

## The Western Territory of the Median Kingdom and Its Correspondence with the Western Extent of the Kurdish Tribes

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The date the search was received: 28/10/2024

Date of publication approval: 1/2/2025

### Abstract

The Median kingdom, despite its relatively brief existence, exerted a significant and multifaceted influence on political, social, and cultural developments within the Iranian Plateau and beyond. However, a dearth of historical and archaeological data has hindered our understanding of this crucial period, leading to skepticism regarding the extent and impact of Median rule. This lack of evidence has sometimes been used to deny the existence of a powerful Median kingdom and its pivotal role in the rise of the Achaemenid Empire. One key area of uncertainty lies in the western extent of Median territory. Determining this boundary is crucial for validating or refuting the historical accounts of a substantial Median kingdom. The main question of this research is whether the Median kingdom expanded into the regions of northern Iraq, Syria, and eastern Turkey, and whether the distribution and dispersion of Iranian-speaking Kurdish tribes can be matched with the expansion of the Median kingdom. Historical sources indicate that following the Assyrian collapse, the Medes acquired significant portions of the former Assyrian Empire, encompassing regions such as Iraqi Kurdistan, northern Syria, and parts of southeastern Turkey. This expansion likely facilitated the spread of Iranian-speaking elements within these areas, previously dominated by Assyrian and Hurrian cultures. This research, drawing upon historical, archaeological, and linguistic data, suggests a strong correlation between the present-day distribution of Iranian-speaking Kurdish populations in northern Iraq, Syria, and southeastern Turkey, and the western reach of the Median kingdom. This spatial congruence supports the hypothesis that the presence of Kurdish populations in these regions is a consequence of Median expansion.

Keywords: Median Kingdom, Historical Geography, History of Kurdish Peoples, Iraqi Kurdistan

### Introduction

Despite their relatively brief historical existence and the challenges they faced in establishing a unified and centralized state, the Medes played a significant and lasting role in regional and supra-regional politics, shaping the Iranian culture and civilization. However, recent archaeological and historical studies have not only failed to illuminate various aspects of this state and its people, but have also given rise to fundamental ambiguities concerning its political structure, historical geography, religion, art, and associated artifacts. These questions have yet to be adequately addressed.  
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The most significant and numerous ambiguities in historical geography and political history relate to the final period of the Median kingdom, specifically the period between the establishment of the Median kingdom (around 650 BCE, particularly after the defeat of Assyria in 612 BCE) and its fall to Cyrus the Achaemenid (550 BCE). This relatively brief historical period was a crucial and transformative phase in the political life of the Medes.

Due to a lack or scarcity of archaeological and historical data, numerous and contradictory hypotheses have been proposed regarding the political history and, consequently, the historical geography of this period. Since ancient times, many authors, relying on classical Greek sources, have portrayed this period in the political life of the Medes as an empire that extended from central Anatolia to Central Asia and from the southern Caucasus to the Persian Gulf. However, the absence of evidence commensurate with such an empire has led some researchers to conclude that after defeating their common enemy (Assyria), the Median tribes reverted to their tribal and provincial structures and never succeeded in forming a centralized state with a vast territory (Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1988).

Considering the issues and ambiguities raised, this research endeavors to reconstruct the western territory of the Median Kingdom and its correspondence with the distribution and dispersion of Iranian-speaking Kurdish tribes in the period between the Median victory over Assyria in 612 BC and its fall to Cyrus the Achaemenid 550 BC, relying on historical, archaeological, and linguistic data. The results of this study, alongside other research, can confirm the formation of the great Median Kingdom and the relatively extensive expansion of its western territory. This research has been conducted analytically and using library sources over a three-year period.

### **Research Background**

Given the information from classical Greek, Hebrew, and later cuneiform sources, the study of the Medes and their historical geography has a long history. One of the most important works, primarily based on classical Greek texts, is Rawlinson's valuable work on the five great monarchies of the ancient East, which includes the Median Empire (Rawlinson, 1871-73). In the realm of historical geography, the foundation of this research and other similar, later studies is based on references from Greek and to a lesser extent, Biblical Hebrew sources. With the discovery and reading of Assyrian, Babylonian, and Achaemenid sources, the scope of information regarding the historical geography of the Medes expanded. Diakonoff's book, "History of Media" (2009), is the most valuable historical and linguistic study conducted on the Medes until the mid-20th century. After this period, many researchers turned their attention to the Median period (Abdi, 1993), and numerous excavations were carried out at sites attributed to this period (Mollazadeh, 2014). The results of these studies not only failed to shed much light on the political structure, territorial extent, and archaeology of Media but also raised significant doubts and ambiguities about the pre-conceived image of Media.

