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چکیده

این مقاله نور تازه‌ای بر این پرسش داغ می‌افکند که کوروش در سال ۵۴۷ قبل از میلاد به کدام کشور حمله کرد، بنابراین یک بار دیگر با نام شکسته رویدادنامه نبونعید مواجه می‌شویم. قرائت نشانه(ها) بسیار تحت تأثیر منابع کلاسیک متأخر بوده است که شکست کروزوس را در برابر کوروش در حدود سال ۵۴۷ قبل از میلاد نشان می‌دهد. یک نظریه، بیان می‌کند که هیچ قرائت قابل اعتمادی را نمی‌توان با قطعیت مطلق استنباط کرد. به جای قرار دادن مبداء تاریخ برای آناتولی و پارس-چیش‌پیش، منحصراً بر روی این شواهد مبهم، رویکرد جدیدی به این موضوع آزاردهنده پیشنهاد می‌شود. در نهایت در این مقاله به این نتیجه می‌رسیم که منطقه اورارتو قانع کننده ترین فرضیه تاکنون را به تصویر می‌کشد.

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ONCE MORE THE NABONIDUS CHRONICLE (BM 35382) AND CYRUS' CAMPAIGN IN 547 BC

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Abstract

This paper sheds new light on the hotly debated question of which country Cyrus attacked in 547 BC, therefore dealing once more with the broken toponym of the Nabonidus Chronicle obv. ii 16. The reading of the sign(s) has been highly influenced by later classical sources, which place Croesus' defeat against Cyrus somewhere around the corresponding year 547 BC. A collation has made it clear that no reliable reading can be inferred with absolute certainty. Instead of placing a cornerstone of Anatolian and early Persian-Teispid history exclusively on this ambiguous evidence, a new approach to this vexed topic is suggested. The contextualisation of the whole text passage leads to the conclusion that the region of Urartu depicts the most convincing hypothesis so far.

Introduction

After more than 100 years of intense debate on how to interpret the partly broken toponym in line obv. ii 16 of the so-called Nabonidus Chronicle (BM 35382), some very recent publications claim to have finally solved the problem by being able to definitely 'read' and identify the country that was the object of Cyrus' campaign in Nabonidus' ninth year, i.e. 547 BC. Since the debate and the various 'identifications' of the toponym have considerable repercussions on the question of how to reconstruct Anatolian and early Persian-Teispid history in the middle and second half of the 6th century BC, it is of utmost importance to clarify what we definitely know and what we do not know with certainty, to highlight the borderline between 'reading' and 'interpreting' and to make apparent the premises of our reconstructions. Moreover, it is also salient to demonstrate how possible solutions of the vexed problem could be achieved, thus putting the debate on much more substantial and promising ground. This paper will illustrate that any assumed 'definite' reading of the crucial passage is driven by presuppositions that trace back to chronological speculations of much later classical sources. Whereas earlier contributions appear to have been conscious of this connection, more recent articles seem to be fairly ignorant about this interdependency, hence confounding 'fact' and 'claim', 'proof' and 'hypothesis'.

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This paper will proceed in three steps. In the first section we will focus on the basis of the entire discussion, i.e. the classical chronographic tradition and the immanent problems related to how classical scholars achieved a date for Cyrus' campaign against Croesus. In the second section we will present an overview of the history of the various 'decipherments' of the broken toponym of the Nabonidus Chronicle obv. ii 16. In the third and last section we will suggest a solution on how to interpret the broken toponym that is not primarily based on 'reading' but on contextualising the relevant passage of the Nabonidus Chronicle.

The Nabonidus Chronicle and the Classical Chronographic Tradition: How the Ancients Dated Cyrus' Campaign against Croesus

For over 100 years, the correct reading of the broken toponym in line obv. ii 16 of the Nabonidus Chronicle has remained the subject of a lively and not yet adequately resolved debate.¹ The cuneiform tablet reports events under Nabonidus (556–539 BC), the last Neo-Babylonian king, and the early years of Cyrus' reign (ca. 559–530 BC), but was written nearly 200 years thereafter in Hellenistic times.² For Nabonidus' ninth year, i.e. 547 BC, Grayson offered the following reading and translation:

15: ... *ina*ⁱⁱⁱ *Nisanni*^m *Ku-raš*^{šar} *šar*^{kur} *Par-su ummāni-šú id-ke-e-[m]a*
 16: *šap-la-an*^{uru} *Ar-ba-'il*^{id} *Idiqlat i-bir-ma ina*^{iti} *Aiiari ana*^{kur} *Lu'-u[d-dí(?) ...]†*
 17: *šarra-šú idūk bu-šá-a-šú il-qí šu-lit šá ram-ni-šú <<AS>> lu ú-še-li [...]*³

15: In the month Nisan Cyrus (II), king of Parsu, mustered his army and
 16: crossed the Tigris below Arbail. In the month Iyyar [he marched] to Ly[di]a†.
 17: He defeated its king, took its possessions, (and) stationed his own garrison (there) [...].⁴

In the appendix Grayson stated that he had collated the original tablet once more and therefore changed the reading of the toponym into *kur* *Lu!?-ú!?'-[du? il-lí]k⁵*. This is – not very surprisingly – exactly the Babylonian writing of the toponym (*Lu-ú-du*) that became apparent in Grayson's times, whereas earlier interpretations based their 'readings' on the Assyrian way of writing the name of the Anatolian land

¹ An overview of the enormous amount of literature can be found in Cargill 1977; Rollinger 1993, 188–97; 2008, 56–57; Kokkinos 2009b, 1–2; Räthel 2015. Amélie Kuhrt also commented on this issue: Kuhrt 1988, 120, n. 62.

² Waerzeggers 2015, 96, 115–16.

³ Akkadian text according to Grayson 1975, 107.

⁴ English translation according to Grayson 1975, 107.

⁵ Grayson 1975, 282.

(*Lu-ud-du*) that was well known from the very beginning of the debate.⁶ However, Grayson discloses the fact that the 'traces are ambiguous' and argues further that 'such a reading is suggested by historical probability rather than any clear indication from the traces'. Reflecting on this matter it is crucial to show why the connection with Lydia was suggested in the first place. For that very reason those written sources which contain a date for Cyrus' victory over Croesus, have to be put under scrutiny. Hence, not only the above quoted text passage of the Nabonidus Chronicle will be discussed but also the Greek chronographic tradition.

