

16. CAMPAIGNING AROUND MUSASIR

Julian Reade

Alternative historical reconstructions are possible for the events surrounding Assyrian campaigns in the Muşasir region. They depend on the location assigned to the nearby state of Hubushkia. A southern position is compatible with the theory that Assyria was involved in the region because of its need for horses in the 9th century, and is compatible with a straightforward understanding of the itinerary of Sargon's campaign of 714 BC. A northern position, advocated by several scholars, presents geographical problems embodied in misconceived versions of Sargon's itinerary, and has led to the unlikely supposition that Urartu lost control of the western side of Lake Urmia in the early-7th century.

Several historical reconstructions are possible for events surrounding the Assyrian involvement with Muşasir. The choices are controlled by our understanding of the geography of the campaigns in which Muşasir features, especially by different views on the location of its neighbour Hubushkia.

There are several possibilities for the precise location of Hubushkia, but the details need not concern us. At present two general theories are current. One places Hubushkia south or south-east of Muşasir, and has been supported by carefully published arguments that take into account the known locations of other places and the geographical realities. There is no point in repeating the evidence, which is readily available for anyone willing to consult it (Kinnier Wilson 1962: 108-111; Hulin 1963: 59; Reade 1979: 178; Russell 1984: 195-198; and probably others). My reconstruction follows this scheme (Fig.16.1).

The other theory, which goes back to the birth of Assyriology, places Hubushkia north or north-west of Muşasir; it was derived logically from information available before 1900 (Norris 1870: 403), but there does not seem to have been any modern attempt to justify it by reasoned discussion. It remains essentially unquestioned, however, by scholars who have relevant misconceptions concerning Iranian geography (Levine 1973 and 1974: *passim*; 1977: 143-144), Urartian history (Diakonoff and Medvedskaya 1987: 390) or the names of their own favourite Urartian sites in Iran (Salvini 1984: 13, 51; Muscarella 1986: 473-474). I shall mention at the end a few of the conclusions that flow from a northern location for Hubushkia.

The first recorded Assyrian involvement with Muşasir happened around 865-860 BC, at the end of the reign of the Assyrian king, Ashurnasirpal II. A text of about 860 BC mentions a delegation from Muşasir visiting Assyria, and we have to connect this with the same king's claim to have campaigned as far as Urartu about the same time (Grayson 1976: 164-166, 176). The next Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III, records definitely hostile action against Urartu. Muşasir was involved in 826 BC ('year 31': for the date, see Reade 1978b: 260) when his army, coming from Hubushkia, ravaged its territories and those of Urartu, before departing in a south-easterly direction (Luckenbill 1926-27, 1: 210).

Now, if Hubushkia was south of Muşasir, with Urartu beyond it, the pattern is straightforward. The prime aim of Assyrian moves across the Zagros at this time appears to have been the acquisition of horses, especially from a country called Gilzanu (or Habzanu). The lands north and south of Lake Urmia have been famous throughout history for their production of horses. The lands north of the lake were remote from Assyria, but those to the south were accessible through several passes, one or more of which will have been controlled by Hubushkia. Accordingly we find, in the area south of Lake Urmia, at least one site, Hasanlu, with close Assyrian links (and quantities of horse harness) in the 9th century (Winter 1977). Elsewhere I argue that the centre of Gilzanu was either Hasanlu ~~its lf~~ or some other site in the same general area (Reade 1979), but all that needs emphasis here is the close connection between Hasanlu and Assyria, and the significance of the horse trade.

The Assyrians then were touching Muşasir in the 9th century during operations intended to maintain their supply of horses. This policy eventually failed. By the end of the century, as is reasonably clear from a survey of the excavated remains, the relevant occupation level at Hasanlu had been destroyed, to be replaced eventually by an Urartian fortress, and the Tashtepe inscription demonstrates that the Urartians had reached the southern shore of Lake Urmia (Dyson and Muscarella 1989). Whatever the details of the historical events in this period, their effect was to advance Urartian interests and to eliminate what must have seemed, at least to the Urartians, a threatening bridgehead of Assyrian influence. The Assyrians found that they would have to go further south-east, towards Media, to collect horses in future. Muşasir was left firmly within the Urartian sphere.

