

Hyrcania and the Eastern Borders of Median Kingdom


Hamid Kavyanipooya¹ , Esmaeil Sangari² , Amirhossein Moghaddas³ 


Abstract


The Territorial conquests of the Medes, as Far East as Hyrcania, could be traced from the first half of the seventh century BC onwards. The first Median kings undertook far-flung campaigns to take control of the region and extend their territory. The existence of the fortified settlement in the Gorgān plain could prove the expansion of centralized Median kingdom as far as Hyrcania. The Assyrian sources of the 9th to 7th century BC are also in overall agreement with the results of the archeological studies in the western steppe of Gorgān plain (Hyrcania). As a result, the Median's dominance over Hyrcania determined the strategies and political guidelines of the Median kingdom and set the foundations for its transformation from a confederation of tribes to a powerful trans-regional state. Accordingly, in the present paper, beside historical and literary sources, archaeological evidences have also been studied in order to determine the Median's range of territory in the east of their homeland.

Keywords: Vehrkana/Hyrcania; Median kingdom; Assyrian Sources; Achaemenids; Border.



¹ Faculty of literature and Humanities, Department of Iranology, Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran (Corresponding Author).  h.kavyanipooya@basu.ac.ir

² Department of History, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran.  e.sangari@ltr.ui.ac.ir

³ Department of History, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran  amirhossein.moghaddas@gmail.com

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Introduction

The Medes were traditionally believed to have been the founders of the first Indo-Iranian empire on the Iranian plateau. In early Assyrian sources, the Median leaders are called ‘*bēl āli*,’ meaning ‘city lord,’ a term often applied to local rulers with no overarching, unifying political structures (Lanfranchi, 2003: 92-96; Radner, 2013: 444). It seems that the use of the term *bēl āli* was not specific to the Medes and it was also used to refer to the kinglets of the mountainous lands in the east of Assyria (Radner, 2003: 49). The last of the Median city lords in Assyrian sources are three named Birīṣḥatri, Sarrati and Pariḥia, who rebelled against Ashurbanipal, and he fiercely ended their rebellion after suppressing Aḥṣeri, king of Mannea, around 656 BC (Radner, 2003: 62). After nearly forty years of silence, this time the Babylonian sources start talking about the Medes. They talk about an “Umman-manda king” named Umakištar (Cyaxares in Greek) who succeeded to “break the backbone of the Assyrian Empire” with the help of the Babylonian king, Nabopolassar (Fuchs, 2023: 726).

Meanwhile, the Graeco-Roman historians assumed Medes “to have the political and administrative structure of an empire” (Liverani, 2003: 2). The concept of ‘empire’ in Greek histories or ‘state’ in Babylonian sources suggest “the existence of an administrative center, of some kind of bureaucracy” (Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1994: 41), but in the last two decades, attempts have been made to justify and interpret any historical, archaeological and linguistic¹ data to

make the Median government appear to be nothing but a loose confederation of tribes (e.g. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1988, 1994, 1995; Radner, 2013; Rollinger, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2010 and recently 2021).

It is not known to us exactly what has happened to the Medes in those forty years, and it is not clear from when and for what reasons (except for the constant threat of the Assyrians) the motivation for unity among the Medes tribes arose. Despite this, in this article, an attempt is made to discuss the possibility of forming a long-lasting alliance in the eastern regions of the Median territory.

The existence of an administrative structure of a centralized kingdom in Media has been proved by archeological evidences such as fortified settlements excavated in various parts of Media (Stronach and Roaf, 2007; Young, 1974a, 1974b; Goff, 1970, 1977; Madjidzadeh, 2001). Archeological excavations in Median sites in western Iran such as Tepe Nush-i Jan I (Stronach and Roaf, 2007), Godin Tepe during building phase II (Young, 1974a, 1974b), Tepe Baba Jan II (Goff, 1970, 1977), the fortress of Tepe Ozbaki, about 70 kilometers to the west of Tehran (Madjidzadeh, 2001) and also the archeological studies conducted in the western steppe

dence is *Xšāyaθiya Xšāyaθiyānām* (King of kings) which have been claimed to have Median form rather than a (Old) Persian one (Lecoq, 1997: 166; cf. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1988: 202, 210). According to Malekzadeh, in addition to the Median form, this institution must have emerged during the Median rule, when “a king really ruled over other kings ... and many historical evidences testify to the existence of [minor] kings alongside the Median king [e.g. The Abu Habba cylinder of Nabonidus and *Jeremiah* 51:28]” (2023: 103, 107).

¹ Perhaps the most famous linguistic evi-

of Gorgān plain (Hyrkania) (Sauer *et al.*, 2013: 420) and the Median settlement of Delazian in Semnān (Mehryār and Kabiri, 1986: 36), south of Gorgān plain could prove the presence of a centralized Median kingdom as far east as Caspian Sea (Fig. 1).

Contemporary Assyrian records, dating from Šalmaneser III to Esarhaddon (ca. 850-670 BC), can be considered as an important source on early Median history that can provide extensive information concerning the Median border of territory (Helm, 1981: 88; Liverani, 2003: 4). According to Assyrian sources, Media had a limited territory along the Great Khorasan Road including “Kār-Nabû, Kār-Sîn, Kār-Adad, Kār-Issār, Kār-Sîn-aḥḥē-eriba, in the provinces of Kār-Šarrukīn (Ḥarḥar¹) and Kār-Nergal (Kišessim)” (Waters, 2005: 521). After the fall of Assyria, the classical Greek sources suggest an extensive Median territory that extended as far as Bactria (Ctésias de Cnide, 2004: 108).²

The Medes tried to establish a military base so as to be able to stand against the significant powers of that period. In Assyrian sources, Median cities have been described as fortified settlements (Gunter, 1982: 109; Radner, 2003: 38). However, in the eastern part of the Median territory, the situation was very different. Due to the gradual transition of the Median political structure from tribalism to the establish-

ment of a centralized kingdom and the lack of historical records to explain the events occurring in the east of the Median territory, it is difficult to identify the Median borders, especially in the southeastern corner of the Caspian Sea. In the present paper, the authors try to determine the Median border of territory in the east and to discover whether the Vehrkana/Hyrkania, that submitted to the Median kingdom, was considered a part of a unified Median territory during its historical evolution. Archaeological evidences, contemporary Assyrian records, and classical Greek sources have been used in order to identify the Median influence eastward. We will see that this region stood out as an economic-military power, bearing a strategic position among the Iranian Satraps during the Median and Achaemenid periods.

Research Literature

So far, the historical geography of the Medes has been discussed in many works. *История Мидии с древнейших времен до конца 4 века до н.э.* (*History of Media from the earliest times until the end of the 4th century BCE*; Moscow and Leningrad, 1956) by Igor M. Diakonoff and *История Мидии* (*The History of Media*; Baku, 1960) by Igrar Aliyev are considered as the first efforts in this field. Aliyev has not paid much attention to the Medes' territory in his writings, but in some cases, he has studied some similarities, linguistic affiliations, and unity among important eastern tribes, such as the Cadusians, Parthians, Hyrcanians, Chorasmians with the Medes in the central plateau of Iran (Aliyev, 2009: 467–522).

On the contrary, Diakonoff has stud-

¹ For the situation of Ḥarḥar and other mentioned areas in the Assyrian reports, see Herzfeld, 1968: 32; Young, 1967: 15; Reade, 1978: 137–143; Medvedskaya, 1999: 55.

² Old Persian royal inscriptions also mentioned Bactria (Bāxtriš) as an imperial state; see Kent, 1953: 141.

ied the eastern borders of the Medes more precisely. He has tried to define the eastern territory of Medes through the names of regions mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions. In fact, in Diakonoff's opinion, there is no doubt that the Medes tried to extend their territory to Parthia in Kaštariti's' period (fl. 670s BCE); which was also the Assyrians goal (Diakonoff, 1966: 328). Diakonoff considered the realm of Medes as including Hyrcania, Parthia, and Aria; firstly because of their support of Median impostor Pseudo-Xšaθrita according to Behistun Inscription and secondly, because of Herodotus' account in which Parthia, Chorasmia, Sogdiana and Aria are listed in a single taxation district at the dawn of Achaemenid Empire (Hdt. 3.89–95; Also see Diakonoff, 1966: 328; Diakonoff, 1985: 127).