Herodotus, one of the earliest and in any case most substantial Greek sources for Croesus' defeat, details the story of Croesus and informs about Cyrus the Great's conquest of Lydia with its capital Sardis. When exactly Herodotus (1. 86. 1) thought this to have happened, remains unclear.⁷ To be precise, Herodotus offers an elaborate relative chronology for the Mermnad dynasty of the Lydian kings, providing the length of each of the five Lydian kings' reigns from Gyges to Croesus.⁸ But he does not clarify the date of Croesus' defeat and thus the end of the Lydian dynasty any further. Even though numerous connections with primary sources of the Neo-Assyrian empire and Egypt exist,⁹ no sound absolute chronology can be established. The case of Gyges in the Neo-Assyrian sources gives an illustrating example: Prism A (ii 111–120) of Ashurbanipal's (669–631/27 BC) annals¹⁰ refers to Gyges' death though without providing a precise date. Therefore, the date of this text can only offer a *terminus ante quem*, namely before 645 or 643 BC.¹¹ Assuming that the other references to Gyges in Prism B (ii 86b–iii 4) and F (F ii 10–20) imply that Gyges was still alive then, these texts in turn provide a *terminus post quem*. Consequently, Gyges must have died between 645/3 BC and 649/8 BC¹² or 646/5 BC.¹³ For the sake of convenience modern scholars assume a date of about 645 BC for Gyges'

⁶ Bagg 2007, 158; Zadok 1985, 213; cf. also below n. 61.

⁷ Bichler 2004, 213.

⁸ Herodotus 1. 15. 1 (Gyges reigned 38 years); 1. 16. 1 (Ardys 49 years, Sadyattes 12 years); 1. 25. 1 (Alyattes 57 years); 1. 86. 1 (Croesus 14 years).

⁹ For example, Payne and Wintjes 2016, 120–21.

¹⁰ For an up-to-date transliteration and English translation, see the website of the RINAP project: <<http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinapl/rinap5/corpus>>.

¹¹ These dates can be inferred from the mention of the *limmu* official Šamaš-dāninani. As the *limmu* list of the Neo-Assyrian empire only stretches from 910 until 649 BC (Millard 1994), there is some uncertainty about the precise date of Šamaš-dāninani's office. A discussion of the exact date can be found in Cogan and Tadmor 1981, 230; Reade and Walker 1982, 120–22; Fuchs 2010, 421 (with the suggestions 644, 643 or 642 BC).

¹² Texts of the version B either name the *limmu* official Bēšunu or Aḥu-ilāya, which according to Millard (1994, 54, 62, 91) means 649 and 648 BC respectively.

¹³ Texts of Prism F all name the official Nabû-šar-aḥḥēšu, who has been assigned either to the year 646 or 645 BC: Aynard 1957, 12–15; Fuchs 2010, 421.

death.¹⁴ Using Herodotus' information about the length of the reign of the other four Mermnad kings (132 years) the dynasty would have ended – at least in theory – in 513 BC! An apparently impossible result, as Cyrus only lived until 530 BC.¹⁵ Herodotus' numbers for the reigns of the Mermnad kings are obviously too high and have therefore been regarded critically concerning their historical value. These numbers are understood at least partially as constructs by Herodotus himself or his source(s).¹⁶ For that very reason, a combination of Herodotus' relative chronology of the Lydian kings together with the mentioned Lydian kings in primary Akkadian and Egyptian sources cannot form a methodologically sound basis for the absolute chronology of the Mermnad dynasty.¹⁷ New research on the Lydian coins of Croesus and his father Alyattes has opened the possibility to use archaeological contexts to date both regents according to the pottery chronology. As a result, new dates have been proposed, which assign Alyattes' reign a range from about 635 BC until shortly after 585 BC and date Croesus' ascension to the Lydian throne already in the 580s BC.¹⁸

Modern consensus on the date 547 BC for Croesus' defeat relies exclusively on Greek chronographic tradition¹⁹ that sets the event between 548 and 545 BC. The very fragmentary state of preservation poses a serious challenge when dealing with these texts.²⁰ The *Chronikōi Kanónes*²¹ of the Christian author Eusebius (3rd/4th century AD) serve as a sort of collecting basin for the otherwise lost chronographic works, but characteristically even his text from the early 4th century AD has not survived in its original Greek form. Two important transcripts above all offer, however, an important insight, namely the Latin copy of Jerome from the second half of the 4th century AD²² and the Armenian manuscript tradition from the 5th century AD.²³ Originally, Eusebius' Chronicle comprised two

¹⁴ *Contra* Kalaitzoglou 2008, 53–63.

¹⁵ Hinz 1983.

¹⁶ Busolt 1895, 458; Strasburger 1956, 143; Fehling 1985, 93–97; Ivantchik 1993, 109–11; Parker 1997, 63; Bichler 2004, 213; Haider 2004; Brehm 2013, 96; van Dongen 2013, 49; Wallace 2016, 169–72.

¹⁷ *Contra* Kalaitzoglou 2008, 41–65.

¹⁸ Dale 2015; Wallace 2016.

¹⁹ The most comprehensive study about ancient Greek chronography is still Mosshammer 1979. More recent contributions are Möller 1996; 2001; 2004a; 2004b; 2005; 2006; Panchenko 2000; Taylor 2000; Kōiv 2001; Christesen 2007; Feeney 2007; Kokkinos 2009a; 2009b; 2013.

²⁰ Mosshammer 1979, 97.

²¹ For the Chronicle of Eusebius, see Mosshammer 1979, 29–83; Croke 1982; Adler 1992; Burgess 1999, 21–109; Burgess and Kulikowski 2013, 119–26.

²² Helm 1956 is to be regarded as the standard edition.

²³ Karst's German translation from 1911 is still the best available means of access even though he does not provide the original Armenian text but only its German translation. Dating the Armenian manuscript tradition in the 5th century AD now seems to prevail (Christesen and Martirosova-Torlone

books. In the first, *Chronographia*, different lists of officials and kings were displayed separately and consecutively.²⁴ In the second book Eusebius synchronised the various lists of kings (*fila regnorum*) in table form and noted the historical events and persons in the according line, also named *spatium historicum*. There Eusebius placed the battle between Croesus and Cyrus right next to the row, where he listed the Olympiads, the years after Abraham and the reigns of various kings. Jerome²⁵ lists this entry in Ol. 58.1 (548/7 BC) and in the Armenian text tradition²⁶ the entry appears between Ol. 58.3 (AA 1470 / 546/5 BC) and Ol. 58.4 (AA 1471 / 545/4 BC). The minor difference of one year for the date of the fall of Sardis can be explained by the copying process of the manuscripts. A misplacement of the historical event by a single line would have had the consequence of shifting the date by a whole year. This also applies to the placement of the first Olympiad in the different text traditions of Eusebius: Jerome placed it 1241 years after Abraham (AA 1241), the Armenian version 1240 years thereafter (AA 1240).²⁷

Moreover, the dates provided by ancient Greek chronography are usually expressed with eponymous dates, such as the Attic archons and the Roman consuls, or with Olympiads in reference to the Olympic Games every fourth year in classical antiquity. Additionally, ancient authors and chronographers frequently relied on giving a time interval between a reference point, which could be the present or an episode in the historical or mythical past, and the event at hand. For better understanding, the dating method applied by ancient authors is normally rendered in BC/AD dates. The concept of eponymous dating obviously differs greatly from the modern comprehension of time and implies some challenges concerning absolute chronology. Ancient authors could, for example, name the same eponymous official for a given year, but nevertheless adduce differing time intervals between corresponding dates. This paradoxical situation is probably best known from the diverging chronologies of Varro (1st century BC) and Livy (1st century BC/AD) for the Roman past.²⁸ Thus, the inherent method of ancient chronography means that

2006, 45–48; Drost-Abgarjan 2006, 261), even though Karst (1911, XI–XII, LIV) proposed a significantly later date in the 8th century AD. A more recently made manuscript find has made a new edition essential, and this is currently in preparation (Drost-Abgarjan 2006).

