

A HISTORY OF LOCATION IN ANCIENT AZERBAIJAN: ATROPATENE**Nimet SÖNMEZ OKULMUŞ*****ABSTRACT**

The name Atropatene is one of the place names that has survived from antiquity to the present day. An examination of ancient sources reveals that Atropatene derives from the ruler Atropatos. He defended the region against the Macedonians and subsequently declared himself king. According to ancient sources, Atropatene, which gave its name to the region, is a region located east of Matiane, west of Greater Media, and south and southeast of the Caspian Sea. Although not perfectly equivalent in this respect, it can be roughly placed in the region of Southern Azerbaijan. An examination of the region's ancient history reveals human settlement from the Paleolithic era to the present. However, the region's written history begins with the Assyrian and Urartian periods. Based on Assyrian and Urartian sources, it can be concluded that the region was rich. Therefore, it can be argued that these kingdoms engaged in expeditions to access these riches. Based on Assyrian sources, it can be concluded that the land of Manna was divided between the Assyrians and Urartians, but that the region came under Assyrian rule after Sargon II. Our article examines the primary sources of the period, Assyrian and Urartian written texts, and evaluates place names to identify ancient settlements in the Southern Azerbaijan region. This demonstrates that the area around Lake Urmia, in particular, witnessed dense settlement.

Keywords: Atropatene, Lake Urmiye, East Azerbaijan, Sargon II, Manna.

INTRODUCTION

Atropatene was one of the important regions of the Caucasus area and can be traced in ancient sources. Strabo constitutes one of the principal sources that provide significant information about Atropatene. When the eleventh book of his work *Geographica*, in which he describes the land of Media, is examined, the following statements can be observed (Akbulut, 2025, p. 81):

“This country (Atropatian Media) lies to the east of Armenia and Matiane, to the west of Greater Media, and to the north of both. It extends around the bay of the Hyrcanian Sea and is adjacent to Matiane in the south. Judging by its power, Atropatian Media is by no means a small country. According to Apollonides, it is able to field 10,000 cavalry and about 40,000 infantry. It has a lake called Kapauta, in which salt crystallizes and hardens. This salt causes itching and pain, but the remedy for this condition is raw olive oil... They recover what is taken from them, just as they took back Symbake from the Armenians who had become subject to the Romans. Subsequently, they sought friendship with Caesar and at the same time showed closeness to the Parthians.”

When this passage transmitted by Strabo is evaluated from the perspective of historical geography, the place referred to as the Hyrcanian Sea appears as the ancient name of the region extending to the south and south-east of the Caspian Sea (Çoban, 2023, p. 805). Matiane, on the other hand, is located to the east or south of Lake Urmia (Syme, 1988, p. 138 and footnote 7). While Atropatene was situated between Armenia and the shores of Lake Urmia, it was also adjacent to the region lying to the south and south-east of the Caspian Sea. From this perspective, it is possible to state that it included the area known today as Southern Azerbaijan (Iranian Azerbaijan).

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Map I: Atropatene and Albania

(K. Farrokh (2024), “An Analysis of the Military History and Martial Culture of Ancient Iran and the Caucasus in the pre-Islamic Era”, *Hunara: Journal of Ancient Iranian Arts and History**, 2/2, pp. 7–62).*

Since Atropatene is also closely associated with Atropates, it is necessary to address this issue. Indeed, Media and Atropatios are interconnected concepts. Strabo provides the following information on this subject in his work *Geographica* (Akbulut, 2025, p. 81):

“Media is divided into two parts. The first is called Greater Media, whose metropolis is the great city of Ecbatana, which contains the royal palace of the Median Empire (even today the Parthians continue to use it as a royal residence. Because Media is cold, kings spend the summer here; their winter residence is Seleuceia on the Tigris near Babylon). The other part is Atropatian Media, which takes its name from the commander Atropates. He defended this country, which had been a part of Greater Media, from the Macedonians. Moreover, after being proclaimed king, he organized this land as an independent state. This achievement has been preserved by his successors to the present day...”

