REVIEW

ON THE SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION OF

SENIOR ASSISTANT PROFESSOR ELMIRA MLADENOVA VASILEVA, PH.D.

CANDIDATE IN THE COMPETITION FOR THE ACADEMIC POSITION "ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR" IN THE FIELD 2. HUMANITIES, PROFESSIONAL DIRECTION 2.2. HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY, SPECIALTY "MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY HISTORY" (FOREIGN MISSIONS TO THE BALKANS 18TH – 19TH CENTURIES) FOR THE NEEDS OF THE SECTION "BALKANS 15TH – 19TH CENTURIES" OF THE INSTITUTE OF BALKAN STUDIES WITH CENTER OF THRACIAN STUDIES – BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

The procedure for holding a competition for the academic position "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional direction 2.2. History and Archaeology, Specialty "Modern and Contemporary History" (Foreign Missions to the Balkans 18th – 19th Centuries) for the needs of the Section "The Balkans in the 15th – 19TH Centuries" of IBSTS - BAS, is according to an announcement published in the Durzhaven Vestnik, No. 63/01.08.2025.

The procedure for announcing the competition and admitting candidates to participate in it is proper from the point of view of the requirements of the Law of Development of Academic Personnel and the Regulations for its implementation. The stipulated legal deadlines and procedural requirements have been met and the necessary sets of documents have been attached.

The only candidate who appeared is Senior Assistant Professor Elmira Mladenova Vasileva,Ph.D., whose scholarly biography and production fully meet the requirements for participation in a competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor".

The candidate has consistently received relevant training and has achieved professional success as a M.A. in History (Faculty of History, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, with a Minor of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology of Sofia University), a teacher of history in English at two metropolitan schools, Ph. D. in History and a Senior Assistant Professor at the Institute of Balkan Studies

with the Center for Thracian Studies "Alexander Fol" - BAS. She has completed several specializations in scientific institutions in France, Greece, Turkey, Slovakia.

My assessment of Elmira Vasileva's scientific production as a reviewer is somewhat facilitated because I have impressions of her development as a researcher from the time she was a doctoral student and later (from her participation in conferences organized at NBU, as well as her articles and studies that I have come across), so I have long had a certain idea of her scientific production up to now. So, by virtue of the circumstances, I have had the opportunity to observe to a certain extent Elmira Vasileva's scientific development and I can claim that it is distinguished by a consistent and stable character. In connection with this competition, I had the opportunity and pleasure to familiarize myself thoroughly with the materials submitted by the candidate in the competition, which were provided to me in a timely manner electronically, which demonstrate the impressive results of her active research activity in recent years.

In the competition for academic position of "Associate Professor" the Senior Assistant Professor Elmira Mladenova Vasilevaq Ph.D., participates with one monograph, 24 studies and articles (of which 12 were published in collections and periodicals in foreign languages), and with the compilation and editing of four collections.

Elmira Vasileva's scholarly production over the past less than twenty years is impressive with both its quantity and its scholarly qualities and contributions. From the beginning of her career, she has shown interest in the history of non-Eastern Orthodox Christian missions in the Balkan countries in Modern History, respectively Catholic and Protestant, and in the effects of their activities in the respective societies and cultures. Elmira Vasileva's research naturally falls into two clearly defined thematic areas.

The first group of Elmira Vasileva's research interests concerns the activities of the Bosnian Franciscans, which are part not only of the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the northwestern Balkans, but also affect other regions, even Bulgaria, whose territories were the subject of missionary activity. Elmira Vasileva examines the history of Catholic missions in the context of the political, socio-economic and religious situation in the Ottoman Empire and the Counter-Reformation policy of the Roman Catholic Church in the Balkans in the 16th-17th centuries. (Bosnian Franciscans and Bulgarian Catholics in the Years of Preparation for the

Chiprovtsi Uprising (2014); Les missions des franciscains bosniaques et bulgares dans les terres d'outre-Danube au XVIIe siècle (2014); The Catholic Reforms on the Balkans and the Bosnian Franciscans, 16th – 17th Centuries (2015); Ottoman Istanbul from the Perspective of the Catholic Missionaries in the Post-Tridentine Period (end of 16th – 17th centuries). In: Osmanlı Istanbulu, IV (2017); Franciscan Missions in Bulgaria (2017); Bulgarian Participation in Franciscan Missions in Southeast Europe in the 17th Century: Paul of Petokladentsi (2017); Catholic Clergy in Bulgarian Lands and the Transmission of Ideas in the Ottoman Empire (17th Century), 2019).

