

SOFIA UNIVERSITY "ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI"

FACULTY OF HISTORY

## STATEMENT

under the procedure for defense of a dissertation on a topic

**"Authority and Ideology in the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire (934–745 B.C.)"**

For acquiring of the educational and scientific degree "PhD"

by

Candidate: **Zozan Mehmet Tarhan**

Scientific area: **2. Humanities**

Professional field: **2.2. History and Archaeology**

Doctoral program: **„Ancient history” - Ancient history**, department "Ancient history, Thracian studies and Mediaeval history"

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

Statement author:

Assoc. Prof. **Julia Milcheva Tzvetkova**, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Faculty of History, Department "Ancient history, Thracian studies and Mediaeval history"

member of the scientific jury by order № РД 38-562/ 26.11.2021 г. of the Rector of Sofia University

## 1. General characteristics of the PhD thesis

The dissertation presented by Zozan Tarhan on "Authority and ideology in the Early Neo-Assyrian Empire (934-745 BC)" is the first study of its kind in the specialized Assyrian historiography on this topic within this chronological range. With its publication the Bulgarian historical scholarship can successfully fit into international scientific achievements. The text contains 342 pages and consists of preliminary pages including the Content and Acknowledgments (pp. I-V), a main part, including Introduction, four chapters and Conclusion (pp. 1-278), Bibliography (pp. 279-298) and Appendices (textual and illustrative - pp. 299-336). The bibliography begins with a list of the corpora editions of Assyrian inscriptions and other published primary sources (17 titles), 216 titles of modern historiographic researches on the subject, as well as a list of used electronic editions. The Appendices build a contextual part of the main text and include a glossary, table, 2 maps, 10 plans of studied key palace complexes and 49 illustrative images of Assyrian reliefs from the era which are referred in the body text.

The layout is clean, the set of computer pages is legibly presented, exceeding the accepted standard of 1800 characters per page, the references are organized in footnotes, which is appropriate in this case and does not interrupt the main text with abbreviations of source references as adopted in the Assyriology.

## 2. Data and personal impressions of the candidate

Zozan Tarhan's academic development takes place at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", where she has been studying since 2012 and completing a bachelor's program in Archaeology, master's programs in Antiquity and the Middle Ages and in Archaeology, and has been accepted as a doctoral student in the program "Ancient History: Ancient History" at the Department of Ancient History, Thracology and Mediaeval History. Apart from the excellent performance of the colleague Tarhan at all stages of the educational process at Sofia University, the many specializations (in Turkey, Poland and Germany) in leading institutions in the study of ancient Middle Eastern societies, which outlined a consistent and focused efforts of the colleague to acquire specialize and profound knowledge in the field of Assyriology, I would like to share my personal impressions and the pleasure to work with her both as a student in my master's courses and as a responsible and active colleague in the implementation of various research projects of our department.

## 3. Observations on the scientific achievements of the candidate

The presented dissertation examines an analytical aspect of the history of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, which implies a good acquaintance with a variety of source material, as well as theoretical and methodological training. It is necessary to note already here that the colleague demonstrates a skillful approach to the subject, and her abilities for interpretation and synthesis of the primary sources and modern historiography illustrates her good knowledge in the topic and the capacity to navigate through the rich documentary legacy of Neo-Assyrian empire.

Chapter I "Sources" (pp. 8-24) presents the variety of source material - written sources, archaeological and iconographic sources, on which the further research is based. The next chapter II (pp. 25-41) presents the problem of the authority in the previous historical periods of the Old Assyrian era (2004-1736 BC), and the Middle Assyrian era (1353-935 BC). Extremely useful (especially for Bulgarian

audience, where studies in the field of Assyriology are isolated) is the synthetic review of the historical development of Assyria in the previous periods. Z. Tarhan demonstrates a very good acquaintance with the issues and the current state of research, in which no mechanical increase of the volume of the dissertation with stories outside the topic is sought, but are focused on the evolution of the concept and ideology of authority.

