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ANCIENT HISTORY

THE NAIRIAN CAMPAIGN OF TUKULTĪ-NINURTA I (1242-1206 BC) IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONQUESTS IN THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF HIS REIGN

Abstract: The "Nairi land(s)" (KUR.KUR Na-i-ri) was first mentioned in the inscriptions of the Middle Assyrian king Tukultī-Ninurta I (c. 1242-1206 BC¹). Currently, the "Nairi land(s)" is mentioned in 18 of the 55 known inscriptions². In historiography, the chronology and motives of the Tukultī-Ninurta I campaign to the "Nairi land(s)" have been discussed many time. However, in some cases, the existing opinions are contradictory and need to be justified. A new reading of the inscriptions of Tukultī-Ninurta I allows to discuss the date, reasons and outcome of the campaign not in isolation, but in the context of the campaigns of the first three years of his reign.

Keywords: Assyria, Aššur, Tukultī-Ninurta I, Armenian Highlands, Nairi, Alzi, Ehli-Tešub, eponym, inscription.

ukultī-Ninurta I stated that «ina šarrū) šarrūtiya» - "at the beginning of my sovereignty", i.e. in the accession year of the king, around 1242/1241 BC, he invaded Uqumēnu (Qumenu) and Qutû³. According to the inscription, Tukultī-Ninurta's campaigns to the north were motivated by the disobedience of the above-mentioned territories⁴. Moreover, the lines of the inscription "At that time, they banded together (?) against my army in a difficult place, in a mountain defile. They fiercely took up position for a fight and battle"⁵, show that Uqumēnu and Qutû, led by king Abu-le'e of Uqumēnu, were united against Assyria. Tukultī-Ninurta I defeated the allies, captured Abu-le'e and brought to Assyria. Later, according to the inscription, Tukultī-Ninurta I allowed them to return to their countries after the Uqumēnu-Qutû authorities took the oath of allegiance to Assyria

Ruslan A. TSAKANYAN

Institute of Oriental Studies, Department of Ancient Orient, Yerevan rooslantsakanyan@gmail.com

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¹ For more information about the chronology of the Middle Assyrian Period, as well as the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, see: LLOP 2013, 549-560; BLOCH 2010, 1-35; BLOCH 2008, 143-178; RÖLLIG 2008, 189-196; FREYDANK 2005, 45-56; FREYDANK 1991, 188-189; WILHELM/BOESE 1987, 74–117.

 $^{^2\,}$ RIMA 1, A.0.78.1, IV, ll. 10, 32; A.0.78.2, l. 31; A.0.78.3, l. 13; A.0.78.4, l. 5; A.0.78.5, ll. 9, 39; A.0.78.6, l. 17; A.0.78.7, l. 4; A.0.78.8, l. 9; A.0.78.13, l. 14; A.0.78.16, l. 18; A.0.78.18, l. 23; A.0.78.20, l. 6; A.0.78.23, ll. 46, 49; A.0.78.24, ll. 18, 31; A.0.78.26, ll. 7, 12; A.0.78.1001, rev. l. 7; A.0.78.1010, l. 5, and BLOCH/PERI 2016-2017, Col. V, l. 1. $^3\,$ BLOCH/PERI 2016-2017, Col. II, 27; RIMA 1, A.0.78.1. Col. II, 14- Col. III, 11,

³ BLOCH/PERI 2016-2017, Col. I, 37 – Col. III, 27; RIMA 1, A.0.78.1. Col. II, 14- Col. III, 11, and - A.0.78.2; A.0.78.3; A.0.78.10; A.0.78.18; A.0.78.20; A.0.78.23; A.0.78.24; WEIDNER 1959, nos. no.no.1; 2; 3; 14; 16; 17; 21.

⁴ MUNN-RANKIN 1975, 284.

⁵ BLOCH/PERI 2016-2017, Col. II, 20-24; RIMA 1: A.0.78.1. Col. II, 21-26.

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and imposed annual tax on them⁶. Whether Uqumēnu and Qutû were subdued during a single campaign or double invasion in the same year, is another matter⁷. However, the relevant lines of the inscription, as well as comparison with other inscriptions of the king, which mention the same events, suggest that this was a single campaign.