These publications determine the content of the doctoral dissertation "Bosnian Franciscans. Organization, Activity and Missionary Work in Southeast Europe (1453 – 1688)", defended at the IBCTS in 2014. The Franciscan friars were the most active missionaries, and their local origin, adaptability and experience made them the most suitable implementers of this policy in the lands under Ottoman rule. Research on this issue continues to be of interest and even relevance after the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The author also reveals how the different religious communities in the region present their past and what is the place of Catholics among them.

The second thematic circle of research interest and relevant publications of Elmira Vasileva is related to the American Protestant missionary activity (or propaganda) in the European territories of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. The interest in American missionary activity in the Empire dates back a long time, but Western historiography has focused on activities in the eastern provinces of the Empireq namely the American missions among the Armenians in Asia Minor, missionary educational institutions in Anatolia, Lebanon, Syria, and others. The European provinces of the Ottoman Empire remain somewhat fragmentarily studied by Western authors. On the other hand, they are the focus of attention of local researchers, who examine specific aspects of the activities of American missionaries and their social and cultural influence.

The main subject of the review is Elmira Vasileva's habilitation work "Protestant Missions in the European Provinces of the Ottoman Empire: The Activities of the American Council of Commissionories for Foreign Missions, 19th Century - to the First World War)" (Sofia: IBSCTS - BAS, 2025, 406 pages)

Elmira Vasileva's habilitation work is preceded by a significant number of publications on the topic with significant contributions in refereed periodicals and thematic collections of materials at national and international conferences (American Protestant Missionaries and Their Educational Institutions in the European Provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Conference on Protestant Missions, 2015; The Study Trips of American Protestant Missionaries in the Balkans in the 19th Century. - In: Culture of Travel in the European Southeast (2020); American Missionaries among Greeks and Bulgarians: Salonica Station by the End of 19th and Beginning of the 20th Centuries. In: Greeks and Bulgarians: Parallels and Intersections in History and Culture. (Ed. by Yura Konstantinova and Eleonora Naxidou, Sofia, 2021); The Literary Activities of the American Protestant Missionaries in Constantinople in the 19th Century. – In: The Long Eighteenth Century 3 (2020); Protestants in a Balkan Town: The Activities of the American Missionaries among the Bulgarians in Bitola (19th – Early 20th Century). – in: Cities in the Balkans Spaces, Faces, Memories (IBSCTS, 2021); The American Protestant Mission in Thessaloniki and the National Question of the Bulgarians (late 19th – early 20th Century). – In: Religious Institutions and National Identity in the Balkans (19th – early 20th Century) (2021); Protestant Missionaries in Nineteenth-century Eski Zağra (Stara Zagora). - Études balkaniques, LVIII, 2022, 2; Propagating the Gospel among the 'Nominal Christians': American Protestant Missionaries in the 19th Century Balkans. – In: Christian Networks in the Ottoman Empire: A Transnational History, CEU Press; American Protestant Missionaries and Their Educational Institutions in the European Provinces of the Ottoman Empire (19th Century – Beginning of 20th Century). – In: Revista istorică, Tom XXXV, 2024; The American Agricultural School in Thessaloniki and the Bulgarians. – In: Thessaloniki and the Bulgarians).

In these articles and studies, Elmira Vasileva examines in detail and analyzes thoroughly the activities of American Protestant missionaries, with the presentation being detailed on the regions where the ABCFM stations were particularly successful (Stara Zagora, Bitola, Thessaloniki). Specific problems of these activities are examined namely the missionaries' familiarization tours, which lead to specific cultural exchanges, Protestant literary activity and its influence in the region; the development of missionary educational work, which is the Protestant initiative with the most lasting and significant results; the question of the founding of the American Agricultural School in Thessaloniki and its close

connection with the mission among the Bulgarians, the views of American Protestant missionaries on the Bulgarian national question.

Elmira Vasileva's habilitation work, as well as previous publications on the topic, are based on a wide range of sources - the huge array of documents from the archive of the American Board of Comissioners for Foreign Missions (kept in the Houghton Library, Harvard College Library. Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, partially available in microfilm form in the Central State Archives in Sofia, digitized documents from Internet sources - American Board Archives in Istanbul (ABAI), Amerikan Bord Heyeti (ABH), Salt Research, Amerikan Bord Heyeti, Bulgarian Historical Archive at the National Library Sts. Cyril and Methodius, the archive of the Evangelical Church in the town of Bansko, Istorikó Archeío Makedonías – Thessaloniki, American Farm School Archives (AFSA) – Thessaloniki, a large number of published sources, the press from the period under research – missionary publications, Bulgarian newspapers, hundreds of studies by Bulgarian, American, English, Turkish, Greek, Bosnian, Dutch, Australian authors have been subjected to critical analysis.