Chapter III (pp. 42-193) presents the ten Assyrian kings who ruled in the period 934-745 BC. The emphasis here is on their foreign policy and construction activities, which most clearly illustrate the existing concept of royal power. A kind of summary of this chapter is the section III.9 "Institutions and officials", which presents the conclusions of the historical analysis and formulates the main duties of the king - to expand the borders of the state, to maintain stability in the country, to control administrative power, to continue the construction policy and occupy the role of high priest. The role of the royal chancellery in the implementation of the authority, the Council of Senior Royal Servants, the army, the local administration and the temples as an institution is outlined, which allows the colleague to conclude that the early Neo-Assyrian Empire had built "complex established mechanisms, the functioning of which supports the implementation of the royal power" (p. 193).

Chapter IV (pp. 194-265) builds the main analytical part of the dissertation. It demonstrates perhaps at best the colleague's expertise in synthesizing the overall picture and outlining the chosen issues of presenting the ideology of royal power. Her familiarity with the issues at theoretical and methodological level allows her to formulate critical remarks on existing hypotheses and to express personal opinion, such as to Liverani's approach, which "is focused more on the goals of the ruling elite than on the methods that ideology uses - ideas, views and ways of influencing" (p. 195). The new reading of Z. Tarhan and the other view of the royal authority in the early Neo-Assyrian period allow her to question the shared concept of the imperial ideology of the royal authority and to support the religious nature of the ideology, which is the colleague's essential contribution to the issue. She argues well for this concept, consistently illustrating the king as the chosen one of the gods (demonstrated by the specific title, summoning and following the coronation ritual), as a priest who received this role directly from the gods and practicing it, as well as a conqueror which is also conceived as set by the gods. The messages of the royal power are materialized in the palace architecture and the imagery monuments in them, which are discussed in a separate paragraph.

Of special value and a significant contribution of the work of Z. Tarhan is the proposed interpretation of the relief from the Throne Room in the Northwestern Palace of Ashurnazirpal II, where the colleague revised the established interpretation that it depicts in the central part a double image of the king. She convincingly argues through iconographic and semantic analysis a new interpretation of the depicted characters - the left image as representing the previous king Tukulti-Ninurta II, pointing to his successor Ashurnazirpal II, depicted on the right (p. 207 sq.). The colleague demonstrates well-mastered theoretical terminology and works correctly with concepts of the notion "empire" which allows her to differ from Liverani's very general definition.

In the chapter "Conclusion" the colleague summarizes the historical period and concludes that the ideology of authority is key to its successful functioning, where despite the royal power deriving from the gods, the ruler is in fact an absolute monarch.

#### 4. Approbation of the results

The mentioned scientific works – the dissertation and four articles (two of which are in print) meet the minimum national requirements and the additional requirements of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific field and professional direction of the procedure.

There is no plagiarism in the presented dissertation and scientific papers on this procedure.

#### 5. Qualities of the abstract

The abstract correctly reflects the content of the dissertation and meets all the requirements for the preparation of the summary presentation of the studied topic and its main achievements. The indicated contributions of dissertation work reflect objectively its qualities.

#### 6. Critical remarks and recommendations

Some isolated grammatical or purely technical errors are observed in the course of the exposé, such as on page 70 Tukulti-Ninurta remains in the title as "III", not as "II" as it occurs correctly through the rest of text, or in note 922, where the indicated year of visiting the site is "20221". It is recommended that the works listed in the bibliography in the separate section "Electronic resources" to be organized within the rest - these are articles or online archives that differ only in the way they are disseminated in the web, and their listing separately violates the sequential principle of bibliographic organization in alphabetical order and by years, the latter of which should also be arranged in the bibliography in ascending order from older to newer, and not the other way as it is now.

#### 7. Conclusion

After getting acquainted with the dissertation presented in the procedure and based on the above-said, I **recommend** to the scientific jury to award Zozan Mehmet Tarhan the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and archaeology ".

Signature:

Date: 30.12.2021  
/Sofia/

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/Assoc. Prof. J. Tzvetkova/