

## Promotion Review of a Candidate's Application for Professorship

by Prof. Liliana Vidinova Simeonova, Institute for Balkan Studies & Center of Thracology (BAS), on behalf of Roumen Zhivkov Boiadzhiev, the only applicant for the academic position of full professor in Professional Field 2.2: History and Archaeology, Research Area: Late Antiquity (Christian Prosopography), advertised in *DV 57/26.06.2020*.

Dr. Boiadzhiev's long-time field of research is Late Antique Christianity. Of the numerous publications he has authored prior to his applying for this position, particularly noteworthy are his book on the Late Antique cities in the *Strymon* and the *Nestos* river valleys and his *Prosopographia Feminarum Christianarum /Saec. IV–VI/, Pars I*. As an applicant for the academic position of full professor, Assoc. Prof. Roumen Boiadzhiev has submitted three monographs to be reviewed by the seven-member Review Committee.

Firstly, there is Dr. Boiadzhiev's monograph titled *The Lost Africa Sacra*, etc. (Sofia: Paradigma, 2019), 491 p. + one map. It focuses on the Roman provinces of North Africa, and specifically the five old Roman provinces in the Maghreb, in the 4<sup>th</sup> through the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. The book offers an account of the different facets of Late Antique Christianity in North Africa, with an emphasis on Christian urbanism, bishops, and saintly women. In addition, there is an appendix to the text containing a prosopographical corpus of local female saints and other Christian women who appear to have lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> through the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

Boiadzhiev's approach to his subject of study is interdisciplinary: he draws on a wide variety of sources (literary, epigraphic, and archaeological) in order to examine the transformations occurring in the cities of Latin North Africa in Late Antiquity. More importantly, he reassesses the varied body of written material that has survived from Africa and, at some points, questions its authorship, audience and function, as well as its historical value to the modern scholar.

As could be seen from the bibliography cited in his monograph, Dr. Boiadzhiev is familiar with the vast corpus of literature on the subject. The book takes account of recent research on topics such as the barbarian 'invasions' in Latin North Africa, periodization, and questions of decline or continuity, as well as the current interest in Church councils, Orthodoxy, and heresy. Last but not

least, Boiadzhiev pays special attention to the economic situation in the West African “Horn” in the 4<sup>th</sup> through the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

After a brief survey of North-Western Africa’s history in Classical Antiquity, Boiadzhiev offers a detailed account of what he calls “the provincial situation in Late Antique North Africa” in the 3<sup>rd</sup> through the 6<sup>th</sup> century. It is in this relation that he explores the impact of Diocletian’s reforms upon Latin Africa’s territorial-administrative division as well as upon its economic development, and underscores the uniqueness of the North African urbanism and economy in that time period. And it is within the wider urban context that Boiadzhiev tackles the nature of Christianization in the North African cities. In a case by case study, he considers the appropriation of elements of the classical urban heritage for Christian use and the construction of new Christian buildings.

Martyrdom in Latin North Africa is another major topic in Boiadzhiev’s book. The history of the African Church begins in AD 180 with a small group of martyrs. After an interval of twenty years, there was a renewed series of martyrdoms; about the year 200, there was a violent persecution at Carthage and in the provinces held by the Romans. One of the most important events was the martyrdom in Carthage of Perpetua and Felicitas in AD 203. We gain information about the various phases in the persecution of African Christians primarily from the *Martyrdom of St. Perpetua* and Tertullian’s treatises. Boiadzhiev draws additional evidence of the treatment of African Christians by the Roman authorities from the *acta* of the African martyrs.

Carthage was again a focal point of Christian North Africa with the figure of Cyprian, bishop of this town where he was martyred in AD 258. Boiadzhiev dwells upon the collection of Cyprian’s letters in order to show that, by that time, the Church in North-Western Africa had already become a rich and powerful institution. Further, Boiadzhiev presents cases of individual and collective martyrdoms of clerics, soldiers, entire families, and even children. Also, he notes that, on certain occasions, Christians launched brave anti-pagan actions, which ended up with the tortuous death of the people involved in them. For the African Christians, persecution and martyrdom did not end with the edicts of religious tolerance of AD 311 and 313. Even in the 5<sup>th</sup> century they suffered persecution under the Vandals, a Germanic tribe that, having converted to Arianism, invaded Roman Africa. (It is worth noting, however, that the attitude of the Arian Christian Vandal government towards the Catholic community was not always adverse.)

As for the bishoprics that were founded in Latin North Africa, their boundaries are hard to be defined. The Roman political authority would periodically rearrange the provincial divisions: on various occasions the ecclesiastical authorities re-adjusted the limits of their respective jurisdictions to those of the civil power. However, while these limits were liable to successive rectification there were cases when they were not even clearly marked. (Here, an important addition to Boiadzhiev's bibliography would be A. Leone, "Bishops and Territory: The Case of Late Roman and Byzantine North Africa", *DOP* 65/66 (2011–2012), pp. 5–27.)

The next section of the book is concerned with the religious changes in the period under consideration. It challenges some of the certainties that have arisen in the consideration of North African Christianity, including the tensions between Donatist, Catholic, and Arian. Informal primacy was exercised by the Archdiocese of Carthage, a metropolitan archdiocese also known as "Church of Carthage". As has been noted by Boiadzhiev, North African Christianity reached its peak under St. Augustine, bishop of Hippo Regius. St. Augustine developed his doctrine of the Church principally in reaction to the Donatists. (This sect developed and grew in North Africa causing unrest and threatened riots in Carthage connected to the bishop controversy. As bishop, Augustine campaigned against Donatism; through his efforts, Orthodoxy gained the upper hand.)

