

ASSYRIAN EXPANSION INTO ANATOLIA IN THE SARGONID AGE (c. 744-650 BC)

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1. Introduction

Plate 29

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the history of Assyria's dealings with Anatolia during the Sargonid age in an attempt to deduce the relative position of Anatolia in Assyrian foreign policy and the reasons behind this policy¹. I am not concerned so much with the events themselves but with their wider interpretation. Since the chronology and general outline of this part of Anatolian and Assyrian history have been well known for decades (although new details keep coming to light to fill out the picture), I shall present just a brief summary (2. Events) before proceeding to an interpretation (3. Assyria's Policy Towards Anatolia).

Some preliminary remarks on geography are required. In this paper I am concerned only with the area around and immediately west of the Upper Euphrates, that is south central Anatolia. The region east of this divide has quite a different story and involves northern Persia which is beyond the scope of my intentions.

As to historical geography, the political and geographical scene in ancient Anatolia is extremely confusing both because there were no fixed borders defining the limits of a particular place name and because territorial control was in a constant state of flux. Let me briefly describe the chief states in this period (see the map). On the Mediterranean just west of the Gulf of Iskenderun were Que (region of modern Adana) and Hilakku (region of modern Mersin). North-east of these, between modern Adana and Kayseri, was Tabal. Further north-east were Gurgum and Kum-

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muḫ, with the Upper Euphrates as their eastern boundary. Finally, yet farther north, was Milid in the region of modern Malatya. These states form a diagonal line running north-east along the Taurus Mountains from the Mediterranean to the Upper Euphrates. This was the Assyrian frontier in Anatolia in the Sargonid Age.

2. Events

During the late ninth century BC, Assyria had established a significant presence in the region of the Upper Euphrates and Eastern Taurus mountains². But with the rise of the Kingdom of Urartu and the decline of Assyrian power in the first half of the eighth century, some states, such as Kummuh, had switched their allegiance to Urartu while others, such as Gurgum, regarded themselves as independent.

When Tiglath-pileser III came to the throne in 744 BC, his main concern was Urartu and throughout his reign he concentrated upon Urartu's defeat. This long-standing conflict took place in the north and west, the west including the Upper Euphrates and Eastern Taurus. Thus south-central Anatolia became an important arena for the bitter fighting between these two giants.

Three Anatolian states — Milid, Gurgum and Kummuh — joined with Urartu in the very first battle at Kummuh against Tiglath-pileser in 743 BC. Assyria won the day and Tiglath-pileser incorporated both Kummuh and Gurgum into his empire. For a few years thereafter no further word is heard about Assyrian activities in south central Anatolia since Assyria was occupied with a direct invasion of Urartu. In 738, however, a number of states — Milid, Kummuh, Gurgum, Tabal, Tuna, Samal, Kaska, and Que — paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser after an Assyrian victory in north Syria. Thus Anatolia seems to have remained fairly docile, except for an undated and unsuccessful insurrection at Tabal, during the remainder of the reign.

Sargon's activity on the Anatolian frontier was essentially that of consolidation and fortification against two major powers, the Mushku (Phrygians) led by Mita (Midas) and the Urartians under Rusa I and later Ar-

² For full details and documentation of these events see my chapters in the revised Cambridge Ancient History 3/2 (in press).

gisti II. The campaigns of Tiglath-pileser III had established the Assyrian frontier in the Taurus range in dangerous proximity to the domain of Midas who felt threatened. Midas avoided open conflict with Assyria, preferring like Urartu to form alliances with the various small states in the buffer zone east of Phrygia and to encourage them to rebel against Sargon. It is these states that bore the brunt of Assyria's hostility for they, once again, became the battlefield between larger powers.

Fairly early in Sargon's reign Phrygia and Urartu formed an alliance against Assyria and Milid and Gurgum joined them. This was ill-fated for in 712 Sargon invaded Milid, adding its territory to the vassal state Kummuh, and in 711 Gurgum was reconquered and attached to the vassal state Tabal. By this time the might of Assyria was pressing hard upon the two allies, Phrygia and Urartu, and Urartu in particular had suffered from direct Assyria invasion. The Cimmerians were probably now in Anatolia as well, threatening the entire area. Thus in 709 Midas of Phrygia dramatically changed tactics and sued with Sargon for peace. The Assyrian was delighted, as we know from a recently discovered letter, and terms were agreed upon.

Other Anatolian states continued to cause Assyria concern, however. Kummuh, which had gone over to Urartu once again, was recaptured and made an Assyrian province in 708. Sargon continued his efforts to pacify the region and was killed on the battlefield at Tabal in 705. This was a signal for Tabal, Que, Hilakku, and Milid to rebel.