In the 1990s, especially the works of Jacobs and Vogelsang showed how close the relationship between the Medes and Eastern Iranian states/satrap had been. In his precise categorization, Jacobs indicated that even until the fall of Darius III's empire, the Median *Großsatrapie* was divided into some *Hauptsatrapie* and *Kleinsatrapie* that included Parthia, Hyrcania and Chorasmia (Jacobs, 1994: 176–177). While acknowledging that “the exact extent of the Median kingdom is still a moot point,” Vogelsang (1992: 311) also used historical and archaeological evidences to show that the Medes dominated Hyrcania and Parthia at the time of Astyages' fall. He even considered a slight possibility that Areia (= Ἀρ(ε)ία/

Aria) and Drangiana were part of the vast Median kingdom.

Among Iranian researchers who have tried to explain the issue of Median territory using new archaeological data, we can mention two articles written by Mollazadeh and Taheri-Dehkordi in 2014 and 2016. In the first paper, the authors have studied the territory of Medes only on the basis of Assyrian sources, their expeditions in the plateau of Iran and their encounter with Medes, whose territory extended to the deserts in the east of Iran (today's Semnān). In the second paper, the northwestern and northeastern borders of Median kingdom has been discussed at length along with the sphere of Medes' influence on the east to the current Turkmenistan based on the new archeological findings (Mollazadeh and Taheri-Dehkordi, 2014; Mollazadeh and Taheri-Dehkordi, 2016: 287–288).

Discussion

Geography of Hyrcania and its Historical Evolution in the Early Median Period (750-670 BC)

Hyrcania is located in the southeastern corner of the Caspian Sea. The geographical borders of Hyrcania are the wide steppes of Dahae from the north, Margiana and the Tejen/Hari-river from the east, and the Alborz Mountain from the south (Syme, 1988: 137; Schippmann, 2011: 17). Strabo wrote about the western borders of the Hyrcania: “The Caspian looks like an open sea and continues to the borders of Median and the Armenian mountains” (Str. 11.1.6–7). Ptolemy, the historian, also supposed that this region “shared the same borders with parts of the Hyrcanian Sea from the north, Medi-

¹ For the identity of this Median ruler, see Diakonoff, 1966: 254; Dandamayev and Medvedskaya, 2006.

an from the west, Merv from the east and Parthia from the south” (Ronca, 1971: 103; Wiesehöfer, 2005; Hartmann, 2016).

The Latin word *Hyrkania* (= Wolf's Land) is derived from the PIE root *w₁lkʷos (= Wolf → Skt. *vṛka-*; Av. *Vəhrka-*). It is *Vṛkāna* in Old Persian (Cook, 1985: 255; Lecoq, 1997: 143, DB §35), *mi-ir-qa-nu-ia-iþ* (= the Hyrcanians) in the Elamite and *Ἰρκανία* in Ancient Greek sources (Marquart, 1901: 72; Kent, 1953: 206; Tavernier, 2007: 77; Schmitt, 2014: 283). In his *Natural History*, Pliny also referred to Hyrcania, Tapyri, Anariaci and Staures as the eastern regions of the Caspian Sea (Plin. *NH* 6.18). Aside from Ptolemy's account, Ammianus Marcellinus, the Roman historian of 4th century AD, wrote that Hyrcania retained its name of the marine coasts (Amm. 23.6.50). The oldest Iranian sources (e.g. *Videvdād*) also indicate the position of this land in the west of states such as Sogdiana, Merv, Bactria, Harōiva, and Vaēkereta (*Vd* 1.5–12). The archeological studies carried out by Riccardi, have attested the Atrak valley as being the eastern border of ancient Hyrcania. According to him, “a basically homogeneous type of pottery in the region bears no resemblance to that of the plateau” (Riccardi, 1980: 60).

The account of the campaign in 737 BC in the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (r. 744–726 BC) has proved the Assyrian expansion towards “the mighty (*dannu*) Medes of the rising sun” (Tadmor and Yamada, 2011: 41: 13'-15' [p. 103]; 47: 42' [p. 121]). In addition, in an Assyrian inscription of Esarhaddon (dated 674 BC), the land 'Pātušarri' has been mentioned in Median territory in the de-

scription of his campaign against 'distant Medes,' located near Mount Bikni,¹ or the mountain of Lapis lazuli (as Esarhaddon described it) (Leichty, 2011: 20, Esarhaddon 1, Col. IV, 46–52).

The people of this region were defeated by the Assyrians, but some of its city lords like Uppis from the Partakka, Zanasana from the Partukka and Ramateia from the Urakazabarna, surrendered to the Assyrians and were reappointed as governors of their rebel-stricken cities (Leichty, 2011: 58). These Median tribes were those whom Assyrians known them as the 'distant Medes' (Leichty, 2011: 58). In Sennacherib's (r. 705–681) inscription, 'distant Medes' are mentioned as the most eastern inhabitants of the Median realm (Leichty, 2011: 58; Waters, 2005: 521). “This appellation refers to the Medes [who lived] outside the regions controlled by the Assyria. It is attested again in the inscription of Esarhaddon” (Radner, 2003: 58).

Cameron has attributed these regions, which were mentioned in the inscription of Esarhaddon to Parthia and Hyrcania (Cameron, 1937: 191). In *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon has written about the position and allegiance of Hyrcania in the Assyrian period: “The Hyrcanians are neighbours of the Assyrians; they are not a large nation, and for that reason they also were subjects of the Assyrians” (Xen. *Cyrop.* 4.2.1).

After the accession of the first Median kings and their attempts to form a confederation, the Medes were annexed by

¹ For the possibilities regarding the geographical location of Mount Bikni, see Levine, 1973; cf. Reade, 1995: 40; Radner, 2003: 49, 59.

Scythians who were Assyrian allies. According to Ctesias, Scythians conquered “the land of the Cadusians, the Tapyrians, and that of the Hyrcanians” (Ctésias de Cnide, 2004: 24–25) during Ninus’s reign. As attested by archaeological excavations, the Scythian arrows found in Tureng Tepe (layer IVA) could confirm the presence of Scythians in ancient Hyrcania (Vogelsang, 1992: 297). Therefore, it seems that Hyrcania was under Scythians’ control - who were Assyrian allies - at least at the beginning of Cyaxares’s reign (ca. 625–585 BC) (Diakonoff, 1966: 264). However, it is not clear whether or not Phraortes (Fravartiš) was able to extend his domination over the shores of Caspian Sea — and especially Hyrcania — before engaging with his dangerous enemy, Assyria. In one of his inscriptions, Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BC) has mentioned that the Assyrians reappeared in the land of distant Medes during his reign and reached as far east as the shore of the Caspian Sea for the first time. ‘Patušarri,’ on the edge of Mount Bikni, was described by Esarhaddon as the land “not one among the kings, my fathers, had trodden” (Luckenbill, 1989: 215).

The Geographical Situation of Hyrcania in the Territory of the Mighty Medes

After the domination of the Scythians over the Medes, Media solely reigned over the central part of its territory, unable to extend domination over the eastern regions, especially Hyrcania. Based on the names listed in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, the Median territory was limited by Assyria along the long road of Khurasan from the eastern part of Ḫarḫar to Alvand Mountain and

probably beyond that which was extended to the Mannea from the north and to Ellipi from the south (Luckenbill, 1989: 215). The boundaries of this territory date back to the beginning of the Median kingdom, before the reign of Cyaxares.

Some Greek historical accounts indicate the expansion of Median territory to Hyrcania during Cyaxares’ reign. In his account, Ctesias has considered “*Barcania*” [= Hyrcania] as part of the Median territory until Medes’ fall (Ctésias de Cnide, 2004: 108).¹ In addition, Ptolemy’s geography represents the eastern border of Median territory as far east as Charindas² River, which was located in Hyrcania (Marquart, 1901: 35). Thus, it is strongly plausible that Median’s control over Hyrcanians continued through the reign of Astyages (585–550 BC) and Hyrcania remained under his control until the fall of Medes.

