

THE HISTORICAL PORTION OF SARGON II'S NIMRUD INSCRIPTION

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The account of Sargon's restoration of Ashurnasirpal's palace appears on two slabs from Calah (Nimrud) — one in Assyrian, the other in Babylonian characters¹. The inscription is not dated, but was clearly written in Sargon's early years. It is a summary inscription divided into four parts: (a) An introduction consisting mainly of the ruler's titles; (b) Sargon's achievements in his campaigns; (c) the restoration of Calah's *duprānu* palace; (d) the placement of the Karkemiš booty in the palace's treasure-house.

The following analysis of the "historical" part of the inscription seeks to clarify the principle underlying the organization of its material and to establish an accurate date for the consecration of the restored palace.

For the sake of convenience, I will first translate this part of the inscription (lines 7-12):

"Exalted prince, who met with Ḫumbanigaš, king of Elam, in the district of Der and defeated him; subduer of the land of Judah, which lies far away; who deported the people of Hamath, capturing Jaubi'idi, their king, in his hands; who repulsed the land of Kakme, the wicked enemy; who set in order the disordered land of Mannai; who gladdened the heart of his land; who extended the border of Assyria.

Diligent ruler, snare of the unsubmissive, whose hand captured Pisiri, king of Ḫatti, and set his official over Karkemiš, his city; who deported (the people of) Šinuḫtu, bringing Kiakki, king of Tabal, to Assur, his city, and placing his yoke on the land of Muški; who conquered the land of Mannai,

¹) A.H. Layard, *Inscriptions in the Cuneiform Character from Assyrian Monuments* (1851), pls. 33-34; H. Winckler, *Die Keilschrifttexte Sargons I* (1889), pp. 168-173; D.D. Luckenbill, *ARAB II*, §§ 136-138; H. Tadmor, *JCS* 12 (1958), pp. 38-39, n. 146.

Karallu and Pattiru; who avenged his land; who defeated the far away land of Media as far as the rising sun.”

The passage is clearly divided into two sections each of which opens with a royal title, “exalted prince” in the first, “diligent ruler” in the second. A foreign king captured by Sargon is mentioned in each section. Each cites the deportation of a group of people, and each names a land which lies far away: Judah —located in the southwestern end of the empire— in the first section, and Media —situated in the northeastern end of the empire— in the second. The land of Mannai is mentioned twice, once in each section.

The division of the passage into two parallel sections requires an explanation. It seems to me that the basis for the partition is chronological and that each section presents events of a well defined period.

The episodes mentioned in the text can be dated by reference to these campaigns recorded in the Khorsabad Annals whose dates are well established. But the ensuing chronology should be completed by reference to Sargon’s Stela from Najafehabad in Iran (L. Levine, *Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae from Iran*, pp. 25-50). H. Tadmor (JCS 12 [1958], pp. 22-40, 77-94) has demonstrated that Sargon’s scribes sometimes shifted historical episodes from one year to another². The Najafehabad Stela was composed during the king’s campaign against Media in 717 and thus belongs to the small group of inscriptions written in Sargon’s early years. Comparison of the dates of campaigns as they appear in the Stela and in the much later Khorsabad Annals (707 B.C.) gives further support to Tadmor’s argument and indicates how cautiously one should treat the later organization of the historical material in the Annals.

Following is a chronology of the episodes which appear in the Nimrud Inscription:

(a) The battle against Ḫumbanigaš at Der and the subjection of Ḫamath and Judah took place in year 720 B.C.

(b) The first campaign against the cities of Mannai which revolted against their king was conducted in 719. The land of Kakme is located in the northwestern part of the Iranian plateau, east or northeast of Mannai. A campaign against the land of Kakme is not mentioned in Sargon’s other inscriptions. In his Cylinder Inscription from Khorsabad composed a short time after 713, Sargon is designated “destroyer of the seats of the cities Papa, Lallukna, Sukkia, Bala and Abitikna, who conspired treacherously (?) with the land of Kakme”³. In the Khorsabad Annals composed in

² For another example. see N. Na’aman - R. Zadok, JCS 40 (1988), pp. 42-43.

