Mirjo SALVINI, *Corpus dei testi urartei, 1: Le iscrizioni su pietra e roccia* (*Documenta Asiana 8*).

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Mirjo Salvini, Corpus dei testi urartei, I: Le iscrizioni su pietra e roccia (Documenta Asiana 8), 3 vol. 31 cm, I: Testi (653 p.), II: Thesaurus (503 p.), III: Carte, fotografie e disegni (390 p.), CNR/Istituto di studi sulle civiltà dell’Egeo e del Vicino Oriente, Rome, 2008, ISSN: 1126-7321.

Kingdom of Urartu, also known as Kingdom of Van, thrrove in 9th through 7th cent. in the area corresponding to the present-day eastern Turkey, southern Armenia, and northwestern Iran. Although the first written documents emanating from this kingdom are in Akkadian, after a few decades the local kings began to commission cuneiform inscriptions in their native Urartian language, a close relative of Hurrian. In a sharp contrast to the deployment of Akkadian in Babylonia and Assyria, the use of the Urartian language in the Kingdom of Van never spread beyond the public domain. One of the explanations of this discrepancy is the multietnic character of the Kingdom of Van, where the Urartian native speakers perhaps constituted a privileged minority. But the other indigenous languages of the kingdom are not available for direct observation, and so we must rely on Urartian and Akkadian cuneiform texts for learning about its history and culture.

Urartian philology is of interest for three partially overlapping research communities. Assyriologists regard it as a minor subfield of Cuneiform Studies, whose main goal is to shed light upon the northern neighbor and formidable enemy of the Neo-Assyrian kingdom. The specialists in Ancient Anatolian Studies contribute to the reconstruction of Proto-Hurro-Urartian and investigate the position of the Urartian language with respect to the Anatolian linguistic area. Finally, Urartian studies enjoy particular popularity in the Republic of Armenia, because the sense of affinity with the ancient Urartians represents an integral part of modern Armenian cultural identity. From the perspective of Armenian scholars, the study of Urartian texts is a self-sufficient task, and Armenia is probably home to more Urartologists that all the other countries of the world taken together.

The decipherment of the Urartian language is an ongoing process. The writing system is generally not a problem, because the Urartian texts were recorded in a simplified version of the Neo-Assyrian cuneiform, but the grammar and especially the lexicon remain a challenge. Apart from a handful of Urartian and Akkadian bilinguals, the corpus of well-understood Urartian texts is largely limited to the stereotypical building inscriptions and repetitive royal annals. On the bright side, new Urartian inscriptions are excavated almost every year, the collation of known inscriptions brings interesting results, and the amount of texts already available is large enough to warrant successful application of the combinatorial approach. This means that a new Urartian corpus, even if published shortly after the preceding one, can bring additional insights into the understanding of the language.

The last point can be illustrated with reference to the volume under review (hereafter CTU), which appeared only eight years after the Korpus urartšikkh klinooobraznykh nadpisej (KUKN) by Nicolay Harouthioounyan [Erevan: Gitouthioun, 2000; in Russian]. The interim period saw the publication of a number of important Urartian texts, among which one can single out the Movana bilingual (CTU A 10.3) and especially the long temple inscription from Ayanis (CTU A 12.1). In addition to this, Salvini has managed to correct a large number of mistakes and omissions made in KUKN, which were due in part to insufficient access to modern scholarly literature in Post-Soviet Armenia. Most of these corrections have already been summarized in Salvini’s review article of KUKN [Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici 43/2 (2001): 241-267].

The authoritative character of the new corpus is endorsed by the whole career of Professor Mirjo Salvini, who has made himself a name as leading expert in the Hurrian and Urartian languages. On the one hand, he played a major role in the international project Corpus der hurritischen Sprachdenkmäler and made a number of contributions to the linguistic comparison between Hurrian and Urartian. On the other hand, he is known as an indefatigable traveler through eastern Anatolia pursuing the cause of documenting Urartian cultural heritage. He (co-) authored the first editions of most Urartian texts found in Anatolian and Iran in the recent years, including the above-mentioned inscriptions of Ayanis and Movana. On the virtue of his position at the Istituto di studi sulle Civiltà dell’Egeo e del Vicino Oriente, Salvini has full access to secondary sources in Anatolian Studies, while his excellent knowledge of Russian keeps him abreast of the work of his colleagues living in the CIS.

