

Sarduri II - One of the Most Unfortunate Rulers of the 8th Century B.C.E.

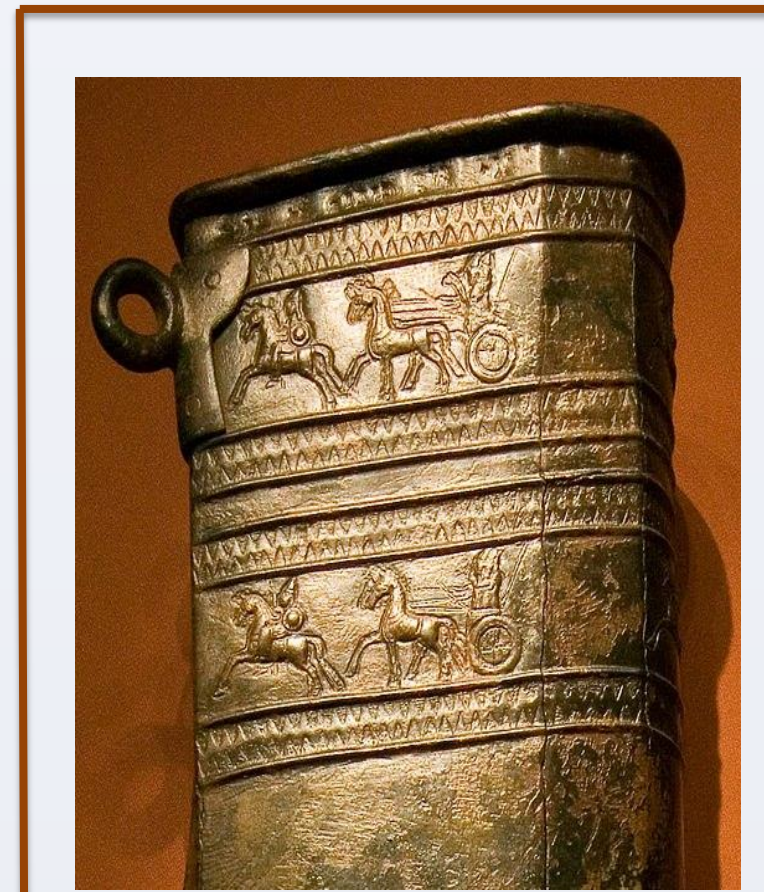


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FORTUNE

Introduction

After the death of Argišti I, his son Sarduri II inherited a well organized and expanding empire. It occupied Eastern Anatolia, Transcaucasia and North-Western Iran. Sarduri's reign can be divided into two contrasting phases. In the early stage Sarduri continued the policy of his father. He conquered and incorporated new lands into his empire. At that time Urartu reached unprecedented heights, culminating in the alliance with Syro-Anatolian states. However, this political move, whose aim was to block Assyria's access to the Levant and Central Anatolia, proved futile and ended with a disaster, after which Sarduri's position was shattered. Therefore, his reign is a good example of the changing wheel of fortune.



A quiver belonging to Sarduri from Teishebanini / Karmir Blur (U. Seidl 2004 – F. 101; Hermitage Museum; [Photo CC BY-SA 3.0])

The Initial Successes of Sarduri II

YEAR*	North Front	South-East Front	West Front	East Front	Source
753	TULHU (royal city); WELIKUHE	---	ARME	---	Stele from the church of Surb Pajon (CTU A 9-1); Rock inscription from Adaman village (CTU A 9-4); Inscription from Eban (CTU A 9-5B).
752	---	---	MELITEA	---	CTU A 9-1 Vo; CTU A 9-1E; inscription from Hapruje (CTU A 9-4).
751	---	---	---	---	Rihā? (case uncertain) – CTU A 9-1
750	ETIUNE	MANA	URME	---	Maline Kapis annals (CTU A 9-3 II)
749	QULHĀ	---	---	---	CTU A 9-3 II
748	ERİAHE	---	---	---	CTU A 9-3 II
747	ETIUNE	---	---	---	CTU A 9-3 II
746	QULHĀ and WITERUHE	---	---	---	CTU A 9-3 III
745	WEDURE ETIUNE	---	---	---	CTU A 9-3 III
744	ERİAHE	---	---	PULUADE	CTU A 9-3 IV; The rock inscription in Sepende (CTU A 9-8P).

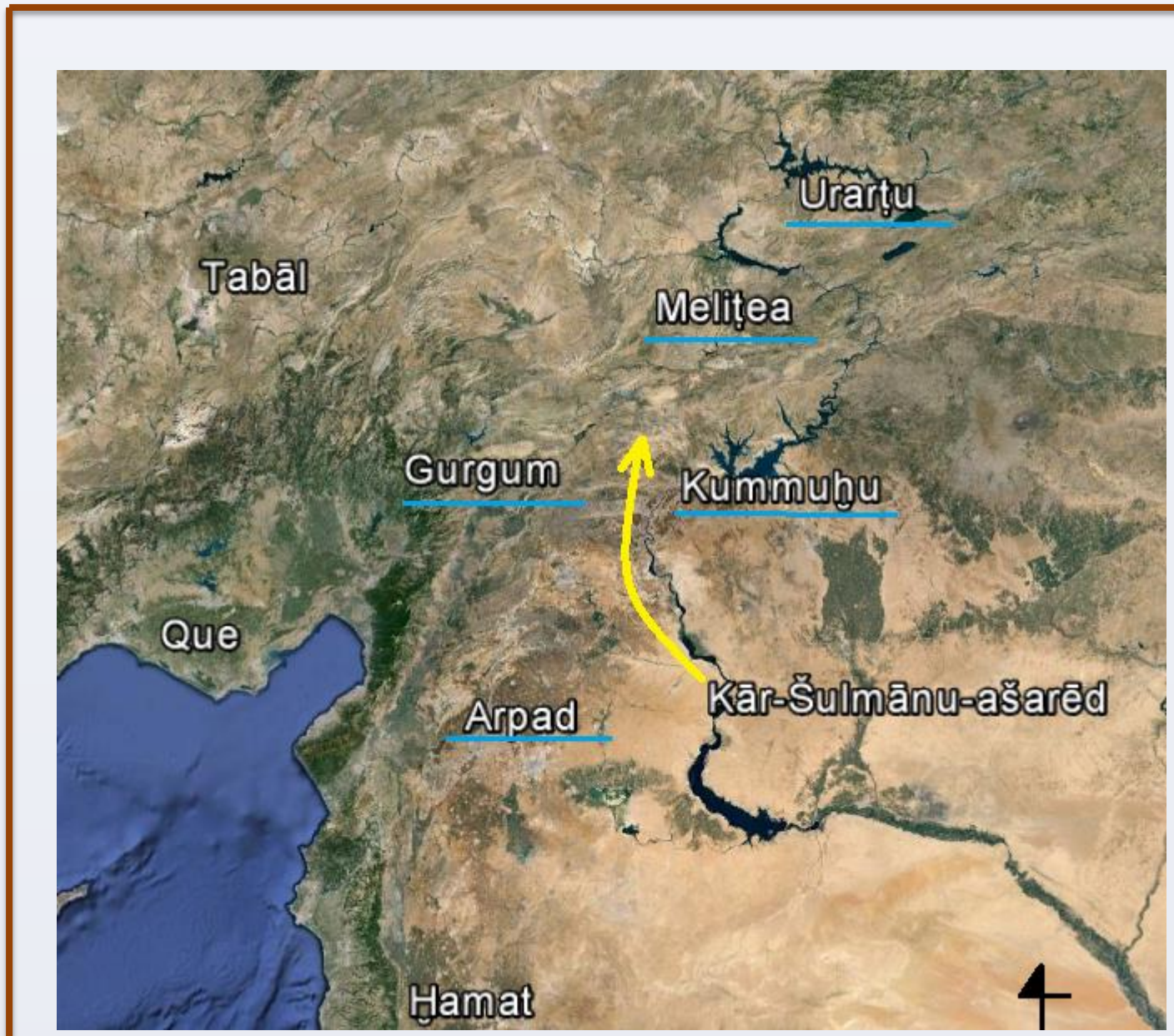
The Military campaigns before 743 B.C.E.. Possible absolute dates according to M. Salvini 1995 and 2008, A. Fuchs 2012.