²⁴ Codex pages in ancient Greek from the first book, hitherto preserved only in the Armenian text tradition, have become known in recent years. An edition of these pages is underway: Grusková 2013.

²⁵ Helm 1956, 103b^b.

²⁶ Karst 1911, 189.

²⁷ Mosshammer 1979, 80. For admittedly practical reasons, this one year difference has been ignored in the conversion into BC dates above, as it would seem impractical not to equate Ol. 1.1 with 776 BC. The reference to the years after Abraham is given in addition to avoid any confusion.

²⁸ Cornell 1995, 401–02.

a variation of a couple of years for the same historical event in different texts is to be expected. This applies even more so for the Greek Archaic period (*ca.* 800–500 BC), where ancient and modern scholars alike have difficulties providing a comprehensive chronology.²⁹

Besides Eusebius three further chronographic texts mention the date when Cyrus conquered the Lydian empire and its capital city Sardis, which shall be discussed briefly in chronological order.³⁰ The author of the Chronicle of Paros (3rd century BC), also called the Parian marble, applied the method of counting down the years until the Athenian (and Parian) archon of the year 264 BC. Additionally he named the Athenian archon to date each of the entries. In line A 42 the text mentions Croesus' defeat, but the interval is unfortunately broken off and a secure reconstruction has proven to be impossible.³¹ The only safe conclusion is that the author puts this event before Darius' seizure of power in 520/19 or 519/8 BC³² in line A 44, as the preceding line A 43 does not preserve the interval either. In the question of a precise date this inscription is, therefore, not helpful.

Apollodorus³³ (2nd century BC) seems to have used the date 547/6 or 546/5 BC, as can be inferred from the following information. According to him (*FGH* 244 F 28 *apud* Diogenes Laertius 1. 37–38), as Diogenes of Laertius (3rd century AD) reports, Thales of Milet was born in Ol. 35.1 (640/39 BC) and died in the 58th Olympiad (548/7–545/4 BC) at the age of 78 years. The relevant information concerns the additional detail that Thales was a contemporary of Croesus, whom he advised to cross the Halys river by diverting its course. Hence, the date of Thales' death is used to date the end of Croesus' reign, which ended not long after Croesus decided to cross the Halys. However, as is common in

²⁹ A notorious example of the difficulties connected with the chronology of the Greek Archaic period are the highly diverging dates for Pheidon of Argos in antiquity, which translate as belonging to a range from the 9th to the early 6th century BC: Köiv 2000; 2001.

³⁰ In the following, only the most crucial chronographic texts are treated and especially those which in our opinion can provide clues towards determining an absolute date. See however the more sceptical view of Tuplin: 'The essential point to grasp is that the only surviving text from this tradition to give a precise date for the fall of Sardis (Jerome's version of Eusebius' Chronicle) puts it in Olympiad 58.1 = 548/7 and that all other statements about Greek chronographers' views on the matter are the result of speculative attempts to make sense of numerically and substantively conflicting data' (Tuplin 2010, commentary *BNJ* 691 F 1).

³¹ For the year 541/40 BC, see the highly influential, but rather problematic, supplement by Jacoby (1904a, 13, 171).

³² The name of the Athenian archon of this line is not preserved. As the *Marmor Parium* applies inclusive and exclusive counting methods (Jacoby 1904b, 82–84; Rotstein 2016, 2), it remains unclear which exact year has to be assumed here.

³³ For Apollodorus' chronicle, see Jacoby 1902; Pfeiffer 1968, 253–57; Dorandi 1982; Montanari 1996; Christesen 2007, 13; Feeney 2007, 19–20; Burgess and Kulikowski 2013, 87–88.

chronographic texts, the maths does not add up with the aforementioned numbers.³⁴ In order to maintain the information about the death of Thales in the 58th Olympiad and the old age of supposed 78 years, Thales' year of birth must be assumed not to have fallen in Ol. 35.1 (640/39 BC) but in Ol. 39.1 (624/3 BC).³⁵ Depending on whether one applies inclusive or exclusive reckoning³⁶ Apollodorus appears to imply a date of 547/6 (Ol. 58.2) or 546/5 BC (Ol. 58.3) for the fall of Sardis.

The *Chronicon Romanum*³⁷ is a miniature chronicle inscribed on limestone under the reign of the emperor Tiberius (AD 14–37). In analogy to the *Marmor Parium*, this text reports events from the Roman and Greek past with intervals. Its starting point AD 15/16, however, is not directly explained in the preserved part, but has to be inferred from the information about Sulla's military campaigns.³⁸ The chronicle mentions the start³⁹ and end of Croesus' reign⁴⁰ alike, but in both lines the numbers of the interval are missing. Fortunately, the Getty table,⁴¹ which is also called the Vasek Polak Chronicle, is better preserved. Scholars assume that the same workshop produced both miniature chronicles, as they exhibit strong parallels.⁴² Thus, one hypothesises that the intervals of the Getty table refer to the same starting point in AD 15/16. Given this assumption, the 561 years from Croesus' defeat until the 'present'⁴³ imply a date 546/5 BC for the end of Croesus' reign. Sextus Julius Africanus (2nd/3rd century AD) placed the end of Croesus' reign in the 58th Olympiad (548/7–545/4 BC).⁴⁴

³⁴ In many chronographic lists the numbers appear faulty, for example those in the classical tradition about the Assyrian kings: Rollinger 2011, 323, n. 44.

³⁵ Moshammer 1979, 256–57; Kokkinos 2009b, 3–4.

³⁶ Hellenistic chronographers used both inclusive and exclusive reckoning, but no theoretical treatise has survived. In general, only additional information provides insight which of the two methods is the most likely in each case.

³⁷ For the *Chronicon Romanum*, see IG XIV 1297 = FGH I BNJ 252 (the parallel text of the Getty table was unknown to Jacoby but is included in *Brill's New Jacoby*); Burgess and Kulikowski 2013, 309–10 (English translation); Rotstein 2016, 59–60 (Greek text with English translation). General information about the *Tabulae Iliacae* is provided by Squire 2011.

³⁸ Jahn 1873, 79.

³⁹ BNJ 252 F 3.

⁴⁰ BNJ 252 F 6.

⁴¹ BNJ 252; Burstein 1984; SEG 33 802; Rotstein 2016, 61–62 (Greek text with English translation).

⁴² Burstein 1984, 157.

⁴³ BNJ 252 F 6a.

⁴⁴ Wallraff 2007, 182–85.

Table 1: Overview of the Greek chronographic tradition for the fall of Sardis.