The papers presented at the Padua, Italy conference (Lanfranchi & Roaf and Rollinger, 2003) are focused on these fundamental ambiguities. The most comprehensive published research on Media is "Archaeology of Media" (Mollazadeh, 1393), which, while addressing the archaeology of Media, also examines the historical geography and political history of this period, considering new perspectives. Regarding the historical geography of Media, one can also refer to Imanpour's articles, which address the relationship between the Medes and Persians before the formation of the Achaemenid Empire (Imanpour, 2002-2003: 61-79; Imanpour and Ghasabzadeh, 2011: 87-73). Additionally, two articles

by Mollazadeh on the historical geography of Media (2011 and 2013) and the master's thesis of Behnoush Ghalvazi, supervised by Kazem Mollazadeh (2014), are relevant to this topic.

### **Primary Sources for the Median Kingdom**

Regarding the period in question, aside from classical Greek sources (particularly Herodotus), other sources remain silent or provide only indirect information about the historical geography of Media. Assyrian sources, which provided the most information from the early period, disappear from the mid-7th century BCE (coinciding with the probable date of the formation of the Median kingdom). Neo-Babylonian sources, due to the long and shared border between Babylonia and Media, could have provided very valuable information, but it seems that the Median kingdom was intentionally overlooked in Babylonian sources, and aside from limited references, no other information is provided (Mollazadeh, 2014: 42-48). There are few references in Hebrew sources, and Urartian (Diakonoff and Kashkai, 1981) and Elamite (Henkelman, 2003: 196-201) sources lack any information whatsoever. Achaemenid sources also do not provide any information other than brief and indirect references. In the following sections, based on the aforementioned sources, we will examine the expansion of the western territory of Media.

### **Studying the Western Extent of Media Based on Historical Sources**

#### **Babylonian Sources**

The limited information from Babylonian sources primarily relates to two significant events: the fall of Assyria (614-610 BCE) and the subsequent fall of the Median Empire to Cyrus the Achaemenid (550 BCE). Unfortunately, Babylonian records are almost silent regarding the Medes between the fall of Assyria (610 BCE) and the fall of Media (550 BCE) (Jursa, 2003: 169-171). The lack of references to the Medes in Babylonian texts, especially considering that Media shared over a thousand kilometers of border with Babylonia, is puzzling (Liverani, 2003: 5). It seems that after the fall of Assyria, a dispute arose between the two allies over the division of Assyrian spoils and the Median presence in northern Mesopotamia, which caused tension with Babylonia. Consequently, the Medes and related topics were intentionally omitted from Babylonian inscriptions.

According to the Chronicle of Nabopolassar, in 615 BCE, Median forces led by Umakištar entered the region of modern-day Kirkuk and attacked an Assyrian city (Novotny and Weiershäuser, 2024:28-30). In the following year (614 BCE), they launched a campaign against Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, capturing and destroying a city in the province of Nineveh as well as the city of Assur. In 612 BCE, the kings of Babylon and Media jointly attacked and captured Nineveh(Ibid).. The Babylonian source states that Umakištar and his army returned to their land, while the Babylonian king and his army continued their advance into Assyrian territory. The last Assyrian king moved his capital to Harran in northern Syria. Therefore, in 610 BCE, Babylonian armies, along with a massive Median force, attacked this city and brought the long-lasting Assyrian empire to an end (Kinast, 2004: 210).

A tablet from the reign of Nabonidus, referring to the sixteenth year of Nabopolassar's reign, mentions the destruction of the city of Harran and its important temple by the Medes, indicating that after the fall of Assyria, the Medes remained in the region and caused considerable trouble for the Babylonians in Harran (located in northern Syria) (Weiershäuser and Novotny,2020: 152-153).. The Sippar Chronicle of Nabonidus also mentions this destruction(Ibid). Finally, a report from the year 553 BCE mentions the capture of Harran by the Babylonian king, and considering the previous presence of the Medes in the city, it seems that the Babylonians seized the opportunity of the conflict between the Medes and the Persians to capture the city (Diakonoff, 1992: 389).

