Assessment

on the competition to fulfil the academic position of professor

in discipline No 2.2: history and archaeology (History of Late Antiquity: Christian Prosopography), announced by SG No. 31/12.04.2019

A candidate: Dr. Rumen Zhivkov Boyadjiev, Assoc. Prof. In CSVP "Prof. Ivan Dujcev"

Author of the assessment:

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The only applicant for this position, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rumen Zhivkov Boyadjiev has submitted a total of 13 scientific works for assessment - two monographs, three studies and eight articles. One of the presented monographs is a Doctorate of Philosophy dissertation of the candidate and should not be taken into account for the present application.

The most substantial number of these works – the monograph presented and six more publications – deal with the problem of female holiness in various forms and in different parts of the late Roman Empire – mostly in the region of north-west Africa. The author presents pieces of research covering other themes: historical geography - one about "Africa" and a second one about South eastern Europe); two studies on the famous graffiti drawings from the monastery near village of Ravna, Provadiay, as well as a very interesting study on the perception of the ideals of the Eastern Monk in Christian Gaul in the 5th c. Out of these, two are published in international journals and the rest in prestigious Bulgarian editions!

The main work submitted for assessment in the competition is Rumen Boyadzhiev’s monograph with a long, descriptive and slightly confusing title, due to the two chronological frames: *The Lost Africa Sacra. The Late Antiquity North Africa IV – VI C. (Prosopographia feminarum Cristianarum. Pars. II/Africa, SAECC. IV – VII* ). One the one hand, this choice seems odd since the region is distant from the Balkans and the issues are unrelated to those that occur in nowadays Bulgarian lands. But, on the other hand, the topic seems to me a very good choice as far as it breaks a tradition in our science, which dictates to undertake historical, archaeological, other related studies only if they have a connection with the lands where the Bulgarian state was established or have a link with Bulgarian history.

Choosing this theme, the author has overcome this purely provincial attitude - the offspring of belated development and a decade of isolation. Furthermore, with this topic the candidate introduces a considerable amount of information into scientific fabric of Bulgarian scientific community. The topics addressed are indeed dealt with the global scientific space, but not so in the Bulgarian community, and the candidate does a good job of synthesizing this dense literature comprehensively. Thus, the candidate expands the basis for comparison of works pertaining to the research period: works in our community mostly address the Apennine peninsula, which is the centre of the Roman Empire, but very rarely use written sources from other Roman provinces. As the author has noted, the territories and the period in question have a very cursory study in our country. Here are excluded some general patristics examinations or textbooks, which have other purposes and objectives. Overall, I would like to highlight the scientific importance of this monograph, which I have already included in the bibliographies of some of my university courses.

The assessed monography is divided into several parts. At the beginning is an "historical framework" of the research area for the period spanning from II BC to VI AD which briefly outlines the geographical distribution and historical fate of northwest Africa in the specified time (map attached). A synthesized – but sufficiently comprehensive – review of the economic development of these areas under Roman rule follows. The economic heyday easily explains the construction activities in these territories, including churches and huge basilicas, which are rarely found in the other parts of the Roman Empire in such dimensions. The work offers in essence an ecclesiastic history of north-west Africa in the early Christian era, which in spite its conciseness gives a lot of details with an excellent overview of sources and a rich literature review, All of these are of significant importance for the correct assessment. Given the theme of the book, a special emphasis is put upon the early Christian martyrdom in the research area. However, it seems to me that such a scrupulous division of the Martyrs in paragraphs by types of torture is unjustified.

For the period following the formal permission of Christianity, the work presents the diocesan network with a detailed list of the Christian antiquities in various cities by provinces – total about fifty-five cities. Here, in places, the candidate has indulged himself in details that seem irrelevant to me – such as, for example a detailed descriptions of the various temples. To each diocese was added a list of famous bishops having serve there, which results in a very convenient to use guide, again with a nice bibliography and sources.

