DYNAMICS OF THE FALL: ASHURBANIPAL'S CONQUEST OF ELAM

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1. Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to reconstruct the facts responsible for the end of the so-called Neo-Elamite Period II.1 Assyrian annals give the impression that Ashurbanipal's campaigns against the king Ummanaldash sufficed to destroy the Elamite kingdom. In this paper I offer a more nuanced reading of the last days of Ummanaldash's reign. Military conflicts between Elamite kings and Ashurbanipal triggered in Elam certain dynamics such as conspiracies, coups d'état, rebellions, etc., which ultimately helped the Assyrians to triumph over Elam. The capture of Ummanaldash was the final straw that broke the back of Elamite resistance. After this point the quantity and quality of extant documents decreased dramatically and from the Assyrian point of view Elam stopped being a real rival. Between 643 and 627 BC we can notice a period of political uncertainty in Elam.2 Even though extant sources permit scholars to reconstruct a list of the next Elamite kings, it remains an open question whether after 643 BC Elam regained its previous power or became only a minor player on the stage of Mesopotamian history.3 In this paper I will point out the dynamics present in Elam that I believe brought to an end Ummanaldash's kingdom. In the first part, I will analyze the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, in the second, I will discuss some neo-Babylonian letters dated to this period, and in the last part I will summarize the phenomena responsible for the downfall of Elam.

2. Royal Inscriptions

In order to provide the historical context for the following analysis let us now briefly summarize Ashurbanipal's first three military conflicts with Elam.4 The most important written source for this period is Prism B. This prism relates the Assyrian campaigns against Elam and eastern Mesopotamia (against Urtak in BIWA B §28–30; against Te-Uman in BIWA B §31–35; against Gambulu in BIWA B §36–41; against Ummanigash, Tammaritu, and Indabibi in BIWA B §42–50), then the campaigns against the Arabs (BIWA B §51–58), and the prism ends with the description of Ashurbanipal's building projects (BIWA B §59–61) followed by an admonition not to destroy the inscription (BIWA B §62). Since this prism does not mention Ashurbanipal's campaigns against Ummanaldash, most scholars conclude that the prism was composed in 648 BC.5 Some of the events described in this prism were mentioned or copied word for word in the later editions of Ashurbanipal's annals (Prisms C, Kh, G, F, A, and H).

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According to these prisms Ashurbanipal’s first military conflict with Elam took place when the Elamite king Urtak presumptuously invaded Babylonia. The occasion for the Elamite invasion of Babylonia was Assyria’s involvement with Egypt in 667 BC. The Elamites quickly overran Babylonia and laid siege to Babylon. In response Ashurbanipal dispatched his troops to Babylonia and the Elamites were forced to retreat.\(^6\)

In 664 BC there was a dynastic upset in Elam and Te-Umman took the throne. The usurper Te-Umman marched against Assyria, but the Assyrian army promptly occupied Der and the Elamites fled back to Susa. The Assyrian troops pursued Te-Umman. A pitched battle was fought at Till Tuba on the banks of the River Ulai in which the Elamites were defeated on their home ground. Te-Umman was beheaded and Ashurbanipal appointed to the throne two sons of Urtak, who in the meantime had become Assyrian allies. Urtak’s oldest son Ummanigash was appointed king at Susa and Tammaritu king at Hidali.\(^7\)

The third Assyrian invasion took place when pro-Assyrian Ummanigash joined Shamash-shumu-ukin’s revolt.\(^8\) Ummanigash’s two generals Nesu and Attamenetu, along with Te-Umman’s son Undashi, were killed.\(^9\) This abortive attack precipitated the revolution in Elam and Ummanigash was replaced by his nephew Tammaritu.\(^10\) According to Prism B the situation in Elam after the last Assyrian invasion became stable and the Elamite king Indabibi became an Assyrian vassal. He was required to pay a regular tribute and to maintain requisite diplomatic relations with Assyria.\(^11\) However, soon after Ashurbanipal’s last campaign Elam slipped out of Assyrian hands. A new Elamite king Ummanaldash revolted against Assyria and Ashurbanipal had to intervene two more times. These campaigns against Ummanaldash are preserved in multiple versions of the Assyrian royal inscriptions. In order to cast light upon this period of Elamite history I will first discuss Prisms C, Kh, G, T, F, A, H, the Letter to the God Aššur, the epigraph on slab BM 124793, and the Inscription from the Temple of Ishtar.

Novotny’s analysis of the fragments from the British Museum and the Chicago collection demonstrated that Prism C finishes with the installation of Ummanaldash on the throne and it should be dated to 647 BC. Thus the parts which Borger attributed to Prism C (\(BIWA\) C §68–75) in reality represent an independent prism—Prism Kh.\(^12\) Following Novotny’s reconstruction a next redaction of Ashurbanipal’s campaigns against Ummanaldash is thus preserved in Prism Kh dated to 646 BC (Table 1).\(^13\) This prism records only one campaign of Ashurbanipal against Ummanaldash. The events in Prism Kh develop quite straightforwardly. Even though the documents are damaged, from the context it is possible to deduce that the confrontation between Assyria and Elam took place in Bit-Imbi.\(^14\) The preserved part of the tablet mentions that the wounded Shamash-shumu-ukin escaped to Elam and his son was deported from Bit-Imbi to Assyria where he was flayed. A further section of the tablet mentions that Tammaritu betrayed Assyria and escaped. Ummanaldash, seeing the advancing Assyrian troops, became frightened and escaped from his royal residence, Madaktu. In a similar way his rival Umbhababa, who had seized the throne, escaped from his residence Bubilu. There is no description of the very

\(^6\) Grayson 1991: 147.
\(^7\) Grayson 1991: 148.
\(^8\) Grayson 1991: 150.
\(^9\) Potts 1999: 281.
\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^11\) With some changes these events are also described in Prisms A, C, D, H, the Inscription from the temple of Ishtar (\(BIWA\) 258–296), and the Relief Inscription (\(BIWA\) 297–319).
\(^13\) Novotny 2008: 129.
\(^14\) For the reconstruction of this part see ibid.: 132.