Until 743 B.C.E. Sarduri conducted victorious military campaigns in all directions.

To the north, he campaigned in the Lake Sevan basin. He also subdued the land of Qulhā (classical Colchis). In the east his armies reached the remote land of Puluade. On the south-east front he invaded the land of Mana and went far down to the south along the Zagros mountains conquering the land of Babilū (identified with Namri) and the land of Baruātā. These two lands flanked the Great Chorasian Road.

MISFORTUNE

The Defeat at Kiştan (743 B.C.E.)



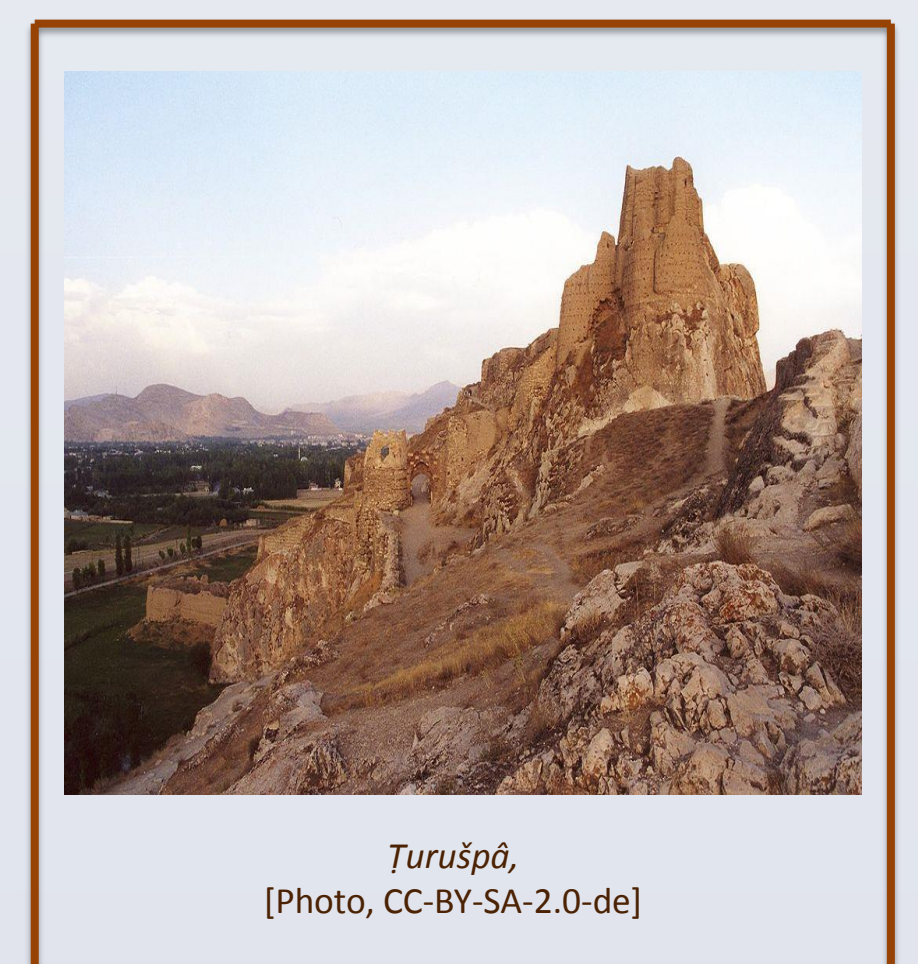
A Map presenting the anti-Assyrian coalition (underlined in blue) and the Assyrian counteraction in 743 B. C. E. (yellow arrow).