The final section of the book is concerned with urbanism in the West African Roman provinces in Late Antiquity. In a case by case study, Boiadzhiev explores the cities of the five provinces in that area (i.e., *Africa Proconsularis*, *Numidia*, *Byzacena*, *Mauretania Sitifensis*, and *Mauretania Caesarensis*), highlighting the connection between the historical sources and the archaeological events. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, under Byzantine rule bishops appear to have played an important role in the managing of properties. The connection recorded between churches and productive complexes in urban areas suggests, on the one hand, the existence of a productive activity controlled by the Church and, on the other hand, the presence of rules, which controlled the reuse of buildings in urban areas in that time period.

As I noted at the beginning, there is an appendix to Boiadzhiev's monograph, which is a prosopographical corpus containing data about the Christian women in North Africa in the 4<sup>th</sup> through the 7<sup>th</sup> century: *Prosopographia Feminarum Christianarum, Pars II /Africa, Saec. IV–VII/*. Sources cited include histories, literary texts, inscriptions, and miscellaneous written

sources. While the three-volume PLRE (*Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, Cambridge University Press, 1970–1992) collectively describes many of the people attested or claimed to have lived in the Roman Empire from AD 260 to AD 641 Boiadzhiev's corpus focusing on the Christian women of Late Antique Latin Africa throws additional light on the roles played by women in the spread of Christianity.

The period under discussion in Boiadzhiev's monograph bore witness to more than political transitions and administrative re-organization: it saw the adoption of Christianity in Roman North Africa, Germanic rule and Arianism, and the Byzantine *reconquista* under Justinian the Great. The five provinces in the north-west of Africa that are chosen by Boiadzhiev present different aspects: while there are areas characterized by intensive urbanization there are also other areas (such as *Byzacena*) with a lower quantity of urban areas. *The Lost Africa Sacra* fits into a recent stream of research, which is the result of a rise in interest toward Late Antiquity in North Africa. In an effort to systematically examine and organize the data available, Boiadzhiev has encompassed a wide range of material, including secondary sources, which have been published since the mid-1800s to the present. In addition to the extraordinary amount of material, extensively researched, Boiadzhiev's *The Lost Africa Sacra* breaks ground on the introduction of the study of Late Antique African Christianity in modern Bulgarian historiography.

The other two books of Dr. Boiadzhiev's, the one primarily dealing with the letters, which St. Jerome and St. Augustine wrote to and about women and the other one dealing more broadly with the correspondence between high-ranking clergy and Christian women in the fifth and sixth centuries, make a further contribution to the study of Christianity in the Late Roman Empire in general as well as in Latin North Africa in particular. They are titled, as follows: *St. Jerome and St. Augustine: Prosopographical Portraits and Letters to and about Women* (Paradigma, 2020) and *Between the Decline of Late Antiquity and the Approaching Middle Age. High-Ranking Clergy and Their Letters to Christian Women in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Paradigma, 2020).

The study period of Boiadzhiev's *St. Jerome and St. Augustin* is relatively short, from AD 380 to 430. In its introductory part, Boiadzhiev presents a brief survey of the processes taking place in the period under consideration: the demise of the Western part of the Roman Empire, the survival of its Eastern counterpart, the Church councils (both the ecumenical and the local ones), and the

contribution of prominent Christian thinkers such as St. Jerome and St. Augustine to the shaping of new mentality in the Late Antique world. The second chapter, which is nearly ninety pages long, consists of two parts, as follows: the first one presents a detailed study of St. Jerome's life and career while the second part contains prosopographical data of the contemporary women with whom St. Jerome exchanged letters or whom he mentioned in some of his writings. The third chapter of the book deals with St. Augustin, who was one of the most prolific Early Christian writers, and his correspondence with North African holy women, in the later fourth century and the first three decades of the fifth century.

The other book titled *Between the Decline of Late Antiquity and the Approaching Middle Age* appears to be a sequel to the first one. The study period of this book could rightfully be called the Golden Age of Christian epistolography. (The letter became a popular literary form in the fourth century and combined Christian and classical Greek traditions.) By tracing the careers of prominent African Christian writers, such as Evodius, bishop of Usalis, and Fulgentius, bishop of Ruspe, as well as by drawing information on the letters they wrote to Christian women, Boiadzhiev has managed to paint a colorful picture of daily life in North-African Christian communities, with an emphasis on the various roles, which women played in it. In this study, there are also represented one patriarch of Antioch, Severus, as well as several high-ranking Italian clergymen, namely Bishop Enodius of Pavia, Pope Hormisdas and Pope Gregory the Great. They all wrote letters to women or otherwise referred to women in their writings, including formal documents.

After taking into consideration both the candidate's documented academic results and his contribution to the research field of Late Antique Christianity, I highly recommend him for the academic position of full professor. As a member of the Review Committee, I vote in the affirmative for him to get elected as professor in Professional Field 2.2: History and Archaeology, Research Area: Late Antiquity.

18 September 2020

Signature: