

PEER REVIEW

by Prof. Maria Antonova Schnitter, DSc, Paisii Hilendarski Plovdiv University in connection with the competition for the occupation of the academic position “Associate Professor” in Higher Education field 2. “Humanities”; Professional field 2.4 “Religion and Theology (Christian Art)”, promulgated in State Gazette, Issue 99/20.11.2020

By Order No P33-610 dated 18.02.2021 I was appointed as a member of a scientific jury in the competition described above. In the competition for “Associate Professor”, announced in State Gazette, Issue 99/20.11.2020 and on the website of Paisii Hilendarski Plovdiv University for the needs of the Department of Theology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, as the only candidate who participate is **Chief Assistant Dr. Adriyana Hristoslavova Lyubenova** from the same Department.

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

I have known Adriyana Lyubenova since the beginning of her studies at the Plovdiv University (2009) and her work as a part-time lecturer (2012) and I have had the opportunity to follow her entire academic and creative path of development. I will immediately state that her commitment to the construction of Plovdiv Theology is an important factor in strengthening the Department as a scientific, educational, and administrative unit.

Within the term established by law, Dr. A. Lyubenova submitted a set of documents that meet the formal requirements. She is included in the announced competition with three monographs, three studies, and ten articles. One of the monographs contains her dissertation work from 2014 entitled “*Mosaic Art in Late Antique Philippopolis*”, and the other two – “*Word and Image*” (2013) and to a lesser extent “*Floor Mosaics from Philippopolis*” (2021) are thematically related to the announced competition.

The three studies (two of them published before the defense of the dissertation), as well as the articles (half of them also before 2014) are almost entirely in the field of Christian art and are published mainly in collections from conferences in the country and abroad.

2. General characteristics of the activity of the candidate

In the scientific activity of the candidate in the period after the defense of her doctoral dissertation two main thematic areas emerge. The first is presented by the articles, initially presented as reports at scientific forums that examine the Russian-Bulgarian contacts and influences in the field of church art. Although limited in volume due to the formal requirements of the respective editorial boards, they help to outline the general characteristics of these cultural interactions. The second thematic area is more definitely focused on the study of the rich cultural and historical heritage of Plovdiv. Here I would like to pay special attention to the studies *“The Liturgy and the Symbolism of the Images in the Early Christian Mosaics of Philippopolis”* (2016) and the articles *“Peculiarities of the Religious Life in Philippopolis”* (2016) and *“For the Mosaicists”* (2019). They testify, on the one hand, to A. Lyubenova’s in-depth knowledge of the peculiarities of creative work in late antiquity, and, on the other hand, to her ability to look analytically into the religious and cultural-historical context.

Four of the ten articles are co-authored. There are no documents for the distribution of copyrights.

The main work with which Dr. Lyubenova participates in the competition is the monograph *“Floor Mosaics from Philippopolis”* (2021). It presents for the first time detailed and summarized information about the accessible and known so far objects of religious and secular architecture from the period IV-VI century. The catalog, which includes a detailed description of the mosaic canvases published so far in nine archeological sites of the ancient city, undoubtedly demonstrates the high professionalism of the candidate in the research area and will certainly serve as a basis for future analytical research.

The monograph begins with the formulation of the unsolved problem of Bulgarian terminology in art history. Unfortunately, the reader remains dissatisfied with the lack of at least an initial attempt to define for example some of the basic concepts and terms used below. I would recommend that this gap be filled in the future. The need for an illustrated dictionary of terms in mosaic art in Bulgarian is unconditional, although such a research task far exceeds the thematic boundaries of this competition.

The readers would also benefit from a clearer structuring of the exposition – even the coordinates (or, if you will, the addresses!) of the described archeological sites are missing (with the exception of the one at 4, Pushkin Street). It is especially important in future

revisions to provide clear information about the origin and copyright of the illustrations used, which would encourage a professional recording and publication of the accumulated archaeological data.

Another task ahead is the placement of the described buildings with ritual purpose in the broader context of the religious life of Philippopolis and ancient Thrace in the period of the imposition of Christianity as the (only) official religion in the Roman Empire. This will allow for a liturgical analysis of the preserved mosaic images and thus will contribute to the establishment of a more comprehensive picture of the history and social functions of church art.

3. Additional notes

Along with the scientific contributions of Dr. Lyubenova, it is important to note her exceptional activity in teaching – both during curricular (she has prepared and leads 9 different disciplines) and extracurricular. The student activities organized by her – study tours, organization and participation in exhibitions and scientific conferences, the mass involvement of students in Theology in the project “Student Internships”, as well as in various media events – contribute to the establishment of academic spirit and sense of community between our graduates, and in the academic college. Her work on the painting of the Sv. Paisii Hilendarski University Chapel, together with the students from the Icon Painting Studio, will leave a lasting mark in the spiritual history of our University. The parallel efforts that A. Lyubenova makes in her work as a member of the Management Board of the Association of Bulgarian Schools Abroad (ABUCH) take a lot of time that she could devote to her own scientific growth, but on the other hand contribute to the promotion of the Bulgarian language and culture around the world and open roads for Bulgarians from all over the world to their homeland (and to their home universities). I hope that in the future she will be able to achieve the difficult balance between her academic development and her social commitments.

CONCLUSION

Based on all that has been said so far, it can be summarized that the candidate for the academic position of “Associate Professor” Dr. Adriyana Hristoslavova Lyubenova has submitted for participation in the competition documents and materials that meet all the requirements of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria,

the Regulations for its implementation and the respective Regulations of Paisii Hilendarski Plovdiv University.

The candidate in the competition has presented a significant number of scientific papers published after the materials used in the defense of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”, which contain original scientific contributions. Adriyana Lyubenova’s scientific and teaching qualification is unquestionable.

After getting acquainted with the materials and scientific papers presented in the competition, as well as the analysis of their significance and the scientific contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and recommend to the esteemed Scientific Jury to prepare a report to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History for the selection of Adriyana Hristoslavova Lyubenova for the academic position “Associate Professor” at Paisii Hilendarski Plovdiv University under Professional field 2.4 “*Religion and Theology*”, in the scientific specialty *Theology – Christian Art*, for the needs of the Department of Theology.

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Prepared by:

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