The rebellions in Anatolia at the end of Sargon's reign mark the beginning of the end of Assyrian control of the region. The next king, Sennacherib, was too preoccupied with other matters to do more than send a couple of token expeditions into the region (696 and 695). Esarhaddon devoted more attention to the area but only, no doubt, because of the serious forces gathering there which forced him to act. The Cimmerians were chief among these and their activities destabilized the whole territory. Thus Hilakku and Tabal remained independent, and Milid was captured by a certain Mugallu.

The Cimmerian presence was a mixed blessing to the Anatolian states. It relieved them from the heavy yoke of Urartu and Assyria, but only to replace this with another yoke, that of the Cimmerians. Thus by the reign of the last great Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, some Anatolian

states were seeking help from Assyria (c. 662). Among these appears, for the first time, Lydia far to the west. Although Gyges, king of Lydia, gained Ashurbanipal's friendship, his state was overrun and he himself killed by the Cimmerians (c. 640). Thus a serious Assyrian presence in Anatolia came to an end by the mid-seventh century.

3. Assyria's Policy Towards Anatolia

Assyria's dealings with Anatolia during the Sargonid age began with Tiglath-pileser III's attempts to destroy Urartu and they ended, a century later, with Ashurbanipal's attempts to stop the Cimmerians. In that century, when Assyrian kings were not campaigning against these two formidable forces, the Urartians and later the Cimmerians, they paid little attention to the region. A case in point is Sennacherib who, unworried by either enemy, virtually ignored Anatolia. Even Sargon only turned his attention to this region after he had crippled Urartian might and subdued the other parts of his kingdom. But when the Urartians or Cimmerians invaded or allied themselves with Anatolian states, Assyria regarded this both as a threat to her own security and as an intrusion into her domain. Then Assyria responded in force to protect her borders and her economic interests.

This behaviour on the part of the Sargonid kings is in contrast to their attitude towards other frontiers. Tiglath-pileser III spent the majority of his fighting time and energy, when not battling against Urartu, in Syria-Palestine, and he was followed in this policy by Sargon II. Sennacherib attempted to do the same but became embroiled with the Babylonian problem. Esarhaddon expanded on this same policy in his ambition to conquer Egypt. Finally, Ashurbanipal, like Sennacherib, was deflected from his primary goal, Egypt, by the Babylonian problem.

Anatolia was, then, never a central concern in Assyrian foreign policy. As long as the Anatolian states remained reasonably passive and provided Assyria with the products of her mines, the Sargonid kings showed little interest in them. They were on the periphery of Assyria's goals.

4. Conclusion

One can only speculate on the reasons for Assyria's relegation of the Anatolian frontier to a secondary position. After all, our sources do not

normally permit a glimpse into the private chambers at Nineveh, Dur-Sharrukin, or Calah where such matters were discussed. But given the general situation, a few reasons seem to be valid. Before presenting these I must stress that these suggestions are hypothetical and there are no precise facts to support them.

First, and perhaps foremost, the riches of the Levantine coastal trade, which under the Phoenicians became immense, were a temptation that no imperial power could resist. The Assyrians had gained access to this before going north to the Taurus Mountains, and it was natural that they should regard the Phoenician coast as of foremost importance. This, in turn, led them down the coast to the fabulously wealthy land of Egypt.

A second reason for Assyria to look to the south rather than the north was probably the relative strength of the peoples in each area. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah were divided and weak and the Egyptians were in disarray with the Ethiopians meddling in their land. On the other hand, the power of the Urartians and Cimmerians, not to mention the Phrygians, considerably curtailed any Assyrian hope of significant penetration into and power over Anatolia.

Finally, a third reason: access to Syria-Palestine and Egypt was much easier than to Anatolia. The Taurus range and the rugged mountainous terrain of the Anatolian highland, notorious for its cold winters, was a major obstacle. The Assyrian infantryman must have been demoralized by a landscape so unfamiliar and so hostile, and a landscape which deprived him of the protection and support of the cavalry and chariotry. For these units were immobilised by the terrain. By comparison, the Sinai desert which blocked the way to Egypt was child's play. The Assyrians were accustomed to heat and once they had crossed the Sinai and penetrated Egypt, they were on familiar battleground: flat plains where their cavalry and chariotry could be manoeuvred effectively. The natural defences provided by the Anatolian mountains were in antiquity, as they are today, a formidable barrier which any army must take seriously.