The dominance of Medes over Hyrcania could also be studied from other aspects, such as its importance in early Achaemenid history. The classical sources record the “voluntary submission” of Hyrcania and its neighboring regions after Astyages’ defeat by Cyrus the Great.³ “Ctesias presupposed a close relationship

¹ For the name of *Barcania* in Ctesias’ account, see Schmitt, 1979: 129–131.

² Χαρινδᾶς, see Ptol. 6.2.2; Amm. 23.6.

³ For example, in a brief statement, Nicolaus of Damascus has stated that “Cyrus received the submission of the Hyrcanians, Parthians, Saka and Bactrians at the beginning of his reign, [which means] that these same peoples had already come to accept Median supremacy;” See Nic. Dam. F 66, 46 (*FGrHist* II A: 90), English translation derived from Stronach, 1969: 7; cf. Briant, 2002: 38–40.

between the Medes and northeastern Iran” (Waters, 2011: 249), because after Cyrus’s victory over Astyages, the Hyrcanians, Parthians, Scythians, and Bactrians, accepted his supremacy (Waters, 2011: 249; Briant, 2002: 33; Vogelsang, 1992: 213; Ctésias de Cnide, 2004: 108).¹ This submission suggests the extension of the Median territory as far east as Hyrcania, lasting through the reign of Astyages.

There are even some hints on the expansion of the Medes’ realm to the east and around Hyrcania in the *Bibliotheca historica* of Diodorus Siculus. He, who probably have had an eye on the *Persica* of Ctesias, reports that while the Medes besieged Nineveh, there came a messenger with the news that a mighty auxiliary force had moved from *Bactriana* to help the Assyrians. Therefore, Arbaces [→ the first Median king according to Ctesias], rushed to the armies of Bactria and finally persuaded them to join the Medes in a revolt against Assyrian Hegemony (Diod. II. 26). The part of Diodorus’ account that shows the Assyrian domination as far as Bactria is, of course, exaggerated, but the expansion of the Medes’ influence in the east of the Iranian plateau does not seem to be devoid of historical facts.²

In another report, Diodorus speaks of

¹ Thus, the major reason of joining these states to Achaemenid territory (Cyrus had subdued them before conquering Sardis and overcoming Croesus in 547 BC) was their subordination to the Medes; see also Mallowan, 1972: 7.

² In addition, we find a similar narrative in Ctesias about the conquests of Cyrus that shows the pre-dominance of the Medes over Bactria; see Ctésias de Cnide, 2004: 109.

an alliance between the Medes with the Parthians as follows:

“After the death of Artaeus, Ctesias continues, Artynes ruled over the Medes for twenty-two years, and Astibaras for forty. During the reign of the latter the Parthians revolted from the Medes and entrusted both their country and their city to the hands of the Sacae. This led to a war between the Sacae and the Medes, which lasted many years, and after no small number of battles and the loss of many lives on both sides, they finally agreed to peace on the following terms, that the Parthians should be subject to the Medes, but that both peoples should retain their former possessions and be friends and allies forever” (Diod. II. 34).

The alliance of the Medes and Parthians is a matter of great importance, and the reason is Herodotus’ brief reference to the ‘treaty of the five lands’ for using the Aces Irrigation System. According to Herodotus, Chorasmians, Hyrcanians, Parthians, Sarangaeans, and Thamanaeans used the Aces River (apparently is Tejen/Hari-river) before the rise of Persian Empire (Hdt. 3.117). These lands could only enjoy the benefits of this union if they allied with Parthia, as none of them shared a border with the Tejen Valley (Diakonoff, 1966: 328–329; cf. Vogelsang, 1992: 207–208). It is very plausible that the Medes dominated over ‘the Aces confederation’ after the annexation of Parthia to their territory, and this may have taken place in the time of Cyaxares.

Another noteworthy point is that the Cadusians who lived on the borders of the Caspian Sea as neighbors with Hyrcanians, subdued to Cyrus after the fall of Medes, (probably because they were

subject of the Medes). Even at the dusk of Achaemenid era, According to Arrian's report and researchers like Aliyev, the Cadusians did not follow Darius III, but allied with Atropates, the satrap of Media (Arr. 3.8; Aliyev, 2009: 188).

