

Researches about the localisation of ancient places around Kermanshah. The analyse of the VIth campaign of Sargon II.

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Introduction

Among the bulk of the Assyrian written sources and inscriptions some texts report the military expeditions of the kings of Assyria. These accounts, the so-called **Itineraries Texts**, describe in details the different stops of the armies through the territories outside the Assyrian heartland. The aims of these sources are to put evidence the geographical expansion of the Assyrian Imperial Control outside the Assyrian heartland.

With regard to the Zagros area, the reports mention different long campaigns undertaken by Assyrian Kings, Assurnazirpal II (883 -859), Shalmanazer III (858-824), Shamshi Adad V (824-811) and Sargon II (720-705). These Itineraries texts differ from the other written sources like the Annals through the use of the chronological succession of events, by which the different place names (towns, villages, mountains, plains and watercourses) are mentioned in the texts according to their order of appearance during the marches of the armies.

Moreover these texts contain a great number of very interesting topographical and geographical information even if they bear serious weaknesses owing to the lack of detailed geographical settings accompanying the place names. Exceptionally, geographical features like high mountains, stormy and dangerous rivers, “strategic” passes are named as they could serve as landmarks.

It's clear that only some of these features of the landscape can be identified with a certain degree of certainty (high mountains, large plains, large rivers) but unfortunately we are so far to be able to locate the majority of them on a modern geographical map.

Before trying to locate place names and other sites on a geographical map, the Itineraries must be analysed methodologically.

We have to determine the direction of the movements of the armies according to the possibilities given by the geography. Indeed we have to take account that the marches of the armies are submitted to the logic of the geographical possibilities offered by the paths, tracks and other ways that make possible the movements of the troops.

The first point is that the strategic coherence of a campaign is led by the need to use the most easy and best practicable tracks as possible to move across the Zagros.... where an army can match great difficulties to cross over mountainous areas and terrains with wheeled chariots and also loaded horses and mules.

According to the geography of the Zagros Area, the routes through the valleys, passes and fords used by the Assyrian army must not have been very different from those we can observe watching an actual topographical and geographical maps. The geographical reality has not changed and it's not unreasonable to think that valleys, plains and passes used nowadays as connexion between cities and villages could have existed and could have been used in the time of the Assyrian campaigns (VIII –VII th C. BC).

Moreover we have to bear always in mind that the movements of the troops and the itineraries must be linked to the possibilities for water and fodder supplies in all the areas crossed over.

Exceptionally, it could be made with certainty a phonetic link between an ancient place name and a modern place or settlement. In contrast to the documents explaining the Assyrian campaigns against cities in Syria and even in Babylonia, the phonetic connexions between ancient toponyms and the modern names of places, sites, regions, rivers and mountains are exceptional for the Zagros area. However we can find only very few examples like the name of the city of Arbela (most probably the modern Erbil), the river Zaban (the Lower or the Greater Zab) and the mount Zimur (most probably the mount Zeimur near Tabriz).

The diagrammatic chart

The Aims of our Study are to reconstruct with the data's given in the Itineraries, the Ancient Topographical Map of the Zagros area,.... the Zagros area like the Assyrians knew it.

We have used a methodology based on the drawing of diagrammatic charts in which all the place names are introduced in a network showing their geographical connexions with other places in relation to their position in the itineraries.

However the construction of these “diagrammatic” charts must take account of three points, which are particularly important.

- First of all it's necessary to construct the chronological sequences in which the different place names take place according their order of appearance in each itinerary account. Indeed each place name is linked to other neighbouring places and sites according its own position in the itinerary.

- The next stage is to establish cross-checking geographical connexions between the sequences of different itineraries based on the appearance in the different texts of the same names.

Indeed we have absolutely to take account that a position or a place for any place name must be coherent that is to say, its network of geographical connexions must be left unchanged whatever the itinerary and whatever the reign during which the campaign is undertaken. For each place name, it's necessary to establish a permanent system of connexions that must not change from an itinerary to another.

By no means, the same place could belong to two different networks of interconnected place names. Each place name must “hold” constantly its position.

- The aims of the drawings of these networks of connections are to make appear coherent and stable assemblages of different interconnected place names, as parts (or subdivisions) of a wider network even if afterwards some other place names are added to.

Indeed in some passages of the texts there are precious information about the neighbourhood of some place names for example, the mention of the tributes brought by some rulers or other high representatives of cities to the place where the king of Assyria has fixed his base camp. This place must be situated in the neighbourhood or in the vicinity of the Assyrian city where the tribute is paid.

Other helpful information could help to locate with more accuracy some places according their geographical setting in well-watered plains. We will see that it's not unlikely that these administrative centres have been inhabited and have functioned on the same spot (or in a close vicinity) from the time of the Assyrian expeditions.

Despite all these precious information coming from the Itineraries texts the mentions of the geographical features are very few. Only when they are exceptional for the Assyrians like a very high mountain with snowed cap summit, or a dangerous narrow valley, or a large watered plain, or a difficult pass or a stormy river, they seem to have been of enough interest to be reported.

Exceptionally some of these landmarks could be identified with precision to significant or major geographical features bearing modern names for example, the mount Arusaka seems to be the mountain of Bisutun – Bai't Ilu, known by the Assyrians as the land of *White Mountain* or later as the mount Bikni seems to have been the Alvand – the pass of Upurya could be the long pass situated on the modern road connecting the valley of Sahneh to the one of Kangavar.

For the most part these geographical features seem to have served as landmarks helping the troops to find their way and to take the right direction. If the Assyrians seem to have more or less correctly reported the local names of the different toponyms, we have to be aware of possible phonetic distortions and spellings or changes in the names. The Itineraries show obviously that they were more acquainted and familiar in the use of place names of lands or cities that are in good (economical) terms with Assyria or in a state of submission like for example: Mannea, Allabria, Karalla and Parsua/Parsuash. As regards to the other people and lands, the itineraries texts reveal countless examples of phonetic confusions between different place names. For example, Shurdia is written to the place of Shurgadia, Zikirtu is written sometimes for Zakritu and Zirta for Izirtu. Of course, the construction of a diagrammatic chart reveals all the confusions.

The passage from a Diagrammatic chart to a real geographic map is not direct or easy. The same conditions must be applied for both in the setting of the different place names. All the connexions identified in the Diagrammatic map must be clearly pointed up but this time according to the geographical reality. All the connexions between different place names must be related to the possibilities of communications revealed and exposed by the existing tracks, valleys, passes, paths and even by the modern communication roads through the mountainous areas.

Of course, itineraries texts may be different in relation to the number and the precision of the details giving more possibilities to follow the different stops of the marches of the Assyrian armies in the Zagros Area.

Now You are acquainted to such methodology of research through the analyse together the **Assyrian expedition of the year 716 BC or the 6th campaign of Sargon II**

The text of the Itinerary comes from the inscriptions on the stele discovered in Nadjaf-e Abad (in the province of Kermanshah). It has been proved that the inscription on this monument corresponds to the text of the Annals relating the VIth campaign of Sargon II. The goals of this campaign are to bring Izirtu, the Karalla, the Allabria and the Mannea/Manna back in the Assyrian sphere of Influence.

Coming from Assyria by a pass through the *Chaîne Magistrale* of the Zagros Sargon II attacks the lands of Karalla and Allabria before to take control of the city of Izirtu in the land of Mannea/Manna.

If the Assyrian troops follow the usual and long standing route of penetration that is to say the road leading (south/southeast direction !!!) by **Zeribor/Marivan – Sanandaj-Kermanshah**, the land of **Karalla** must correspond to the area around the lake of **Marivan** (former **Zeribor**) and **Allabria** the region of **Sanandaj**.

According to this, **Izirtu** must be located to the north east of the **Karalla-Allabria** Area and to the east of the pass crossed by the Assyrian Army.

