

**Revisiting the Conquest of Karkamiš of
Mursili's 9th Year:
Assyrian Aggression or Mursili in the Long Shadow of His Father?**

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It is a great pleasure for me to be able to contribute to this *Festschrift* for Gernot Wilhelm, who has earned the respect and affection of so many researchers of my generation, not only for his scholarship at the highest level, but also for his eagerness to support students and young scholars, his generosity and selflessness, exemplified by his readiness, as the epigraphist at Kuşaklı / Saressa then Boğazköy / Hattusa, to share the publication of new text finds with colleagues, and for his academic openness and vision, typified by the way in which he has made available to the research community the resources of the *Arbeitsstelle Hethitische Forschungen* at the *Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz*. I trust the topic of this paper will be of interest to him, since he himself suggested that I publish these observations as a separate paper, noting the fact that such comments are often overlooked when buried in footnotes in articles on other topics.¹

It has long been essentially the *communis opinio* among Hittitologists that the Assyrians attacked and/or conquered Karkamiš during the ninth year of the reign of Mursili II, and that this Hittite king responded by campaigning to Syria to drive the Assyrians out, and this view has become enshrined in the standard historical reference works.

Klengel (1999: 198), for example, writes, 'Während Muršili auf einem Feldzug gegen Hajaša im nordöstlichen Kleinasien war, ging der assyrische König gegen das Land Karkamiš vor und griff dessen osteuphratisches Gebiet an. Da der Thron von Karkamiš noch vakant war, ... erschien die Lage im Euphratbereich dem assyrischen König günstig für einen Angriff. ... Adad-nirari muß nach seinem Sieg über die Residenzstadt des Wasašatta, Taʾidu / Taʾite, bis in die Nähe des Verwaltungsbereiches von

¹ See Miller (2007: 138, n. 43, 149, n. 71).

Karkamiš gelangt sein. Das dürfte nicht zuletzt dazu beigetragen haben, daß Muršili II. sich veranlaßt sah, in seinem 9. Regierungsjahr persönlich in Nordsyrien zu erscheinen, wobei er seine Aufmerksamkeit vor allem der Sicherung der Euphratgrenze zuwandte.²

T. Bryce (2005: 203) goes even a step further, writing, 'the news of Sharri-Kushuh's death prompted the Assyrians to invade and occupy the kingdom of Car-chemish,' prompting 'the king himself (to) set out for Ashtata on the Euphrates to make preparations for driving the Assyrians from Carchemish,' a campaign which apparently met with success, as (p. 204) 'Mursili himself succeeded in regaining from the Assyrians control of the kingdom of Carchemish.'²

It should be clear, however, that this Assyrian attack against, even conquest of, Karkamiš in Mursili's 9th year is based exclusively on restorations (e.g. Götze 1933: 116 f., 247 f.)³ in the Annals of Mursili (KBo 4.4 ii 40, 43). It is the purpose of this paper to assert that these restorations are quite unlikely and that the surrounding context hints at another scenario entirely. The whole of the Assyrian confrontation of Mursili's 9th year and the attack against, even capture of, Karkamiš should therefore be regarded as a modern fiction.

The events leading up to the passage in question are well known. In Mursili's 9th year the Great King travels to Kizzuwatna in order to take part in rites for Ḫebat of Kummanni, is met there by his brother, Šarri-Kušuh, the King of Karkamiš, who promptly falls ill and dies (Götze 1933: 108-109). Thereafter, and likely at least in part as a result thereof, troubles began anew in Nuḫḫašše, while Ḫayasa befell the Hittite cities Istitina and Kannuwara (ibid.: 108-111). Mursili, who seems to have remained in Kizzuwatna, responded by dispatching his general ḪLAMMA to put down the rebellion in Nuḫḫašše, which he does (ibid.: 110-113). Niqmaddu, prince of Qadeš, exploited the opportunity by murdering his father, Aitakkama, seizing the throne and allying himself with the Hittites, an alliance which Mursili accepts only after initially expressing abhorrence toward Niqmaddu's patricide (ibid.: 112-115). Meanwhile Mursili's general Nuwanza sought to subdue Ḫayasa, whereby extispicy and bird oracles played a significant role in determining who was to lead the campaign in Anatolia; Mursili himself apparently seriously considered campaigning personally against the Ḫayaseans (ibid.: 114-117), and this is the context in which the passage in question is to be considered.

Mursili recognizes the seriousness of both threats, the Ḫayasean incursions and the Syrian rebellion. To which should he direct his personal attention, and why? In Götze's reconstruction Mursili's hand was suddenly forced by the unanticipated and, up until this point, yet to be mentioned conquest of Karkamiš by Assyria: 'Wäre ich [nach Istitina zu Hi]lfe geeilt, hätte [ich die Ḫajašäer aus Kannuwar]a hinaus gejagt.

[Aber da] besiegte [der König von Aššur⁴ das Land] Kargamiš und [.....] es' (KBo 4.4 ii 38-41). It seems, however, that Mursili's motivation for choosing to campaign to Syria rather than against the Ḫayaseans was quite another, as found in ll. 44-48: '... hätten sie da nicht fol[gendermaßen gesprochen?]: "Sein Vater hat das Land Kargamiš besiegt, und es steht [.....]."⁵ Welchen Bruder von sich er aber im Lande Kargamiš zum König gemacht hat, der ist gestorben. Und er zog nicht nach dem Lande Kargamiš und ordnete das Land Kargamiš nicht; und er zog nach einem anderen Lande."⁶ In other words, if in the face of the precarious situation in Syria brought on by Šarri-Kušuh's death, Mursili had been forced to campaign in his own back yard rather than moving to quickly establish control in volatile Syria, he would have been perceived as weak and ineffective, especially in comparison with his illustrious father.