Author	Date for Croesus' defeat
<i>Marmor Parium</i> (3rd century BC)	interval is broken off
Apollodorus (2nd century BC)	547/6 or 546/5 BC ⁴⁵
Getty table (1st century AD)	546/5 BC = 561 years until 'present' (AD 15/16)
Sextus Julius Africanus (2nd/3rd century AD)	548/7–545/4 BC
Jerome (4th century AD)	548/7 BC
Armenian tradition of Eusebius (5th century AD)	between 546/5 BC and 545/4 BC

Despite Herodotus being the closest in time to the historical event, he – contrary to later chronographers – did not provide an exact date. This aligns well with the general picture that, with the introduction of Olympiad dating, the chronology of 6th century BC Greece was only afterwards established with (pseudo-)precision.⁴⁶ As authors of the 5th and 4th century BC did not use such precise absolute dates, an exact chronology was established *post festum* by applying chronographic methods such as synchronisations as well as the *acme* and generation principle.⁴⁷ Therefore, it appears very likely that later authors created a precise date relying on Herodotus without having any additional primary information!⁴⁸ Worth mentioning is the fact that later chronographers provide a shorter time span for the Mermnad dynasty by roughly 20 years than Herodotus does.⁴⁹ This constitutes an interesting instance, because Hellenistic chronographers tend to provide higher dates for the Archaic period than their precursors.⁵⁰ Summing up the evidence of ancient Greek chronography for Croesus' defeat, it becomes obvious that, in Hellenistic times (and not earlier), there was some consensus around the traditional date 547/6 BC. However, we should not be persuaded solely by the neat accuracy of this precise date but rather see it as a result of the chronographic context with the necessary caution regarding its historical value.

Complementary to earlier discussions about the date of Croesus' defeat, modern scholars can also refer to archaeological research in the city of Sardis. There archaeologists have excavated a destruction layer with findings of military equipment and skeletons of soldiers killed in action, which they relate to the military campaign of

⁴⁵ Assuming that the death of Thales is to be synchronised with Croesus' defeat and that the confusion with the numbers can be sufficiently resolved.

⁴⁶ For the difficulties involved, see Shaw 2003.

⁴⁷ Fehling 1985. However, see Gehrke 1990, who argues for a possible higher reliability of later chronographic sources.

⁴⁸ Bichler 2004, 213, n. 23.

⁴⁹ An overview of the different sources with the reign lengths can be found in Kaletsch 1958, 2.

⁵⁰ For examples in the Parian marble, see Kellner 2017, 82–83.

Cyrus the Great against Croesus.⁵¹ According to archaeological methodology, the pottery sherds cannot point to an exact year for this event but rather provide a *terminus post quem*. Applying the conventional chronology,⁵² most Greek pottery of this destruction layer dates from around the middle of the 6th century BC and not a single piece belongs to a time after the 540s BC. No red-figure vases at all were found.⁵³ Hence, archaeology can only place the destruction roughly in (or shortly after) the decade of the 540s BC.⁵⁴

The Broken Toponym of the Nabonidus Chronicle obv. ii 16: A History of the Various 'Decipherments' and 'Readings', or How Modern Scholars Interpreted the Passage

Given the uncertainties of the chronology of Archaic Greece even in the 6th century BC,⁵⁵ scholars have pinned their hopes on possible cuneiform sources to precisely date Cyrus' victory over Croesus. Already shortly after the arrival of the Nabonidus Chronicle at the British Museum in 1879 Assyriologists were engaged with the content of the damaged line on the obverse ii 16 and the historical implications of its interpretation. The whole discussion focusses on the reading of the very fragmentary toponym, the target of Cyrus' military campaign in Nabonidus' ninth year (547 BC). Only the first sign – or depending on different opinions the first two signs – of the country's name is still visible on the tablet. Theophilus Pinches,⁵⁶ one of the first scholars to deal with the text, read IŠ,⁵⁷ without, however, attempting to restore the country's name. Immediately thereafter Floigl was the first to suggest the weighty connection with Sardis, trying to substantiate the Greek chronological date 547 BC. He referred to the then usual reading Isparda for Sardis in the Bisutun inscription of Darius.⁵⁸ To our knowledge Floigl did not collate the tablet, but he exclusively relied on the reading suggested previously by Pinches,

⁵¹ Greenewalt 1992; 1997; Cahill 2010. Snodgrass (1983; 1985) terms the seemingly unproblematic combination of historical and archaeological sources 'positivist fallacy' and hence calls for caution in this regard.

⁵² For a theoretical consideration of a lower absolute chronology for the Greek pottery, which Francis and Vickers have suggested, see Cahill and Kroll 2005, 602–03.

⁵³ For an overview of the Greek pottery in connection with the destruction layer, see Greenewalt 1992, 254–55, n. 15; Cahill and Kroll 2005, 599–604, 607, 607, 611. For the imported Greek pottery in Sardis in general, see Schaeffer *et al.* 1997.

⁵⁴ Cahill and Kroll 2005, 605; Greenewalt 2010, 11, 18, 24.

⁵⁵ For example, Ehrhardt 1992.

⁵⁶ Pinches 1882, 142, 159 (he had given the lecture in 1880).

⁵⁷ The indexes of the cuneiform signs were slightly different at this time. For this reason Pinches actually named the sign IS, which is nowadays read as IŠ or ÍS.

⁵⁸ Floigl 1881, 125, n. 1.

who did not make the connection with Lydia and Sardis. In 1894 Hagen published a new edition of the Nabonidus Chronicle, where he frankly stated that the country's name was damaged. In a footnote, he brought forward the suggested reading SU.⁵⁹ A little later, in 1898, Lehmann-Haupt⁶⁰ started a new attempt to verify Lydia as the aim of Cyrus' military campaign in 547 BC. After reading Hagen's edition Lehmann-Haupt asked the curator of the cuneiform collection in the British Museum, Theophilus Pinches, whether the fragmentary sign could be linked with Lydia. Lehmann-Haupt assumed the country's name to have been written *Lu-ud-di* according to Neo-Assyrian standards that were just drawn from already published inscriptions of Ashurbanipal.⁶¹ Pinches passed the information to Lehmann-Haupt that after having checked the relevant signs multiple times, he could read LU with certainty. Moreover, he now claimed even to be able to distinguish a further sign, i.e. a very fragmentary UD. Thus, only after knowing what should have been read, the desired evidence was finally found! Lehmann-Haupt⁶² expressed his view in a handful of articles, which led to the establishment of the *opinio communis* in scholarship that Croesus' reign ended in 547 BC and that this was now definitely proven by a Babylonian Chronicle.

Before continuing the discussion of the text passage in question, two important points should be underlined. First of all, the different readings suggested by various scholars exhibit clearly how difficult it is to read the fragmentary sign with certainty. Second, the reconstructions of the country's name are deeply intertwined with the information gained from Greek sources and the interpretation of the historical context.