The second part of this monograph is occupied by a prosopography of female saints only, or as the author has coined them, "women of light", totally a hundred and sixty in number. This catalogue is a continuation of an older study, devoted to the feminine sanctity of the Apennines covering the same period. This method of organizing the material is very much reader-friendly, convenient to use and full of information. In the Bulgarian historiography such studies are definitely scarce – they also serve as a good basis for further research. This catalogue is also very detailed and equipped with the relevant sources and literature. In places I have reservations about its composition, which is too extended, although the logic of the author is clear - to include persons connected in some way to the area. Finally, I would like to add that the author has indexed all the citations, which is rarely done in our field, and that make the work completely usable.

Assoc. Prof. Boyadzhiev has six more articles on the female holiness in the Western Roman Empire. He examines therein several interesting points related to the modern notion of *gender*. These works along with the monograph examined above are characteristic of an interdisciplinary approach since the author uses sources of different nature – epistolary, epigraphic and archaeological. In these articles he examines not only the question of Christianity among the women of the early Christian age and their role in its development, especially in the midst of the higher layers of the Roman society, but also other *accidental* issues – en effect fundamental - the life cycle of the Roman woman: the age of her marriage, giving birth, duration of marriages, widowhood, healing, aging, death, etc.

The author has presented two studies about the graffiti of the monastery near the village of Ravna, Provadiay, one of which is a short version of the other. They are one of the few dedicated to this abundant material, which has not yet been studied enough. R. Boyadzhiev did not give in to the temptation of wide interpretations – rightly pointing out that some of the images may not only have symbolic meaning but also decorative (in spite of his urge for highlighting the artistic value of the images). In these articles he has studied a wide array of comparable material from different parts of the Christian world and has extracted considerable information from these images. However, some more research could be added here and the parallels with other parts of medieval Bulgaria and the Balkan Peninsula could be drawn.

Заслужава отбелязване и изследването му върху един практически непознат в нашата историография въпрос – този за прочутото раннохристиянско монашество в районите на дн. Южна Франция, и специално за монашеските общности на остров Лерин. Тази проблематика също е много слабо застъпена в нашата историография и има важно познавателно значение.

It is noteworthy that R. Boyadzhiev had explored an issue that is not familiar to our field of historiographic studies – it deal with the famous early Christian monastic community in present southern France, and more precisely the monastic communities on the island of Lerin. This issue is also very poorly researched in Bulgarian historiography and has contributed significantly to our knowledge.

A special article examines the Roman presence of the middle-Danube limes in the period from II century to V century and its background for the emergence of new cities and the colonization of these regions. It focuses on the Christianisation of this area, as well as its Christian history. The author’s observations on the famous town of Sirmium, which played such an important role in the following centuries, are contributing to the field.

In addition to all his academic works, Assoc. Prof. R. Boyadzhiev is editor and compiler of the Annual of the University of Sofia -CSBS *Prof Ivan Dujcev* from 2002 to 2018, of Studia Slavico-Byzantina et Mediaevalia Europensia, as well as of two collected volumes of conference papers. He has a teaching workload at the Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" of 280 hours – three lecture courses. Two of them are basic – "History of Byzantium" and "Balkan history", and one elective – "Holy places on the Balkans". He has participated and takes part in six scientific projects – two international (France and Cyprus), and four national ones, of which three at the FSI and one in the SU-ARS. He is a head of one of the ongoing national projects. In an enclosed report of his quotations, the applicant has 53 confirmed citations of his publications, out of which 31 were selected by him and appended to the application, 22 citations can be found on Google by exact match of the title of his works. It is worth noting that some of the quotations are made by internationally renowned scholars in basic works on mediaeval period (eg. V. Tupkova-Zaimova, P. Schreiner).

Finally, I would like to declare clearly that as a member of the scientific commission, I will support Assoc. Dr. Rumen Zhivkov Boyadzhiev and I will allow myself to recommend to the Honourable Scientific Council to elect him to the academic position of Professor!

August 2, 2019

Plovdiv Prof. Dimo Cheshmedzhiev