

An Immersed World

Review

Tudor DINU

The Phanariot people. Faces from churches of Wallachia and Moldavia
Bucharest: Humanitas, 2018

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Abstract

“The Phanariot people. Faces from churches of Wallachia and Moldavia” by Tudor Dinu represents a fascinating visual history of the people from Romanian principalities in the 17th century and during the first two decades of the 19th century, identified in his travels, on the wonderful church frescoes and contextualized in the richness of the historical civilization, in the social and political movement of those phanariotic times.

Keywords: votive painting, frescoes, faces, apparel, ornament, church, phanariot era.

*How many of us have the capacity and opportunity to fully imagine the true life of an era that lasted more than a century, and who leaved us with a persistent inheritance, even if still partially ignored?*¹ is the author’s question.

About the author:

Tudor Valeriu Augustin Dinu is Professor at the University of Bucharest - the Classical Philology Department where he teaches Greek language, literature and civilization. Throughout his professional activity, he held lectures and conferences on topics that revolve around the Greek spirit, as a visiting professor at the universities of Athens, Berlin, Hamburg, Lund, Kiev, Brno, Sofia, Plovdiv, as well as at numerous Greek scientific societies.

¹ Tudor Dinu, *The Phanariot people. Faces from churches of Wallachia and Moldavia* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2018), 9.

In recent years, he has participated in the most important international congresses of Modern Greek Studies in Granada - Spain 2010, Nicosia - Cyprus 2012, Tbilisi - Georgia 2012, Athens - Greece 2012, Paris - France 2013, Thessaloniki - Greece 2014, Bucharest - Romania 2015, Veliko Tarnovo - Bulgaria 2016, Athens - Greece 2017, Chios - Greece 2017.

His researches in philology, history, ancient Greek, Byzantine and post-Byzantine Greek civilization, as well as in the Hellenism in the Romanian principalities, were materialized in valuable works published in Romania and after that translated in countries such as Greece, Cyprus, France, Czech Republic, Latvia, Ukraine, Georgia. He also published translations from ancient authors as Aristofan, Plutarch, Iamblichos, Seneca, Plinius Maior, and modernists like Iannis Ritsos, Nikos Engonopoulos, Andeas Empirikos, Christos Iannaras, etc.

He is the founder and editor-in-chief of the first Romanian-Journal in Modern Greek Studies *Neograeca Bucharestesia*, and in 2014 he was elected Secretary-General of the European Society of Modern Greek Studies. All these impressive activities echoed until the famous Phanar, and on the Flower Sunday of 2018, one week before Easter, the Bucharest Professor made us proud with his enlightenment by His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who awarded him the Byzantine title *Archon Hypomnematografos*.

About the album:

The Phanariot people. Faces from churches of Wallachia and Moldavia is the recent book of Tudor Dinu, and represents the materialization of an ambitious and complex project alike, meant to delight in its complexity and beauty, and dedicated to the distinguished Ms Ekaterini Sophianou, Archonistis of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa.

Looking for the lost image of the Phanariot people, the author has travelled all over the South of Romania, crossing the Banat, Oltenia, Muntenia and the whole Moldavia in order to identify all those churches which, depending on the area, more or less in despite the vicissitudes of history, still keep on their walls the faces of the aforesaid founders.

This volume saw the light of the print in June 2018, and was released at the Humanitas Bookstore. This event was attended by His Excellency Vasilis Papadopoulos, Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic to Bucharest, historian Georgeta Filitti, philologist and anthropologist Cristina Bogdan and Radu Gârmacea, editor-in-chief of the Publishing House Humanitas.

In the dynamic interventions of these personalities, we are made a foray into those Phanariot times, the hardships and censorship of the political and social regimes, a constant struggle, about people either privileged or not, but united by faith in God.

The author's speech on the event was as impressive as it was touching, shattered around with the characteristic humour gained from contact with all sorts of characters worthy of mention in the summary of his intellectual adventure. This book is a proof of an extensive documentation of the murals, taken from the 238 listed churches. He succeeded to see his dream come true, discovering, touching, admiring and photographing about 135 votive paintings of that time, comprising a thousand of our fellow men represented in situations where they wanted to remain in the memory of posterity, displaying the most beautiful colourfully clothes, gowns, jewellery, weapons, ornaments or haircuts.

The need for such a work is very welcome. In the author's opinion, nowadays society, perpetually and everywhere bombarded with the most diverse images, it was to be expected that the interest in our premodern history would registered a regress.

Thus, at the same Humanitas Publishing House, where he published before *Mihai Viteazul, the Hero of the Greek epic (2008)*, *Dimitrie Cantemir and Nicolae Mavrocordat - political and literary rivalries at the beginning of the 18th century (2011)*, *Phanariot Bucharest. Churches, Ceremonies, Wars (2015)*, *Phanariot Bucharest. Administration, Crafts, Trade (2017)* and who have enjoyed a genuine success abroad, appears in the Romanian language the impressive publication under the title *The Phanariot People. Faces from the churches of Wallachia and Moldova*, being part of the *History* collection, namely *The Cultural and Social History*, according to the highest quality standards, containing 255 pages.

The book is structured in numerous chapters, distinct in the presentation, but interdependent and complementary in content; it abounds in images of extraordinary beauty and clarity, collected by the author in the photographic activity segment of his research.

The book begins with the placement of these frescoes in the historical context and by revealing the desire of those people to leave a testified evidence of their passage and sense of their life.

In addition to notes and bibliography, the album also contains an indispensable glossary so mandatory for the reflection of the Phanariot society, as well as a repertoire of studied edifices. Here, therefore, amazingly concentrated in

one man work, artistic, historical, literary, linguistic, anthropological and technical skills, ordered and executor alike, only adds to our admiration.

All this work sums up more than a book. It is an *immersed world*, as the author beautifully calls it, an extremely successful presentation of those times, in line with the exactness of events, the language used, the description of the social hierarchy, the occupations of each social class and which the author attempts to mirror it by posting these paintings: from the descendants of the great rulers, followed by the great rulers and the boyars, the customs officers, the artisans, the merchants and the painters of the churches, the metropolitan bishops, the deacons, the protopopes, the abbot and the monks of the holy monasteries, the shepherds, the free tenants, a huge painting rendered in an exceptional local colour.

A dowry chest of an undeniable value in the national patrimony; a detailed description of gesticulation, physiognomy, clothing, tailoring, floral symbolism, or geometric inspiration, all that colourness meant to revive a stashed and dusty world, and in whose pleasant mirage you are overwhelmed by the opulence displayed, caught by the curiosity of a personage of those time.

The Philology Department Professor has done a sensational work that is recommended to both readers concerned with this type of literature and to those who are curious to rediscover a controversial world.

The historical past of a nation must be protected and passed on to the future generations in as good as possible conditions, healthy and enriched. For this important reason are often invoked solutions to educate the population in the spirit of love and caring towards the past and implicitly to historical monuments, in the proposed laws on the protection of them, and the creation of a professional accreditation system that only qualified persons should be allow to study and present the past events;² a filter from which the author of the study in question fulfils in its entirety.

In conclusion, in order to continue in the spirit of these certitudes, we should consider the auspicious words of His Holiness Patriarch Ecumenical Bartholomew, very welcomed:

You are an Orthodox Romanian who is honoured by the Ecumenical Patriarchate because you are the bearer of this ecumenical spirit without ethnic barriers (...) The Church needs people with gifts like yours, with intelligence and godliness, inclined to

² M. Shanks and C. Tilley, *Re-Constructing archaeology. Theorie and practice*, Second Edition, (London-New York: Routledge, 1992), 65.

*science, diligently, with the contemporary spirit that characterizes you, but also with interest for patriotic traditions.*³

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³ “Conf. dr. habilit Tudor Dinu înnoobilat de către Patriarhul Ecumenic Sanctiatea Sa, Bartolomeu I al Constantinopolului,” Universitatea din București, accessed June, 20, 2018, <http://www.unibuc.ro/2018/conf-dr-habilit-tudor-dinu-innobilat-de-catre-patriarhul-ecumenic-sanctiatea-sa-bartolomeu-i-al-constantinopolului/>; Aurelian Iftimiu, “Un profesor roman de filologie a primit distincția Patriarhiei Ecumenice în Duminica Floriilor,” *Basilica.ro*, April 2, 2018, accessed June 20, 2018, <http://basilica.ro/un-profesor-roman-de-filologie-a-primit-distinctia-patriarhiei-ecumenice-in-duminica-floriilor/>.