The presence of the Medes up to the vicinity of Chorasmia can also be proved by relying on other evidences. "The Persian name of the region Bactria (Bakhtriš) is not Persian in form, but could well be Median.¹ [In addition,] the Greek tradition does not represent Cyrus achieving new conquests of substance in Eastern Iran; so it could be that the Median Empire had already reached the Hindu Kush and crossed the Oxus into Sogdiana" (Cook, 1983: 29; Cook, 1985: 212–213). Furthermore, there was a great deal of proximity and affinity between the Median language and "a part of the Scythian language"² that indicates a close connection between the Medes and the Eastern regions (Aliyev, 2009: 130).

The Persian royal inscriptions provide significant information about the eastern range of Median territory through the Medes' fall. "In the earliest list of Persian royal inscriptions, Mede appears in tenth position, followed by Armenia, Cappadocia and the eastern Iranian states"

¹ See also Kent, 1953: 8; cf. Tavernier, 2007: 25. Could the Median form of this word indicates that this region was under the rule of the Medes before the domination of the Persians? (Lecoq, 1997: 48).

² Undoubtedly, there were both Iranian-speaking and non-Iranian-speaking groups among the Scythian tribes. Here, "part of the Scythian language" refers to the language of those Scythians who were Iranian-speaking and lived in eastern Parthia (Diakonoff, 1966: 266).

(Tuplin, 2004: 231). This information is based on the Behistun Inscription as well as Ctesias and other classical sources that confirm the expansion of Median authority in the eastern regions (Waters, 2010: 68). Elsewhere, in the Behistun Inscription (DB §35), Darius mentioned that Parthia and Hyrcania joined the rebel Phraortes who called himself Xšaθrita, "of the family of Cyaxares" (DB §24; Kent, 1953: 123). All the mentioned evidences could support the conclusion that Hyrcania was subject to Astyages until the Medes' fall.

Sometime after Astyages' defeat, Cyrus controlled the previous lands of Media in the East (Walser, 1972: 16). According to the account of Ctesias "After Cyrus's victory over Astyages, Artasyras, the Hyrcania governor, brought Cyrus an army of 50.000 warriors and surrendered himself to him" (Ctésias de Cnide, 2004: 108).

The Hyrcanians' indisputable and early surrender to the fresh Achaemenid Empire was very important and vital for Cyrus. First, it was necessary that the Hyrcanians, Parthians, Scythians, and Bactrians prevent repetitive invasions and let Cyrus to stabilize his power after the occupation of Ecbatana (Briant, 2002: 39–40). In the next stage, the Achaemenids' success against invaders (Scythians and other nations) was not only because of their military power, but was also because of relying on the military power of Hyrcanians, in addition to the strategic position of the region (Kavyani Pooya and Daghmehchi, 2014: 174). In this regard, Xenophon, like Ctesias, clearly and repeatedly referred to the role of the Hyrcanians militaries during the

time of Cyrus. According to Xenophon in *Cyropaedia*, the Hyrcanians were united with Cyrus in the war against the Assyrians and Babylonians led by Gobryas (Xen. *Cyrop.* 5.2.23–25). As we know, Thousands of Hyrcanians were led by a Chiliarch [= *Hazārapatiš*] during the war of Cyrus against the Assyrians (König, 1934: 43).

In addition to the account of Xenophon, the information derived from Ctesias' account reflects the existence of fortification in ancient Hyrcania that was strongly defended by a great military force. The archeological evidences also support much of the information derived from historical sources. The landscape studies of Gorgān wall conducted by Tony J. Wilkinson *et al.*, confirm that "the Gorgān plain had been a densely occupied and exploited region for a long time and the peak of settlement expansion may have been reached during the first decades of Achaemenid rule or even earlier" (Sauer *et al.*, 2013: 420). Additionally, a close resemblance between the ceramics found from Tureng Tepe, layer IV (dating back to the seventh century BC) with the concurrent ceramics of the western part of Iran (Deshayes, 1973: 149) indicate the influence of Media beyond the Alburz and in the direction of Gorgān plain during the seventh century BC, until 625 BC. The existence of similarities between the buff and cream-colored ceramics of the layer IVB of Tureng Tepe since the Achaemenid period along with the buff and cream colored ceramic sets from the west of Iran can also indicate the Median influence in ancient Hyrcania (Vogelsang, 1992: 297). The precise dating of these evidences lead us to the

conclusion that the influence of Media over Hyrcania and its northern region occurred after the Median's conquest of Scythian and continued throughout the Persian empire.