This does not mean that the volumes under review render KUKN completely obsolete. The main strength of the earlier corpus lies in its philological commentary, which focuses on the interpretation of Urartian place-names. Urartian historical geography is Harouthioounyan’s specialty area, which is only logical given that many Urartian toponyms linger on
in Classical Armenian historical sources. By contrast, Salvini’s philological notes in Volume I are rather laconic and mostly deal with the reconstruction of texts and their correct readings. Furthermore, KUKN strove for the complete representation of the Urartian texts known at the time, whereas the published volumes of CTU encompass the inscribed stone monuments and rock faces, but leave aside for the moment inscriptions on artifacts and clay tablets. The last two categories of documents will be treated in Volume IV of the new corpus, which is currently in preparation.

The structure of the published parts of CTU is organized as follows. The introductory sections of Volume I include a chronological table with the Assyrian synchronisms (p. 23), concordances with the previous corpora, including KUKN (p. 25-54), lists identifying current locations of the items edited and places of their discovery (p. 55-65, 71-83), the concordance of toponyms (p. 65-70), and the bibliography (p. 83-92). The monumental inscriptions edited in the rest of Volume I are all labeled with the letter A and divided into groups according to the kings that sponsored their production. For example, the inscriptions of Minua that do not mention his co-regents are all marked A 5. Each group of texts is accompanied with a map illustrating their geographic distribution and a glossary documenting their lexicon. The final group A 18, which consists of texts of uncertain attribution, is not large, because the well-preserved Urartian monumental inscriptions invariably mention their royal sponsors, and frequently more than once.

Volume II of CTU contains a general thesaurus of the texts on stone and rock, organized into sections according to the language of words treated (Urartian texts, Sumerograms, Akkadograms, Akkadian texts) and referring to the compositions and lines where individual words occur. Although the benefits of this thesaurus are obvious and significant, one may question the wisdom of printing it as a separate volume. Adding an extra five hundred pages with no additional primary data to the new corpus must have contributed to its high price. This, in turn, ultimately hurt the cause of Urartian scholarship by negatively impacting the distribution of CTU. A way of remedying the situation would be placing the indexed version of the corpus online, perhaps integrating it with the TITUS database (titus.uni-frankfurt.de), which already features several corpora of the non-Indo-European languages of the Caucasus. This would provide additional publicity to Salvini’s work, at the same time prompting the interested scholars to turn to its printed version for the translation of the relevant inscriptions.

Volume III of CTU gives photographs of the texts, many of which are published for the first time, and contains reconstructions of the most problematic monumental inscriptions. In my opinion, the attention to archeological and paleographic detail constitutes the most commendable feature of the publication under review. The new set of photographs make a favorable contrast to those collected in KUKN, being more conducive to verifying the transliteration of the relevant texts. This is not to say that Salvini relegates the responsibility for the collation to the readers of his corpus: his close study of the previously published inscriptions resulted in numerous improved readings, which can be spotted on almost every page of Volume I.

The conservative translation style of CTU objectively reflects the current stage in our understanding of Urartian texts. The author does not impose questionable interpretations upon the reader, but leaves problematic passages without translation inviting the future generations of scholars to contribute to their decipherment. If one is obliged to point to a weaker spot in Salvini’s treatment of the Urartian material, the rigorous standards of transliteration that characterize CTU are not always matched by the consistency of its translations. For example, the same pronominal form a-i-še-e-i is translated as ‘mai/never’ in A 5.11 A 19 (CTU, I: 202) and ‘nessun/no’ in A 12.10 2 (CTU, I: 582). The first rendering is traditional, while the second one represents an innovation of the new corpus, presumably adopted on contextual grounds. I believe that Salvini’s insight is essentially correct and Urart. a-i-še-(e)-i /ai-se/ represents the ergative form of the pronoun, whose absolutive form was long known as a-i-še-(e)-i /ai-ne/ ‘some(one)’ (or ‘no(ne)’ when used with negation). Unfortunately, Salvini failed to impose the uniform translation for the lexeme a-i-še-(e)-i, which may prompt a reader to take it in some cases as a variant of the adverb a-še ’when(ever)’. One must hope that inconsistencies such as this will be corrected with the publication of the Urartian dictionary, which is conceived by the author as yet another forthcoming part of CTU (vol. V).

The genre of a book review prompts its author to look for deficiencies and correct them. In this particular case, it was a hard task, because CTU is written by a person who defined the field of Urartian Philology for the last several decades. I have found it more rewarding to use this seminal work for the purpose of moving forward the study of Urartian grammar. The results of this research are reflected in my recent paper “Morphological Negation in Urartian” [Aramazd V/1 (2010): 141-65].

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