The site of **Qala'itchi** near the modern town of Bukan (8km to the NW), believed to be the ancient site of **Izirtu** seems for us to be located too far away to the north as regards with the geographical setting of lands of **Karalla** and **Allabria** according to the logic of the direction (= southern direction) taken by the expedition.

In matter of fact, to reach the area south of Sanandaj area the most logical route for the Assyrians is to take the modern road connecting **Marivan** to **Sarband/Sarvabad** (maybe the **Surikash** of the VIIIth campaign) before to pursue their march to the area of **Kamyaran**. Along this route, they have carved in a rocky cliff overhanging the valley a relief known as the relief of **Tang-I Var**.

In the inscription of the Nadjaf-e abad's stele, the Assyrians have reported the annexing of the **Karalla** to Zamua after the capture of **Izirtu**.

If **Karalla** is annexed to **Zamua** but **Allabria** seems to have been left in a state of dependence according its more distant geographical situation from **Karalla**. According to this, **Allabria** could be located in the area of **Sanandaj**, that is say on the east of the long chain (running Northwest to Southeast) of the **Kuh-e Shahu** mountain.

According to this the distance that separates **Allabria** to the area of **Qala'itchi** (supposedly **Izirtu**) is too long and dangerously close to the territories controlled by the Urartians to be reached during this campaign .

Along the Chain of the **Kuh-e Shahu** two parallel routes lead in the SE direction and it seems that a southern road (Karalla road) is shorter and direct, and moreover easily practicable by the Assyrians to reach the north part of the **Mahi Dasht** plain.

In the text there are no mentions about any intermediary place names but it's said that consequently to this events (= first step of the campaign), the **Karalla** is annexed to the long-standing Assyrian province of **Zamua**. (nowadays the Iraqi district of the **Shahrizor-Halabja** plain) . It means first a geographical proximity that bounds the two areas now united in a same province and secondly (!!!) the existence of a route connecting the two lands through a pass in the ***Chaîne Magistrale***.

According to this, **Karalla** must be located to the South-east of **Zamua**, along the road joining **Halabja** in Iraq to, **Nowsud** and **Paveh** in Iran.

Placing Karalla more to the north around the lake of Marivan doesn't frame with the series of toponyms as they are reported step by step in the well known letter of the 8th campaign.

Going back to the Itinerary of the campaign, Sargon II is said to go from the city of **Patta** (capital of the **Karalla** ? possible modern **Paveh**?) to the city of **Niqqar** (possible modern **Ravansar** ?). On the way the Assyrians capture the fortress of **Shurgadia** (mentioned as a fortress of the Quti people.

The existence of the salient fortress of **Shurgadia** (mentioned as a fortress of the Quti people) most probably on the western edge of the Chain of the **Kuh-e Shahu** (**Quri Qal'eh** ?) may be justified by the interest to control this important communication route.

Shurgadia as some other cities were annexed to the Assyrian province of **Parsua** (not mentioned in the stele) which seems to be a long standing ally of Assyria. It's noteworthy to remark that **Allabria** and Karalla from where the army of Sargon II comes directly were not annexed to this land, even though these two lands are not far away from **Parsua**.

PARSUA must be located to the south of the **Karalla-Allabria** area, otherwise how to explain this province (or a vassal entity) was not annexed by the Urartu like the two other lands.

The city of **Niqqar (or Nikkar)** above mentioned is believed to have been the capital or at least an important centre of **Parsua**. It's tempting to identify this ancient city with **Ravansar** according his localisation to the south of **Shurgadia** and according the direction of the march. However, the situation of **Ravansar** is situated too much to the SW in an isolated and remote position as regard the geographical area of the land **Parsua**. **Niqqar** must be located to the NW of the modern city.

According to some researchers, **Parsua** is to be located in the north part of the long **Mahi Dasht** plain. It's clear that the route followed by the Assyrian army leads naturally to the southeast direction before to run into the large valley of the upper course of the **Qara Su** river that's to say the north part of the **Mahi Dasht** plain. If his suggestion could be attractive we have therefore to take account that the same area must encompass the future province of **Kishesim**.