Archaeological excavations in Tureng Tepe also led to the discovery of a large brick porch on the southwest of the hill that dates back to the late Iron III (the end of Medes and the early Achaemenid period). This building, which has a large platform with a height of 14 meters, is considered to be comparable to the great terraces in Pasargadae and Bard-i Nešānda in Masjed-i Solaymān in Deshayes's opinion. The structure seems to have had a religious function (Deshayes, 1973: 149) and in the opinion of some, it was considered as an administrative center at that time. However, this huge building represents the existence of an organized administrative center with a large military structure in Hyrcania.

This is despite the fact that in Ulugh Beg in Turkmenistan, along the mountain ridge of Kopet Dag, some vestiges of a castle dating back to pre-Achaemenid period have been found which in terms of plan and architectural details are very similar to the Median castle of Nush-i Jan and Tell Gubba (Boucharlat *et al.*, 2005: 479–480). The relations of Parthia (as part of the Median territory) with the eastern regions and consequently the extension of the territory of Medes in the eastern part of Parthia is also evident from the historical accounts, according to which, it is said that during the Achaemenid period, each of the southern Central Asian lands had a separate irrigation system: Dehistan used to be benefited from At-

rak, Bactria from Oxus [= Amu-Darya], Merv from Murghab, Chorasmia from Oxus, Parthia from Kopet Dag and Sogdiana from Zeravshan (Francfort and Lecomte, 2002: 633; cf. Coloru, 2014: 32; Rapin, 2017: 46–47).

The Median influence over Hyrcania is noticeable in the military deployment of Hyrcania “in a Median style” even after assigning power to the Persian Empire (Vogelsang, 1992: 213). At least in the early Achaemenid period, they followed their former rulers, the Medes, rather than Achaemenids, in political and cultural affairs. In addition, in the Persian campaign against Greece, the Median forces are mentioned in most cases along with the military forces of the eastern regions such as Bactrians, Scythians, and Indians. This suggests that they had the probability of long-term unity and the similarities in style and behavior during battles. Justin, like Ctesias, mentions that after Astyages’ defeat, Cyrus appointed him as the governor of “the mighty nation of the Hyrcanians” (Pompeius Trogus apud Just. 1.6.16). If this report is true, it confirms a constant unity between Media and the eastern regions in the mid-sixth century. “Herodotus history also refers to the similarity of the Hyrcanian and Median military facilities in the Xerxes army. In addition, the archeological studies show a close resemblance between the ceramics of the pre-Achaemenid period in Hyrcania and the concurrent ceramics of western parts of Iran” (Vogelsang, 1988: 132). Moreover, the archaeological excavations of the Median settlement of Delazian in Semnān, south of the Gorgān plain, show a close similarity

with the eastern building of Nush-i Jan (Mehryār and Kabiri, 1986: 36). This close similarity points to Median influence (if not domination) towards the east.

Following the Medes, the Persian Empire tried to establish a military base and fortification in Hyrcania to confront the assault of Scythians from the steppe of Dehistan in the north of Hyrcania (Sherwin-White and Kuhrt, 1993: 81). Hyrcania was considered a temporary region for the assault of Scythians in a large scale (Sherwin-White and Kuhrt, 1993: 81). The archeological survey in the western steppe of Gorgān plain (Hyrcania) has proved the presence of “urban civilization like Qelich Qōīneq in the pre-Median, Median or early Achaemenid period (7th or 6th century BC)” (Sauer *et al.*, 2013: 421). The existence of a large Median city suggests the extent of the centralized empire of the Median kingdom by the first half of the 6th century BC, at the latest, in Gorgān plain (Hyrcania) (Sauer *et al.*, 2013: 420). This fortified settlement reflects a military power in ancient Hyrcania during the first half of the 6th century BC.