The ambitious plan of Sarduri to block access to the Mediterranean could not be tolerated by the Assyrian rulers. After Tiglath-pileser III took power in Assyria, a confrontation on a full scale was inevitable. The coalition was defeated between Halpi and Kiştan. Sarduri was forced to retreat beyond the Euphrates, losing his position in Syria. After a three-year siege (742-740 B.C.E.), the city of Arpad was conquered and Tiglath-pileser created a new Assyrian province. Never before and after did the Urartians penetrate so deeply into Northern Syria and never were they so close to threaten the political presence of the Assyrians in that region with all its far reaching consequences.

Following the defeat at Kiştan, there is not much evidence concerning the fate of the Urartian king. Several years later Sarduri appears again in the Assyrian sources.

„Confined in the City ʾTurušpâ”

The Assyrian royal annals report that in his 10th regnal year (11th palû) Tiglath-pileser III marched into the heartland of Urartu. He defeated Sarduri II at the gates of the Urartian capital ʾTurušpâ/Tušpa and devastated the country without encountering any resistance. According to the fragmentary preserved and laconic account, the campaign was partially successful. Although the Assyrians reached the Lake Van basin and besieged the capital, they did not conquer it, and as a result, Sarduri was not captured. On the other hand, the war with Assyria seems to have weakened Urartu and resulted in a deepening internal crisis.



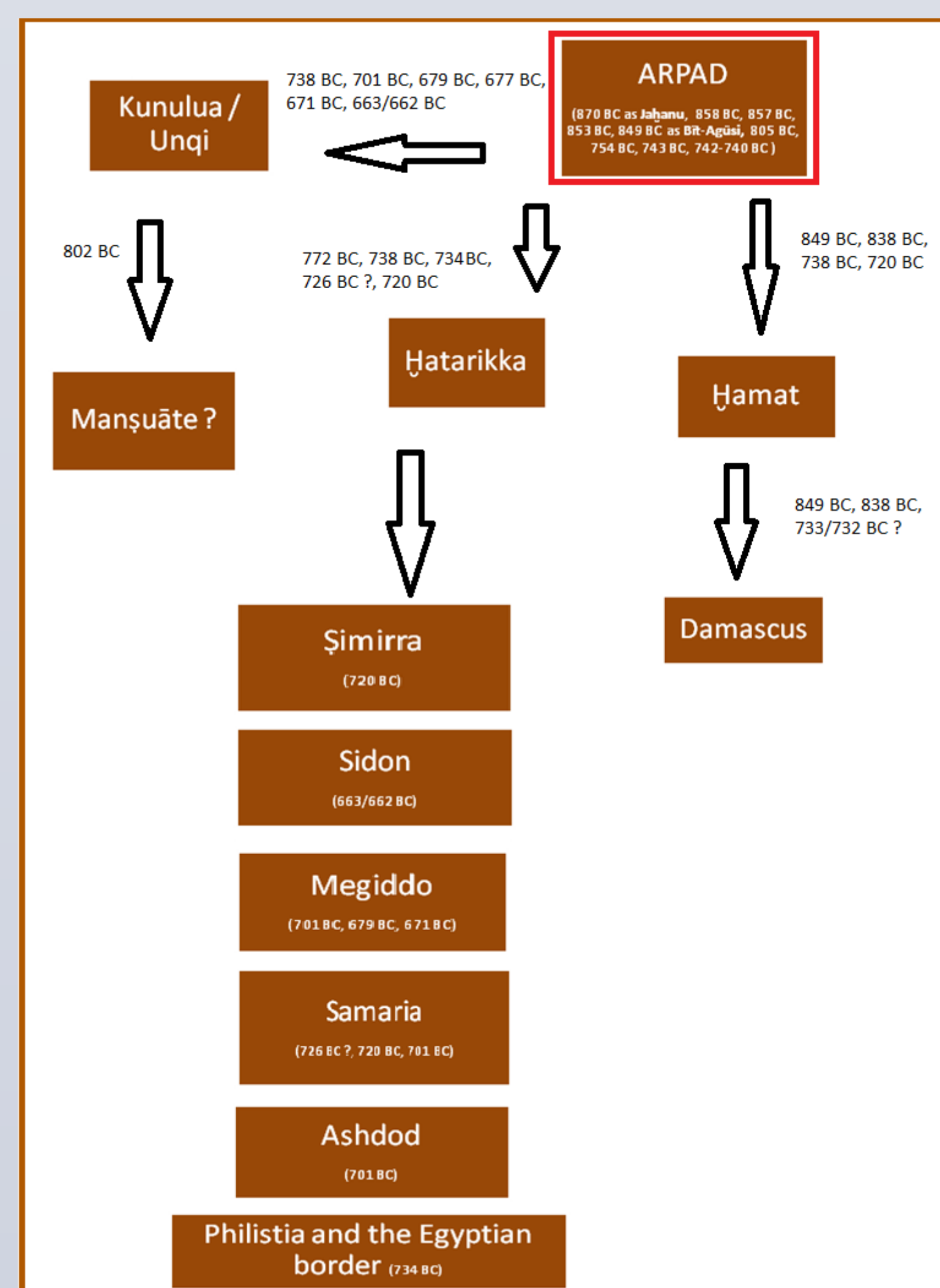
Turušpâ, [Photo, CC-BY-SA-2.0-de]