In 1241/1240 BC, after subjecting Uqumēnu and Qutû, the Assyrian king organized a campaign to northwest, Šarnida, Mehru and Katmuhu. Apparently, Tukultī-Ninurta I rapidly conquered and subjugated Sarnida and Mehru as evidenced in line 30 of the inscription: it took place «ina Á-at ÉRIN.MEŠ-at Qu-ti-i» - "by the means of the army of the land of Qutû".8. This may indicate that the campaign to Sarnida and Mehru took place at least a year after the above-mentioned invasion. Next, the Assyrian king attacked Katmuhu. The Assyrians were concerned about Katmuhu. According to the inscription, in violation of the "deceitful peace («šá ina su-lu-me-e ù sa-ra-ar-te»)" with Assyria, they repeatedly attacked the Assyrian settlements, looted and returned with captives. The center of Katmuhu and 4 or 510 fortified cities or bases fell under the Assyrian attack, and a part of the population was deported to Assyria. In another fascinating inscription of the king, Eluhnia, Buššu and Mummu are also mentioned along with the above-mentioned toponyms¹¹.

After subjugating Katmuḥu, in 1240/1239 BC the Assyrian king campaigned to the west, passed the Mountains of Kašiyari and attacked Alzi¹². According to the inscription, "All the land of the Šubarû" had rebelled¹³ since the period of Šulmānu-ašarêd (Shelmaneser) I (c. 1272-1243 BC) and refused to pay taxes to the Assyrian king. After the defeat of Eḫli-Tešub, the king of Alzi fled with his sons and courtiers and took refuge in the previously unknown country of Nairi - «Na-i-ri ana KUR la i-du-úv)¹⁴.

Tukultī-Ninurta I conquered and ruined Purulumzu, the spiritual center of Alzi, and ordered to burn to death its population. In an inscription dated to the 14th year of the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta I and the eponym of Uṣur-namkur-ṣarri, it is reported that in the city of Kar-Tukultī-Ninurta, King Purulumzu - «ΓLUGAL¬ KUR. Pu-ru-lum-za-ie-e» received oil 15. It can be assumed that King Purulumzu, unlike other rulers and princes, did not receive permission to return to his country and was held captive for about 11 years.

During the assault he ruined four cities of Alzi, and after that, probably, six cities of the country of Amadanu, the ally of Alzi, and annexed Alzi, Amadanu, Niḥanu, Alaya, Tepurzu and Purulumzu. Tukulti-Ninurta I delineated the campaigns of the first three years:

"At that time, from Tulsinâ the ... mountain, (the region) between the cities Šasila (and) Mašḥat-šarri on the opposite bank of the Lower Zab, from Mount Zuqušku (and) Mount Lallar

⁶ BLOCH/PERI 2016-2017, Col. III, 1-27.

- ⁸ BLOCH/PERI 2016-2017, Col. III, 30; RIMA 1: A.0.78.1. Col. III, 14-15.
- ⁹ BLOCH/PERI 2016-2017, Col. IV, 4; RIMA 1: A.0.78.1. Col. III, 24.
- $^{\rm 10}~$ 5 cities according to A. K. Grayson RIMA 1: A.0.78.1. Col. III, 21.
- 11 BLOCH/PERI 2016-2017, Col. III, 28-Col. IV, 10; RIMA 1: A.0.78.1. Col. III, 12-29, see also: RIMA 1: A.0.78.2, 17-36.
- $^{\rm 12}$ BLOCH/PERI 2016-2017, Col. IV, 11-Col. V, 17; RIMA 1: Col. III, 30-Col. IV, 23.
- ¹³ BLOCH/PERI 2016-2017, Col. IV, 11-16; RIMA 1: Col. III, 30-36.
- $^{\rm 14}~$ BLOCH/PERI 2016-2017, Col. V, 1; RIMA 1: Col. IV, 10.
- ¹⁵ FREYDANK/FISCHER 2001, no. 146.

— the district of the extensive Qutu —, the entire land of the Lullumu, the land of the Paphu to the land Katmuhu (and) all the land of the Šubaru, the entirety of Mount Kašiiari to the border of Nairi [and] the border of the land M[akan], to the Euphrates — those regions the great gods allotted to me. All (my) enemies [I brought] under one command^{*16}.