The reading LU of the sign at the damaged end of line obv. ii 16 of the Nabonidus Chronicle was never entirely undisputed: already in 1915 Hüsing⁶³ launched the possibility that Cyrus' military campaign targeted Urartu and hence opted for the reading Ú⁶⁴ of the damaged sign. In *Babylonian Historical Texts Relating to the Capture and Downfall of Babylon* (1924) Smith also provided a copy of the whole

⁵⁹ Hagen 1894, 219, n. 82. According to Cargill (1977, 100) the drawing of the Nabonidus Chronicle in Hagen's publication was made by Friedrich Delitzsch, who wrote the addenda to Hagen's contribution.

⁶⁰ Lehmann 1898.

⁶¹ Lydia (^{KU}*Lu-ud-di*) is mentioned in eight passages in Ashurbanipal's inscriptions. See the preliminary on-line edition of RINAP 5: <<http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinap/rinap5/pager>>. Cf. also Bagg 2007, 158. Lehmann-Haupt could not rely on a standard publication, where the different writings of the name of Lydia were given according to Babylonian sources. See Zadok 1985, 213, where the few attestations write the toponym as *lu-u-du/a*.

⁶² Lehmann 1902, 344; Lehmann-Haupt 1921, 113–14; 1929, 123–25.

⁶³ Hüsing 1915, 178.

⁶⁴ Hüsing writes U, but this can only refer to the sign Ú.

tablet. Similar to Grayson's above-mentioned statement, Smith confirmed that 'the name of the land probably begins *Lu ...*'.⁶⁵ Smith only had to refer to the established 'fact' that Cyrus marched against Croesus in 547 BC to make his reading more plausible. A look at Smith's copy, however, highlights the problem of this sort of argument, as the corresponding sign does not exhibit the shape of LU.⁶⁶ König⁶⁷ on the other hand followed Hagen's suggestion to read SU and did not attempt an interpretation, but refused a connection with Lydia on historical grounds.

Amendments of the suggested readings were repeatedly made: Smith, for example, changed his opinion 20 years after his original publication about the Nabonidus Chronicle, but nevertheless insisted upon the connection with Lydia. Instead of LU he now read IŠ, even though in his opinion LU was not entirely impossible.⁶⁸ Lambert and Sachs also collated the tablet with the result ZU-x[...],⁶⁹ but in 2010 Lambert changed his opinion in favour of LU.⁷⁰ In 1977 Cargill⁷¹ demonstrated the serious problems associated with this text passage and concluded that it cannot provide any evidence for the fall of Sardis; Kuhrt⁷² and Schaudig⁷³ later reached a similar conclusion.

More recent collations appeared to establish a nearing consensus with the reading Ú and the possible interpretation Urartu, as Oelsner⁷⁴ and Waters⁷⁵ have both argued for a clearly visible Ú sign. Since then other scholars have followed their suggestion.⁷⁶ However, in a further collation Finkel⁷⁷ now excluded the possibility of reading Ú and SU/ZU. Furthermore, he remarked that even the sign KUR is written differently from usual. Glassner obviously agreed with this, as he opted for the reading ^{<kur>}*Lú-ú-[di]*,⁷⁸ otherwise unattested for Lydia. The new edition of the Babylonian Chronicles by Finkel and van der Spek also appears to return

⁶⁵ Smith 1924, 101.

⁶⁶ Already pointed out by Oelsner 1999–2000, 379.

⁶⁷ König 1931, 180–81.

⁶⁸ Smith 1944, 36, 135, n. 74.

⁶⁹ Grayson 1975, 282.

⁷⁰ Lambert's collation is mentioned by Zawadzki 2010, 147, n. 27.

⁷¹ Cargill 1977.

⁷² Kuhrt 1988, 120, n. 62.

⁷³ Schaudig 2001, 25, n. 108.

⁷⁴ Oelsner 1999–2000, 379.

⁷⁵ Personal information quoted by Rollinger 2008, 56.

⁷⁶ Haider 2004, 86; Stronach 2007, 165; Rollinger 2008, 56–57; Kokkinos 2009b, 19; Cahill 2010, 344; Marek 2010, 155, 189; van Dongen 2013, 49.

⁷⁷ Finkel's statement about his collation is quoted by Zawadzki 2010, 147, n. 27.

⁷⁸ Glassner 2004, 236. To the best of our knowledge, Glassner is the only one who suggests this particular reading.

to the reading LU for Lydia,⁷⁹ as a statement of van der Spek reveals. Van der Spek reported once more a collation of the chronicle by himself, Mark Geller, Irving Finkel and Stefan Zawadzki in 2013. Their unison conclusion was that the sign is to be read as LU and that Ū should be regarded as impossible.⁸⁰ Therefore, van der Spek proposed the reading KUR Lu-ú-[du GI]N for the end of line obv. ii 16. This immediately became a ‘fact’ in further scholarly discussions.⁸¹

What remains from an exclusively palaeographic point of view is the fact that the crucial sign obviously proves very difficult to be read, which is not only caused by its fragmentary state but also by its placement on the edge of the tablet. Finkel⁸² at one point even suggested that Assyriologists would never have dared a confident reconstruction of the broken toponym, if it were not for the link with Herodotus, as the traces of the sign are just too fragmentary.⁸³ The different and repeatedly changed opinions of various scholars should probably serve as a warning against identifying the sign with too much certainty, even more so as this tiny fragment implicates far-reaching historical conclusions. In Fig. 1 (below), the various suggested readings and respective signs are shown. As the line is so central for the history of Anatolia and the Near East in the 6th century BC a new collation was undertaken by Angelika Kellner.⁸⁴ As the picture of the relevant passage of the tablet demonstrates (Fig. 2), in our opinion a ‘definite’ conclusion on how to read the sign is simply not possible. From all the suggestions brought forward we would tend to exclude the reading of the sign as ÍŠ. However – and this is equally important to note – to the best of our knowledge no secure reading can be inferred.

⁷⁹ Selim Adalı has also personally checked the sign on the tablet and concluded that it is to be identified as LU in 2014: Payne and Wintjes 2016, 14, n. 6.

⁸⁰ van der Spek 2014, 256, n. 184: ‘On March 12, 2013, I collated the tablet together with Mark Geller, Irving Finkel, and Stefan Zawadzki, and we all agreed that the reading Lu is by far the most acceptable reading, while ú is impossible.’ Note, however, that Rocío Da Riva was also present at this occasion, although she is not mentioned by van der Spek. She writes in an e-mail of 21 November 2016 to RR: ‘Ich war im BM als Bert [van der Spek] die Tafel kollationiert hat, und er hat mich natürlich auch gefragt, was ich dort sah/las, M. Geller war auch dabei, und auch I. Finkel. Wir 4 [scil. van der Spek, Geller, Finkel and Da Riva] haben die Tafel ganz, ganz genau angeguckt und: Bert und Mark sahen LU, ich sah eher Ū, und Irving sah beides.’ And in an e-mail from 22 November 2016 to RR she adds: ‘Ich hatte damals auch die Tafel kollationiert, mE ist Ū ‘not impossible’. Aber das bedeutet nicht, dass man ú-[rash-tu] zwangsläufig lesen muss, oder?’ Van der Spek’s affirmative reference to Stefan Zawadzki is obviously due to a confusion since he, in the very same note, refers to Zawadzki 2010, 147, n. 27, and earlier collations by W.F. Lambert and I. Finkel (cf. above nn. 70 and 77). In any event, the claim that the reading Ū ‘is impossible’ hardly appears to be tenable.