The Babylonian inscriptions also contains a reference to presence of the Medes in the central regions of Mesopotamia. Here the king of Babylon refers to the construction of a defensive wall between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, near Sippar(Ibid: 130). This appears to be the same wall referred to in classical Greek sources as the "Median Wall."

The Gutians or Gutium (also known as Uman-manda) were a general term used in the first millennium BCE to refer to the inhabitants of western Iran, including the Medes. This reference suggests that the Medes controlled the Kirkuk region for a time, and the Median settlement of Tell Gubba (Mollazadeh, 2014: 315-317) could be evidence of this presence.

Another significant reference to the Medes in Babylonian sources relates to the reign of Nabonidus, around 550 BCE. This reference is in the form of a dream or vision that the Babylonian king had: "Marduk said to me, 'Nabonidus, king of Babylon, load the bricks onto your chariot, build the temple of E-hul-hul in its kind, and let the lord Sin dwell therein. I [Nabonidus] said to Marduk: The Uman-manda [Medes] have attacked every temple that you have commanded me to build, and their military power is great. But Marduk said to me: The Uman-manda of whom you speak, they, their land, and all their kings, their allies, are doomed to be uprooted. And indeed... Marduk stirred up Cyrus, king of Anshan, his young servant, against them, and Cyrus scattered the many Uman-manda, and he captured Ishtumegu, king of the Uman-manda, and brought him in chains to his own land'" (Weiershäuser and Novotny,2020:147, 152-153). Nabonidus also Says: that (Astyages) moved (his army) and marched against Cyrus, king of Anshan... but the soldiers rebelled against Astyages and seized him and handed him over to Cyrus. Cyrus marched towards Ecbatana, the royal city. Silver, gold, wealth, and property... he took as booty from Ecbatana to Anshan..." (Ibid: 25). This is the first time in historical sources that Ecbatana is mentioned, indicating that this city was chosen as the capital of Media before 550 BCE.

Another Babylonian reference relates to Cyrus's campaign in Asia Minor in 547 BCE. A brief report of this campaign is found in the Chronicle of Nabonidus, which mentions Cyrus crossing the Tigris River below Erbil (Rollinger, 2008). Many scholars have identified the target of this campaign as Lydia and have considered Cyrus's crossing of the Erbil region, without entering Babylonian territory, as evidence of prior Median control over this region (Curtis, 2003: 166). Rollinger, based on the first letter of the name of Cyrus's destination (U), identifies the target land as Urartu and concludes that the kingdom of Urartu was not conquered by the Medes but continued to exist until Cyrus's invasion and that the conquest of Lydia occurred not in 547 BCE but later (perhaps after the conquest of Babylon) by Cyrus (Rollinger, 2008: 56). This conclusion is not supported by various historical and archaeological data. The presence of Lydian craftsmen in Pasargadae and the construction date of this complex confirm Cyrus's attack on Lydia in the early years of his reign. Furthermore, given the good understanding of the kingdom of Urartu in the eastern part of Asia Minor in Mesopotamian literature and the fact that the main routes to Asia Minor and Lydia passed through the former territory of this kingdom, mentioning Urartu instead of Lydia is not unreasonable. Ultimately, what can be inferred from Babylonian sources regarding the territory of the Medes is that around 615 BCE, the Medes were a powerful state under the rule of a king and had brought the western regions of Iran under their control, attacking the Assyrian territory and achieving significant victories independently(Weiershäuser, 2024:28-30). Also, despite the Babylonian record mentioning the return of the Medes after the defeat of Assyria, historical evidence and archaeological data show that a part of northeastern Mesopotamia, including the regions of Sulaimaniyah, Erbil, and Duhok,

came under Median control, and they extended this control to northern Syria and the city of Harran, causing annoyance and hostility among the Babylonians by encroaching on Babylonian territory, including the Kirkuk region. According to Babylonian sources, Median control over northeastern Mesopotamia and northern Syria continued until the mid-6th century BCE. Also, the Babylonian reference to Cyrus's rebellion indirectly indicates the previous control of the Medes over Persia, a fact that Herodotus also acknowledges (Herodotus, I: 102).