Parsua must be located to the extreme north of the **Mahi Dasht** plain or even in the vicinity of its Northeast border.

The text of the stele relates that after the sacking of **Shurgadia**, the Assyrian army enters (captures ?) the city of **Hundir** where Sargon II receives the tribute of the defeated king of **Kishesim**. We suppose that the city of **Kishesim** has been already

captured and destroyed according the image showing the attack displayed on the palace relief. Most probably this place fitted better than the ruined city of **Kishesim** for such ceremony.

If **Kishesim** is not very remote from **Hundir** the area seems enough remote from **Parsua** to allow the foundation of a new province avoiding an annexation from the long-standing Assyrian province of **Parsua**.

Moreover Kishesim is designated by Sargon II as the administrative centre of a new province formed by different lands (**Bit-Sagbi = Bit Sagbat, Bit-Hirmami**) and cities (**Harhubarban, Kilambati, Armangu**) impossible to locate on a map due to the lack of geographical information.

The extension of this province probably centred on the upper course of the **Qara Su** river is not known but most probably its southern part is limited by the north extension of the neighbouring province of **Harhar**, which seems to have been centred on the lower course of the **Qara Su river**.

HARHAR

After the forced bloody reintroduction of the city of **Harhar** in the Assyrian sphere of influence and the change of its name in **Kar Sharrukin**, the campaign of Sargon seems to enter in a new phase.

Harar seems to have been a long-standing ally of Assyria (when and how), which changed for a rebellious or seditious party.

The text reports that the city – and its inhabitants- refused to pay the tribute (horses) during four years to Assyria and looked for an alliance with **Ellipi**.

This situation indicates that the land of **Ellipi**, most probably the area of Luristan as it is assumed now, has a common border, or must be located in a geographical proximity with the area controlled by the city. Otherwise the search of such an alliance between the small state of **Harhar** and the seemingly mighty kingdom of **Ellipi** would be illogical.

The text of the Nadjaf-e Abad stele reports that **Harhar** is situated between the upper and the lower courses of a river whose name is not mentioned. We are informed that the upper course of this unknown river flows in an area named **Arazishu/Araziash** and its counterpart, the lower course, in an area named **Bit Ramateia** (giving the geographical positions of both , nord for the former and south for the latter).

This clear but unusual differentiation between two areas may signify that the city of **Harhar/Kar Sharrukin** was situated at the confluence of two important rivers. It's not unlikely that the junction of the two streams was a wide marshy and regularly swampy area that the Assyrians were not able to distinguish the two watercourses or more simply not worried about.

According to the geographical maps and the satellite images of the area around Kermanshah, two major rivers may be observed running in this very well irrigated region, the above mentioned **Qara Su**, which runs North West to South West and the **Gamas-I Ab**, which comes from the East.

During the time the confluence point moved gradually some kilometres away to the south of the modern town of **Kermanshah**. If we could identify this city with **Harar/Kar Sharrukin** mentioned in the text of the stele, the area to the north west could be identified to **Arazishu/Araziash** and the area to the south east to **Bit Ramateia**. We will find the later name further in our study.

If Harhar is said to have become the camp base for expeditions toward the East areas mainly to raid in the Medan Heartland, the situation of Kermanshah represent a clear and serious advantage for the Assyrian army.

ZAKRUTI & KURABLI

After Harhar has been secured and pacified Sargon II takes the direction of the west, toward **Zakruti and Kurabli**. Most probably these two lands are located to the west of the city of **Harhar** taking into account that the second half of this campaign (march) takes obviously part in the territories situated in the east of Harhar.

The text of the stele relates that the Assyrian troops cross over a river whose name is not mentioned. We could be sure that it is not the same river as the watercourse that runs in the **Bit Ramateia** already mentioned. Precluding the solution represented by the Gamas-Ab river, it's likely that the troops cross over the **Rudkhaneh-ye Marek** or **Marek** river that runs to the west of the **Qara Su** parallel and in the same direction of the later.