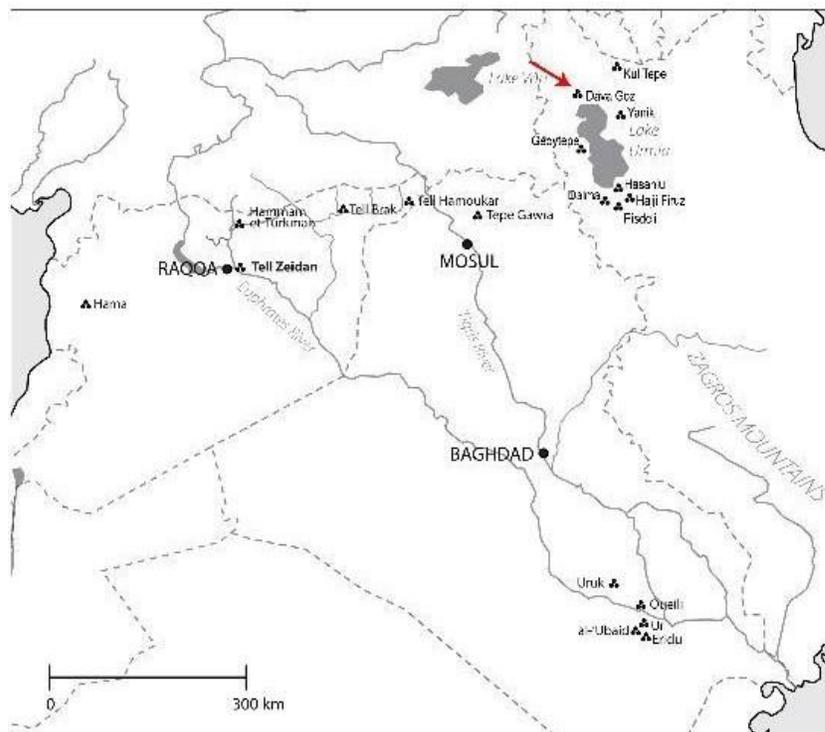
As can be understood from Strabo’s account, Atropatene derived its name from the commander Atropates. After defending the region from the Macedonians, he later declared himself king, thus establishing a separate state in the area. Houtsma, in the entry on Azerbaijan in the *First Encyclopaedia of Islam*, states that this region in antiquity constituted the Greater Media area of the Achaemenid Empire, but in the period following Alexander the Great it became an independent satrapy called Atropatene, named after the Persian satrap Atropates. He further notes that the dynasty preserved itself until the Christian era (Houtsma, 1987, p. 134). Xavier de Planhol, in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* under the heading “Azerbaijan” in the Geography section, remarks that the country’s name derived from the satrap of Media Atropates, that he retained his position in western Media during the time of Alexander the Great, and that the region was incorporated into the Persian Empire during the reign of the Sasanian king Shapur I (Planhol, 1987, p. 205).

In this respect, when ancient sources and the views of modern scholars are evaluated together, it is possible to state that the term “Azerbaijan” is a legacy of Atropatene that evolved over time into its present form. This article aims to examine the ancient history of this region. The primary sources of the study consist of written texts from the relevant period, while the works of modern scholars are used as secondary sources.

1. Ancient History of Southern Azerbaijan up to the End of the Assyrian Period

Scientific studies conducted in Southern Azerbaijan (Iranian Azerbaijan) indicate that the region possesses a very ancient past. A review of this research shows that between 1932 and 1933 the French scholar Jacques Demurgan carried out investigations around Lake Urmia (Karimikiya, Rezaloo, Abedi & Javanmardzadeh, 2022, p. 5). Furthermore, between June and November 1949 Carlton S. Cook discovered four settlement sites, two of which were located in the Zagros Mountains. These included Hunter's Cave in the Bisotun Cave in Kermanshah Province in southwestern Iran and the Tamtama Cave overlooking Lake Urmia in Southern Azerbaijan. The finds obtained from the archaeological excavations at these sites were dated to the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic periods (Bazgir, 2017, p. 3). In his 1957 excavations at Tamtama, which he stated was situated one to two miles from Lake Urmia, Cook reported finding only seven pieces of flint, none of which were worked (Cook, 1957, p. 126). On this basis, it is possible to trace the history of the region back to the Palaeolithic period.

Settlement in the region is not limited to these examples. Another site in Southern Azerbaijan is Dava Göz, a small area measuring approximately 100×100 m located 15 km southeast of Khoy and to the north of Lake Urmia (Map II).