### **Greek Sources**

While Greek sources were not contemporary to the events of the Median period, they provide reliable information, particularly Herodotus' Histories. Herodotus (485-425 BCE), a Greek historian from the western coast of Asia Minor, dedicated a portion of his work to the Medes. According to Herodotus, the Medes first annexed the small states of western and southwestern Iran, including the state of Pars (Herodotus, I: 102). Subsequently, they conquered Nineveh and all of Assyria, except for the region of Babylon (Ibid, I: 106). After defeating the Scythians, they pursued them into the eastern part of Asia Minor and the southern Caucasus (all of Upper Asia) as far as the Halys River (Ibid, I: 72, 103). Their war with Lydia ended in a stalemate, with the Halys River becoming the border between the two states. According to Herodotus, Cyrus invaded Lydia via the Diyala region and, without entering Babylonian territory, marched towards Lydia (Ibid, I: 28). Herodotus also mentions the city of Pteria, which was called Median, and states that the Greeks considered the inhabitants of Cappadocia (central Asia Minor) to be Syrians. These Syrians, before the dominance of the Persians, were subjects of the Medes (Ibid, I: 72). In addition to Herodotus, Xenophon and Ctesias also made references to the Medes. Ctesias, around 400 BCE, mentions the rebuilding of Nineveh under Median rule (Roaf, 2003: 154). Xenophon, who passed through northern Mesopotamia around 401 BCE, refers to the "Median Wall," which Nebuchadnezzar had built to a length of 40 kilometers from Sippar on the Euphrates to Opis on the Tigris to counter Median attacks (Hinz, 1388: 116). He also mentions the occupation of the cities of Nineveh and Nimrud by the Medes (Curtis, 2003: 157) and, in the Anabasis, states that Armenia paid tribute to the Medes (Xenophon, 1350: 112). He considers the region east of the Tigris River and north of Baghdad to be Median (Tuplin, 2004: 234). The power and extent of the Median Empire, reaching into Asia Minor and bordering the Greek tribes of western Asia Minor, is evident in other ways. In numerous Greek sources, the wars between Greece and the Achaemenid Empire are referred to as Median Wars, and the Achaemenid kings are called Medes (Tuplin, 2004: 361). Cyrus's invasion of Lydia is described as a Median attack. This situation continued until the late 4th century BCE (Ibid: 365). This evidence indicates that the Medes controlled eastern Asia Minor and had a long and powerful war with Lydia. The Greeks thus came into close contact with the Medes, and considering the role of some Medes in bringing Cyrus to power, they viewed the Achaemenid period as a natural continuation of the Median kingdom.

### **Achaemenid Sources**

Unfortunately, Achaemenid sources are silent about the Median kingdom. This is apparently because the primary archives of the Achaemenid Empire were written in Aramaic on perishable materials like leather and papyrus, and were destroyed during Alexander's invasion and the passage of time. However, by analyzing the indirect references available, we can draw some results. From the content of Achaemenid inscriptions and reliefs, it becomes clear that, except for a brief period, the Median state and Median people, perhaps due to their large population, vast territory, and the role a part of the Medes played in bringing Cyrus to power, held the second most important position in the

Achaemenid Empire after the Persians. In several inscriptions of Darius I, he calls himself king of Persia, Media, and other countries, or the Achaemenid army is called the army of Persia and Media (Tuplin, 2004: 353). Darius, in the Behistun Inscription, places Media on par with Persia, considering it a co-ruler of the empire (Lucock, 2007: 222). Considering the numerous inscriptions referring to the state of the Achaemenid Empire, one can infer the very vast extent of Media during the Achaemenid period, which undoubtedly included a significant portion of the former kingdom of Media. According to the provided lists, Media shared borders with the state of Pars, Elam, Assyria, Babylonia, Parthia, Cappadocia, and Armenia, and was limited by the central deserts in the east. The locations of Pars, Elam (southwestern Iran), and Babylonia (southern Mesopotamia) are known. The province of Assyria seems to have included the original homeland of the Assyrians, which had been conquered by the Babylonians and had become a separate province with the formation of the Achaemenid Empire. This province did not include the northeastern part of the Assyrian Empire, including the important city of Arbela, as this was considered one of the important centers of the Medes at that time. Armenia (which roughly corresponds to modern Armenia) and Cappadocia (central regions of modern Turkey) were also, according to the evidence, part of the possessions of the Median kingdom and had become separate state in the Achaemenid period. With the rise of Darius and the continuation of the Median rebellion, a man named Chisantakhma, claiming to be king of Sagartia, led a revolt (Lucock, 2007: 258). After suppressing this rebellion, Darius captured Chisantakhma and executed him by hanging in Erbil, which appears to have been his primary base (Ibid: 234-235). This incident, along with other evidence, indicates that a segment of the Median population settled in northeastern Mesopotamia following the fall of Assyria.