The area irrigated by the **Marek** may be the land **Zakruti**, that is the first step reached by Sargon II after the fall of **Harhar**. According to this, it's not surprisingly to locate the **Zakruti** (and its main city of the same name) at a relatively short distance from Harhar.

The city of **Kurabli** seems to be also a very important centre that controls an extended area. The importance of this area for Sargon II is proved by the fact that the Assyrian king receives in this city the tributes of many local "kings" of lands (and cities) located all around, like those of **Urikatu, Sikris, Shaparda, Uriakku, Bigali and Bit Uargi**. Unfortunately these lands are impossible to locate because of the lack of more information about them.

We know that Sargon II decided to integrate all these lands and cities in the new province of **Kar Sharrukin**. This may indicate a relative regional proximity between these lands and the Assyrian provincial centre. This province could have been created on the model of the neighbour province of **Kishesim**).

According to this, **Kurabli** seems to be located in the vicinity of the modern city of **Eslamabad-e Gharb** (if not under the city) that is situated in a well-irrigated plain

clearly separated from the one centred on the city of **Zakruti** by a range of low mountains. The two areas are directly connected to the not-too-distant city of **Kermanshah/Harhar** by a road that may naturally have taken the place of the ancient track.

RETURN TO THE EAST

What happens after **Kurabli**, the text is not clear (lines 49-50) but it seems that Sargon II goes back **to the east from Kurabli** itself or from the city and the land named **Sikris** possible modern **Sarab-e Harasam or Cheshmeh Mâhi**. The mention of a high mountain named **Abrau** at the beginning of the march leads us to identify **Sikris** with the former where a high mountain exists in its neighbourhood and the local mountainous geography corresponds better to what is described in the text of the expedition. We note that **Sarab-e Harasam** (supposedly Sikris) is located at some three days of march to the south of **Eslamabad-e Gharb/Kurabli**.

Possible Confusion QARA SU and GAMAS AB

Coming from **Sikiris** or from **Kurabli**, the Assyrian army goes across a river named **Pattus**. Most probably, in regards with the direction taken by the march, the river seems to be identified logically with the **Qara Su** already mentioned above.

According the marshy area of their confluence, the Assyrians seem not to have understood that this watercourse is the same as the river, which runs right across the land of **Arazishu**, identified to the north west part of the same wide and long fertile basin. It's not unlikely that the Assyrians believed that this watercourse come from the east and so, they have made confusion with the course of the **Gamas-Ab river**, which could be the real **Pattus**, a eastern tributary of the **Qara Su** and along which the Assyrians pursue their march to the east.

Of course as it is usual in the texts the **Araziashu** and the **Bit-Ramateia** have been already pacified and secured hence their nonappearance in the report of this part of the expedition.

East of QARA SU – (until pass of UPURYA)

The first area met by the Assyrians east of the Qara Su is a land named **Ukuta**, which appears in the itinerary to be connected to the neighbouring mountain named **Arusaka**. This mountain seems to have cached the imagination of the Assyrians they called it the “mighty mountain” most probably in connection with its massive form and height but also its proximity with the route taken by the troops. The mountain seems to be identified with the rocky mountain of **Bisutun**, which appears in the landscape as a tremendous huge massive peak with an abrupt cliff facing the valley of the **Gamas-Ab river**.

Having passed this outstanding geographical feature, the route open onto a long and narrow valley, which ends by a pass named **Upurya**. Before this passage, one city named **Anzaknie** is mentioned in the text as the centre of this land. It's probably the modern **Sahneh**, which is well irrigated by many little streams coming from the mountain.

EAST OF QARA SU – (from the UPURYA pass to the modern pass of KHARIZ)

The pass of **Khariz** (connected to the village of **Sarab**), recently enlarged, connects the valley of **Bisutun** with the one of **Kangavar-Assadabad**. In the text of the stele, the pass of **Upurya** is situated between two high mountains named **Patashun** and **Darue**. In fact, it's possible to observe from the highest point on the pass of **Khariz-e Bid Sorkh** (east of the village of **Sarab**) two high mountains, which may be identified with the two, mentioned on the stele.