I would suggest that this passage reveals both Mursili's motivation for choosing to campaign to Syria, i. e. living up to his father's reputation, as well as the identity of the conqueror of Karkamiš in l. 40, i. e. the very same Suppiluliuma. That is to say, there was no battle for or conquest of Karkamiš in Mursili's 9th year. Rather, in deciding whether to campaign against the Ḫayaseans or to quell the Syrian rebellion, Mursili reflects on his father's grandiose conquest of Syria and its centrepiece, Karkamiš, and concludes that campaigning against Ḫayasa might be understood as him failing to live up to his father's deeds in Syria. The next question would be who, if not the Assyrians, does Mursili imagine mocking him (i. e. in ll. 43-44) as failing to live up to his father's greatness? Perhaps simply 'the lands', 'all the lands' or 'the enemy lands' (cf. KBo 3.4 i 4, 6, 7, 8, 11 and *passim*), possibly referring to the Syrian vassals and/or the other great powers, is sufficient. Indeed, Mursili's attempts to step out from the long shadow of his glorious father in the eyes of the surrounding lands, who had mocked him as a child upon the death of his father, and that of his experienced older brother, is a recurring theme in his annals.

Still, exactly what is to be restored in ll. 40-43 must remain open. Presumably something along the lines of *u-i-ia-[nu-un A-BU-IA-ma-za ku-it KUR URUK]ar-kà-miš tar-aḫ-ta na-at [da-ni-nu-ut⁷ am-mu-uk-ma-an]* in ll. 40-41 and *ma-aḫ-ḫ[a-an KUR.KURMEŠ LÚKÚR]* in l. 43, yielding a translation "Wäre ich [nach Istitina zu Hi]lfe geeilt, hätte [ich die Ḫajašäer aus Kannuwara] hinaus gejagt. [Da aber mein Vater] Karkamiš besiegt hatte, und es [geordnet hatte], wenn [ich meinerseits] gegen diesen

⁴ Götze (1933: 116, n. h) does add at this point the caveat, which seemingly went largely ignored, 'Erg(änzung) ganz unsicher.'

⁵ One would expect perhaps 'and he pacified/organized it' (*taninut*) in l. 45, but the sense of what can be read (x[ca. 3 signs]x *ar-ta-r*) eluded Götze and escapes me as well.

⁶ Del Monte (1993: 94 f. and n. 71) prudently avoids restoring Assyria as the conqueror of Karkamiš and the Assyrians as those who Mursili fears would have mocked him, merely citing the fact that it is generally assumed to have been Assyria.

⁷ Another possibility, suggested to me by I. Singer, would be *na-at [IR-(na)-aḫ-ta-(at)]*, for which cf. e. g. KBo 3.4 i 41.

² Similarly Cornelius (1973: 189 f.); Goetze (1975: 123); Hawkins (1976-80: 430); Gurney (1990: 26); cf. Freu (2003: 173 and ns. 302 f.), opting for Egypt rather than Assyria.

³ Similarly already in Forrer (1926: 46).

Feind [gezogen wäre und ihn bes]iegt hätte, sowie [die Feindesländer] davon erfahren hätten, hätten sie da nicht fol[gendermaßen gesprochen]?”

Such an assumption also moots the question of why, if Assyria had conquered Karkamiš at this juncture, it is mentioned in such lapidary fashion. Surely such a momentous episode, the conquest of Ḫatti's principal possession in Syria by one of the other great powers of the day, would have received some further exposition? After all, Mursili labours on for many lines concerning the Ḫayasean threat to the relatively unimportant cities of Istitina and Kannuwara. And if Assyria had in fact attacked or even conquered Karkamiš, why does Mursili make no further mention of Assyria? One would surely expect that he would have told of his driving Assyria from Syria, or at least have related how the Assyrians fled upon his arrival in Aštata. This would have been the greatest achievement of his career thus far. Is it conceivable that he would have neglected to mention it? And would the Assyrians not have committed, in the eyes of the Hittites, a grave transgression against Ḫatti and the gods for such an unprovoked attack, and would Mursili have left such aggression uncommented in his annals? Almost certainly not. It therefore seems that neither the Assyrians nor any other power launched an attack against, let alone conquered, Karkamiš in Mursili's 9th year.

Once the conquest of Karkamiš by the Assyrians and Mursili's reaction to the Assyrian threat is struck from the record, it is seen that Mursili is in fact never witnessed to have engaged in any military activity in Syria in his Annals in any year; not in year 2, in which he sends Nuwanza to guard against an Assyrian threat which never materializes; not in year 7, in which he sends Kantuzili and Šarri-Kušuh to deal with the Nuḫḫašše rebellion and the Egyptian threat;⁸ not in year 9, in which he appears personally in Syria in response to the rebellion, but undertakes no action other than the coronations of his nephews,]-Šarruma in Karkamiš and Talmi-Šarruma in Ḫalab (Götze 1933: 124 f.), as well as the fortification of Aštata.

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⁸ On the possibility that Mursili may have campaigned to Syria in his 7th year, see discussion in Miller (2007: 145 f.).