### **Hebrew Sources**

Biblical Hebrew sources contain references to the significant power of the Medes, their enmity towards Babylon, and the hope for a Median invasion of Babylon (Tuplin, 2004: 234). This reference, along with other evidence, confirms the long-term presence of the Medes in northern Mesopotamia. Additionally, in the Book of Jeremiah, dated to 595 BCE, there is a reference to the kings of the Medes, all the rulers of the Medes, and all the lands under Median control (Ibid). This reference suggests that Urartu, Mannea, and Scythia were under Median control at that time (Ibid: 236). Prior to this date, the kingdom of Mannea had included the southern and southeastern basins of Lake Urmia, and Urartu had controlled a significant part of northwestern, eastern Turkey, and modern-day Armenia.

### **Archaeological Data**

Unfortunately, the limitations of sites and archaeological data obtained from the Median period, especially in the western part of the Median territory, pose a major obstacle to reconstructing the historical geography of this period. However, in recent years, sites have been excavated on the fringes of the western Median territory, which, given their architectural similarities, are likely to indicate the expansion of the western Median territory during the reign of the kings. The sites of Kerkenes Dağ, Tille Höyük, Ülüz Höyük, Tell Gubba, and the Qizqapan Rock-cut tombs (Mollazadeh, 2014: 331-361) are among these. The Kerkenes Dağ site is located in central Anatolia and the ancient Cappadocia region, east of the Kizilirmak River, and is the largest Iron Age settlement in central Anatolia. Herodotus refers to the presence of the city of Petria in the Median territory in a similar geographical location (Herodotus, I: 76). Based on this narrative and the discovery of columned halls, the Kerkenes Dağ site has been equated with the Median Petria (Summers, 1997, 2000).

However, the set of archaeological data discovered shows that the city was not built by the Medes and belongs to the Phrygian tribes. However, there is a possibility that the city was built in the 7th or early 6th century BC, and after the domination of the Median tribes, it was used as an important regional base against the borders of Lydia. The short-term military use of a Phrygian city by the Medes justifies the lack of clear Median artifacts. It is also possible that the columned halls of the site were formed during the Median presence and under the influence of Median architecture (Mollazadeh, 2014: 314).

The Tille Höyük site is located in southeastern Anatolia, on the western bank of the Euphrates River, and 60 kilometers east of the city of Adiyaman. The architectural remains obtained from it are comparable to the architecture of Median sites (Roaf, 2008: 10; Saeidian and Gholizadeh, 2019). Given the location of this site and historical evidence of the presence of the Medes in southeastern Turkey and northern Syria, it is possible that the discovered remains are related to the presence of the Medes in the region. The Tel Qube site is located in the Hamrin region, 5 kilometers from the confluence of the Diyala and Narin rivers and 12 kilometers from the city of Saadiyah, and on an important communication way between Iran and Mesopotamia. In the second period of this site, a complex was found that, in terms of plan and architectural details, is very similar to the Median castle of Nush-i Jan and the Olghu Tepe complex (Excavations in Iraq, 1979: 172). Given the construction time of this complex, architectural similarities, and its location on the probable borders of Media and Babylon, it is possible that this complex was a regional base for the Medes against the borders of Babylon (Mollazadeh, 2014: 315-317). The Qizqapan Ruck-cut tomb is located in the Sulaimaniya region of Iraq. Given the Median figures depicted on its facade, it is another piece of evidence of the presence of the Medes in this region (ibid: 331-361). In the region of eastern Turkey and the southern Caucasus, no clear and studied artifacts of the presence of Median tribes have been found so far (Kroll, 2003); although, based on the pottery found, the presence of the Medes in the sites of Altintepe and Van Kale-si (eastern Anatolia), Armavir, and Arin-berd (Armenia) has been suggested (Roaf, 2008: 10). Recently, Shokat Donmez from Istanbul University discovered the remains of a fire temple in the northern Cappadocia region (Pontus) and the Ülüz Höyük site near the city of Amasya, which he attributed to the Medes and pointed out that the Medes settled in this site between 580 and 600 BC, after the collapse of the Urartu kingdom, and gradually expanded westward ([www.turkiyetoday.com/culture/2600-yo-persian-fire-altar-49801/](http://www.turkiyetoday.com/culture/2600-yo-persian-fire-altar-49801/)).

