REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Irina Sotirova

on the PhD dissertation of Maria Marinova

Strategy and Diplomacy of the Emperor Wu of Han (141-87 BC) in Central Asia through the prism of "Treatise on the Dayuan" from "Records of the Grand Historian"

The proposed PhD dissertation, entitled "Strategy and Diplomacy of the Emperor Wu of Han (141-87 BC) in Central Asia through the prism of "Treatise on the Dayuan" from "Records of the Grand Historian"", consists of an Introduction, four chapters (of which the last is the Conclusion), a Bibliography and four appendices with a total volume of 203 pages. The structure is balanced, the text is focused and stylistically consistent with academic requirements, the bibliography is well selected and representative, and the appendices are an integral part of the dissertation itself.

The Introduction clearly presents the scope of the dissertation, the object and subject of the study, the relevance of the problem and the contribution value. Chapter I presents the state of research on the problem and provides an overview of the primary and secondary literature on the topic, with the author showing that in the Bulgarian academic community there is a tangible need for such research and for the translation of primary texts, key to understanding Asian history and culture. Chapter II analyzes the historical context of the study, with the policies and strategies of the Han Dynasty presented in a synthesized, but at

the same time comprehensive manner. Chapter III focuses on the foreign policy strategies of Emperor Wu of Han and includes particularly valuable information and analysis not only for China, but also for a large part of the peoples in Asia. Presented on the means of China's "soft policy"- a topic that is regaining its relevance today. Chapter IV is concluding, but at the same time it also marks prospects for future research. The four appendices (Translation of the "Treatise on the Dayuan"; Map of the expansion of the Han Dynasty in the 2nd century BC; Map of the state and ethno-political entities with which the Han Empire had established diplomatic relations by the 2nd century AD; Demographic profile of the kingdoms in the Western regions based on the "Book of the Han" and the "Book of the Later Han") in themselves represent a valuable source of information about China and neighboring countries during the period, but are also an integral part of the dissertation text itself, which would be difficult to understand and isolated theoretical without the proposed illustrative material.

Maria Marinova's dissertation covers a topic that is important not only for China, but also for neighboring countries. Although the direction in which Emperor Wu's diplomacy is examined is to the west, towards Central Asia, his strategies and policies are also valid for China's relations with countries to the east. The topic of China's diplomacy is particularly relevant today, when Asia is organizing new political and economic formations, including the interests of many countries in the region and concerning the entire world. The issue of hegemony and, accordingly, independence is becoming an important point and a look at history is inevitable. The text of the "Treatise on the Dayuan" is among the most important sources revealing the early stages of the formation of the Silk Road. And the issue of the Silk Road today is no less diplomatic and strategic than it was during the time of the Emperor Wu of Han. Therefore, access to information from

primary sources is particularly necessary in attempts to understand the processes in the Asia. In this aspect, I believe that the dissertation can be an important source of information for any researcher or reader who is looking for the basis of the subsequent centuries-old social and political order in Asia.

From the perspective of a Korean studies scholar and translator of the classical Korean historical source “Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms of Korea”, I can claim that the dissertation is a valuable reference material on many issues of the Korean Peninsula. The reign of Emperor Wu was a key period for the formation of the Korean state, therefore very controversial and politically manipulated topic. The text of the Grand Historian and some of the other classical texts covered in the dissertation are a starting point for the formation of Korean national identity. Future comparison and discussion of the way in which classical Chinese texts are cited and accepted in Korea will be interesting and useful both for Maria Marinova as a specialist and for us as Korean scholars and users of the text.

I consider Chapter III of the dissertation, entitled “Analysis of the Foreign Policy Strategies of Emperor Wu of Han Based on Historical Information in the “Treatise on the Dayuan” from the “Records of the Grand Historian,” to be particularly valuable. It lists and analyzes in detail the diplomatic missions and military expeditions important for the period. The events and historical figures in them have been repeatedly reproduced in later written sources and have become symbols of wisdom/foolishness and honor/shame for all of Asia. The analysis that Maria Marinova makes in her dissertation is orderly, focused, and systematized and would be beneficial for a better understanding of the literature of the East.

Last but not least, I would place the contribution of the dissertation in terms of the translation (transcription and transliteration) of the many names of state formations, titles, historical figures, regions, etc. The unification of geographical, historical, political and cultural realities is a task that Bulgarian orientalists should solve through academic discussion and most likely through mutual compromises. Maria Marinova's work would be a good starting point in such a discussion, given the meaningfulness and solidity of the translation, as well as the volume of the source material drawn upon. Maria mentions that "the geographical, political, cultural and historical realities clarified in the course of the research could serve as a basis for creating a specialized dictionary or teaching aid intended for teachers and students in the field of Sinology" (pp. 14-15). I would expand the scope of this work to include the preparation of a handbook with basic toponyms, ethnonyms, book titles, etc. for China and neighboring countries, which would be of particular benefit to researchers and would significantly reduce the incorrect transfers of Chinese words into Bulgarian.

The proposed dissertation is academically strict, focused and comprehensive. The translation of the "Treatise on the Dayuan" is valuable in itself, and the additional explanations, footnotes and maps provided make it accessible and understandable even for non-specialists. The visual layout, including the Chinese text in parallel, is extremely convenient. Based on all of the above, I unreservedly recommend that the dissertation be highly evaluated and that Maria Marinova be awarded the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor".

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