**Emmanuel Moutafov**[[1]](#footnote-2)

**Some Aspects of the Development of Christian Orthodox Art in the 16th and 17th Centuries: the Testimony of Church Inscriptions and Artists’ Signatures**

**Summary**

This text tries to draw a general view of the development of the Christian Orthodox art in the 16th and 17th centuries. The author represents in brief the main monuments and artists during the above period on the Balkans as well as the interactions between different cultures in historical context. Special interest is given to the art appeared on Mount Athos and the role of Patriarchate of Constantinople as a political and spiritual factor in the Ottoman empire and their influence in the Trans-Danubian principalities. Most of the existing bibliography on this subject is presented and analyzed. In his critical reading of the available publication E. Moutafov suggests for instance that it is more accurate to speak about Cretan painters on Mount Athos, rather than about the presence of a Cretan school in the artistic processes there. On the hand, when speaking of Western/ European influences, he believes that the influencing side should be interested as well, i.e. the West should have been interested in its influence over the Christian East, which is not documented. It is important to note the observation made here, that during the preparation of the mural programs for the temples in Bulgarian lands, the artists used a Greek-language painter’s manual of the type of the First Jerusalem Manuscript, or of the so-called *hermeneia* of the priest Daniel. Also interesting noting is that the Russian “лицевые подлинники” appeared around the same time, which is evidence for a common need of established models across the Orthodox world, regardless of the political situation of the lands where the specific monuments were located. Until then for the author there was no need for written manuals since the tradition was alive and art was passed on from teacher to student and by imitation from good models. This does not mean that painters did not make preparatory sketches (*anthivola*) or did not collect them. One thing is certain though: in spite of the Ottomans’ presence on the Balkans, inscriptions on frescoes in Orthodox churches continued to be the same in the 16th century as the ones during the two previous centuries. This means for Moutafov that the ethnic profile of painters, clergy, and users of this art remained the same. A century later, however, a *hellenization* process began with varying intensity and two forms of manifestation – by the direct use of Greek and manuals in Greek or by encouraging the use of the local language, for instance in the monuments in Romania from the 17th century. In this the author agrees with Helen Evans’ insight that the year 1557, when the term “Byzantium” appeared in research, was in fact an important date for the Christian East because it marked the end of the medieval Orthodox tradition and its transition into the pre-modern period.

1. Dr Emmanuel S. Moutafov is an Associate Professor and a scientific secretary of the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, as well as a member of the General Assembly of the same Academy. He is a Hellenist, Byzantinist and works in the fields of Greek epigraphy and paleography, Orthodox iconography, painter’s manuals and comparative Balkan Studies. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)