Conclusion

The Assyrian sources and archaeological evidences applied in this research led us to the conclusion that the territory of a centralized Median kingdom had extended as far as Hyrcania. The classical sources indicate that the “distant Medes” were considered a great military force in the Median kingdom and the archaeological evidences approve this result. Perhaps the Median kings tried to conquer this region in order to augment its military forces. The

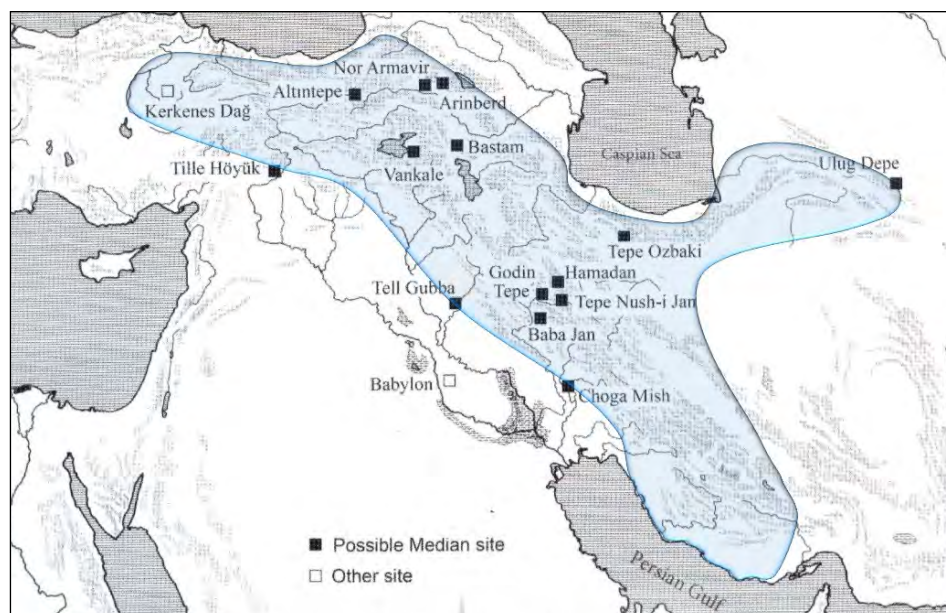


Fig. 1. Hypothetical Realm of Median Kingdom

Map of Iran's Plateau and its Adjacent Areas in which, Median Kingdom and Associated Sites are Shown (cf. Mollazadeh and Taheri-Dehkordi, 2016: 295; For the Subjugation of the Persians by the Medes, cf. Imanpour, 2002-2003; Basic Map from Roaf, 2008; Edited by the Authors, 2024).

contemporary Assyrian sources do not provide information about the eastern regions of the early Median territory. After Cyaxares' victory over Scythians, the Medians extended their territory eastwards in order to gain the control of the eastern regions and increase their military power against the Assyrians. After Cyaxares' victory over the Assyrians, the Medians were able to extend their territory from the Halys River in Anatolia to Hyrcania and Parthia in the east. The Medes' control over the eastern regions continued through the reign of Astyages and these territories remained under his control until the fall of Medes. The archaeological studies in various parts of the Median territory confirm the existence of fortified settlements as far east as Hyrcania. Hyrcania was also considered to be a military base in which one could take advantage of the other east-

ern regions such as Parthia and Choras-mia. In fact, the eastern regions that encompassed "distant Medes" had a unity even after the fall of Medes. It indicates the fact that the Media's territory could have extended beyond Hyrcania. The archaeological evidences from the early Achaemenid period also suggest a Median influence on the eastern regions even after the conflicts that finally made Persians the superior power in the region; and the military deployment of Hyrcanians in a Median style provide good evidence for this claim. Moreover, studies carried out on the ceramics indicate a close resemblance between Media and Hyrcania. The military power of Hyrcania was also significant during the Persian Empire. Using the Hyrcanian military forces, the Persians were able to prevent the invasions of Scythians from the steppe of Dehistan.

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