

ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI UNIVERSITY OF SOFIA  
FACULTY OF HISTORY

R E V I E W

under a procedure for the defence of a dissertation on the topic  
“**Authority and Ideology in the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire (934–745 B.C.)**”  
for the acquirement of the educational and scientific degree “PhD”  
by the regular doctoral candidate **Zozan Mehmet Tarhan**

Scientific area **2. Humanities**

Professional field **2.2. History and Archaeology**

Doctoral program **Ancient history**, Department of ancient history, Thracian studies and  
medieval history

Academic supervisor: **Prof. Dr. Dr.Sc. Dilyana Boteva**

Review author:

**Prof. Dr. Peter Nedelchev Delev**, Faculty of History,

St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia (emeritus)

member of the scientific jury by order of the Rector No ПД 38-562/26.11.2021

Zozan Mehmet Tarhan, born in 1993 in Burgas, graduated *cum laude* with a BA degree in archaeology in the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia in 2016, and between 2016 and 2018 took concurrently and also *cum laude* two MA degrees in the same university, one in ancient and medieval studies with a specialization in ancient history, the other in archaeology. Her two MA theses were entitled “Relations and Interactions of Assyria with Urartu and the Neo-Hittite Kingdoms during the Reigns of Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III (883–824 B.C.)” and “Near Eastern Influence in Hellas during the 9<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.” In February 2019 she was enrolled as a regular doctoral student of ancient history with the Department of Ancient History, Thracology and Medieval History at the Faculty of History of the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia,

under Prof. Dilyana Boteva as an academic supervisor. All her duties as a regular doctoral student have been successfully completed and her dissertation has been written and presented for defence in less than the stipulated three-year period, a commendable achievement we have met with quite rarely in recent years, and which fits in nicely in the series of outstanding achievements marking the academic career of Miss Tarhan.

The dissertation submitted for reviewing is entitled “Authority and Ideology in the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire (934–745 B.C.)” and consists of 341 pages of text and illustrations. The treatise is structured into an introduction, a review of existing publications, four consecutive divisions, a conclusion, a bibliographical list and a supplement. The structure is clear and logical and does not raise any objections. The chosen taxonomy however is arguable: the four major structural divisions of the dissertation are called “sections” and their constituent parts – “chapters”. The opposite seems to me preferable – four “chapters”, subdivided into “sections”.

The subject of the dissertation is clearly formulated in the title. The *Introduction* (p. 1-3) adduces convincing arguments that the study is well-timed in view of the existing state of research and the introduction of new and still not adequately used historical sources. By its compass and the complexity of the problems involved the subject appears well-suited for a doctoral dissertation.

The historical period discussed in the dissertation of Zosan Tarhan and provisionally called “the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire” covers a chronological interval of nearly two centuries – from the last third of the 10<sup>th</sup> to the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, and coincides with the new consolidation and rise of Assyria after the temporary decline caused by the Aramean invasion in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, up to the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III which is usually assumed to have set the beginning of the brilliant “late” period of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> and in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC.

A brief review of the existing literature is presented on p. 4-8. To my best understanding the candidate is very well acquainted with the existing scientific publications relevant in one way or another to the problems discussed in the dissertation, and uses them actively throughout her treatise. It seems important to emphasize explicitly that

her methodological approach is based primarily on an independent, detailed and thorough scrutiny of the existing historical sources, and the opinions of other authors are rather critically discussed, accepted or challenged in the commentaries on the source data and the various reconstructions, conclusions and generalizations drawn on the basis of the primary analysis of the sources.

Since this approach makes the sources a centrepiece of the dissertation, it seems absolutely justified that its main text should begin with an introductory section devoted to them (pp. 9-24). The main categories of Assyrian written sources containing information on the topic of the dissertation (royal inscriptions, *Limmu* lists, chronicles, king lists, ritual and cultic texts, literary texts, etc.) are systematically presented here, together with the relevant data on the origin, publications, character and informational value of the main documents in each group. The specific texts are not discussed here; this is done in the main part of the exposition (sections 3 and 4). Following the chapter on the written sources, the archaeological and iconographic sources used in the thesis are presented in a similar manner at the end of this section: the ruins of the royal palaces and other buildings in the capital city of Calah (Nimrud) and the satellite royal residence of Imgur-Enlil (Balawat), as well as various figural scenes on stone slabs, bronze plates from the fittings of ceremonial gates, and other monuments with relief images which are particularly relevant to the interdisciplinary analysis of Assyrian royal ideology undertaken in “section” 4.

Section 2 is equally brief (pp. 25-41) and contains an introduction to the preceding periods of Assyrian history in the third and second millennia, focusing on the main themes of the dissertation: royal power and royal ideology. This brief overview, done professionally and with references to both the essential sources and the main existing literature, also appears important and necessary in order to reveal the evolutionary roots and the background of the development in an Assyrian environment of the phenomena that are the main subject of the study.

The third section contains the most substantial part of the study, covering almost half of the total number of pages (pp. 42-193). It is devoted to the actual authority of the