### **Historical Geography and Linguistic Data**

Alongside historical and archaeological data, historical geography and linguistic data can also help reconstruct the western territory of the Median Kingdom. One of the most important of these data is the expansion and distribution of Iranian-speaking Kurdish tribes, which can largely correspond to the western expansion of the Medes and thus show the historical geography and western territory of the Medes and more detailed discussion of this point follows. (how? It needs explanation with bibliography)

### **The Expansion and Distribution of Iranian-Speaking Kurdish Tribes and Its Correspondence with the Western Extent of the Medes**

The Kurdish people, who today are present in the mountainous part of northern Iraq and east of the Tigris River, part of northern Syria, and a large part of southeastern and eastern Turkey near the Kizilirmak River (Sykes, 1908: 451-486), according to historical and linguistic evidence that is agreed

upon by the vast majority of researchers, are part of the Iranian-speaking peoples, and their expansion is in line with the migration and expansion of Iranian peoples in the mid-first millennium BC.

### **The Western Basin of the Expansion of Kurdish Tribes**

The Kurdish people are now present outside the Iranian plateau in southeastern Turkey, northeastern Iraq, and northeastern Syria. The area of Kurdish expansion in Turkey includes the southern and southeastern parts of Turkey (Minorsky, 2000: 23). This part extends from the Gulf of Iskenderun and the Anti-Taurus Mountains in the west to the borders of Iran and Azerbaijan in the east, and is limited from the north by the mountainous regions of the Black Sea and from the south by the borders of Syria and Iraq (Kendall, 1993: 87) and, based on modern Turkish divisions, includes 23 provinces with a population of around 13 million (Hoshmand, 2011: 47).

The presence of Kurdish tribes in Iraq is mostly in the mountainous northeastern part of the country (part of the Zagros Mountains and Taurus highlands) and is connected to Iran, Turkey, and Syria, and important centers include Erbil, Sulaimaniya, Duhok, and Kirkuk. This region formed an important part of the Assyrian Empire in the first half of the first millennium BC, and Erbil was one of the important centers of this empire. Northeastern Syria is the continuation of the Kurdish-speaking regions of Turkey and Iraq and is probably the region where, according to the Babylonian inscriptions, the Medes or Harran had a presence in ancient times and was later referred to by Xenophon as "Gazartai Kardou" (Kenyan, 1997: 59). Here, the Kurdish population of Syria lives in three small and separate regions of Jazira, Tripoli, and Kurd Dag, which are in fact natural continuations of the Kurdish-speaking regions of Iraq and Turkey (Tejel, 2009: 9). The Ain Arab (Kobane) or Arab Pinari region in northeastern Aleppo, just east of where the Euphrates enters Syrian soil, is entirely Kurdish (Kendall, 1993: 255). René Dussaud points out that Kurdagh (Kurd Mountain) and the plain of Antioch "have long been inhabited by Kurds." Kurd Dag (Kurd Mountain) is located in northwestern Aleppo and borders Antioch and the plain of Iskenderun. Kurd Dag, with a dense and homogeneous Kurdish population, is the westernmost Kurdish-speaking region and the only mountainous Kurdish-speaking region in Syria (Ghalvazi, 2014: 19).