In fact, during the first three years of the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta I, the borders of Assyria reached the southern approaches of the Armenian Highlands.

This record does not tell anything about the fate of the king of Alzi, Ehli-Tešub, as well as any other invasion of Nairi by Tukulti-Ninurta I. It is not difficult to guess that the reason is that at the time of its writing no invastion of the Nairi lands happened. The war of Tukultī-Ninurta I against Nairi was only a matter of time, since after the aforementioned achievements Assyrian expansion in the northern direction reached the borders of that country. In this case, Nairi became one of the most important targets for the king of Assyria, as the king of Alzi Ehli-Tešub and his courtiers had taken refuge there. Perhaps, Nairi was one of the factors of the anti-Assyrian front and played a certain role in the aforementioned rebellion of Alzi against Šulmānu-ašarêd I. It is likely that Nairi's anti-Assyrian position was due to the desire to control the Taurus passes and the transformation of Alzi into a safe zone against the Assyrian attacks. In any case, the escape of the defeated King Alzi Ehli-Tešub and his "sons and courtiers" from Tukultī-Ninurta I and finding shelter in Nairi in c. 1240/1239 BC, allows to suppose that even before these events Nairi had already joined the anti-Assyrian camp, and the fugitive king Alzi Ehli-Tešub was sure that he would not be extradited to Assyria. In itself, the finding of asylum of the King of Alzi Ehli-Tešub by the Nairi could be seen as a sign of clear opposition to the expansionist policy of Assyria and, as such, became a motive for the campaign against Nairi. The comparison of facts allows asserting that the contradictions between Assyria and Nairi had appeared earlier, even in the last period of the reign of Šulmānuašarêd I and had deeper strategic reasons. In other words, the escape of Ehli-Tešub was not the cause of the Assyrian-Nairian military conflict, but only a factor that accelerated it.

In any case, it is clear that the campaign of Tukultī-Ninurta I against Nairi took place in the period between 4-13 years of his reign¹⁷.

In the RIMA 1. A.0.78.23 on the Assyrian invasion of the Nair countries, we read: «40. KUR.MEŠ-*i dan-nu-ti ki-şir šap-šá-qi*

- 41. šá MAN ia-um-ma ar-ḫa-te-šu-nu la i-du-ú
- 42. i-na li-it kiš-šu-ti-ia šu-tur-ti
- 43. i-te-ti-iq-ma hur-šá-ni-šu-nu
- 44. i-na ak-kúl-la-at e-ri-i lu-pe-și-id
- 45. ar-ḥa-te-šu-nu la pe-ta-te uš-pél-ki-ma
- 46. it-ti 40-a MAN.MEŠ KUR.KUR Na-i-ri
- 47. i-na qé-reb ta-ha-zi lu am-da-ha-aş
- 48. a-bi-ik-tu um-ma-na-te-šu-nu áš-ku-un
- 49. kúl-la-at KUR.KUR-šu-nu a-bél MAN.MEŠ KUR. KUR Na-i-ri
 - 50. šá-tu-nu i-na be-re-et ZABAR GÚ.MEŠ-šu-nu
 - 51. ar-pi-iq a-na É-KUR KUR-i GAL-i
 - 52. É tu-kúl-ti-ia a-na ma-ḥar dAš-šur
 - 53. EN-ia lu-bi-la-šu-nu-ti ni-iš DINGIR.MEŠ

⁷ For further discussions see: MUNN-RANKIN 1975, 284f.; ARUTYUNYAN 2006, 21ff.; SALVINI 1998-2001, 87f.; SALVINI 1967, 18ff.; HARRAK 1987, 207ff.; HAAS 1986, 26f.; TSAKANYAN 2021, 20ff.

 $^{^{16}\,}$ RIMA 1: A.0.78.1. Col. IV, ll. 24-36; WEIDNER 1959, no. 1, Kol. IV, Z. 25-36; BLOCH/PERI 2016-2017, Col. V, ll. 18-34.