Assyrian kings in the period under consideration, who number ten in all: **Ashur-dan II** (934-912 B.C.), **Adad-nirari II** (911-891 B.C.), **Tukulti-Ninurta II** (890-884 B.C.), **Ashurnasirpal II** (883-859 B.C.), **Shalmaneser III** (858-824 B.C.), **Shamshi-Adad V** (823-811 B.C.), **Adad-nirari III** (810-783 B.C.), and the latter's sons and successors **Shalmaneser IV** (782-773 BC), **Ashur-dan III** (772-755 BC) and **Ashur-nirari V** (754-745 BC). The ten kings are examined one by one in chronological sequence in separate chapters (with the exception of the last three, Shalmaneser IV, Ashur-dan III and Ashur-nirari V, who are combined in a common chapter), with an attempt to bring together and discuss for each one of them all the available data related in one way or another to the topic of royal power. For each of these rulers, the available information on their military and political activities and building and reconstruction projects is presented on the basis of the existing sources, with the essential observations concerning the subject of the study summarized at the end. The information on the foreign and military policy of the Assyrian empire in this period greatly exceeds in volume the more limited data on construction enterprises (absent altogether for some of the kings), and its analysis occupies accordingly the bulk of the volume of the exposition. The latter is organized as a passage-by-passage analysis of the contents of the extant documents (every consecutive passage is strictly cited in the footnotes), with the most important details quoted verbatim in the text, either in translation or in Akkadian transcription. The chapters devoted to Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III are understandably the largest ones by size, not only due to the relatively long reigns of both, but mainly because it was under those two kings that the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire reached its greatest prosperity, and also because of the abundant historical documents and testimonies preserved about them.

At the end of the third section, a separate chapter (pp. 183-193) is devoted to the state institutions and various high offices in the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire. This overview is essential for the clarification of the actual functioning of power through the administrative apparatus mediating the supreme authority of the kings. In a number of places, existing discussions or unresolved issues in the literature are presented here, and

not infrequently the author expresses a personal point of view or justifies her opinion in favour of a particular solution.

The fourth and last section, about half the size of the third (pp. 194-264), is devoted to the royal ideology in the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire. Separate chapters are devoted here to the divine patronage of kings (traced in royal titles and epithets, in the “call” to power, and in the coronation ritual), to the priestly functions of kings attested in royal inscriptions, in iconographic sources, and in ritual texts, to the “imperial” mission of the kings as conquerors, to their supernatural, ideal nature (with the discussion for and against their “divinity”), to the ideas about the kings and their power as embedded in the architecture of palaces and in iconographic sources. On the basis of a careful analysis of diverse documents and a critical examination of often contradictory opinions in the modern literature, this part of the thesis builds a convincing and multi-layered picture of the ideas and propagandistic suggestions associated with the Assyrian kings during the period under consideration.

The brief conclusion (pp. 265-277) summarizes the results of the analyses realized in sections 3 and 4, respectively on the exercise of authority in real politics and on the royal ideology in the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire. The overall conclusion (on p. 277) is that royal authority and ideology operated in complete symbiosis during the examined period as a prerequisite for the successful building of the foundations of the Assyrian Empire, which reached its greatest flowering in the subsequent age.

The bibliographical list (pp. 278-297) is exhaustive, with some 242 titles listed. As far as I can judge, all of this ample literature has been actively used in the production of the dissertation and is accurately cited in the copious footnotes (1137 in total).

The dissertation also contains an appendix (pp. 298-335) with the following additional materials: a glossary of Assyrian titles and offices and of the names of the months in the Assyrian calendar, a table with data from the royal inscriptions on the priestly authority of the Assyrian kings, two maps, urban and architectural plans, and images of the iconographic monuments analysed in section 4. The only comprehensive geographical map of the region (on p. 302, after Karlsson 2017) unfortunately does not contain

most of the toponyms mentioned in the text of the thesis and does not allow the reader to spatially navigate the abundant descriptions of military campaigns in Section III. With a view to a future printing of the thesis, I would recommend that an attempt be made (being fully aware of how laborious such a task is) to develop separate maps for each Assyrian ruler, which would contain, in addition to the main geographical sites (such as mountains and rivers), all the cities, regions and countries mentioned in the text (where possible accurately, where not – at least approximately or conjecturally), as well as the outlined routes of the royal campaigns (with their dates), the main Assyrian territory and the external territories conquered at the time. It would be appropriate to place these maps not in a separate appendix but in the relevant sections of the main text.

The dissertation of Miss Zozan Tarhan makes an excellent overall impression. It has already been mentioned that the study is well-timed and suited for a PhD dissertation and has a well-balanced and logical structure. Linguistically, the dissertation is also on a good level, the language is clear and precise, grammatically correct, with only occasional unpolished phrases or minor technical inaccuracies. The reference apparatus (footnotes, bibliographical list) is implemented meticulously. It is more significant to note that Miss Tarhan has successfully managed to collect, systematize and analyse an impressive amount of source material, including both texts from various categories of written documents, mainly in the Akkadian language, and archaeological and iconographic monuments. The work with historical sources, which is the basis of the entire dissertation and is carried out on a high professional level, presents her as an accomplished, mature scholar, and is a major argument in favour of the award of the PhD degree. The dissertation has the qualities of a comprehensive and exhaustive scientific work and contains significant and undeniable scientific contributions. I recommend that it be published, preferably in an internationally accessible language.

The author's abstract has been prepared in accordance with the requirements and reflects the content of the thesis in detail and faithfully. The reference to the scientific contributions of the dissertation (page 36 of the abstract) is credible and reflects the actual achievements of the PhD candidate. The list of scientific publications by Zozan

Tarhan includes a total of 10 articles, of which seven were published between 2016 and 2021 and three are in press. Four of these publications are on the topic of the dissertation. Miss Tarhan has participated in research projects and has a considerable field experience in archaeological excavations. She has successfully completed three specializations abroad – two short-term ones, in Adrianople (2015-2016) and Warsaw (2017-2018) respectively, and a one-year long one at the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Studies of the Julius Maximilian University of Würzburg (2019-2020), where a significant part of the work on the dissertation was realized. She is a member of the International Association of Assyriology.

Summarizing my excellent impressions of both the overall performance of the doctoral candidate and the dissertation she has developed, I can confidently recommend to the scientific jury to award to Miss Zozan Mehmet Tarhan the educational and scientific degree of Doctor.

Sofia, January 2, 2022

Reviewer:   
(Prof. Peter Delev)