⁸¹ Rung 2015, 8, n. 3; Thonemann 2016, 152 with n. 1; Wallace 2016, 168 with n. 1.

⁸² Finkel’s statement is quoted by Zawadzki 2010, 147, n. 27.

⁸³ See Rollinger 1993, 190.

⁸⁴ We would like to thank the Curators of the British Museum for granting access to the tablet.

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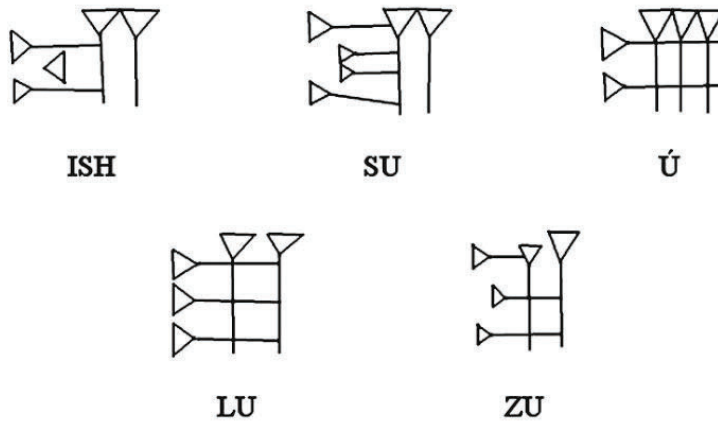


Fig. 1: Overview of the various signs suggested for the broken toponym.

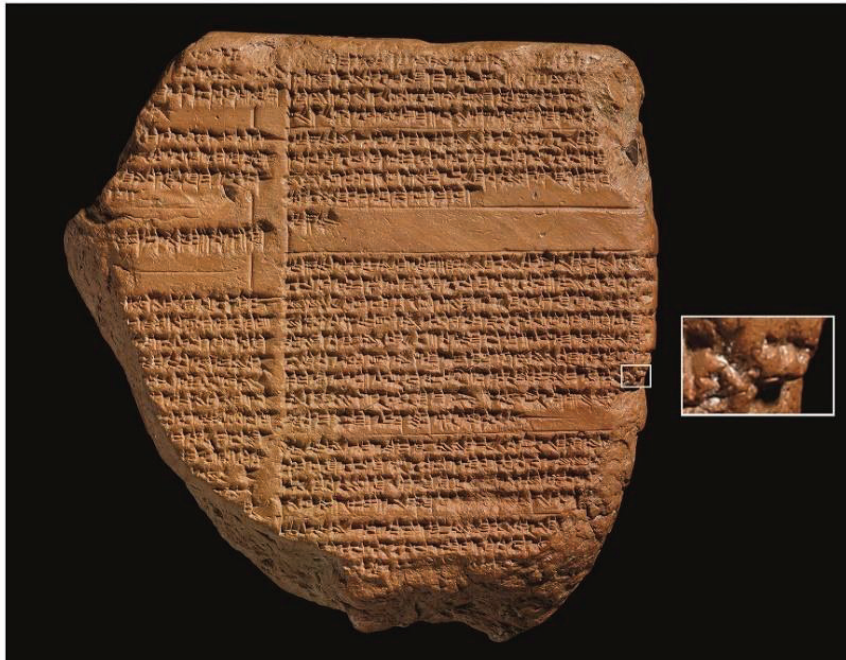


Fig. 2: Detail from the Nabonidus Chronicle obv. ii 16 (© Trustees of the British Museum).
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Thus placing the campaign of Cyrus the Great against Croesus in the year 547 BC exclusively on the evidence of the Nabonidus Chronicle is neither sound nor definite proof. Only contextualising the information of the Tigris crossing and scrutinising the historical context independently from the problematic Greek chronographic traditions can lead to new insights.

Contextualising the Evidence of the Nabonidus Chronicle obv. ii 15–18

Let us return to the informations we gain from the Nabonidus Chronicle.⁸⁵ There it is stated that Cyrus (II) of Parsu mustered his army and crossed the Tigris downstream from Arbēla and, in the month of Iyyar, [march]ed to X [???]. He defeated its king (or: put its king to death), seized its possessions, [and] set up his own garrison [there]. After that, the king and his garrison resided there.⁸⁶

Contextualising this evidence can be achieved in two complementary ways. First, we will analyse the geographical perspective of the passage itself. Afterwards we will place this analysis in a larger framework that takes into consideration campaigns in the very same geographical regions.

The Geographical Perspective of Nabonidus Chronicle obv. ii 15–18

The document's geographical perspective immediately reveals an important dimension of argument, although this crucial point is generally all but totally ignored, for the alleged statement that Cyrus crossed the Tigris and marched towards Lydia is very difficult to explain. According to google maps, the distance between Erbil and Sardis is 1739 km, calculating the shortest route through upper Mesopotamia crossing the Euphrates at Birecik and continuing via Gaziantep to the west. However, Cyrus could not have taken this short route, for most of the area was, at least at that time, controlled by the Babylonians.⁸⁷ If the reading Lu-[??] is supposed to be correct, he must have taken a route via eastern Anatolia that was about 2000 km in length. This is slightly less than the distance between Cologne and Moscow (about 2300 km). From this perspective, such an interpretation becomes hardly tenable. It is as if a 19th-century Central European source on Napoleon's campaign against Russia had described the event as follows: 'The French emperor crossed the Rhine below Cologne and marched against Moscow.' Additionally, one has to stress that the perception of space is not an absolute value: 2300 km was a much larger distance in Cyrus' times, when Lydia was perceived to be at the western fringes of the world. Lydia is therefore not

⁸⁵ For more details, see Rollinger 1993, 188–97.

⁸⁶ Nabonidus Chronicle ii 15–18; Grayson 1975, 107.

⁸⁷ Jursa 2003; Rollinger 2003.

really an attractive option for the reconstruction of the toponym. What is clear is that Cyrus marched against a still independent country in the immediate reach of a route along the Tigris. If we want to identify this country as well as the region that might have been the ultimate goal of Cyrus' campaign we have to decode the meaning of Cyrus' river crossing. Apparently for a Babylonian reader of the text the crossing as well as the route along the Tigris were somehow connected with the region that marked the goal of Cyrus' campaign. It is this kind of mental map we will have to have a closer look now.

The Larger Context: Campaigning from the Tigris to the North

As has been demonstrated earlier we know that after the fall of the Assyrian empire the Assyrian heartland was under firm Babylonian control until 539 BC.⁸⁸ It is also worth recalling that considerable parts of the north-eastern Tigris region around Arrapha were part of the Babylonian empire as well. This is important, for it explains, why an otherwise insignificant detail, i.e. the crossing of the Tigris was recorded at all by the Babylonian Chronicle: *Cyrus crossed the Tigris downstream from Arbēla*. The obvious answer is that every Babylonian knew that it was by this route that Cyrus passed through Babylonian territory. But is there anything further we can learn from this passage?