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54. GAL.MEŠ šá AN-e KI-ti ú-tam-mi-šu-nu-ti 55. GUN ù ta-mar-ta a-na u ,-um șa-a-ti»

"40-55. With my surpassingly strong might I frequently traversed mighty mountains (and) extremely difficult ranges, the paths of which no other king knew. I cut into their mountains with copper picks (and) widened their impassable paths. I did battle with forty kings of the lands Nairi (and) brought about the defeat of their army. (Thus) I became lord of all their lands. I fastened bronze clasps to the necks of those same kings of the lands Nairi (and) brought them to Ekur, the great mountain, the temple of my support, into the presence of the god Aššur, my lord. I made them swear by the great gods of heaven (and) underworld (and) levied upon them tribute and impost forever" 18.

In another inscription found from the temple of the God Aššur, Tukultī-Ninurta I noted:

«7. $[en\bar{u}$ - $m]a^dA$ - $\check{s}u[r]$ $\lceil a \rceil$ -na KUR. $\lceil KUR \rceil [N \dot{a} iri]$

8. [u] KUR.KUR a-ah A.AB.BA $\lceil e \rceil$ - $\lceil l\bar{e}n\bar{t}i \rceil$

9. Γú¬-ma-ʾi-r[a(?)-an-ní]

10. i-na šu- $\lceil mur\ ta$ -ha \rceil -z[i-ia]

11. a-ba-'a kúl-la-a[t mātāt]

12. *Na-i-ri* ù KUR.KUR *a-a*[*h*]

13. A.AB.BA e-le-ni-t[i]

14. *qa-ti ik-šu-*[*ud*]

15. 40-a 「LUGAL」.MEŠ-šu-nu a-bél ana GÌR-i[a ušekniš]

«7-16. [When] the god Assur sent [me] to the lands [Nairi and] the lands on the coast of the [Upper] Sea, I swept over with my raging warfare (and) conquered all [the lands] Nairi and the lands on the coast of the Upper Sea. (Thus) I became lord over their forty kings, [subdued (them)] at my feet, and imposed (upon them) corvée»¹⁹:

It is obvious that the Assyrian king faced quite serious obstacles during the invasion of Nairi. Moreover, in the context of another inscription, it follows that the Assyrian king's invasion was not a surprise to the rulers of the Nairi confederation. The inscription states:

«7. [... šarrāní].MEŠ KUR.KUR Na-i-ri i-na qa-ab-l[i . . .] 8. [... ittišu]-nu am-da-"ḫa-aṣ¬ a-bi-ik-t[a-šunu aškun ...]»:

"rev. 7-8. [... kings] of the lands Nairi [fiercely took up a position] for armed conflict. I fought [with] them (and) [brought about their] defeat"²⁰.

The number of kings of the Nairian confederation, as we saw above, was 40. According to M. Salvini, that number is probably exaggerated, in all probability it can be read as "many", "countless crowds", etc²¹. Certainly, the rulers of the countries of the Confederation were ready for a clash with Assyria, as it is unimaginable that they could have mobilised enough forces and take up positions concurrently with the campaign of Tukultī-Ninurta I. It is difficult to say who headed the confederation. We have no doubt that if Ehli-Tešub led the confederation, the Assyrian king would have definitely mentioned him, once again emphasizing his superiority and making it look more impressive. However, the escape of Ehli-Tešub to the land of Nairi itself confirms the fact that it provided ample opportunities for anti-Assyrian actions, both in terms of military-political (population)

and economic (natural resources). In any case, it is not difficult to guess that Nairi's land was a separate formation among the "*Nairi lands*", apparently Nairi's ruler later headed the Confederation.

It is not difficult to guess, the countries included in the Alzi and the Nairian Confederation were either bordering or close enough, which may indicate that the "Lands of Nairi" were spread at least in the south-western districts and their adjacent regions of the historical Great Armenia. Probably, the invasion of Tukultī-Ninurta I into the countries of Nairi was carried out along the path along which later his successors, Tukultī-apil-Ešarra (Tiglath-Pileser) I (1114-1076 BC)²², Tukultī-Ninurta II (891-884 BC)²³ and Aššur-nāṣir-apli (Ashurnasirpal) II (883-859 BC)²⁴, used for invading Nairi. The above allows us to conclude that it is more real that Nairi was located in the areas north to the Taurus Mountains to the basin of the Eastern Euphrates and Lake Van²⁵. One cannot rule out that «KUR.MEŠ-ni šá KUR.KUR Na-i-ri»-"Mountains of the Lands Nairi"26, mentioned in the inscription of the Assyrian king Ašur-bēl-kala (1074-1057 BC), refered to the Taurus Mountains. Tukultī-Ninurta I celebrated victory against the lands of Nairi, captured some of its rulers, later allowed them to return to their countries after they took an oath of allegiance to the God of Assur and promised to pay an annual tax. After the invasion against the lands of Nairi countries, Tukulti-Ninurta I added «MAN kúl-la-at KUR.KUR Né-'i-ri» «King of all the lands Nairi»²⁷ to his title²⁸. This title should be treated with caution, since obviously he did not have a complete domination over the territory of the Lands Nairi. Rather, it was a subordination with an annual tax.