Elmira Vasileva managed not only to comprehend and analyze a huge mass of sources and research, but also to distill her own original concept. Elmira Vasileva naturally focused on the activities of the American Council of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in the Balkans (which was the largest American organization anyway), and was the most effective, while other Protestant societies operating in the region (the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, the American Bible Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society) were comparatively less important.

Protestant missionary activities developed significantly later as compared with other Christian traditions. That was particularly true of the American missionary movement, but its global scale and energy made up for the delay. The American missionary campaign was a consequence of the Second Great Revival in the United States in the early 19th century – the great religious enthusiasm which manifested itself most notably in the northeastern states and from the theology of postmillennialism, which prevailed in American religious circles at the beginning of the century. Within the framework of their global strategy, the Ottoman Empire with its diverse population attracted the attention of several American missionary organizations and Bible societies with a view to the spread of Protestant confessions and interdenominational translations of the Bible into spoken languages. The most active and

successful is the Congregationalist Church and the creation of its members by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), which sent missionaries and financed various activities in the European and almost all Asian provinces of the Ottoman Empire (and its successors) from 1819 to 1931. In 1870, the ABCFM established a Mission to European Turkey with five stations - in Constantinople, Adrianople, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora and Samokov, and later in Bitola (1873) and Thessaloniki (1894). In 1816 The American Bible Society was created, which operated in parallel with the earlier established British and Foreign Bible Societies.

The greatest successes of the missionaries was achieved among the Armenians and the Armenian field became the basis for the American mission. Due to the sharp conflict with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the missionaries practically did not work among the Greeks. Thus, the Bulgarians were a great discovery for the missions in European Turkey and on their circle great hopes were placed, and by the end of the century, also on the Albanians.

In the monograph and the previous publications, Elmira Vasileva proposes a comprehensive and detailed exposition of the various activities of missionaries in the Ottoman Empire, in Constantinople and in the respective stations in European Turkey (Adrianople, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Bitola, Thessaloniki).

Elmira Vasileva emphasizes the educational activities of missionaries in the region, the schools created by them have a dual purpose: to prepare local assistants and to attract new followers to Protestantism. The first Protestant educational institutions were opened in the Ottoman capital, followed by ones in the European provinces of the Empire – in Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Samokov, Bitola and Thessaloniki. These schools, which offered higher quality and modern education, uphold not only purely religious priorities, but had a wider cultural influence and promote ideas and practices that contributed to the modernization of the Ottoman Balkans. No less important was the literary activity of the missionaries, with translations of the Bible, publication of brochures with religious and temperance content, and especially with their journals and newspapers.

Although they strived to stay away from politics and national conflicts, American missionaries, driven by humanitarian motives, directly or indirectly advocated fo the suffering members of oppressed nationalities and carried out significant philanthropic activities.

Although they did not achieve the expected inclusion of a large number of “nominal” Christians, to say nothing of Turks and Jews, American missionaries managed to translate the Bible in vernacular languages, published a large amount of religious and other literature, acted as a kind of cultural intermediary between America and the Balkan peoples, and substantially contributed to the general modernization process. With all the problems they encountered, the missionary activity was focused on Bulgaria as most prpmising field. To some extent, the missionary activity and publications even led to the penetration of the ideas of American proto-feminism into Bulgarian society.

Elmira Vasileva's monograph is a solid study that is based on the author's painstakibg research, often with archival sources, and is result of historical synthesis, combination of macro-historical and micro-historical approach, and offering a new perspective on the activities and achievements of the ABCFM in the European possessions of the Ottoman Empire during the period under review.

Elmira Vasileva has actively participated in numerous national and international conferences and collections of their materials. Her publications have been cited a total of 80 times by Bulgarian and foreign authors in various publications, books and articles in prestigious journals.

Elmira Vasileva has 350 points in scientometric indicators exceeding those required for holding the academic position of "Associate Professor".

The research work of Senior Assistant Elmira Mladenova Vasileva, Ph.D., has high scientific and cognitive value, both with an original contribution to the issues she researches, and with the achieved balance of the factual narrative with theoretical understanding. The results of Elmira Vasileva's research activities, her professionalism and undisputed contributions make her a worthy candidate for the academic position of "Associate Professor" and the positive vote of the esteemed scientific jury will be a well-deserved recognition of her qualities and achievements.

After my detailed and thorough familiarization with the materials presented in the competition and assessment of the significance of the scientific contributions contained in them, I shall vote with full conviction "FOR" and recommend to the esteemed Scientific Jury to give its positive vote for the election of Senior Assistant Professor Elmira Mladenova

Vasileva, Ph.D., to the academic position of "Associate Professor" in Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology, Specialty "Modern and Contemporary History (Foreign Missions to the Balkans, 18th -19th centuries).

November 12, 2025 Prof. Roumen Genov