Immediately after the crossing of the river the chronicle reports the goal of Cyrus campaign. From this we may deduce with a high degree of probability that the country and object of Cyrus' campaign was either not too far away from the crossing point or that the combination of the given toponyms, i.e. the Tigris valley and name of the relevant country, immediately referred to a well-known mental map that was well aware of an established route connecting these toponyms. And indeed we do have evidence for such a combination from Neo-Assyrian to Neo-Babylonian and Persian-Achaemenid times. Karen Radner has shown that in order to get from the Assyrian heartland to eastern Anatolia the route along the Tigris is best avoided because of the extremely rough and mountainous terrain. Therefore the Upper Tigris region is most directly and most easily reached by crossing over the Tūr 'Abdīn mountain range.⁸⁹ Since the Tigris valley itself offers no easy passage,⁹⁰ two routes west of the Tigris which both lead to the southern and south-eastern piedmont of the Tūr 'Abdīn (Mazı Daiları) are much better suited. From these two and their different branches,⁹¹ however, the closest and most easily accessible one enters the Tūr 'Abdīn directly from the south-east. There the gentle slopes of the basalt ranges

⁸⁸ Cf. Rollinger 2008.

⁸⁹ Radner 2006.

⁹⁰ See now also Comfort and Marciak 2018, 3, 7.

⁹¹ For other routes cf. Rollinger 2008.

offer fairly easy access to the plateau of the Anatolian highland. This route starting from the Tigris valley of the Assyrian heartland passed the Sufan Çay plain and continued via Midyāt and Savur to the regions of the Upper Tigris.⁹² From the time of Adad-nērārī I (1300–1270 BC) onwards it was used again and again by Assyrian armies. One of the best documented itineraries is the fifth campaign of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) in 879 BC as it is related in his Annals. It starts from Tillê (Tiluli) in Katmuḫḫu and heads forward via Ba Sebrina/Haberli (pass of Ištarāte) and Kivakh (Kibaki) to Midyāt (Matiātu) from where it continues via Savur (Šūru) to the Upper Tigris region. Since the campaign of 882 starts from the source of the River Supnat which can safely be equated with the Sufan Çay it is evident that also the campaign of 879 started from the Sufan Çay plain.⁹³ One of the regions mentioned in these contexts many times is Izalla that has to be located between Nusaybin and İdil/Asakh and may be equated with the Dibek Dağı, an area where the limestone is coated by a layer of basalt from the long extinct volcano of Alem (Elim) Dağı in the vicinity of the source of the Sufan Çay.⁹⁴ This evidence can be compared with what we know from the Babylonian Chronicles about the campaigns of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar in eastern Anatolia in the years after the fall of the Assyrian empire. There it is not only Izalla that appears to be one of the stage goals of the Babylonian army but also the ‘region of Urartu’ (*piḫāt^{uru} Uraštu*) as one of its final objects. This applies for the year 609 BC, when Nabopolassar led his troops to the north on an operation towards the region of Izalla and as far as the ‘region of Urartu (*piḫāt^{uru} Uraštu*)’.⁹⁵ The same is true for the following two years, when the Babylonian army operated again ‘in the region of Urartu (*piḫāt^{kur} Uraštu*)’. Whereas, for the year 607 BC, Chronicle 4 offers only a very short note with no clear indication about the army’s final destination,⁹⁶ the same document reports an intriguing piece of information for the preceding year 608 BC:

⁹² Cf. now also Comfort and Marciak 2018, 36.

⁹³ Cf. Liverani 1992, 57–62 with fig. 6; Radner 2006.

⁹⁴ Radner 2006, 293. See also Bagg 2017, 263–65. The source of the Sufan Çay (Supnat) is situated at Babil ca. 26 km south-west of Cizre.

⁹⁵ Chronicle 3, ll. 70–74: ⁷⁰LUGAL UR^{ki} *ana re-su-ur ÉRIN^{me}-šú DU-ma šal-tú [ul DÚ^{mi} ana kurI]-za-al-la i-li-ma⁷¹ URU^{me} šá KUR^{me} ma-a-du-rú [...]-šú-nu ina IZI iš-ru-up⁷² ina UD-mi-šú-ma ÉRIN^{me} [šá ...] EN pi-ḫat^{uru} Ū-ra-āš-tu⁷³ [D]U ina KUR(?) [...]^{me}-šú-nu iḫ-tab-tu. ⁷⁴šú-lu-tu šá LUGAL [...] ina šá-šú ú-še-lu is-suj-hu-nim-ma⁷⁵ ana^{uru} [...] i-lu-ú. The king of Akkad came to the aid of his troops, but [did not join(?) battle. He went up [to I]zalla and he set fire to the [...] in many mountain localities. At this time the troops of [(?) ... m]oved as far as the region of Urartu. In [...] they pillaged their [...] They dro[ve] out the garrison that the king of [..] had set up there] and went up to [...]. Cf. Grayson 1975; Glassner 2004; Rollinger 2008.*

⁹⁶ Chronicle 4, l. 11: ... iḫ-[tab]-ta EN pi-ḫat^{kur} [Ū-ra-āš-tú(?) gi-mi]r KUR^{me} ik-šu-ud. ... He [i.e. Nabopolassar] conquered [al]l of the mountains as far as the region of [Urartu(?)]. See Grayson 1975; Glassner 2004; Rollinger 2008. But cf. Reade 2003, who proposes to read ... EN pi-ḫat^{ur}

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The eighteenth year (of the reign) of Nabopolassar [ca. 608 BC], in the month of Elul, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, moved along the bank of the Tigris, climbed the mountain of Bit-Ḥanūniya, a region of Urartu, burned and pillaged towns. In the month of Tebeth, the king of Akkad returned to his own country.⁹⁷

Here it is clearly stated that the campaign started at the bank of the Tigris (GÚ ¹⁴IDIGNA). However the army followed the river valley only for a certain distance from where it entered the Ṭūr 'Abdīn mountain range (Bit Ḥanūniya) to continue its way to the 'region of Urartu' (*piḥāt Uraštu*). Thus this source not only testifies that the Babylonian army followed in the footsteps of its Assyrian predecessors by choosing the old and fairly easily passable approaches to the Upper Tigris region. Moreover it proves the existence of a mental map that clearly connected the Tigris region of the Assyrian heartland with the regions of Urartu when referring to a military campaign from south to north. Apparently the most convenient way to reach this 'region of Urartu' was to start out somewhere to the west of the Tigris in the plain of the Sufan Çay and to cross the Ṭūr 'Abdīn by approaching it from the south-east. This route can be documented for about half a millennium; it was the one taken by the Assyrian kings and later by the Babylonian army. Moreover, with a high degree of probability, its ongoing relevance can also be demonstrated in the decades following Cyrus' reign.