As already mentioned, the campaign of Tukultī-Ninurta I against the Nairi and its allies occurred in the ten-year period between 4-13 years of her reign, c. 1239/38-1230/1229 BC. That is, the campaign of Nairi occurred after the campaign of Uqumēnu, Qutû, Katmuḫu and Alzi and before the invasion of Babylonia.

As far as we know, the most successful dating of the campaign on Nairi belongs to A. Harrak. Summarizing the results of the construction activities carried out by Tukultī-Ninurta I, the latter came to the conclusion that the Assyrian king's campaign of Nairi took place in the seventh year of the king's reign²⁹, that is, in c. 1236/1235 BC. Accordingly, the construction of the New Palace in the area of the Ziggurat of the God Adad to Craftsman Gate in the city of Aššur (mentioned in the inscription of RIMA 1, A.0.78.2³⁰) he placed before the campaign in Nairi³¹, and

¹⁸ RIMA 1: A.0.78.23, Cf.: A.0.78.20, ll. 6-7, A.0.78.24, ll. 31-33; WEIDNER 1595, no. 16, ll., Cf.: no. 17, ll. 18-20, no. 21, ll. 6-7.

¹⁹ RIMA 1: A.0.78.26; WEIDNER 1959, no. 19.

²⁰ RIMA 1: A.0.78.1001.

²¹ SALVINI 1998-2001, 88.

 $^{^{22}}$ RIMA 2: A.0.87.1, Col. IV, l. 49, 83, Col. V, l. 9, 29, Col. VIII, l. 13; A.0.87.2, l. 25; A.0.87.3, ll. 9, 10, 12; A.0.87.4, l. 15; A.0.87.10, ll. 7, 17; A.0.87.13, l. 3; A.0.87.15, ll. 9, 10; A.0.87.16, l. 4; A.0.87.17, l. 4.

²³ RIMA 2: A.0.100.5, ll. 1, 1, 2, 11, 13, 27, 129; A.0.100.6, l. 3.

 $^{^{24}}$ RIMA 2: A.0.101.1, Col. II. 6, 13, 15, 97, 117, 131, Col. III, l. 120; A.0.101.2, l. 10; A.0.101.3, l. 33; A.0.101.17, Col. II, ll. 18, 43, 47, 49, Col. IV, ll. 39, 105; A.0.101.19, ll. 27, 84, 93, 94, 96, 99, 100, 102; A.0.101.22, ll. 3, 6; A.0.101.23, l. 7; A.0.101.24, l. 2; A.0.101.26, l. 19; A.0.101.28, Col. III, l. 15; A.0.101.31, l. 11; A.0.101.32, l. 7; A.0.101.34, l. 21; A.0.101.35, l. 7; A.0.101.38, l. 17; A.0.101.40, l. 22; A.0.101.41, l. 10; A.0.101.42, l. 5; A.0.101.43, l. 18; A.0.101.50, l. 20; A.0.101.51, l. 15; A.0.101.53, l. 1; A.0.101.56, l. 9; A.0.101.66, l. 7; A.0.101.68, l. 2.

²⁵ SALVINI 1967, 13-15, 45-47; SALVINI 1998-2001, 88.

²⁶ RIMA 2: A.0.89.7:, Col. IV, l. 18.

²⁷ RIMA 1: A.0.78.5, 8-9.

²⁸ SAZONOV 2011, 242, 252, 270.

²⁹ HARRAK 1987, 254, 265.

 $^{^{\}rm 30}~$ RIMA 1: A.0.78.2, ll. 39-45; WEIDNER 1959, no. 2, ll. 39-46.

