

SARHADDON'S EASTERN CAMPAIGNS

Esarhaddon was one of many Assyrian kings famous for their numerous conquests and military campaigns. So far, historians have mostly focused on this ruler's western conflicts¹ and, recently, also on the conquest of Shubria,² usually neglecting the areas east of Assyria. In part, this might be due to the very nature of sources. There are a lot of geographical names in Esarhaddon's inscriptions, which may refer to the East but are very difficult to match with modern toponyms and excavation sites, since most inscriptions mention only the place (city or land) of the king's victory and, rarely, the enemy leader's name.

Nonetheless, several attempts were made to describe the conflicts between Assyria and the Medes during Esarhaddon's reign. The first one, undertaken by I.M. Diakonoff, was part of a greater work, *Istoriya Midii*,³ published in the mid-1950s. Its chapters 3.4 and 3.5 are devoted to the period of Esarhaddon and Kaštaritu of Karkašši, his chief opponent from Media. The set of divination queries in which his name is frequently mentioned is the most important source for the reconstruction of this conflict.⁴ While Diakonoff generally succeeded in arranging the queries in a proper chronological order, I find some of his conclusions not entirely convincing. First, he seems to have erroneously linked the events known from the queries with a passage from a royal inscription.

¹ K. Radner, *Esarhaddon's Expedition from Palestine to Egypt in 671 BCE: A Trek Through Negev and Sinai*, in D. Bonatz, R.M. Czichon, F. Janoscha Kreppner (eds), *Fundstellen. Gesammelte Schriften zur Archäologie und Geschichte Altvorderasiens ad honorem Hartmut Kühne*, Wiesbaden 2008.

² I. Eph'al, 'Esarhaddon, Egypt, and Shubria: Politics and Propaganda', *JCS* 57 (2005), 99–111.

³ I.M. Diakonoff, *Istoriia Midii*, Moscow-Leningrad 1956, 266–280.

⁴ I. Starr, *Queries to the Sun god. Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria* (SAA 4), Helsinki 1990, 46–81.

56 <i>ad-iš</i> KUR. <i>bar-na-ka-a-a lem-nu-u-ti</i> 57 <i>a-ši-bu-te</i> KUR.DU ₆ - <i>a-šur-ri ša ina pi-i</i> UN.MEŠ 58 KUR. <i>mi-ih-ra-a-nu</i> KUR <i>pi-ta-a-nu i-nam-</i> <i>bu-u zi-kiir-šú-un</i>	I crushed the wicked Barnaki, who live in the land Til-Ašuri, which is called Pitānu in the language of people of the land Mihrānu.*
--	--

* E. Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)*, Winona Lake 2011, 18.

The Soviet scholar claimed that Til-Ašuri was located in south Hamadan and, more importantly, was part of the Assyrian Empire at the beginning of Esarhaddon's reign, making the whole conflict in fact a rebellion of Medes against the Assyrian rule. However, he failed to provide any arguments in support of this connection. Second, he associated this uprising with the foundation of the so called Median Empire, mentioned by Herodotus. According to Diakonoff, as the rebellion was mostly successful, an independent Median state replaced Median tribes, some of which had been dependent on Nineveh.

The idea of the rise (and the very existence) of the Median Empire was commonly accepted in the Soviet historiography in the 1970s. Several years ago, I. N. Medvedskaya repeated the majority of Diakonoff's concepts, adding some new elements nevertheless.⁵ Among other things, she dated the events known from the queries back to 670 BC. It seems unlikely, if only because the Assyrian commander Ša-Nabu-šu, mentioned in query 63, was at that time occupied with stabilizing the situation after the conquest in Egypt.⁶ Medvedskaya also linked the conflict in Media to the troubles with the Cimmerians and Elippi, which seems slightly premature. Still, the whole theory of the anti-Assyrian revolt stems from the idea of the Median Empire, which has been mostly rejected by the Western scholars, especially for such an early period.⁷

The fact is that we do not have any evidence that there was any organized territorial state in Media during the reign of Esarhaddon, not to mention an empire. Moreover, the divination queries style Kaštaritu and other Median chieftains as EN-URU,⁸ which implies that none of them had any formal sovereignty over the others.