### **History of the Presence of Kurdish Tribes in the Western Territory**

When we talk about Kurdish tribes, we refer to specific ethnic and cultural groups whose primary characteristic is speaking one of the branches of Iranian languages. The word "Kurd" or similar words alone cannot represent this specific ethnic and linguistic group. Therefore, tracing the presence of these tribes in the third to first millennia BC lacks a scientific basis, as such linguistic groups did not exist in the region during this period. Based on this, it seems that the references of Greek sources to the inhabitants of southeastern Anatolia and northern Iraq, and the groups present in these regions, are the first references to these tribes.

Xenophon, in his book and during the events of 401 BC, refers to the war with the "Kardouchoi" tribes inhabiting the area north of the Centrites River (Botan River) (Limbirt, 1968, p. 45). Nikitin believes: "The Kardouchoi (Cardukoi) that Xenophon referred to beyond the land of present-day Kurdistan to the Black Sea were undoubtedly the ancestors of today's Kurds (Nikitin, 1987: pp. 34-35). Strabo believes that the mountainous region between Mush and Amad/Diyarbakir was once called "Kordua," which is probably "Kurd" or "the land of the Kurds." The Armenians recorded this land as "Kurdukh" and "Kurcikh," which may have been the settlement of the Kurds (Golzari, 1971: 62).

In the sources of the Seleucid and Parthian periods, in these regions, reference is made to the Cyrtii or Kirtii tribes, which may correspond to the Kurdish tribes of the region or part of them (Limbert, 1968: 46; Rashidiyasi, 9187: 160-162). Driver points out that the lands where the Kurds live today in Iran and the Zagros regions are the same places where the Kirtii lived, the word "Kirtii" first returned to "Kurtu" or "Kardu" and then changed to the word "Krt" (=Kurt), and Nöldeke's view on the connection between the Kurds and the Kirtii must be correct (Driver, 1923:14-44).

From the Sassanian period onwards, the presence of Kurds is mentioned in western Iran and the studied regions (Abu al-Qasim, 2009: 230; Limbert, 1968: 41-51). In Islamic period sources, Kurds are frequently mentioned in various regions, and it seems that in some cases this word was applied to tribes with a particular way of life and livelihood rather than a specific linguistic group (Frye, 1996: 111; Ghalozi, 2014: 89-93). In the early Islamic sources, while referring to the regions of northeastern Iraq and northern Syria, and especially the events of Mosul, Kurdish tribes are mentioned (Eppel, 2014: 4; Ibn Athir, vol. 3, p. 1443; Le Strange, 1958: 95). In the events of the year 22 AH and the conquest of the city of Şarezûr, the presence of a large number of Kurds is mentioned (Ibn Athir, vol. 3: 1545). Ibn Hawqal, in the fourth century, says that the city of Zor is a fortified city with a castle and ramparts, and the Kurds tribes, whose names he mentions, live there and have control over the entire surrounding area. When Ibn Mahlah saw that region, the number of Kurds there reached sixty thousand households, and in the time of Hamd Allah Mustowfi, in the eighth century, the Şarezûr was a prosperous city and the residence of the Kurds (Le Strange, 1958: 205). Considering the existing references and the cases mentioned in later sources, the presence of Iranian-speaking Kurdish tribes in the studied regions can be confirmed. However, it is necessary to note that the extent of the presence of these tribes has naturally changed over time. For example, in later periods, their presence in eastern Turkey and north of Lake Van has expanded greatly due to the expulsion of Armenian tribes (Bruinessen, 1992: 22,150). Also, in the early 20th century, the pressure of the Turks led to the migration of groups of Kurds to Syria.

### **Correspondence Between the Western Median Territory and the Western Expansion of Kurdish Tribes**

Before the formation of the Median Kingdom, northern Iraq, Syria, and a part of southeastern Turkey today formed important parts of the main territory of the Assyrian Empire. According to historical and linguistic evidence, Semitic-speaking ethnic groups formed the majority of the population of these regions, and alongside them, Aramean and Hurrian tribes lived in some parts with much smaller percentages. Although Assyrian sources refer to the exile of a group of Median tribes to the region of Hamath in Syria (Luckenbill, 1927, 28), their number was certainly not enough to affect the demographic composition of the region. The eastern half of Anatolia, before the expansion of the Median Kingdom and at least until around 600 BC, was under the territory of the Urartu Kingdom with a majority of Hurrian-speaking peoples, and there is no evidence of the presence of Iranian-speaking peoples in this region. The human geography of southeastern Turkey, northern Iraq, and Syria changed with the fall of the Assyrian Empire and the Urartu Kingdom around 612 and around 600 BC, respectively. The territory of Assyria was divided between the Medes and Babylonians, and according to Babylonian sources, the presence of the Medes extended to northern Syria. The territory of the Urartu Kingdom was taken over by the Medes, and the Medes expanded to the central regions of Anatolia and the eastern borders of the Lydian Kingdom, leading to a long-lasting war with Lydia and the determination of the borders of Media on the banks of the ancient