³¹ HARRAK 1987, 254, 265.

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construction of a New Palace: North Side³², after the campaign of Nairi or in the same year³³.

This dating is quite justified, since in the inscriptions³⁴ devoted to the construction of Tukultī-Ninurta I's new capital of Kar-Tukultī-Ninurta (modern Tulūl al-ʿAqir³s), as well as in the insciptions describing his feats, the campaign against Nairi was already a fact. Moreover, it is known that a large number of deportees from Nairi and its allies participated in the construction of the city³6.

It should also be noted that the date of the foundation of the city Kar-Tukultī-Ninurta is not clear, as well³⁷. Possibly, the city was built during the first years of the king's reign.

According to R . Dittmann, it was built before the 11th year of the reign of the king 38 . I argue that the results of the study of A. Gilibert, according whom the construction of the city of Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta probably started in the 4^{th} year of the rule of the king, seem more probable and accurate 39 . And according to A. Harrak, in the 14th year of Tukultī-Ninurta I, Kar-Tukultī-Ninurta was already the New Capital of Assyria 40 :

It is not excluded at all that the city was really built in the 4th year of the rule of Tukultī-Ninurta I, a circumstance that may have initial significance for our discussion. Thus, during the 3rd year of his reign, when he the invaded Alzi, Nairi appears as «Na-i-ri ana KUR la i-du-ú» "unknown land", and in the 6th year of the Tukultī-Ninurta I and eponym of Libur-zanin-Aššur, 128 horses were imported from Nairi41. That is, after the 3rd year of the invasion, Nairi from an "unknown land" became a "known land". In general, the definition of Nairi "unknown land" can be regarded as a manifestation of political propaganda, namely: Nairi was "unknown" to the ancestors of Tukultī-Ninurta I, not in the sense that they did not communicate with Nairi, but because none of them carried out a military campaign against Nairi. Such a differentiation of the "unknown" and the "known" fully corresponds to the militant spirit of Assyria and the logic of cognition of the world.

Even if we assume that Nairi was really "unknown" to the Assyrians in the 3rd year of the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta I, and already "known" in the 6th year of the reign, then we can suppose that the "Nairian campaign" could have occurred after the 3rd year of the reign of the king and before the 6th year, that is, between 1239/1238-1237/1236 BC. And if we consider that the refuge of the king of Alzi Ehli-Tešub "with his sons and courtiers" in Nairi was one of the motives for the invasion of Nairi by Tukultī-Ninurta I, then we can conclude that this invasion should have taken place soon after that. Having granted refuge to Eḥli-Tešub, the rulers in Nairi openly opposed the expansionist policy of Assyria, which created casus belli for Tukultī-Ninurta I. The king of Assyria had to try not to waste much time, to prevent the consolidation of adversaries. At the same time, there is no reason to believe that the invasion of Nairi immediately followed the escape of King Alzi Ehli-Tešub. The consolidation the forces of the 40 countries in the opposite camp of Assyria indicates that

³² RIMA 1: A.0.78.4, ll. 6-10; WEIDNER 1959, no. 4.

the ruling circles of Nairi had enough time to unite their forces against Assyria.

The above gives us reason to believe that Tukultī-Ninurta I carried out a campaign against the Lands of Nairi in the 4th year of his reign, that is, in c. 1239/1238 BC.

ABBREVIATION

RIMA 1 – Grayson, A. K., Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia BC (To 1115 BC), Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods 1 (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

RIMA 2 – Grayson, A. K., Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia BC I (1114-859 BC), Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods 2 (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

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³³ HARRAK 1987, 254, 265.

 $^{^{34}\;}$ RIMA 1: A.0.78.22-25 and 35-37; WEIDNER 1959, no.no. 15-17,

³⁵ NASHEF 1982, 160f.

 $^{^{\}rm 36}~$ FREYDANK 1976, no. 1, no. 27, and etc.

³⁷ DELLER/FADHIL/AHMAD 1994, 459-472.

³⁸ DITTMANN 1997, 108; DITTMANN 2011, 176.

³⁹ GILIBERT 2008, 83.

⁴⁰ HARRAK 1987, 265.

⁴¹ FRAHM 2002, 68f.

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