⁵ I.N. Medvedskaya, *Drevnij Iran nakanune imperij (IX-VI vv. do n.e.). Istoriya Midskogo tsarstva [Ancient Iran on the Eve of Empires (IX-VI Centuries BC). The History of the Median Kingdom]*, St. Petersburg 2010, 132–134.

⁶ E. Leichty, 'Esarhaddon's Eastern Campaign', in M. Cogan, D. Kahn (eds), *Treasures on Camels' Humps. Historical and Literary Studies from the Ancient Near East Presented to Israel Eph'al*, Jerusalem 2008, 187; Starr, *Queries to the Sungod*, 102–104.

⁷ H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Was there ever a Median Empire?', in A. Kuhrt, H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (eds), *Achaemenid History III: Method and Theory. Proceedings of the London 1985 Achaemenid History Workshop*, Leiden 1988, 197–212.

⁸ EN-URU was clearly explained in G.B. Lanfranchi, 'The Assyrian Expansion in Zagros and the Local Ruling Elites', in G.B. Lanfranchi, M. Roaf, R. Rollinger (eds), *Continuity of Empire (I). Assyria, Media, Persia* (History of the Ancient Near East Monographs 5), Padova 2003, 92–96.

There is also one more possibility. Few decades before Esarhaddon, Sargon II performed several campaigns to Iran, they resulted in the formation of two new provinces with capitals in 𐎶𐎶𐎵 and Kišessim, which became renamed as Kār-Šarrukīn and Kār-Nergal. Strong influence of median city lords, lack of deportations, and return to use presargonid names of the cities suggests that Assyrian rule in this territory did not survive to the reign of Esarhaddon.⁹ So, his eastern campaigns could be an attempt to restore Assyrian control over this part of Iran. This idea might be confirmed by similarities between city names, known from Sargon's inscriptions and from Esarhaddon's queries. Kišessim (Kār-Nergal) could be identical with Kišassu, and Šibar (or Šibura) with Šubara.

The third scholar who investigated the conflict between Assyria and the Medes was E. Leichty. His article 'Esarhaddon's Eastern Campaign' briefly describes this topic.¹⁰ Since it may be difficult to agree with some of his claims, however, I will compare them directly to mine.

As mentioned above, the main sources for reconstructing Esarhaddon's campaigns against Medes are divination queries, published by Starr in the SAA series. It is significant that the largest group of queries (33 texts) concerns the East. It shows that the king considered Media as a serious problem and a real threat to his state. In these texts the main rival of Esarhaddon is Kaštaritu, the city lord (EN-URU) of Karkašši. As he was never mentioned in the royal inscriptions, the first step to the reconstruction of the conflict is to match the queries with the appropriate passages from the inscriptions. Leichty managed to do it correctly.

32 ^m Up-pi-is LÚ.EN.URU šá URU Pa-ar-ták-ka	(As for) Uppis, chieftain of the city Partakka, Zansana, chieftain of the city Partukka, (and) Ramateia, chieftain of the city Urakzabarna,
33 ^m Za-na-sa-na LÚ.EN.URU šá URU Pa-ar-tuk-ka	
34 ^m Ra-am-te-ia LÚ.EN.URU šá URU Ú-ra-a-ak-za-bar-na	

⁹ In my opinion the fate of the lands conquered by Sargon deserves a large separate studies which can not be included into this article. For more about this topic see K. Radner, 'An Assyrian View of Medes', in *Continuity of Empire (I)*, 50–58.

¹⁰ Leichty, 'Esarhaddon's Eastern Campaign', 183–187.