The best-known Assyrian attack in Muşasir is that by Sargon in 714 BC (Luckenbill 1926-27, 2: 73-99). It was the last action in a long campaign that had started with a march in central Iran and had then become an invasion of Urartu. An understanding of Sargon's itinerary through Iran requires familiarity with much evidence, stretching far across the plateau, which needs no repetition here. I demonstrated the general course years ago (Reade 1978a: 141); the details of the march within Urartu have recently been discussed at greater length by Zimansky (1990). Essentially Sargon came from the Tabriz region, passed through the rich lands north of Lake Urmia, and then turned southward down the western shore, at one point actually approaching the waters of the lake itself. From Urartu Sargon entered Hubushkia, heading for home, but interrupted his march with a lightning strike back at an unsuspecting Muşasir, with its consequent capture.

Now the circumstances were that Sargon had defeated an Urartian army at the Battle of Mount Uawush (presumably Sahend) before entering Urartu, and he had proceeded to destroy at least one important Urartian city. When he was somewhere north of Lake Urmia, however, he records that his troops wanted to go home. The implication is that there was the possibility of continuing west towards the great Urartian centres around Lake Van, but that Sargon, out of consideration for his troops' discontent, did not do so. It is an odd story, with the suggestion of mutiny recalling Alexander's experience in India. In any event, what the Assyrians actually did was to stock up for the journey home and proceed back in that direction. Of course they claim to have destroyed innumerable small Urartian forts on their way, but specifically not the most important. By the time they left Urartian territory and entered Hubushkia, a step away from home, the soldiers must have been exhausted, no longer buoyed up by initial victories but thankful to be alive. No wonder Sargon, as he says, sent most of his men back by direct road.

Sargon's own diversion into the mountains to capture Muşasir was strategically irrelevant, simply an act of greed and terrorism against a small, partly independent but manifestly pro-Urartian state, which helped bring a profitable end to the campaign. It also seems to have been in keeping with Sargon's personal boldness, the factor which must have won him the Assyrian throne in the first place besides the victory of Uawush, and which may have been responsible for his death on campaign eight years later. The long-term peace which afterwards developed between Assyria and Urartu, with Urartu effectively acknowledged as supreme within the mountains, cannot have been because Assyria had devastated Urartu; it had done nothing of the kind. A probable reason is that, though there continued to be potential clashes of interest between the two states, in Turkey and in Iran, they both had to contend with problems such as the Cimmerian raids. Peaceful co-existence seemed more practicable.

This broad interpretation of the evidence, based on a southern or south-eastern location for Hubushkia, and a peripheral geo-political status for Muşasir, may be contrasted with some of the results that flow from placing Hubushkia north or north-west of Muşasir.

First, there is the tactical question, as Hubushkia is not then easily on the way to anywhere, and its appearance in several Assyrian itineraries is perverse. Any northern Hubushkia has to be approached, from Assyria, through exceptionally difficult mountainous terrain, probably along the branch of the Greater Zab river north-east of Amadia. This is a route which some European travellers followed from Mosul to Van in the 1800s, which may be why it was once suggested for the Assyrians, but the suggestion was made before anyone appreciated that Urartu extended as far as Lake Urmia. It is far from clear why Assyrian armies should have chosen this appalling and devious route in any circumstances in the 9th century BC, let alone to reach the much more accessible region of Muşasir in 826 BC or to collect horses from the Iranian plateau.

There is a similar tactical puzzle over Sargon's attack on Muşasir. If Hubushkia was north or north-west of Muşasir, then Sargon's whole army took a particularly difficult route home, close to Muşasir, and Sargon's account of a surprise mountainous detour to reach it makes much less sense. In fact, if we are to believe the Sargon itineraries offered by some industrious colleagues, the Assyrian king's method of surprising Muşasir was to march halfway round its territory in a tight circle first.

