

## REVIEW

of

the Ph.D. thesis by Zozan Tarhan “Authority and Ideology in the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire (934–745 BC)“

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The subject of the thesis is very well chosen. The history of the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire is less well studied in world scholarship than the late period of the Empire. Studies on the Ancient Near East are almost completely absent in Bulgarian historiography. Thus, such a Ph. D. thesis should be encouraged in view of a future development of this scholarly field in Bulgaria.

Zozan Tarhan’s thesis comprises 336 pages, Introduction, four parts divided into chapters and sub-chapters, Conclusion, Bibliography List, and Application of five parts: vocabulary of Akkadian terms, a table, maps, plans and images.

The Introduction structures very well the goals and the tasks of the work. Its methodology is well presented: a complex method that includes analyses of the cuneiform texts, of the visual material and of archaeological data due to which synthesis and conclusions on the subject could be reached. The review of the historiography reveals candidate’s excellent knowledge of the current bibliography.

The candidate has done a great job! Her serious background in Akkadian language due to her grants abroad allows her to translate, to discuss with competence and comment upon Assyrian texts related to the subject of the dissertation. Quite few people in Bulgaria are able to do so.

The First Part deals with the sources. Z. Tarhan discusses in detail the different types of written sources: royal inscriptions and lists, the *limmu* lists, chronicles, ritual and cultic texts, literary works. The remains of the palaces and constructions at Kalah (Nimrud) are the major set of archaeological data used, while images originating mainly from the reigns of Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III are discussed. The author knows quite well the specifics of each type of evidence and is aware of the difficulties they present.

The Second Part is the shortest one and provides an overview of the Old and Middle Assyrian Kingdoms in order to outline the historical background of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. As

demonstrated in the next chapters, some of the elements of the royal power and ideology were inherited from the previous periods: the idea that the king was chosen by the gods, that the king was the priest of Aššur since Adad-nērārī I; the king as a builder.

The Third Part of the dissertation, “The Authority in the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire”, is the core of the work and is the longest one. Tarhan examines in detail the activities of all the rulers of the period, one by one. Only Adad-nērārī’s successors are grouped in one chapter because of the paucity of written evidence on the events of the time. The candidate presents the discussion about the beginning of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and sides convincingly with the authors who accept Aššur-dān II’s reign (934–912 BC) as the start of the period. Zozan Tarhan adopts a tripartite model for presenting the material in this chapter which is also reflected in the titles of the sub-chapters: for each ruler his military campaigns are discussed first, then his building activities and conclusions about his rule at the end.

While commenting on the military operations of the Assyrian kings, Z. Tarhan identifies the location of a number of toponyms mentioned in the records and determines the changes in their usage in the course of time, which is a contribution to the studies. Her detailed analysis of the respective campaign allows her to offer some corrections of earlier English translations of the ancient texts (for example, on p. 75). I find her opinion against the identification of Nairi with Urartu well grounded. She points out the early use of Nairi in plural, and after Ashurnasirpal II’s reign – in singular (p. 86-88). Her analysis shows that initially Urartu was part of the Lands of Nairi, and when the kingdom gained political power the two toponyms became synonymous. The excursus is placed in the description of Ashurnasirpal II’s activities because he was the ruler most actively campaigning against Urartu.

The Early Neo-Assyrian Empire reached its climax during the reigns of Ashurnasirpal II and Salmaneser III. Their rules are best reflected in the written and visual sources and that is why the candidate offers them more space in her work. The documents of these two kings give a clearer impression of the ideological propaganda of the Empire. During the time of Ashurnasirpal II many more reliefs, statues at the entrances of the conquered cities and rock-cut inscriptions were produced along with the traditional texts on clay tablets and the royal inscriptions. Ashurnasirpal II’s aggressive policy to the West is worth mentioning among his numerous military campaigns: he subdued the Neo-Hittite kingdom of Karkemish (“the Land of Hatti”) and reached the Mediterranean Sea where he bathed ritually his weapons (p. 101-105).

In his domestic policy Ashurnasirpal II became famous first of all because of his reconstruction of Kalah and proclaiming it as the capital in 879 BC. His building activities were quite intensive. Despite the written evidence about conquered and demolished cities, the archaeological data shows that these settlements were actually renovated and rebuilt.

Salmaneser III was no less successful. He introduced the dating of the events according to the consecutive regnal year of the king (*palû*). He continued the expansive policy of his predecessor to the West, towards Tabal and Que, while Iran formed the new direction in his military ambitions.