35 KUR <i>ma-da-a-a šā a-šar-šú-nu ru-u-qu ša ina</i> LUGAL.MEŠ AD.MEŠ-ia 36 <i>mi-šir</i> – KUR Aš-šur^{ki} <i>la ib-bal-ki-tú-nim-ma la ik-bu-su qa-qar-šā</i> 37 <i>pu-ul-hi me-lam-me šā</i> Aš-šur EN-ia <i>is-hup-šu-nu-ti</i> 38 ANŠE <i>mur-ni-is-qí</i> GAL.MEŠ DAG.GAZ NA₄.ZA.GIN <i>hi-ip šad-dí-šú</i>	Medes, whose country is remote (and) who had not crossed the boundary of Assyria nor trodden on its soil in (the time of) kings, my ancestors-the awesome fear of god Aššur, my lord, overwhelmed them (and) they brought to Nineveh, my capital city, large thoroughbreads (and) blocks of lapis lazuli, hewn from its mountain, and they kissed my feet.
39 <i>a-na</i> NINA^{ki} URU <i>be-lu-ti-ia iš-šu-nim-ma iš-ši-qu</i> ĠIR^{II}-iá 40 <i>áš-šú</i> LÚ.EN.URU.MEŠ-ni <i>ša qa-tú id-ku-šú-nu-ti</i> 41 <i>be-lu-ti ú sàl-lu-ma e-ri-šu-in-ni kit-ru</i> 42 LÚ <i>šu-ut</i> SAG.MEŠ-ia LÚ.NAM.MEŠ <i>ša pa-a-ti</i> KUR-šu-un 43 <i>it-ti-šú-nu u-ma-'ir-ma</i> UN.MEŠ <i>a-ši-bu-te</i> URU.MEŠ 44 <i>šā-tu-nu ik-bu-su-ma ú-šak-ni-šú</i> ĠIR^{II}-uš-šú-un 45 GÍN <i>man-da-at-tú be-lu-ti-ia la ú-kin ši-ru-uš-šú-un</i>	Because of the chieftains who had threatened them, they implored my lordship and begged me for help. I sent my officials, the governors of the boundary areas of their land, with them and they trampled the people living in those cities and made (them) bow down at their feet. I imposed the tribute (and) payment of my lordship upon them.
46 KUR. <i>pa-tu-uš-ar-ri na-gu u ša i-te-e</i> E.MUN 47 <i>ša qe-reb</i> KUR.<i>ma-da-a-a ru-qu-u-te ša pa-a-ti</i> KUR.<i>bi-ik-ni</i> KUR NA₄.ZA.GIN 48 <i>ša ina</i> LUGAL.MEŠ AD.MEŠ-ia <i>mam-ma la ik-bu-su</i> KI-tim KUR-šu-un 49 ^mši-dir-pa-ar-na ^me-pa-ar-na LU.EN.URU.MEŠ <i>dan-nu-ti</i> 50 <i>ša la kit-nu-šu a-na ni-i-ri ša-a-šu-nu a-dí</i> UN.MEŠ-šu-nu 51 ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ <i>ru-ku-bi-šu</i> GU₄.MEŠ <i>-še-ni</i> ANŠE.<i>u-du-ri</i> 52 <i>šal-lat-sun ka-bit-tu aš-lu-la ana qe-reb</i> KUR <i>aš-šur</i>.^{ki}	(As for) the land Patušari, a district in the area of the salt desert, which is in the midst of the land of the distant Medes, borders Mount Bikini, the lapis lazuli mountain, (and) upon the soil of whose land none of the kings, my ancestors, had walked – I carried off to Assyria Šidir-parna (and) E-parna, might chieftains who were not submissive to (my) yoke, together with their people, their riding horses, oxen, sheep and goats, (and) Bactrian camels, their heavy plunder.*

* Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, 20.

This passage is a much better match than the one chosen by Diakonoff. It explicitly mentions the land of Medes and one of their chieftains, E-parna, who appears in query 64 as well. It also contains the information that the theatre of war was close to Great Salt Desert, which lies much nearer to the city of Amul (known from query 63) than south Hamadan. Most importantly again, it reveals

that Esarhaddon had a serious *cassus belli* against Eastern Medes, having been asked for protection by chieftains Uppis, Zansana and Ramateia, who must have been disturbed by the growing power of Kaštaritu.