For Urartian history in general, the most impressive consequence of a northern Hubushkia is the logical conclusion that, in the reign of the Assyrian king, Esarhaddon (680-669 BC), the western shore of Lake Urmia belonged not to the Urartians but to the Manneans. This results from an Assyrian text enquiring whether a Scythian force is going to invade Assyria, from Mannea, through the passes of Hubushkia (Starr 1990: 27-28). Now Mannean territory is well known to have adjoined the south-eastern shores of Lake Urmia, at one time or another, besides extending far south of the lake, so this text is easily compatible with a southern Hubushkia. If Hubushkia lay north of Muşasir, however, Mannea must then have reached up the western shore too. Diakonoff and Medvedskaya (1987: 390)

adopt this view, which invites comment by those more familiar than I am with the many Urartian sites west of the lake.

So, while a northern location for Hubushkia creates serious difficulties for the understanding of the Mušasir campaigns of Shalmaneser III and Sargon, it has a dramatic effect on the history of Urartu in the 7th century BC. A southern location allows for an historical interpretation that is more relaxed and manifestly more consistent with the other available evidence including the location of passes through the relevant mountain ranges. It is to be hoped that future attempts to master the geography of the plateau, interpret Urartian history, and identify specific Urartian sites in the Urmia region, will incorporate these considerations.

Bibliography

- Diakonoff, M. and Medvedskaya, I.N.
1987 The kingdom of Urartu. *BibO* 44: 386-394.
- Dyson, R.H. and Muscarella, O.W.
1989 Constructing the chronology and historical implications of Hasanlu IV. *Iran* 27: 1-27.
- Grayson, A.K.
1976 *Assyrian royal inscriptions 2*. Wiesbaden.
- Hulin, P.
1963 The inscription on the carved throne-base of Shalmaneser III. *Iraq* 25: 48-69.
- Kinnier Wilson, J.V.
1962 The Kurba'il statue of Shalmaneser III. *Iraq* 24: 90-115.
- Levine L.D.
1973 Geographical studies in the Neo-Assyrian Zagros. *Iran* 11: 1-27.
1974 Geographical studies in the Neo-Assyrian Zagros 2. *Iran* 12: 99-124.
1977 Sargon's eighth campaign. In Levine, L.D. and Young, T.C. (eds) *Mountains and lowlands: 135-151*. Malibu (*Mesopotamia* 7).
- Luckenbill, D.D.
1926-27 *Ancient records of Assyria and Babylonia 1 and 2*. Chicago.
- Muscarella, O.W.
1986 The location of Ulhu and Uiše in Sargon II's eighth campaign. *JFA* 13: 465-475.
- Norris, E.
1870 *Assyrian dictionary*. London.
- Reade, J.E.
1978a Kassites and Assyrians in Iran. *Iran* 16: 137-143.
1978b Assyrian campaigns, 840-811 BC, and the Babylonian frontier. *ZA* 68: 251-260.
1979 Hasanlu, Gilzanu, and related considerations. *AMIran* 12: 175-181.
- Russell, H.
1984 Shalmaneser's campaign to Urartu in 856 BC and the historical geography of Eastern Anatolia according to the Assyrian sources. *AnatSt* 34: 171-201.
- Salvini, M.
1984 La storia della regione in epoca Urartea. In Pecorella, P.E. and Salvini, M. *Tra lo Zagros e l'Urmia: 9-51*. Rome (*Incunabula Graeca* 78).
- Starr, I.
1990 *Queries to Sungod*. Helsinki (State Archives of Assyria 4).
- Winter, I.J.
1977 Perspective on the 'local style' of Hasanlu IVB: a study in receptivity. In Levine, L.D. and Young, T.C. (eds) *Mountains and lowlands. Essays in the archaeology of greater Mesopotamia: 371-386*. Malibu (*Mesopotamia* 7).
- Zimansky, P.
1990 Urartian geography and Sargon's eighth campaign. *JNES* 49: 1-21.