, given the lack of a comprehensive analytical study concerning the inclusion of images of the Roman popes in the iconographic programs of the frescoes in the churches of the Late Middle Ages on the territory of Bulgaria. The aims and objectives are clearly formulated. The study has a logical structure, in which the reader can easily orient himself in the set problems.

The dissertation contains an Introduction, five chapters, Conclusion, Bibliography, Catalogue, Illustrations to the text and Appendices. The main text is 235 pages long, including a 32-page bibliography - sources and literature used in Cyrillic, Latin and Greek, which includes 576 titles. An integral part of the dissertation is a Catalogue with Inventory of 87 pages and Illustrations to the text and Appendices of 32 pages, which include a total of 106 photographs and 2 tables. The logical structure, the exposition with the comprehensive multifaceted analyses, the correct citation of sources, the collected visual material with corresponding inventories and annotations to the images, and the conclusions show that the study has been carried out based on a lot of extensively researched literature, but also of serious fieldwork. The summaries of the results presented in the Conclusion testify that the aims and objectives of the thesis have been met.

The abstract corresponds to the content of the thesis. The doctoral student has five publications on the topic of the dissertation, four of which have been printed, and one is in print. Each of them is devoted to the main parts of the conducted research and deals with a topic not studied analytically so far.

## 2. *Scientific contributions*

The research carried out is interdisciplinary, examining the spread of images of Roman popes in Bulgarian monuments in the 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the traditions in their depiction and the peculiarities of their iconography, which are related to the historical and ecclesiastical-political context of the era. The scientific contributions are the result of a systematic study and can be presented in several categories.

**First. The main group of the three Roman popes - St. Clement, St. Sylvester, and St. Leo**, to whom Chapters Two, Three, and Four, respectively, are devoted. The study is supplemented by several images, discussed separately in Chapter Five, which are less well known and present in some Bulgarian churches of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. One part of the images of Roman popes has been identified for the first time by the dissertator. The analysis of their images and the development of their iconography are set on a broad basis, and texts, exemplars, theological and historical arguments are sought. The mural monuments on the territory of Bulgaria of the mentioned period, in which these images are present, are examined in the context of the history of the Church and are compared with examples of church art from the Balkans.

In fact, the chronological and territorial framework of the study is to some extent exceeded, since it concerns earlier periods, related to the establishment of the veneration of the Roman popes and the appearance of their first images in the 1<sup>st</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries, which is already done in the introductory Chapter One. Examples from the Middle Ages - Comnenos and the Palaeologos era, including from Bulgarian monuments, are also commented upon.

**Second. The images of the Roman Pontiffs, as prescribed by the tradition of the church, are examined in relation to themes and subjects included in the registers of the various functional spaces of the temples**, which relate to the main Eucharistic theme in the altar, to subjects of a historical and dogmatic nature such as the Ecumenical Councils, and to those of the menologies. Based on the liturgical character of the painting, the dissertation considers the images as part of the overall iconographic program of the respective temples, thus convincingly defending its thesis. Comparative tables in the Appendix for monuments created in the same period visualize the included images of Roman popes and other saints, along with the dates in the church calendar on which their memory is celebrated. In this way, the reader can easily orient themselves to saints who lack a signature for the cathedrals to which they belong, but the identification of their images is admitted and defended in the text.

**Third. The issues raised in the present work are the basis for future research in several areas of the humanities**, not only in terms of history and art history, but also philosophy and theology. In the Catalogue and Illustrations to the text, visual material has been meticulously selected and arranged, without which such research cannot be conducted. Besides being necessary in the course of the work, it constitutes a database which will serve for future research in the above-mentioned scientific fields.

### 3. *Conclusion*

Considering the above, I emphasize the contributory character of the presented dissertation and I confidently propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the degree of Doctor of Education and Science to Tereza Bacheva, in the scientific field 8 Arts, professional field 8.1 Art Theory.

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Prof. Dr Miglena Prashkova