

# OPINION

On the dissertation for acquiring a PhD in scientific field: 8 Art, professional direction: 8.1 Theory of Arts on the subject:

*Personifications in Roman Art from the Territory of Bulgaria (I-III c.)*

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Opinion by: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Iva Dosi Dosseva, Fine Arts Department, IAS, order № 291-ПД / 03.07.2023

## **Candidate details:**

Elina Antonova Anastasova, born in Sofia in 1991, has obtained a bachelor's degree (2014) and a master's degree (2016) in Archaeology at the Faculty of History, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Her dissertation on "The Cults of Serdica Based on Numismatic and Archaeological Data" reflects her main interests, which are deepening and broadening their scope, as this dissertation shows. Elina Anastasova has gained extensive field experience, participating in archaeological research as an intern, trainee archaeologist and archaeologist at sites of diverse nature and chronology (prehistoric, ancient, late antique, medieval) in different regions of Bulgaria.

Since 2018 Anastasova enrolled as a PhD student in the Fine Arts Department, research group Ancient Art, under the scientific supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Koleva. In 2020, she will receive the Ernst Mach Fellowship, funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research. She specializes in Roman art at the Austrian Institute of Archaeology in Vienna, and the topic of her project is related to the dissertation subject: *The Context of Personification Image - An Attempt to Reconstruct the Roman Provincial Art.*

Elina Anastasova is the author of a total of seven publications in prestigious national scientific journals, five of which were written during her PhD and are on the topic of her dissertation. One of the articles has been published in a Web of Science referenced collection.

The publications are of respectable scientific level and in number exceed the required minimum.

The PhD student has also participated in three scientific conferences.

The data reported so far show that E. Anastasova is a promising young scientist, successfully overcoming the stages of her development.

## **General description of the candidate's scientific achievements:**

The presented dissertation is original and is fully contributive. Following a classical structure, it consists of an introduction; six chapters; a conclusion (approx. 500 standard pages); a list of cited literature (approx. 500 references); a catalogue including all the necessary data, including photographs (227 catalogue items, approx. 255 standard pages); author maps (10 items). I welcome both the topic and the approach to it, the stated (and met objectives), the exposition, the conclusions reached, the catalogue, the maps produced. The abstract and the 7 scientific contributions noted adequately reflect the thesis and its achievements.

Personification, i.e., the giving of an anthropomorphic appearance to abstract objects and concepts (as set out in the work - natural phenomena and terms (as this is presented in the paper – natural phenomena and conditions, topos, human states and emotions, political concepts - six categories in all, with subdivisions) is a characteristic feature of Roman art. The idea of personification has Hellenic origins and substantially modified, continues to develop in Christian art. During the time span of the 1st - 3rd centuries it acquired a meaning and an outlook through whose optics an approach to the interpretation of Roman culture in general could be found. The poor research and the importance of the topic are responsible for its topicality. In fact, in its entirety, thus formulated, the subject has not hitherto been subject of analysis not only in Bulgarian but also in foreign-language scientific literature (Contribution 1).

No less important is the fact that most of the monuments discussed in the work have not been sufficiently studied, others are being introduced into scientific circulation for the first time, and the search, systematization, cataloguing, analysis, in themselves, are contributory (Contribution 4).

The problem of personifications is put in the most extensive context, the state of research, the main theses are precisely stated. In this way the PhD student has demonstrated her successful entry into the subject and, consequently, the successful achievement of the educational aspect of the PhD. The work has been carried out with monuments of various kinds, including numismatic ones, which shows that the PhD student acquired a wide range of competencies and the ability for interdisciplinary research (Contributions 2-4).

In tracing the formation and spread of personified images, the monuments from Bulgaria are analyzed in detail and placed in the complex and heterogeneous context of the Romanizing Thracian lands, open to diverse cultural influences. Thus, ambiguous referential relationships between different categories of personified images are revealed, as well as some regularities of these images in relation to the function and context of the lapidary monuments. Among the theses presented and the proposed new interpretations, what stands out is the more specific linking of personifications to the very essential idea of political propaganda in Roman art (Contribution 6).

The study also enters another topical problem of provincial Roman art, namely, the functioning and the peculiarities of the repertoire of local stonemasons' studios. Some local preferences in the choice and combination of the different categories of

personification according to the purpose of the lapidary monuments are brought to light. Important questions about the ratios between local and imported works, including imported - partially finished - materials intended for finishing in situ are also commented on (Contribution 5). In the elaborated maps of the distribution of the personified image throughout the Roman provinces that fall within the territory of Bulgaria are highlighted the information and patterns reached (Contribution 7). I find that any attempt to illustrate, synthesize, and generalize deserves high recognition.

It is noteworthy that the PhD student has considered the comments made during the initial discussion in the research group and thus the dissertation has made another progress in a short time.

### **Critical comments and recommendations:**

The abstract is subject to language editing.

### **Conclusion:**

Elina Anastasova's dissertation and publications meet the requirements for scholarly work; they are original, contributory research, introducing new data and interpretations. The seven contributions formulated in the abstract correspond to the contributions of the dissertation. I am not aware of any irregularities in the procedure. Thus, the requirements of the ADAS, the Regulations of the BAS and of the IAS have been met. Elina Anastasova shows that she is capable of independent scientific activity and therefore I confidently recommend to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to award the degree of Doctor of Education and Science.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. I. Dosseva