The Confrontation with Assyria and Expansion Towards the West

According to the annals, at the beginning of his reign, Sarduri defeated the Assyrian king, Aššur-nārāri V. This victory gave him a free hand to pursue military operations to the West of the Euphrates. He subjugated the adjacent land of Meliṭea (Melid), but his main goal was to form an anti-Assyrian coalition which would comprise already mentioned Meliṭea and the Anatolian land of Gurgum. He also won former Assyrian allies - Kummuhu (Urartian Qumaḥā, classical Commagene) and Arpad over to his side. Such a situation may have posed a serious threat to the Assyrian interests in that area.

The Strategic Importance of Arpad

For the Assyrians Arpad was a gateway to the Levant. By controlling it they could get access to the Mediterranean coast reaching as far as Egypt to the south. They could also participate in the Phoenician trade and collect large amounts of highly valued tribute and booty. If we have a closer look at the Levantine campaigns from the 9th century B.C.E. onwards, we can see that the main route taken by the Assyrian army led through the land Arpad (Bīt-Agūsī) as presented in this simplified diagram. It is interesting to assume that Sarduri II could have possessed the knowledge, based on a deeper historical perspective, of how important the location of Arpad was for the Assyrians.



After 735 B.C.E.

The fate of Sarduri after the siege of the capital is unknown. From the Assyrian intelligence reports (SAA 19, 71 and SAA 19,72) dated to the later years of Tiglath-pileser's reign we learn that Rusa/Ursa replaced Sarduri on the Urartian throne. The new king managed to inflict a heavy defeat on an Assyrian rab šāqê in an unspecified area. He also conducted military operations in Transcaucasia against the ruler of the land Etini. Was this Rusa Sarduri's son? We cannot rule it out. The traditional theory assumes that after 735 B.C.E. Sarduri's son, Rusa, peacefully took power in Urartu from his father. However, there are two other possible scenarios:

1. After the reign of Sarduri II his son and namesake, Sarduri III, was in power for a short period of time. He is known only from one inscription. He was to be replaced by Rusa I.
2. The defeat in 735 B.C.E. was so disastrous that it resulted in a coup d'état. Sarduri II was overthrown by an usurper. Rusa, son of a certain Erimena, seized power.

The above reconstructions are hypothetical due to the paucity of the source material and should be treated cautiously.

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