

**R E V I E W**  
**BY PROF. BOYKA TSIGOVA D.Sc.**

Of the dissertation titled “*The Hero Archetype in Ancient and Medieval Armenian Literature*”, submitted for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree **Doctor** in professional field 2.1. Philology, academic specialty “*Literatures of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia (Armenian Literature)*”,  
by **Antoaneta Milanova Angelova**

Antoaneta Angelova was enrolled in a PhD program by individual study in the field of 2.1. Philology, doctoral program *Literatures of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia (Armenian Literature)* at the Department of “Classical East” on October 15, 2024, by order RD 20-1954/14.10.2024. She was discharged ahead of schedule on June 16, 2025, with an electronic report by the Dean of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, ref. № 70-04-659/18.06.2025. In 2001, she obtained a Master’s degree in Armenian Philology from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, with a second major in French Language and Literature (three years of full-time study).

Since 2002, she has been an Assistant Professor in Armenian Literature at Sofia University, Department of “Classical East”, specialty Armenian Studies and Caucasiology. Since 2000, she has been an associate member of the International Association of Armenian Studies (AIEA).

The submitted dissertation represents a profound academic study. It stands out for its comprehensive and well-structured composition and explores a field rarely developed in Bulgarian Armenian studies—namely, the systematic examination of the hero archetype in Armenian literature from antiquity to the early middle Ages.

The total length of the dissertation is 408 pages, including 397 pages of scholarly text and appendices—tables containing a typology of heroes, and a glossary of key Armenian terms and concepts. The appendices directly support the main text and facilitate academic work with the material. The work includes an 8-page bibliography with sources divided into two sections: primary sources and specialized academic studies in Bulgarian, Russian, Armenian, French, and English. The main text of the dissertation is very well organized. The author constructs the study in a logically consistent manner, with an introduction, four main chapters, and a conclusion. She notes, “The structure of the study follows not the chronology of the texts, but the logic of the construction

of the heroic image itself—from its cosmogony and mythological origins to its historical and moral realization in literary tradition” (p. 12). Each chapter builds on the previous one, forming a coherent narrative with clear intermediate conclusions.

**The topic** is both innovative and socially relevant, as it emphasizes the role of the heroic in shaping cultural and national identity, including through comparative aspects with other Indo-European cultures. The development of the topic in the dissertation marked by a broad cultural-historical horizon and an impressive command of Armenian literary material.

**The introduction** outlines the theoretical framework of the research. The goals, tasks, object, and subject of the study are clearly defended. The choice of topic and its relevance are good substantiated and the terminology and theoretical apparatus are well argued. The scope of the research is defined as “...an analysis of the significance and manifestations of the heroic in images from the Armenian literary tradition, focusing on mythological, religious, military, and historical heroes” (p. 7). In other words, the author combines contemporary methods of literary and cultural analysis.

Regarding **the aim** of the study, the author states: “The aim of this work is to trace what it means to be a hero in the various layers of Armenian verbal tradition—from pagan myths to the Christian chronicle tradition” (p. 10). In line with this goal, the analytical approach and conclusions are developed.

Thanks to the interdisciplinary nature of the applied methodological approach, the understanding of the hero supports as “a deep structure through which culture articulates the boundary between the human and the divine” (p. 17).

From a conceptual perspective, a merit of the dissertation is the correctly constructed and successfully developed **theoretical framework**. In addition to the literary approach, it integrates methods from psychology, religious studies, philosophy, mythology, history, and folkloristic.

**The First chapter** establishes the conceptual base and justifies the analytical tools used with respect to the examined material. The author relies on Carl Gustav Jung’s theory of archetypes, applying it to Armenian material and combining it with Joseph Campbell’s “Hero’s Journey” model.

Antoaneta Angelova adopts Jung’s hero archetype as “a deep and universal symbol encapsulating the journey of self-discovery, transformation, and integration,” which, in this

capacity, “helps better understand the image of the hero and its evolution over time and across genres” (p. 39).

In the section “Other Theories of the Hero,” the author includes conceptual aspects from the works of Vladimir Propp, Georges Dumézil, and Northrop Frye. Although outside the primary scope of her study, their theories—with their universal symbols and cultural models—contribute to revealing “the deep psychological, cultural, and structural foundations of the hero’s journey,” demonstrating its lasting significance across cultures and eras (p. 72), including for understanding the hero in ancient and medieval Armenian literature.

**Chapters Two and Three** analyze Armenian mythological and historiographical texts. The author presents translations and interpretations of excerpts from works such as *History of the Armenian People* by Movses Khorenatsi, Pawstos Buzand, Eliseus, Agathangelos, and Lazar Parpetsi. The focus of chapter two is on the image of the mythological hero, while chapter three deals with royal or warrior heroes in early Armenian literature.

