

UDC 72



## LINO BIANCO – THE RING METAPHOR AND THE SPIRIT OF SOFIA AND OTHER ESSAYS

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**Abstract.** This article is a review of the publication *The Ring Metaphor and the Spirit of Sofia and other essays* by Lino Bianco. The book was published by Kite Group, Hamrun, Malta, 2022 with ISBN 978-9918-23-053-2 (Hardback) / 978-9918-23-054-9 (Paperback). Bianco is an architect and an academic and Ambassador Emeritus of the Republic of Malta to the Republic of Bulgaria.

**Keywords:** *book review, architectural history, architectural philosophy, culture of architecture.*

**Rezumat.** Acest articol este o recenzie a publicației lui Lino Bianco *The Ring Metaphor and the Spirit of Sofia and other essays*. Cartea a fost publicată de Kite Group. Hamrun, Malta, 2022, ISBN 978-9918-23-053-2 (Hardback) / 978-9918-23-054-9 (Paperback). Bianco este un arhitect, profesor și ambasador onorific al Republicii Malta în Republica Bulgaria.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *recenzie de carte, istorie arhitecturală, filozofie arhitecturală, cultura arhitecturii.*

### Book review

*The Ring Metaphor and the Spirit of Sofia and other essays* was published last year in Malta by Kite Group [1]. It was endorsed by important scholars and academics (see Figure 1). It has six chapters, articles which are in the journal of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Malta *Melita Theologica*. These chapters follow a foreword and an introduction. The foreword is written by King Simeon II (see Figure 2). It points to a talk given by Bianco, then Ambassador of Malta to the Republic of Bulgaria, at School 32 'St Kliment Ohridski' on 19 April 2018. It gives an idea of the respect that the Tsar has of the author. This foreword is followed by an introduction by the philosopher and cultural theorist and the ambassador emeritus of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Holy See and to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta Professor Vladimir Gradev.

The first chapter is on Sofia. Bianco states that the Bulgarian capital is the ecumenical city of Europe [2]. The second addresses Valletta, the capital city of Malta, as a metaphor [3].

The third is on the idea of truth in buildings of London constructed after World War II [4]. The fourth is on Georg Hegel's idea of Gothic architecture and concludes by suggesting that the architecture of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe is Hegelian [5]. The fifth chapter, written with Saviour Catania, focuses on the French film directed by Alain Resnais *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* [6]. The last chapter, written with Marlene Gatt and Irene Dillon, addresses music [7].

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NEW TITLE

## THE RING METAPHOR AND THE SPIRIT OF SOFIA

### and other essays

**Lino Bianco**  
with a foreword by HM King Simeon II

“This collection of thought-provoking essays written by my colleague Professor Lino Bianco demonstrates the inquisitive and outstanding intellect of the author, and reflects his unique experience in architecture, diplomacy and academia. Significantly, these essays were published in the *Melita Theologica*, a venerable journal issued by our Faculty of Theology. Professor Bianco, through his work, offers a valuable exposition of ideas which will enrich the reader who wishes to engage in a deeper understanding of architecture and related disciplines.”

**DAVID ATTARD** – Chancellor, University of Malta, Msida, Malta

“Professor Lino Bianco's current book reconnects architecture with the artistic and spiritual realms. His erudite studies seek the deep mental and symbolic connections – ‘the soul of space’ – in both historical and current architectural contexts. These essays reveal the timeless existential and mental qualities in the art of building.”

**JUHANI PALLASMAA** – Hon SAFA, Hon FAIA, Int FRIBA, Professor Emeritus of Architecture, Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland

“An excellent addition to the global architectural library. In this book Lino Bianco helps us understand the interplay of space and time as phenomena attached to the production of architecture. Weaving connections between several narratives ranging from historical precedents in Sofia and Valletta to philosophical underpinnings and from drama, music, and religion to Post-War British architecture, this book revitalises the role architecture and art forms play in the construction of physical and social realities.”