Main Ubaid and Post-Ubaid Sites and Location of Kul Tepe Jofa and Dava Göz Khoy in NW Iran

Map II. Dava Göz, Lake Urmia and Southern Azerbaijan

(A. Abedi, "Iranian Azerbaijan Pathway from the Zagros to the Caucasus, Anatolia and Northern Mesopotamia: Dava Göz, A New Neolithic and Chalcolithic Site in NW Iran", *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry**, 17/1, pp. 69–87).*

Excavations carried out in the area designated as Trench III at Dava Göz have revealed finds dating to the Late Neolithic / Early Chalcolithic period. In Trench V, materials attributed to the Late Chalcolithic

period were uncovered. Within this framework, Dava Göz III is dated to approximately 4200–3900/3800 BCE (Abedi, 2017, pp. 69–87).

At Göy Tepe, located in West Azerbaijan in Iran, studies conducted by Burton Brown indicate that the Göy Tepe B period may belong to the middle of the second millennium BCE (Brown, 1951, p. 141). Accordingly, it is possible to state in general terms that the region has been inhabited since the Palaeolithic period.

Both Urartian and Assyrian sources provide information on the written history of the region. The Urartian state was formed in the mid-tenth century BCE as a result of economic consolidation and the pressure exerted by Assyria on the Uruatri and Nairi confederations (Tarhan, 1978, p. 1ff.; Sevin, 2012, p. 44; Tarhan, 1982, p. 69). Urartian inscriptions show that during the co-reign of Išpuini and Menua, campaigns against foreign lands were initiated. For example, an inscription on the wall of the Kalatgah Dam states that the king advanced toward the land of Sapaili, while another inscription located in the Surp Pogos Church in the ancient city of Van records victories over the tribes of Luša and Katarza (Payne, 2006, p. 35).

An examination of Urartian inscriptions also indicates campaigns conducted in the vicinity of Lake Urmia. For instance, Ab/purza(ne) is located on the eastern shore of Lake Urmia, Alate in the mountainous area south of the lake, Arha/u/o to the south of Lake Urmia, and Gaduqaniu within Satiraraja to the east of the lake (Dianokoff & Kashkai, 1981, pp. 3, 5, 10, 65). When the Horhor Annals of the Urartian king Argishti I are examined, one of his campaigns to the region is described as follows:

“Argishti, son of Minua, declares: the god Haldi is mighty, and the spear of the god Haldi is mighty. By the greatness of Haldi I sent forth my commanders on campaign. I pursued the Assyrians... I went on campaign to my land Dada and against ... I marched to the land of Arha... I campaigned against the land of Bustu. I captured the city of Aburza... I seized the city of Qaduqaniu... I advanced as far as the mountainous land of Mana. 18,827 people were taken captive in that year. Some I killed, others I carried off alive. I drove away 606 horses, 184 camels, 6,257 head of cattle and 33,203 sheep and goats...” (Payne, 2006, p. 164).

An analysis of this text dating to the reign of Argishti I indicates that the king campaigned in a region encompassing Southern Azerbaijan. As noted above, Aburza and Qaduqaniu are located in the vicinity of Lake Urmia, while Arha is situated to the south of the lake near the land of Bustu (Dianokoff & Kashkai, 1981, p. 10). The booty obtained during the campaign suggests that the region was economically prosperous and that animal husbandry occupied a prominent place in its economy.

Although Argishti I states that he captured several cities, other campaigns were also carried out in the region during his reign. The Horhor inscription records that he campaigned against the land of Mana and captured the land of Irkiuni, resulting in the seizure of 6,471 captives, 286 horses, 2,251 head of cattle and 8,205 small livestock as booty. In another campaign, he is said to have captured the Asqai Valley (Payne, 2006, pp. 165, 168). The land of Mana is roughly located to the east and west of Lake Urmia, while Asqai is placed on the southern shore of the lake and identified with Uski on the northern slope of Mount Sahand, west of modern Tabriz (Dianokoff & Kashkai, 1981, pp. 13–14, 54).

On the basis of this evidence, it is possible to state that during the reign of Argishti I a part of Southern Azerbaijan came under Urartian domination. The numerous toponyms mentioned in the texts also suggest the absence of a strong centralized kingdom in the region at that time. Moreover, Urartian campaigns into Southern Azerbaijan were not limited to the reign of Argishti I; similar expeditions are also known to have been undertaken during the reign of his successor, Sarduri II.