In both chapters, the analyses systematically tied to the historical and cultural context, which, according to the author, is essential for understanding the hero’s image in Armenian literature. Particularly noteworthy is the comparison between the heroes in Eliseus and Pawstos Buzand, showing how symbolic power preserve in ideologically distinct contexts.

Based on carefully selected mythological, legendary, and heroic figures from key texts, the author distinguishes between mythological heroes (godlike, related to creation), warrior-heroes (defenders of the people), and secular or sacred kings. Angelova notes, that “The mythological hero remains a structuring element in the literary and spiritual fabric of Armenian identity, evolving from myth to history, from paganism to Christianity” (p. 139). Furthermore, royal and warrior hero figures “can be seen as embodying ancient Armenian archetypes...carrying elements of pagan heroic heritage, but refracted through a Christian understanding of sacrifice, faith, and service to the community” (p. 248). These transitions viewed not only as genre transformations but also as cultural adaptations to changing socio-religious realities. A significant conclusion drawn by note: “They are not merely characters from the past, but bearers of a lasting moral message combining valor, wisdom, and faith” (p. 249).

Methodologically, chapters two and three are logically interconnected and successfully apply the “*case study*” approach used in the social sciences. Angelova convincingly demonstrates that the Armenian hero archetype reflects the worldview and social attitudes of generations.

She confirms this interdisciplinary approach by stating: “Joseph Campbell’s ‘Hero’s Journey’ model proves a productive tool for comparative analysis, but applied to Armenian material, it reveals many culturally specific modifications. The Armenian tradition does not mechanically follow the archetypal sequence but transforms it according to its internal logic and spiritual needs. This allows us to see not just universal structures but a cultural interpretation where myth, history, and spirituality intertwine” (p. 25 of the abstract).

**The Fourth chapter** is devoted to an in-depth analysis of the heroic epic *Daredevils of Sassoun*. The epic comprises four narrative branches: *Sanasar and Baghdasar*, *Mher the Elder*, *David of Sassoun*, and *Mher the Younger*.

A further merit of the dissertation is how the author applies Joseph Campbell’s *monomyth* model to all four branches. She identifies three typical stages across them: Departure/Call to Adventure, Initiation/Path of Trials, and Return.

According to Antoaneta Angelova, the epic cycle is part of a broader model for the evolution of the archetype, shaped by various cultural, historical, and religious factors. She reaches significant conclusions, such as: “The hero’s development in the epic follows a universal structure...marked by the synthesis of pagan, Christian, and folk motifs” (p. 297).

Her analysis of cyclicity, predictability, and mythological symbolism is supported with scholarly precision and numerous examples. Particularly vivid is the image of Mher, who “embodies traits of ancient solar deities and Christian ascetics, sheltered in the rock of fate – Mheri durn” (p. 381). The image of Mher the Younger is interpreted as eschatological: “He does not simply retreat into the rock – he withdraws from the world as an embodiment of hope for renewal... He does not die, but awaits the final moment of his people's salvation” (pp. 383–384).

Additional strengths of the dissertation include its clear and stylistically rich academic language. This is unsurprising, considering that Angelova speaks five languages—Armenian, English, French, Russian, and Spanish—and is a respected translator for numerous Bulgarian and EU institutions.

**The Abstract** corresponds well to the dissertation’s content, successfully highlighting key analyses and conclusions that support the research’s primary academic goal.

Angelova has also published three articles related to the dissertation topic.

In conclusion:

Antoaneta Angelova's dissertation presents numerous original scholarly contributions that underscore its importance. Supporting the list of contributions provided by the doctoral candidate, I would particularly highlight the following:

- Selection and introduction of rare, unexplored, or little-known Armenian manuscript sources;
- Impressive number of original translations and interpretations of key Armenian literary passages;
- Identification of a typology of heroic figures in the examined texts;
- Potential applicability of the model in curricula for Armenian Philology, Comparative Literature, and Cultural Studies.

The dissertation has practical value and, even in its current form, can be used in educational activities within the Armenian Studies specialty. I am also convinced it is suitable for use in other university programs in the humanities.

I recommend the dissertation be published as a book, as it is ready for prepress and, given how little known these aspects of Armenian culture are in Bulgaria, its publication would undoubtedly contribute to the reception of Armenian culture and deepen our knowledge of Armenia as a country and people.

**Based on my positive evaluation of the dissertation's qualities and the author's demonstrated erudition and research abilities, I confidently propose to the esteemed academic committee:**

**Assistant Antoaneta Milanova Angelova to be admitted for defense and awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 2.1. Philology (Literatures of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia – Armenian Literature)**

**July 28, 2025**

**Reviewer:**



Prof. Boyka Tsigova D.Sc.