**ASHRAF M. SALAMA** – Professor of Architecture and Director of Research, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, United Kingdom

“This collection of papers by Lino Bianco demonstrates his academic intellectual multi-disciplinarian prowess; a manifest testimony of his polymathic dialectic dexterity. Bianco's writings provide proof of his multifaceted attributes both as savant philosophical thinker and scholarly pedagogue. The complex thematics tackled in this publication are testimony to a profound recondite sagacity.”

**RICHARD ENGLAND** – Hon FAIA, Professor Emeritus of Architecture, University of Malta, Msida, Malta

“Lino Bianco gathers some of his papers, previously published in a theological ambiance, in a book. These well written essays are old school meditations on profound topics pertaining to architecture, aesthetics and, why not, theology. This book is a proof that, on top of his many hats, Bianco is also a thinker.”

**AUGUSTIN IOAN** – Professor of History and Theory of Architecture; former Vice-Rector, Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest, Romania



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**Figure 1.** Flyer for the book issued by Kite Group which includes the endorsements.

This publication has been endorsed by a number of scholars. From Malta, it was endorsed by the Chancellor of the University of Malta Professor David Attard and architect Professor Richard England. Foreign scholars include Professor Juhani Pallasmaa (Helsinki, Finland), Professor Ashraf Salama (Glasgow, Scotland) and Professor Augustin Ioan

(Bucharest, Romania). All stated that this book gives an insight to the multi-disciplinary education of an architect-philosopher preoccupied with space, place and time. The book is of interest to scholars, researchers and students of architecture and cultural studies.



A collection of essays has the advantage that each piece of writing can be read as a unit. It is a different experience from that of reading a book. This publication, a compilation of papers, is a journey through a number of themes, generating thoughts and reflections on specific questions pertaining to philosophy, architectural history and cultural studies.

The papers in this book are mainly authored by Lino Bianco, the Ambassador Emeritus of Malta to the Republic of Bulgaria, whose love for Bulgaria stems from scholarly work undertaken on our Capital City over a decade ago. Indeed, a scientific article in which Bianco argued that Sofia is the Ecumenical City par excellence, a truly fitting designation for our Capital, lent this publication its name.

The humanistic education of Bianco is a signature of his diplomatic work in Bulgaria. His intellectual reading of Sofia, and indeed Bulgaria, is inspiring. The question ‘What do you hate about Bulgarians?’ was posted to him by a higher secondary level student in the presence of the media. His response, revealing his understanding of the Bulgarian psyche, was: “You should not speak negatively about your country; it is your guardian. Bulgaria is a lovely country; you have many reasons to feel proud of it and its wonderful people and nature”. Bianco concluded his intervention by making reference to a popular symbol of our country: “Bulgaria is the land of roses: the sharper the thorns, the more beautiful is the rose and it is this that matters most”.

This inspirational statement is truly touching and illustrates ambassador Bianco’s sensitive insights into Bulgaria’s past, present and future.

**Figure 2.** Foreword by Tsar Simeon II.

### About the author

Lino Bianco is an architect, engineer, academic and diplomat who completed his doctorate at the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy (UACEG), Sofia, under the academic supervision of the late Professor Vesselina Troeva [8, 9]. He is currently a full-time resident academic at the University of Malta [10] and visiting professor in several countries including Bulgaria where he is guest lecturer at UACEG [11], and a non-resident ambassador of Malta to Romania and the Republic of Moldova [12]. During his time as non-resident ambassador of Malta to Bulgaria, Bianco was invited and gave speeches at several institutions such the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and other institutions of higher learning and also to schools such as School 32 ‘St Kliment Ohridski’.

The author has been acknowledged by official state awards by the Republic of Bulgaria (Order of the Madara Horseman, First Class, 2018), the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (Cross of Commander Pro Merito Melitensi, 2019), and the Republic of Malta (Member of the Order of Merit, 2021).

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