When the Babylonian version of the Behistun inscription (DB) deals with the revolts of the first year of Darius' reign in eastern Anatolia (DB §§ 26–30) it talks about fierce resistance in 'Uraštu'.⁹⁸ Darius dispatched his generals Dadaršiš and Omises who had to fight three and two battles, respectively, until they finally quelled the rebellion. The locales where these actions took place are named in DB but we are able to identify only one place name with certainty: Izalla, where Omises fought the last and decisive battle against the Urartians/Armenians (DB § 29) – significantly the same place where about 90 years earlier Nabopolassar fought and from where the Assyrian kings preferred to approach the Ṭūr 'Abdīn. Although we do not know from where the Persians started their military campaigns against Urartu/Armenia it is very probable that this was the Assyrian heartland as it happened in the preceding periods.

tam-iim, '...as far as to the district of the sea (Lake Van)'. He also suggests restoring l. 7 KUR. *za-tu-ri*, Zaduri in the Upper Tigris.

⁹⁷ 1MU 18^{kim} ^dAG.IBILA.ÜRİ *ina* ¹³KIN LUGAL URİ^{ki} ÉRIN^{me} *šú id-ke-e-ma* ²GÚ ¹⁴IDIGNA UŠ-ma ana KUR-i šá É-¹Ḥa-nu-ni-ia ³pi-ḥat ^{ku}Ṭ-ra-dš-tu i-li-ma URU^{me} *ina* IZI iš-ru-up ⁴ḥu-bu-ut-su-nu ma-dš iš-tab-ta *ina* ¹³AB LUGAL URİ^{ki} ana KUR-šú GUR-ra.

⁹⁸ The Old Persian and Elamite versions of DB have, as equivalent for the Babylonian Uraštu, the toponym Armenia (Old Persian: 'Armina'; Elamite: 'Ḥarminuya'), which appears here for the first time.

This of course touches the question what ‘Uraštu’ in the Babylonian Chronicles actually referred to. Was it just a region or did the term also bear political connotations? To be clear, it is not possible to answer this question definitely. The Babylonian phraseology *pīhāt Uraštu* (region of Urartu) appears to imply that it is not anymore the former unified kingdom of the 7th century that the Babylonian armies invaded. Indeed, written sources from Urartu come to an end in the forties of the 7th century BC.⁹⁹ This looks very much like as if the Urartian kingdom as it is known from the 9th century onwards did not exist anymore. However, this must not mean that the region was ruled by external powers. One could even take the Babylonian terminology *pīhāt Uraštu* as indication for the existence of some form of local rule, maybe in a politically fragmented landscape. Also the evidence from the Bisitun inscription appears to imply the survival of remnants of a local consciousness of political independence. This is however only possible if some form of political independence still existed from the second half of the 7th through the first half of the 6th century BC. There is further indirect evidence for this.

We know that Darius I and Xerxes set up inscriptions not only in their favourite residences, like Persepolis and Susa, but also in residences of those former political entities that were conquered by Cyrus and in which the early Achaemenids presented themselves as true and legitimate successors of their Teispid predecessors.¹⁰⁰ This is true for Hamadan and Babylon, but also for Van. The inscription placed at a steep rocky flank of the former Urartian capital was obviously tremendously important, for Xerxes explicitly mentions that his father Darius already intended its construction, but only he was able to achieve this. The inscription only makes sense, however, if the choice of the location commemorates the former capital of a substantial political entity that ended through Teispid conquest. Of course, there is still the question of a Median presence in this area. This is especially due to Herodotus’ testimony that the Medes and the Lydians met at the River Halys (Kızılırmak) to forge an alliance during an eclipse generally dated to 585 BC. Although many historians still treat Herodotus as a sourcebook, simply used like a quarry to rephrase history, in recent years it has become increasingly clear that he has to be dealt with as a literary work completed during the Peloponnesian War, presenting a view on the past, first and foremost, through a Greek lens of around 420 BC.¹⁰¹ In his *Histories* he skillfully elaborates ancient Near Eastern history as a sequence of empires, where empire is modelled according to the perception of the Persian-Achaemenid empire of Herodotus’ own time.¹⁰² However, Herodotus’ Lydian-Median ‘border’

⁹⁹ Cf. the various contributions in Kroll *et al.* 2012. See also Stronach 2012; 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Rollinger 2015, 118–20.

¹⁰¹ Cf., for example, the various contributions in Harrison and Irwin 2018.

¹⁰² Bichler 2000; Rollinger *et al.* 2011.

at the Halys looks very much like a Greek construction of the 5th century to organise ancient Near Eastern history according to a line of succeeding and well defined empires with fixed borders and clear cut historical structures.¹⁰³ In order to prove such a construction of a frontier line it is bound to a legendary story. This is exactly the 'historical' context for localising the Median-Lyidian treaty at the Halys and for the famous story about Thales, the sage who allegedly predicted an eclipse of the sun that brought Median-Lyidian strife to an end.¹⁰⁴ The Medes might have campaigned through Anatolia for a very brief period of time, and they may indeed have concluded a treaty with the Lydians, but there was no permanent Median control of eastern – let alone central – Anatolia in the 6th century BC. Thus, in its last stages the Urartian kingdom may have become disintegrated and fragmented. The monarchy unifying all parts of the country may have disappeared in the second half of the 7th century BC.¹⁰⁵ The evidence of the Babylonian Chronicles fits perfectly into such a scenario. Also the testimony of the Bisitun inscription as well as Xerxes' Van inscription can be adduced as additional arguments for such a historical reconstruction. This does not exclude the possibility of some kind of Median supremacy or overlordship in eastern Anatolia, but if so, it existed only for a very short period of time.

Against this backdrop the evidence of the Nabonidus Chronicle also gains momentum. We do not claim that the reading \dot{U} of the toponym obv. ii 16 is the only possible solution. We also do not claim that this reading is the basis for our historical construction. We do however claim that the first sign of the toponym cannot be definitely identified and that it is impossible to come to a definite decision between the two most probable readings, i.e. either LU or \dot{U} . Such an allegation would be untrustworthy. However, as far as we can see, with the reading LU it is impossible to offer a plausible historical reconstruction of the events involved. This does neither fit to the mental map as it can be reconstructed from the chronicle itself nor to a broader historical context. In contrast, the reading \dot{U} offers the paths for a very plausible historical reconstruction if the toponym is reconstructed as \dot{u} -[*raš-tu*]. To be clear, this is still a hypothesis, but we think it is the most convincing and plausible one based on the sources so far available.

¹⁰³ Rollinger 2003; Stronach 2012; 2018.

¹⁰⁴ See also Lanfranchi 2000.

¹⁰⁵ See also Stronach 2007; 2012; 2018. An important observation is still that of Stronach 2007, 170: 'If Sardis had been the main target of Cyrus' campaign of 547, it is difficult to suppose that Croesus, the last king of Lydia (and the reputed brother-in-law of Astyages) would not have been mentioned by name and that both his dazzling capital and his vaunted treasures would not have earned at least similar notice to that extended to the possessions of Astyages (scil. Nabonidus Chronicle ii 1-4; Grayson 1975, 106)'.

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