³ D.G. Lyon, *Keilschrifttexte Sargon’s*, 1883, p. 32, line 28; Luckenbill, ARAB II, § 118; CAD N/1, p. 262b. For the date of composition of the Cylinder Inscriptions from Khorsabad, see Tadmor, JCS 12, p. 36, n. 124.

Sargon's late period (707 B.C.), this episode appears in two different *palûs* and is combined with the motif of deportation as the final stage of a campaign. The third *palû* (719) records that the men of Sukkia, Bala and Abitikna conspired with Ursa of Urartu and were deported and resettled in Syria (Ḫatti) (Lie, *Sargon*, pp. 10-11, lines 66-68); and the fifth *palû* (717) indicates that the men of Papa and Lallukna plotted with the land of Kakme and were deported to Damascus (Lie, *Sargon*, pp. 12-13, lines 76-78). It seems to me that Kakme was an ally of Urartu and was thus involved in the rebellion that broke out in Mannai in the year 719. Therefore it was described in the Nimrud Inscription as a kingdom "repulsed" by Sargon when he suppressed the rebellion of Mannai. The scribe of the Khorsabad Annals edited the historical material in a way that fitted his overall scheme. He thus artificially combined the land of Kakme with the deportation which he assigned to the fifth *palû* while connecting the kingdom of Urartu with the deportation assigned to the king's third *palû*.

(c) The campaign against Karkemiš and its annexation was conducted in 717 B.C.

(d) The campaign against Šinuḫtu in which the ruler (Kiakki) and many of his subjects were deported was conducted in the year 718. According to the Najafehabad Stela (lines 17-19), this campaign was conducted against the land of Tabal and its rulers were obliged to pay tribute. According to a late prism of Sargon from Calah, "Kiakki of the town of Šinuḫtu [conspired with] Mita, king of Muški"⁴. It goes without saying that Sargon's claim of "placing his yoke" on the land of Muški is a vain boast. It is evident that the enmity between Sargon and Mita of Muški began as early as 718 B.C., and that the above mentioned campaign against Šinuḫtu and Muški should be assigned to this year.

(e) The conquest of Mannai, Karalla, Pattiru and Madai may be safely dated to the year 717, as is evident from the Najafehabad Stela (lines 20ff.). This is contrary to the Khorsabad Annals in which the campaign was assigned to the sixth *palû*. The major campaign in 717 was conducted to the east, whereas the conquest and annexation of Karkemiš at the beginning of the year was more administrative than military in nature.

Summing up the discussion, it is evident that the author of the Nimrud Inscription divided its historical part into two sections: the events of the years 720-719 and the events of the years 718-717. Moreover, even within the two sections, the events are chronologically arranged with one exception: the conquest of Karkemiš (717) is prior to the conquest of Šinuḫtu (718). Locating the conquest of Karkemiš at the beginning of the second section may be due to the scribe's desire to underline the event since the placement of the booty of Karkemiš in the treasure-house of the

⁴ C.J. Gadd, *Iraq* 16 (1954), p. 180, lines 50-52, and p. 182. For a comparison of the various descriptions of Sargon's campaign against Kiakki of Šinuḫtu, see J. Renger, in K. Hecker - W. Sommerfeld (Eds.), *Keilschriftliche Literaturen*, 1986, p. 144.

restored palace forms the last episode in the inscription. It is clear that our inscription was written either in late 717 or in early 716, when the new palace was consecrated and the treasures of Karkemiš deposited there⁵.

In conclusion, the Nimrud Inscription may be regarded as a summary inscription whose historical part is mainly arranged according to a chronological principle. With all due caution, it may be used as an additional source for the campaigns of Sargon in the years 720-717 B.C.

⁵) Dating the Nimrud inscription to either 717 or 716 B.C. is not uncommon in scientific literature. See Winckler (above, n. 1), p. VI, n. 2; A.T. Olmstead, *Western Asia in the Days of Sargon of Assyria, 722-705 B.C.*, 1908, p. 17; Tadmor, JCS 12, p. 26, n. 127; SAAB 3 (1989), pp. 26-27. The attribution of the subjection of the kingdom of Judah to Sargon's campaign of the year 715 (G. Becking, *The Fall of Samaria*, 1991, pp. 54-55) is, in my opinion, untenable.