The title of Leichty's article explains his main concept: a single campaign against Media. Based on query 63, he also claims that the king did not take part in the expedition led by Ša-Nabu-šu, which is difficult to accept. First, in his edition of royal inscriptions, Leichty placed a horizontal line after verse 45, just like the line he used to separate subsequent campaigns. Second, in the discussed passage, there are two distinct grammatical subjects: one is the Assyrian army which trampled cities, the other is the king who sent the army, imposed a tribute and, in the latter part of the text, carried off loot and slaves. However, while sending an army or imposing a tribute may have been done remotely from Nineveh, bringing back the loot required the ruler to be there in person. The third argument against Ša-Nabu-šu's leadership of the only expedition can be found among *ezib*-formulas in query 63.

2 [^{md} <i>aš-šur-ŠEŠ-SUM-na</i> LUGAL K]UR <i>aš-šur</i> . ^{KI} <i>liš-pur-ma</i> ^m <i>ša-AG-MU</i> GAL-LÚ. SAG.MEŠ 3 [<i>a-di e-mu-qu mal it</i>]- <i>ti-šu a-na ša-ba-a-ta</i> URU.a.mul (...)	[Should Esarhaddon, king of] Assyria, send Ša-Nabu-šu chief eunuch, [and the army] at his disposal [to take road, and] to go to capture the city Amul?
r.2 [<i>e-zib ša l</i>]- <i>u-u lu-u-ú-tú</i> KI.MAŠ DIB. DIB- <i>ma ú-le-u-ú</i> r.3 [<i>e-zib ša i-n</i>]- <i>a</i> KI <i>an-n[i-i lu-u-u</i> MAŠ.MAŠ- <i>u</i> (...)	[Disregard that an un]clean man or wo[man has come near the place of the extispicy and made it unclean.] [Disregard that an unclean person per- formed extispicy i]n this place.
r.7 <i>e-zib ša a-na-ku</i> DUMU.LU.HAL ARAD- <i>k[a TUG gi-ne-e-a ar-šat lab-ša-ku</i> <i>ina</i> MI LUH- <i>tu</i>] r.8 <i>pi-rit-ti</i> IGI- <i>ru...</i>	Disregard that, I haruspex yo[ur] servant, [am dressed in my ordinary soiled gar- ments], have seen [fear] and terror [at night]...*

* Starr, *Queries to the Sun god*, 70–72.

What fear and terror could the diviner have seen? Why an unclean person may have disrupted the ritual? There is a single answer to both questions: hostilities close to the camp during the previous night. The divination must have been performed at a military camp then, on the day following a battle. It is clear from the first lines of the query that the king would decide whether to send Ša-Nabu-šu against Amul depending on the divination result. Thus, he must have been close, since it is unlikely that a messenger from Ša-Nabu-šu would have been sent to the

king and back again with the query and report, which would severely delay the Assyrians, allowing the city to fortify, and perhaps even straining the army supplies. Neither the Zagros Mountains nor the Great Salt Desert are places where an army can station for long.

Considering that there were two expeditions, the queries should be divided accordingly into two groups. It seems quite logical to put all the queries where Kaštaritu is the subject into one group (41–62), and the remainder into the other (63–72). The latter group can easily be matched to the second part of the quoted inscription containing the name of chieftain E-parna, also mentioned in text 64. Consequently, the former group should refer to the first part of the inscription, describing the conflict against Kaštaritu.

According to the official sources, the reason for the first campaign against Medes was a petition for military support made by three Median chieftains, Uppis, Zansana and Ramatea. The earliest query (45) was dated for the 3rd day of *Ayaru*, so they most likely came to Esarhaddon at the end of *Nisanu*. However, the queries concerning the mobilization of enemy troops (41) and Kaštaritu looking for alliances (42) had to be written earlier than text 45. The queries from this period also include Manneans and Cimmerians among the potential enemies of Assyria. It suggests that an extispicy was performed concerning the negotiations between them and Kaštaritu, and its result must have been positive.