According the following steps of the itinerary (as we will discuss further) we identify the mountain **Patashun** with the one situated to the north of the pass, and the mountain **Darue** to the south.

PLAIN OF KANGAVAR

After the passage of the Assyrian army by the pass of **Upurya**, Sargon II reaches an important city named **Bustus**. Logically, the site of this city seems to correspond to the city of **Kangavar**, the first place located down the road coming from the pass.

After to have received the tribute of **Kanzabakni** and **Aratishta** (these cities are not localisable with some precision),, in the captured city of **Bustus** the Assyrians pursue their march in the direction of cities like **Datumbu**, **Karzinu**, **Barikanu** and **Saka**.

To reach these cities, Sargon change his progress toward the north for an eastern direction. The geographical maps and satellite maps show clearly that another large and well-irrigated basin runs into the main plain of **Kangavar-Assadabad** through a large passage situated just in front of the city of **Kangavar**. Geographically speaking the movement of Sargon's army is perfectly recognizable and understandable. The Assyrians enter the rich plain of **Nehavand-Firuzabad** to subdue its cities and populations. The city of **Datumbu** seems to be situated at the junction of the two great valleys in the proximity or not-too-distant of **Kangavar**.

MARCH to SAKA

In matter of fact the suite of cities, **Datumbu**, **Karzinu** and **Barikanu**, appears as stops along the route. In the end, Sargon II reaches the city of **Saka**, which seems to

be the most important of the plain because here he receives the tributes brought by many rulers of the other cities. **Saka** could be identified with the modern **Nehavand**.

We consider the identification of **Saka** with Malayer highly unlikely. This city is situated too far away to the north-east beyond a barrier formed by a group of low mountains and crossed by the modern road joining Nehavand to Malayer. It was not in the interest of Sargon to pursue this march in this direction leaving the possibility for his enemies to block the way back to Harhar the base of the expedition.

BACK TO ASSADABAD-KANGAVAR VALLEY

Maybe being aware of this danger, Sargon goes back in the direction of the **Darue** river, which bears the same name of the mountain located to the south of the **Upurya** pass as mentioned before. It is highly likely that the river is to be located at the foot or in the vicinity of the mountain. According the geography, it's logical that the mentioned river, supplied by a great number of streams coming from the mountain, could be identified to the lower course of the **Rudkhane-ye Malayer**, which runs into the **Gamas-Ab** river as its affluent. The junction is situated at some distance of the passage leading to the **Assadabad** valley we have mentioned before.

This point is logically situated to the south of the pass of **Upurya** and that is the reason for which we place the mountain **Darue** to the south of the pass.

TO THE NORTH (to Assadabad)

At that time Sargon II and his army march on the right (east) bank of the **Rudkhane-ye Malayer/Darue** river. From this point it doesn't turn out to be necessary to cross any other river except for one or two minor streams because the route taken by the Assyrians seems to be now oriented to the north that's to say in the long and wide **Assadabad** valley where is situated the city of **Ramanda**, the next objective of the expedition.

Ramanda appears as an important city but not as the final point of the march. According to this it's possible to identify **Ramanda** with the imposing site of **Godin Tepe** situated only 25 km to the south of **Assadabad**, a distance covered easily in one day of march.

Then Sargon II goes to **Irnis**a (probably to be identified to one of the many tepes in the plain) and stops his march at the city of **Urratus/Uratas**. It's very likely that this last stop must be situated in the vicinity of **Nadjaf-e Abad** where the stele was discovered. This place is situated very close to **Assadabad**, which lies at the foot of a huge mountainous barrier of the Alavand. **Urratus** may be identified with **Assadabad** most probably a city of importance because, Sargon II chosen this place to receive there the tribute of many mighty median rulers.

The text of the stele stops here and most probably the king and his army went back to **Harhar** through a pacified land. However, we have no definite information if this area was later transformed in a new province or most probably annexed to the long-standing province of **Harhar**.

We have to note that it's not written on the stele that Sargon II turned out this area in a new province .