

OPINION

BY ASSOC. PROF. DR MARCO SCARPA

UNIVERSITY OF MESSINA (ITALY)

CYRILLO-METHODIAN RESEARCH CENTER AT THE BULGARIAN
ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

On the dissertation work for acquiring the educational and academic degree doctor

Academic specialty *Art Studies and Fine Arts, 8.1 Arts Theory*

Author: Tereza Ivanova Bacheva

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

The dissertation of Tereza Bacheva is the result of a long and extensive scientific activity. The dissertation, which covers 355 standard pages, is clearly structured and contains an Introduction, five chapters, a Conclusion, a Bibliography, a Catalogue, and Illustrations to the text; two tables are presented as Appendices.

The literature used is impressive, consisting of 576 titles, of which 375 are in Cyrillic (Bulgarian, Russian, Serbian, Ukrainian and Macedonian), 174 in Latin (German, Italian, English and French) and 27 in Greek.

The objectives of the research, which are clearly formulated, are aimed at the study of fresco depictions of Roman bishops in Bulgarian post-Byzantine churches during the Ottoman period, refining and motivating the temporal and geographical limits of the work. The aim is very well defined in four tasks that guide the whole study. The methodology, which is very well presented and accurately specified throughout the thesis, consists of a historical, iconographic, and comparative approach to the images, sources and hagiographic sources of the Roman bishops and the characteristics of their images.

The chosen topic is completely original, and the literature on the subject, known so far, analyses only individual images of Roman popes. The collection of all the material and its analysis allows Teresa Bacheva to present us with a detailed study in which new data and new hypotheses are available.

The first chapter presents the historical background and depictions of Roman bishops in Eastern Orthodox art, showing what Roman popes were like in frescoes in the Balkans from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries.

The second, third and fourth chapters present the most widespread depictions of the Roman popes - St. Clement, St. Sylvester, and St. Leo. The author collects and describes all their images, seeking to find the reasons for their prevalence, presenting original hypotheses.

The fourth chapter presents the images of other Roman popes who appear only once - St. Telesphorus, St. Agathon and St. Adrian. Teresa Bacheva presents other images that are supposed to be of Roman bishops but gives her opinion on why she disagrees with these hypotheses.

In conclusion, the author offers a general interpretation of the presence of images of Roman popes in Orthodox churches during Ottoman rule. She also provides a stylistic analysis and outlines two general trends: the contribution and development of typological characteristics of images from the Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods with monuments from the same period in Greece, Serbia, Albania, and Northern Macedonia; Secondly, she shows parallels in terms of the place of images of the popes in the respective compositions, mainly in the composition Adoration of the Victim in the Altar.

Of value is the catalogue, which includes 42 images of Roman popes, presented with their location, dating, inscriptions and possible text of the scroll they hold, a detailed description and their place in the iconographic program of the specific church. The 63 photographs collected, most of which were taken by the doctoral student herself, add considerably to the catalogue, and an additional 40 figures allow comparison with other images.

Teresa Bacheva's dissertation has undeniable merits that can be synthesized as follows:

1. She systematically collects and studies the images of the Roman popes in the churches on the territory of today's Bulgaria in the period from the 15th – 18th centuries.
2. Interprets the images in an interdisciplinary manner in relation to written, pictorial, theological and historical sources.
3. Analyzes the development of the iconography of each individual figure.
4. Presents convincing hypotheses for individual images and for the iconographic programs of churches.
5. Proposes basic principles for the introduction of images of Roman bishops into the mural programs of Orthodox churches in Bulgaria.

The overall understanding of the dissertation convinces clearly about the personal participation of the PhD student in the research activity and shows that the results obtained, and the contributions made are his personal merit.

The abstract gives a clear picture of the work carried out, clearly presenting the content of the individual chapters, and reflecting the main results achieved in the dissertation.

The dissertation work shows that the PhD student Tereza Ivanova Bacheva possesses thorough theoretical knowledge and high executive skills in the scientific specialty Art and Fine Arts, 8.1. Art Theory.

Based on what I have stated, I confidently give my positive assessment of the research carried out, as presented by the dissertation, abstract, results and contributions, therefore I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and academic degree Doctor to Tereza Ivanova Bacheva in the scientific specialty Art Studies and Fine Arts, 8.1. Art Theory.

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marco Scarpa