

PEER REVIEW

**by Prof. Dr. Habil. Georgi Minczew, Department of Slavic Philology, Faculty of Philology,
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for the materials submitted for participation in the competition to hold an academic position
‘Associate Professor’ at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”, field of higher education

2. Humanities, Professional field 2.4. Religion and theology (Christian Art)

In the competition for "associate professor", announced in the State Gazette, issue 99 from 20.11. 2020 and on the website of the "Paisii Hilenadarski" University of Plovdiv for the needs of the Department of Theology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, the only candidate is Adriana Lyubenova from the Department of Theology.

1. **General presentation of the procedure and the candidate:** with a Minutes by a commission appointed by Order P33-611/18. ch. Assistant Professor Dr. Adriana Hristoslavova Lyubenova was admitted to the competition as the only candidate who submitted documents within the specified period.

By order of the Rector of the "Paisii Hilendarski" University of Plovdiv I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury, of the competition, for the academic position of "Associate Professor" at the University of Plovdiv in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.4 Religion and Theology, announced for the needs of Department of Theology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History.

I received in time the documents submitted by Dr. Adriana Lyubenova: 1. Application form; 2. CV; 3. M.A. diploma; 4. Ph.D. diploma; 5. List of scientific works; 6. Certificate of conformity; 7. Annotations of the materials; 8. Declaration of originality; 9. Certificate of work experience; 10. Documents of teaching work.

Dr. A. Lyubenova has submitted a total of 20 scientific papers, 3 studies, 3 monographs, 11 articles. Seven of the attached scientific publications are in foreign journals and collections, the rest (monographs and articles) have been published in Bulgaria.

General presentation of the candidate.

Dr. A. Lyubenova was born in Plovdiv, continued her education in the United States (Bachelor of Fine Arts and Sculpture 1998-2004; Assistant and Chief Assistant in Sculpture Department at George Mason University 2001-2004). Her stay in the USA had a great influence on the development of the candidate's artistic talents, further developed and supplemented in theoretical and practical terms after her return to Bulgaria in 2005. Since then she has been associated with the University of Plovdiv, continuing her education in fields of: Christian art, theology, restoration, icon painting and museum work. She has three master's degrees from: the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts in Plovdiv, The "Paisii Hilendarski" University of Plovdiv and Konstantin Preslavski University of Shumen. In 2014 she defended her doctorate (Ph.D.) in art history at the Institute of Art History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) with a title: "Mosaic art in late antique Philippopolis IV - VI century."

Thanks to her exceptional professional activity and the skill to work with both children and students, A. Lyubenova contributes a lot to the development of the Department of Theology at the University of Plovdiv, she makes a great efforts to strengthen the interest of the youngest generation in the Orthodox icon painting (organizes school in icon painting for children at the Plovdiv Metropolitan Church), conducts scientific tours for pupils and students in Plovdiv museums and Bulgarian monasteries, applies in practice her talent as a painter in the Eastern Orthodox mural (paints the chapel of the University of Plovdiv), is actively involved in the Association of Bulgarian schools abroad, participates in several Bulgarian and international projects. The perfect knowledge of English helps the candidate both in following the latest English publications in the field and in her contacts with foreign scholars during international events organized by PU: summer schools of religion, international conferences and others. I had the opportunity to observe the pedagogical and organizational skills of Dr. A. Lyubenova during the Summer School of Religions in Plovdiv, during her visit under the Erasmus program in the Lodz Department of Slavic Philology, where she gave a series of lectures during the school year. 20018/20019, and I had close observations when I was teaching an elective course in Medieval

Heresiology at the Department of Theology at the University of Plovdiv. I can confidently say that Dr. A. Lyubenova is a rare example of a teacher and scientist who managed to combine his creative talent and specific skills in the field of painting and Orthodox icon painting with in-depth theoretical training in several areas (theology, art history and culture), without which it is difficult to understand the multicultural phenomenon of late antique and medieval Christian Art.

Evaluation of the scientific activity of the candidate

As I had the opportunity to mention above, Dr. A. Lyubenova successfully combines several similar scientific fields in her scientific work. The candidate's scientific articles and monographs demonstrate in-depth knowledge of late antique architecture and art, the semantics of images in sacred spaces and their relationship to the symbolism of liturgical action (see, for example, her articles: The Liturgy and Symbolism of Images in Early Christian Mosaics by Philippopolis; "The Symbolism of 'Bread' in the Mosaic Art of Philippopolis").

The first monograph - "Mosaic Art in Late Antiquity Philippopolis IV-VI century", Plovdiv, 2021, is an extended version of the doctorate of Dr. A. Lyubenova, defended in 2014 (supervisor E. Genova). Although this publication is not presented as a work in the competition for an associate professor, it is worth mentioning that, some of the elements of scientific analysis observed in the monograph presented for "associate professor" are found here: an extensive presentation of historical, cultural and theological context of the epoch from Diocletian to the Nicaean fathers, external influences on the mosaic art in Philippopolis, in-depth study of the symbolism of the individual floral and zoomorphic elements, etc.

The monograph presented for the competition - "Floor mosaics from Philippopolis", Plovdiv, 2021 is a detailed catalog of 9 archaeological sites in the ancient city. The description is subject to the following criteria: description of the building in which the mosaics are located; description of the specific object (mosaic) and its place in the individual rooms. The description and analysis of geometric, floral, zoomorphic and object motifs is done with skill and is consistent with modern research methods and methodologies. And at this point I would like to make three recommendations to the author, which are recommendations, not criticism:

1. It would be better if some of the descriptions are more specified with more data on location, degree of conserving facilities, etc. From this, the study will only benefit.

2. I consider the catalog as a first step towards a comprehensive scientific study with rich photographic material on the late antique Philippopolis mosaics - a European phenomenon that is still not well covered scientifically - publications (scientific publications!) The existing publications are few, scattered in hard-to-reach periodicals and rarely present more comprehensively the semantics of the images, their connection with the sacred space and the liturgical action, the external influences on the Philippopolis studios. Just like Dr. A. Lyubenova does it. I realize that this is not an easy task: copyright issues, personal ambitions, etc. But the Plovdiv mosaics deserve a serious summarizing work and Dr. A. Lyubenova is able of creatin it.

3. I would recommend to the author to deepen her research on the relationship between mosaic images, their place in the sacred space and the semiosis image-liturgical act. In several articles she makes a serious request for such a direction of research. Of course, the early Christian ritual has been modestly studied due to the lack of written sources, but it is here that I see the role of art historians who could fill in the blanks of missing documents.

CONCLUSION

The materials submitted for review meet all of the requirements of the normative documents in the Republic of Bulgaria. I positively evaluate the pedagogical and scientific activity of Dr. **Adriana Hristoslavova Lyubenova** and give my **positive assessment** and recommend to the esteemed Scientific Jury to prepare a report on her election to the academic position of "Associate Professor" at PU "Paisii Hilendarski" in the professional field 2.4 Religion and Theology (scientific specialty: Christian Art) .

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Prepared by :

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