2. Campaigns during the Reign of Sarduri II and Assyrian–Manna Relations

An inscription consisting of seven columns was discovered on a stele and base placed in a rock-cut niche known as Hazine Kapı and Analıkız, dating to the reign of Sarduri II. In the first part of the text, the king states that he set out on campaign and captured the land of Mana (Payne, 2006, p. 208). Another campaign to the region is recorded on the reverse side of the same stele as follows (Payne, 2006, p. 213):

“To the god Haldi, to the god Teisheba, to the god Shivini, and to all the gods of the land of Biainili, I prayed. The gods listened to me and guided me. I set out and went on campaign against the land of Puluadi. The enemy army confronted me in battle. I drove them back and pursued them as far as the city of Libliune. I captured the fortified royal city of Libliune by force. There I erected an inscription. I burned the cities and devastated the land.”

An examination of the text shows that two additional toponyms were added to the Urartian corpus. According to the inscription, Puluadi was a territorial entity and Libliune its royal city. Puluadi is located in present-day Southern Azerbaijan, near the village of Seghendel, 5 km east of Varzaghan and about 30 km west of Ahar, while its royal city Libliune is likewise placed at Seghendel (Dianokoff & Kashkai, 1981, pp. 50, 64). The Analıkız stele also mentions a campaign against the land of Qu'albani (Payne, 2006, p. 230). On the basis of Urartian inscriptions, it is therefore possible to state that Southern Azerbaijan was incorporated into Urartian domination during the reign of Sarduri II.

With regard to the Assyrians, the land of Manna appears for the first time in inscriptions dating to the reign of Shalmaneser III (Mutlu, 2017, p. 229). The Black Obelisk, discovered at Calah in 1846 and belonging to Shalmaneser III, records a campaign conducted against Manna. The relevant passage reads as follows (Grayson, 2002, pp. 69–70):

“In my thirtieth regnal year, while I was residing in Calah, I gave orders and sent out Dāian-Aššur, the field marshal, chief of my extensive army, at the head of my army. Crossing the River Zab he approached the cities belonging to the city Hubuškia... Moving on from the cities of the land Madahisa he approached the cities of Udaku, the Mannaean. Udaku the Mannaean took fright in the face of the flash of my strong weapons and abandoned Zirtu, his royal city, and ran away to save his life. I went after him and carried off his oxen, sheep, and property without measure...”

This text shows that during the reign of Shalmaneser III a ruler named Udaku governed Manna and fled before the advancing Assyrian army. The king did not limit his activities to this single campaign: in the thirty-first year of his reign, he again marched against Manna and extracted tribute from several cities, mainly in the form of cattle, sheep, and well-trained horses (Grayson, 2002, p. 83).

Following Shalmaneser III, further expeditions were undertaken in the region during the reign of Shamshi-Adad V. According to information contained on a large stone stele at Calah, the king crossed the River Zab in his third regnal year and received tribute from several lands, including Manna and Parsua (Grayson, 2002, p. 184).

It is known that Argishti I's control over Manna continued until Tiglath-pileser III ascended the Assyrian throne (Mutlu, 2017, p. 230; Salvini, 2006, pp. 70–71). Assyrian sources indicate that at times the Mannaean king sought Assyrian assistance against the Urartians, while at other times he rebelled against Assyrian authority. For example, during the reign of Rusa I, Manna was under Assyrian protection and its ruler Iranzu requested assistance from Assyria. At that time Sargon II was on the Assyrian throne and personally intervened to suppress the rebellion (Sever, 2008, p. 104).

Texts from the reign of Sargon II show that Assyria resumed large-scale campaigns in the region. Inscriptions from the interior of Sargon II's palace at Dur-Šarrukin state that the king conquered regions such as Media, Parsua, and Manna and received tribute from them (Frame, 2021, p. 56). Nevertheless, the region was not brought completely under Assyrian control. One text describes an episode from Sargon II's reign as follows (Frame, 2021, pp. 59–60):

“[In my sixth regnal year, Ur]sa (Rusa), [the Ura]rtian, [sent his mounted messenger with a

mendacious message to Bag-dati of the land Uisdis and ... the governors] of the land Mannea. They brought about the rout of the Manneans on Mount Uaus ... and threw down the corpse of Aza, their lord. I raised my hands in supplication to the god Aššur, my lord, to avenge the Manneans and make that area part of Assyria. On Mount Uaus ... I flayed the skin from Bag-dati and displayed it to the Manneans... Ullusunu, his brother, who had sat on the royal throne, put his trust in Rusa the Urartian ... I overwhelmed the city Izirtu, the royal city of the land of Mannea... Ullusunu, the Mannean, together with his whole land, grasped my feet. I then had pity on them and pardoned Ullusunu's crimes and allowed him to sit again on his throne."