The questions found in many texts name specific periods, within which the events were to come to pass. Comparing the dated texts to the starting points of the periods for which the extispicies were carried out reveals that the queries were written down on the day marking the beginning of such a period of several dozen days, which the king found interesting. This fact enables dating some of the discussed texts on 3rd, 4th, 6th, 8th and 10th *Ayaru*. Two of them (43 and 45) date back to 3 *Ayaru*. This would not be possible in normal circumstances, since divinations could not be performed too frequently.¹¹ In this case, however, two pairs of diviners were employed, Naširu with Marduk-šumu-ušur and Bel-ušalim with Šuma, which allowed conducting two divinations each day. The following table shows the chronology of some of the queries related to the first campaign.

It is difficult to determine the location of these cities. *The Helsinki Atlas, of the Near East in the Neo-Assyrian Period* contains only the location of Kilman, which was placed by the downstream Qara Čāy river; whereas from query 48 we can learn that Šubara lies on the border of Saparda. It leads to the conclusion that they were Median cities, within the area of influence of Uppis, Zanasana and

¹¹ U. Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian Liver Omens: The Chapters Manzazu, Padanu and Pan Takalti of the Babylonian Extispicy Series Mainly from Assurbanipal's Library*, Copenhagen 2000, 13.

Date	No. of text	Subject of query
1st <i>Ayaru</i>	42	Mobilization of Kaštaritu
1st–2nd <i>Ayaru</i>	41	Negotiations with Mamitaršu
1st–2nd <i>Ayaru</i>	Unpreserved	Negotiations with the Manneans
1st–2nd <i>Ayaru</i>	Unpreserved	Negotiations with the Cimmerians
3rd <i>Ayaru</i>	45	Attack on a city
3 rd <i>Ayaru</i>	43	Attack on the city of Kišassu
4th <i>Ayaru</i> *	48	Attack on the city of Šubara
5th <i>Ayaru</i>	Unpreserved or 44	Attack on a city (Karibtu?)
6th <i>Ayaru</i>	49	Attack on the city of Ušiši
7th <i>Ayaru</i>	Unpreserved or 44	Attack on a city (Karibtu?)
8th <i>Ayaru</i>	50	Attack on a city
9th <i>Ayaru</i>	Unpreserved or 44	Attack on a city (Karibtu?)
10th <i>Ayaru</i>	51	Attack on the city of Kilman

* What is certain in the text are the 4th and 11th days of the month. Starr reconstructs the end of the period when the city was to be captured as 11 III with uncertainty. However, compared to other texts, the period of 4 II–11 II seems more realistic. Also, 7 days in a query can also be found in text 49.

Ramatea, which were threatened by Kaštaritu. This way Esarhaddon was given an opportunity to stop the unification of the Medes and gain new vassals among them.

The divination was expected to provide answers to three crucial questions: ‘Does Kaštaritu truly mobilize his troops?’, ‘Who will be his allies?’, ‘Which cities is he going to attack first?’. Divination could only provide yes or no answers. Therefore, determining all potential supporters and objectives required divining for each neighbouring nation of Media and for all possible directions of attack. In the last matter, however, the divination most likely ceased after the first positive answer. Among the extant queries 43–51, the one naming Kilman was written seems to be the latest. Thus, if it really marks the last extispicy, it marks the place where Esarhaddon must have sent his army.

However, the first Assyrian army sent to relieve the three Median chieftains seeking protection must have been unsuccessful, since by the end of the month of *Šabattu* the king was considering to send another one, as attested by query 60. Knowing that in a regular conflict with Assyria his chances would be slim, Kaštaritu sent a messenger to Nabu-šuma-iškun (who may have been the leader of the first Assyrian army), which is evidenced by text 56. He requested a royal emissary to negotiate a peace with him. The fact that Esarhaddon even considered negotiations, which we learn from text 57, shows that waging the war in the East was an inconvenient burden for Assyria, and that even sending another army could not guarantee a success. It is further confirmed by query 61, where the king asked ‘Will

