CHAPTER FIVE

IN WESTERN IRAN: MEDIA ATROPATENE, GREATER MEDIA AND PERSIS

Media Atropatene

Atropates or Atrapata, who now gave his name to Lesser Media as Media Atropatene (later Adarbadagan, Azarbaijan), had been satrap of all Media, possibly by hereditary succession, under Darius III. After that king’s death he swore fealty to Alexander and in due course received back his satrapy,\(^1\) which he governed throughout the latter years of the Macedonian’s brief reign. He had been actively loyal to Iran’s conqueror,\(^2\) and with a daughter married to Alexander’s close friend, Perdiccas\(^3\), should have felt his position reasonably secure. It was surely then with bitterness of heart that under the Successors this clearly very able man found himself deprived of the greater part of the rich domain he had long governed, being left with only its isolated north-west corner.\(^4\) This corner forms, together with neighbouring Arran and Armenia, the “region of the high plains”\(^5\), a fractured plateau of which great blocks have sunk, becoming filled with shallow lakes.\(^6\) Among these is Urmia, the “largest permanent sheet of water in Iran”,\(^7\) bordered by zones of fertile land. It and other lakes of the region are fed by rivers draining down from the plateau, from which three volcanic mountains rise majestically: in Atropatene itself the huge Mt. Savalan to the north-east of Lake Urmia, and Mt. Sahand to the east, the former only just surpassed in size by Mt. Ararat to the west, which is in Armenia. This was old Mannaean and Urartian territory, and in the third century B.C. much of it was probably not

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\(^1\) See above, p. 4.

\(^2\) See above, p. 15.

\(^3\) See above, p. 11.

\(^4\) See above, p. 18. On the geography, archaeology, and pre-Islamic history of this region see the articles by X. de Planhol, W. Kleiss and K. Schippmann in Elr. III 205–24.

\(^5\) Muqaddasî, cited by Le Strange, Eastern Caliphate, 159, n. 1.

\(^6\) Persia, Geographical Handbook Series, B.R. 525 (British Naval Intelligence Division), 1945, 47.

\(^7\) Le Strange, o.c., p. 160.
yet intensively Iranianized.\textsuperscript{8} The chief Achaemenian town of the
region was evidently *Ganzaka, the "Treasury", later known as
Ganzak or Ganza;\textsuperscript{9} and this has been identified with ruin-mounds
near the modern town of Miandoab,\textsuperscript{10} in a broad river-plain at the
south-east end of Lake Urmia—a district "at all times celebrated
for the abundance and excellence of its pastures".\textsuperscript{11} Ganzak domi-
nated the fertile regions around the lake, in which Iranians had
probably settled in considerable numbers; and it was presumably
this town, with its Achaemenian official residence and administra-
tive buildings, that Atropates now made his capital.\textsuperscript{12}

An ancient highway (still in use) led up from Babylonia through
the Zagros mountains, past Ganzak and on to Raga\textsuperscript{13}, and another
road reached the Urmia region from Ecbatana\textsuperscript{14}; but even under the
Achaemenians traffic along these routes must have been thin
compared with that along the Khorasan Highway, which, crossing
Greater Media, linked Babylonia with eastern Iran; and now that
Atropatene had become a separate province, independent in fact if
not theory from the Seleucid Empire, such traffic as there had been
must have been drastically reduced, with trade affected and no
coming and going of officials. The flow of armies, traders and
travellers along the Khorasan Highway itself clearly continued in
full spate during the early Seleucid period, and is likely to have
troubled at least one group of Iranians, namely those Median magi
who lived with (it seems) their chief magus, the "Zarathuṣṭrotema",
at their holy city of Raga, now transformed into the Greek polis of
Rhages-Europus.\textsuperscript{15} Many of those using the highway in Seleucid
times would have been Hellenes, or other foreigners in the service
of Hellenes, who, halting at Rhages, would have swelled the
numbers of non-Iranians there. The magi presumably found them-
selves suffering accordingly in several ways: from alien rule and
alien exactions; from the proximity of many infidels; and from a
sharp decrease in the income brought them formerly by Iranian
pilgrims to their holy city, and by pious Iranian travellers. The

\textsuperscript{8} Markwart, Provincial Capitals, pp. 22–3, 110.
\textsuperscript{9} Markwart, Untersuchungen, 160 n. 2.
\textsuperscript{10} W. Monteith, "Journal of a tour through Azerbijan and the shores of the
Caspian", JRGS III, 1833, pub. 1834, 5–6.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} So Markwart, Provincial Capitals, p. 109. More cautiously V. Minorsky,
"Roman and Byzantine campaigns in Atropatene", BSOAS XI, 1944, 258–9,
with a sketch-map of the area, Pl. I, opposite p. 250.
\textsuperscript{13} Monteith, o.c., p. 6; Persia, Geographical Handbook Series, p. 548 (Branch
Route 16A).
\textsuperscript{14} Le Strange, Eastern Caliphate, 229–30.
\textsuperscript{15} Cf. above, pp. 23–4