According to this Assyrian account, in Sargon II's sixth regnal year the Urartian king Rusa incited Bag-dati, ruler of Manna, against Assyria. Sargon II responded with a campaign in which Bag-dati was killed and his body displayed to the Mannaeans. His brother Ullusunu continued the revolt with Urartian support but was eventually defeated and compelled to seek mercy from Sargon, who pardoned him and allowed him to retain the throne.

However, Assyrian texts also indicate that Ullusunu did not remain loyal. In the seventh year of his reign Sargon II reports that Ullusunu had deceived him, leading to the seizure of twenty-two fortresses, which were annexed to Assyrian territory, while the Mannaeian governor Dayukku was deported with his family and order was restored in the troubled land of Mannea (Frame, 2021, pp. 60–61).

Although Assyrian sources claim that peace was restored, the situation appears to have remained unstable. In the eighth year of his reign Sargon II records that he defeated Rusa again, capturing 260 members of the royal family and cavalry, while Rusa himself escaped. At the same time, he removed the district of Uisdis from Mannea and granted it to Ullusunu (Frame, 2021, p. 65). This suggests that the land of Mannea was divided between Assyrian and Urartian spheres of influence, but that following Rusa's defeat the region eventually passed into Assyrian control.

The struggle between Assyria and Urartu in the region can largely be explained by economic motives. Sargon II states that he received from Ullusunu of Mannea, Dalta of Ellipi, Be'l-aplu-iddina of Allabria, and forty-five powerful Median cities a total of 4,609 horses, mules, cattle, lambs, and goats (Frame, 2021, p. 68). This indicates that Southern Azerbaijan was a region of considerable wealth.

Between 642 and 625 BCE an alliance was formed between the Scythians, the Mannaeans, the Medes, and the Babylonians against Assyria (Erdemir & Erdemir, 2010, p. 29; Mutlu, 2017, p. 234). Ultimately, Assyria collapsed after Babylonian and Median forces besieged and captured Nineveh, killing King Sin-šar-iškun. Although a short-lived ruler named Aššur-uballit II emerged in Harran, he was soon expelled by the Medes and Babylonians, and the Assyrian state came to an end in 609 BCE (Frahm, 2017, p. 192).

CONCLUSION

When Atropatene is evaluated as a geographical region, it can broadly be located in what is today Southern Azerbaijan. This area, also referred to as Iranian Azerbaijan, lies within the territory of modern Iran and includes Lake Urmia. Archaeological research conducted in the region demonstrates that its ancient history extends back to the Palaeolithic period. Since the region was also inhabited during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods, it may be stated that it witnessed continuous human presence throughout different stages of prehistory.

By contrast, the written history of the region begins considerably later. The surviving textual sources originate not from Atropatene itself but from Urartian and Assyrian campaigns conducted in order to exploit its wealth. The first Assyrian expeditions to the area can be dated to the reign of Shalmaneser III, as the land of Manna is located by Dianokoff to the east and west of Lake Urmia. It may therefore be argued that the Assyrians became acquainted with Southern Azerbaijan during the reign of Shalmaneser III. These campaigns, however, were relatively short-lived. Although Manna is mentioned again under Shamshi-Adad V, it was the Urartians who initiated sustained campaigns against Southern Azerbaijan during the reign of

Argishti I, which continued under Sarduri II. The available evidence indicates that during the reign of Rusa I a portion of Southern Azerbaijan, including the area around Lake Urmia, came under Urartian control. An analysis of Urartian inscriptions reveals the existence of numerous settlements, some of which can be broadly placed within the boundaries of Southern Azerbaijan. This domination, however, appears to have been brief, since under Sargon II the region passed fully into Assyrian hands.

During the reign of Sargon II, Rusa I is known to have attempted to incite revolts in the land of Manna, but these uprisings were suppressed by the Assyrian king and thus failed. Following the collapse of the Assyrian state, it is possible to state that the region ceased to be under Assyrian control.

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