This part of the dissertation displays the taste of the candidate for political and military history of the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire. However, it is disproportionately bigger than other parts and especially than the text dedicated to ideology. Here the presentation could have been more succinct: not every military campaign deserves such a detailed description as it does not contribute anything important to the subject of the dissertation. Speaking of authority it would be better to see how it was exercised in the newly conquered territories. The Third Part ends up with a chapter on the institutions and the positions in the Empire (p. 183-193). The text is a valuable contribution. As Zozan Tarhan concludes that the written evidence on these positions cannot justly be used to outline a hierarchy among them. Nevertheless, it would enhance the value of the text if their role in imposing the authority be analyzed in details.

Part Four of the dissertation is dedicated to the other main theme as announced in the title: the ideology of the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire. In the introductory text the author focuses on the theory of “ideology” analyzing the opinion of M. Liverani (p. 195-199). Tarhan mentions a number of other scholars who have written on the subject in the last decade in order to support her choice of terms like “Imperial ideology” and “Imperial mission”. Different aspects of activities of the Assyrian kings have been studied in the next chapters that mark this imperial ideology.

The chapter “The King Chosen by the Gods” starts with the royal titles which eloquently display the idea of the god-chosen king. These titles were to a great extent inherited from Summer and the Old Assyrian period. The king continued to be “appointed by Enlil” and “ruler of god Aššur” in the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire. However, there are differences in the way the titulary formulae were written (p. 201). It is interesting why it was exactly Ashurnasirpal II's

titles that were the longest and the most varied. Was it because he seems to be the most successful king of the period, or because the source database on his rule is richer?

I find Z. Tarhan's interpretation of the relief in the throne hall of Ashurnasirpal II's Northwestern Palace especially felicitous (p. 207-208). While contesting the traditional opinion about a double representation of the king, she suggests a scene of the power transfer from the previous ruler Tukultī-Ninurta II which is sanctioned by the god.

Zozan Tarhan demonstrates her skills in working with fragmentary cuneiform texts and comments their possible collations in the chapter "The Coronation Ritual" ("The ritual of Coronation" would be more appropriate in Bulgarian according to me), as well as the difficulties which such texts pose. Here again Ashurnasirpal II's reign stands out. He introduced the fest of Ninurta, the keeper of royal insignia, and this was probably the moment when the royal power was re-confirmed (p. 212-214). The author's opinion on the latter is well grounded while challenging the current views. Tarhan discusses the formula stating the year of ascending of the Assyrian ruler, which interpretation could also present chronological problems (p. 216-217).

The lack of a narrative about the ritual itself – what was exactly done on the occasion of royal coronation – is striking in this chapter. No translated passage is given here, as it was done in a numerous other cases, neither a description of the activities is provided.

The representation of the king as a priest and as the highest priest at that was inherent to the imperial ideology. The serious work the candidate has done on the sources allows her to mark the difference between the royal inscriptions and the ritual texts: the first were part of the propaganda while the second were practically orientated and because of that they mention less often the priestly functions of the ruler. Since Ashurnasirpal II's rule qualifications appeared to the priestly functions of the king: "supreme", "sublime", "attentive depurative" and "sacred". The formulae of the priestly functions of the Neo-Assyrian kings, or those related to their religious status are summarized in a table in the Application to the dissertation (p. 302).

The inclusion of the visual material precisely in this chapter seems logical, although the images could be interpreted in a wider context: under the subject of "Ideology" and not only under "The King as a Priest". However, in most cases a ritual moment was depicted on the stone reliefs in the royal palaces, as well as on the cylinder seals. The scenes of the warrior king or the hunting ruler in his chariot followed a long tradition and would be reproduced long after the end of the Assyrian Empire.

I fully agree with Tarhan's interpretation of the object often represented on the Assyrian reliefs and usually explained as a fly-whisk. She supposes that this was an object for dispersing fragrant substances and was used in scenes of libations (p. 226-227). The idea is not fully original but is here better supported. Quite original is the candidate's opinion on another object, usually accepted as a ladle or a lamp – Z. Tarhan interprets it as a portable incense burner for purification.

The translation of a ritual text is presented at the end of this chapter which features the king as the major figure.