Kaštaritu defeat the Assyrian troops?’ instead of the common ‘Will the Assyrian troops defeat the enemy?’. Even so, the second Assyrian army was not defeated in battle, as the subject of query 62 is looting the capital city of Kaštaritu, Karkašši. Nevertheless, since this course of action would have been obvious in the case of a decisive victory, it can be concluded that the battle was inconclusive, leaving Kaštaritu with enough forces to try resistance. Alas, it is not possible to determine the result of the divination as the text does not describe the signs. It was most likely negative, however, since Esarhaddon did not mention Kaštaritu or Karkašši in his royal inscriptions. I believe, therefore, that while Kaštaritu was unable to subjugate the lands of Uppis, Zanasana and Ramatea, he retained the *status quo ante bellum*. While Esarhaddon’s victory was not complete either, Assyria gained at least three vassals and a certain dominance in the region which, as attested by subsequent texts, enabled it to impose tribute on a large part of Media, including the territories west and south-west of the Great Salt Desert and between it and the Caspian Sea.

Still, there are ten Median-related queries in Starr, which do not mention Kaštaritu (63–72). I believe that they describe Esarhaddon’s second campaign in Iran. The conflict against Karkašši left Assyria with a large area of influence in Media. Among the north-western tribes, who did not participate in that war but most likely paid tribute to the Assyrian king, the Sapordeans were considered to pose the greatest threat. Most queries in this group concern the collection of tribute, suggesting that the Sapordeans and vassals rebelled and refused to pay the tribute, which forced Esarhaddon to send another expedition to Media.

This time, however, the king took command in person, which I demonstrated at the beginning of the paper. His aim was to tame wayward Median chieftains as well as enforce (and likely increase) the tribute. He clearly wrote in his inscriptions that the troops reached the border of Great Salt Desert. It is probably in that time that the divinations from queries 63–65 were conducted. The first of these texts shows that the king considered sending some of his forced under Ša-Nabu-šu against the city of Amul on the Caspian Sea coast.¹² There is no mention that it was captured in the official texts, so a negative result of the divination most likely prevented that decision. Unfortunately, the description of the divination marks has not been preserved well enough to confirm this theory.

The remaining two texts from this group asked how far Assyrian magnates should go to collect the tribute. It implies that they were written when the king decided to return to Assyria leaving the army under the command of someone else, presumably Ša-Nabu-šu. The existence of two such texts leads to the conclusion

¹² S. Parpola, M. Porter, *The Helsinki Atlas of the Near East in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, Helsinki 2001, 6.

that the divination must have been auspicious at least in the case of the first one, in particular since it mentions Šidir-parna, who as we know was brought back to Assyria. The outcome of the last stage of this campaign remains unknown.

Similar expeditions by magnates to ensure tribute must have taken place in subsequent years, albeit on a smaller scale, as Esarhaddon did not trust Medians after the rebellion. It can be concluded not only from the existence of several texts containing queries about the successful return of royal messengers but also from the fact that one of them (text 71) was written in the month of *Addaru*, the same when the king asked about continuing his expedition in text 65.

The first of Esarhaddon's campaigns against Medes was not entirely successful, and the second most likely did not bring Assyria new lands and vassals. Comparing these results with the contents of royal inscriptions clearly shows that modern scholars analysing such official sources need to exercise particular attention. Even though the first expedition was described as a total success, the analysis revealed that the Assyrians failed to crush their chief enemy. Whereas the second campaign was actually waged just to restore the *status quo* on the borders of the Empire. Faced with the lack of spectacular political or military achievements, the author of the inscription described loot, which was actually overdue tribute, and the king reaching the Great Salt Desert, which was only a gesture, just like his predecessors washing the weapons in the sea. In conclusion, it leads to the question how many events from Assyrian history, known primarily from official sources, require revision.

Krzysztof Kałek

kkalek89@gmail.com

Institute of History
Adam Mickiewicz University
Umultowska 89d
61-614 Poznań, Poland