The next chapter reveals the core of the Neo-Assyrian ideology: the idea about the imperial mission. The introductory passages are dedicated to terminological precisions related to "Empire", "Imperial Ideology", "Imperial Mission" and "Imperialism" as Tarhan reviews the current opinions in scholarship and adheres to most of them. Examples from the royal inscriptions follow that illustrate the formula of the so-called "defensive militarism": the expansionistic policy was not only justified in cases of a potential threat but was also sanctioned by the gods. The common phrase was "by the order of Aššur" but other gods were also mentioned in the inscriptions of different rulers, most often Ninurta and Ishtar. Z. Tarhan offers a careful study of a number of texts describing the military activities of the Neo-Assyrian kings commenting on lights and shades of expressions concerning the imperial ideology. Examples from reliefs depicting battle scenes or overcome enemies taken into captivity are presented in order to elucidate the imperial mission supported by the gods.

The supernatural qualities of the ruler mentioned in the inscriptions are logically added to the other aspects of royal authority and propaganda already discussed. These are analyzed in the "The King without Rivals" sub-chapter. Of course, the Assyrian king was gifted with these qualities by the gods. Tarhan reviews the discussion on the divine origin of the king in modern scholarship (p. 246-248) as she agrees with the authors who deny the divine nature of the ruler. His extraordinary wisdom was most often mentioned in the inscriptions as well as his astonishing warrior valour, strength, bravery and heroism. Such a message was also related by the images on the reliefs from the palaces and on the seals: the hunting scenes were particularly appropriate in this sense.

The last sub-chapter "Personal Palace and the Iconographic Sources as Markers of Royal Authority" examines the ideological meaning of the role of the Neo-Assyrian king as a builder,

which was well enlightened in the documents. The propaganda goal of the new constructions followed an old Mesopotamian tradition and would be continued in the late period of the Assyrian Empire. Z. Tarhan reveals this aspect of royal ideology by considering the building rituals and the inscriptions that were placed in the foundations of the structures. The texts contained blessings over the next rulers who would take care of the building and curses upon the enemies who would possibly destroy it. The erection of a new palace by the successive ruler or additions to an already existing palace was part of the royal propaganda.

Archaeological evidence is most extensively used in this fragment of the dissertation. The account on the architecture and decoration of Ashurnasirpal II's Northwestern Palace and of Salmaneser III's buildings are illustrated with plans and images in the Application of the dissertation. The candidate comments on the unknown functions of some Salmaneser III's constructions. Tarhan analyzes the ideological message sent by the arrangement of the reliefs in the Throne Hall of the Northwestern Palace, their scenes (partly discussed in the previous chapters), and the Standard Inscription for the king's might repeated many times on them. The author discovers unity in the ideological messages sent by the texts and by the images which have decorated the royal palatial complexes.

The concluding chapter of the dissertation summarizes the work. Bearing in mind the expansionistic imperial policy of the kings which was better attested by the sources and has received much attention, the longer review might be justified. However, I think that the summary could have been more concise in order to avoid unnecessary repetitions. The actual synthesis of the work is much shorter. It seems that the conclusions have to be looked for at the end of each chapter.

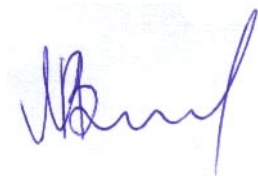
A list of bibliography that follows demonstrates how knowledgeable on the subject Zozan Tarhan is. The Application of the dissertation comprises an extremely useful list of Neo-Assyrian offices, the names of the months in the standard Mesopotamian calendar, one table, two maps, 10 plans, mainly of the buildings in Kalah, and 49 images: pictures of the discussed monuments.

The author's summary reflects correctly and fully the problems considered in the dissertation. I completely agree with the contributions listed by the candidate. Zozan Tarhan has published four articles on the subject; the last one in English language is forthcoming.

I consider Zozan Tarhan's dissertation a contribution to the study of the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire. The work displays the author's skills in working with ancient Akkadian texts.

A number of excerpts from Assyrian royal inscriptions appear for the first time in Bulgarian translation. A great number of them are supplemented by transliterations, transcripts and philological commentaries. The candidate identifies and locates a number of toponyms; she presents some chronological adjustments as well. The motives of the royal ideology which ensured the realization of the imperial mission and the aggressive policy of the Assyrian kings are analyzed. I would advise the dissertation to be published after the necessary editing, preferably in a bilingual version: in Bulgarian and in English.

All this said, I strongly recommend the Jury to confer on Ms. Zozan Mehmet Tarhan the Ph.D. degree.



With best regards:

(Associate Professor Maya Vassileva, Ph.D.)

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