Halys River or the modern Kizilirmak River. Certainly, the Medes needed a significant physical presence to conquer and maintain these regions, which was achieved by mobilizing and transferring a number of Median tribes who also participated more in the war. These tribes, to maintain their dominance and also due to the privileged position of the conquered regions, settled in these regions and gradually became the main inhabitants of the region. The historical and archaeological data presented are evidence of this expansion and presence. The Behistun inscription of Darius I is the first documented reference to the Median tribes in Kurdistan, Iraq, with its center in Erbil (Lukok, 2009: 224-238). Subsequent references from Greek texts and later historical references, which were discussed in the previous sections, confirm the presence and continuity of Median tribes in these regions.

More importantly, the correspondence between the distribution and dispersion of Kurdish tribes in the studied regions (although with minor changes that occurred in the 2600 years after their presence) with the expansion of Median tribes based on historical and archaeological data, as presented in Map (fig 1), is significant. Given these factors, it can be claimed that the Kurdish tribes of the studied regions are the descendants of the Medes who entered this region around 600 BC. Therefore, the distribution pattern of these tribes can show the western expansion of the Median Kingdom. Although this theory was first proposed by Minorsky (Minorsky, 1945: 87; Jaf, 1976: 51), it is being documented here for the first time based on historical, archaeological, and linguistic evidence.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the reconstruction of Median political history (Mollazadeh, 2014: 28-57) and the data examined in this article, it can be concluded that, contrary to the doubts raised about the political structure of the Medes, the Medes were successful in forming a powerful state and an extensive territory. The borders of the Median territory have not been studied scientifically and accurately to date using a combination of archaeological and historical data, and all the maps presented in this regard are overly hypothetical. The present study provides the opportunity to present a more scientific and specific reconstruction of this territory. Based on a collection of Babylonian, Hebrew, and Achaemenid sources, the Medes, after the fall of Assyria, annexed the northeastern part of Mesopotamia from the Diyala region in the south to the Erbil and Duhok region, and this territory extended north to northern Syria and the Harran region. Archaeological data (Tell Gubbe, Tille Höyük, and the Qizqapan Rock-cut tomb) and the distribution and dispersion of Kurdish tribes in the region, as well as the reference to a wall that the Babylonians built in the northern region of Baghdad to prevent the attack of the Medes, confirm this conclusion. As the Babylonian sources indicate and the modern political geography of the region also shows, the modern Kirkuk region was a border area, disputed between the Medes and Babylonians, and passed between them.

Greek and Achaemenid sources (although indirectly) and limited archaeological data indicate the presence of the Medes in the east and central regions of Anatolia. The expression and certainty found in Greek sources and the geographical proximity of writers such as Herodotus to this region, and the closer familiarity that the Greeks of western Asia Minor had with the Medes, diminish existing doubts. Armenia's dependence on the Medes in the rebellions of the reign of Darius I shows the extent of the Median territory or the political and cultural influence of the Medes in the southern Caucasus region. Limited archaeological evidence at the sites of Tille Höyük (southeastern Anatolia), Kerkenes Dağ (central Anatolian plateau), Altintepe and Van Kale-si (eastern Anatolia), Armavir and Arin-

berd (Armenia), and Ülüz Höyük (recently excavated), strengthens the aforementioned conclusion. It seems that after overthrowing Assyria and seizing parts of the territory of this empire, the Medes turned their attention to the territory of the Urartu Kingdom, which had previously been shattered or weakened by the Scythians or Cimmerians (Marf, 2016:195). The confirmed presence of the Medes in the Harran region (northern Syria) and its proximity to the border regions of Lydia confirms Herodotus' account regarding the determination of the Halys River as the border between Media and Lydia.

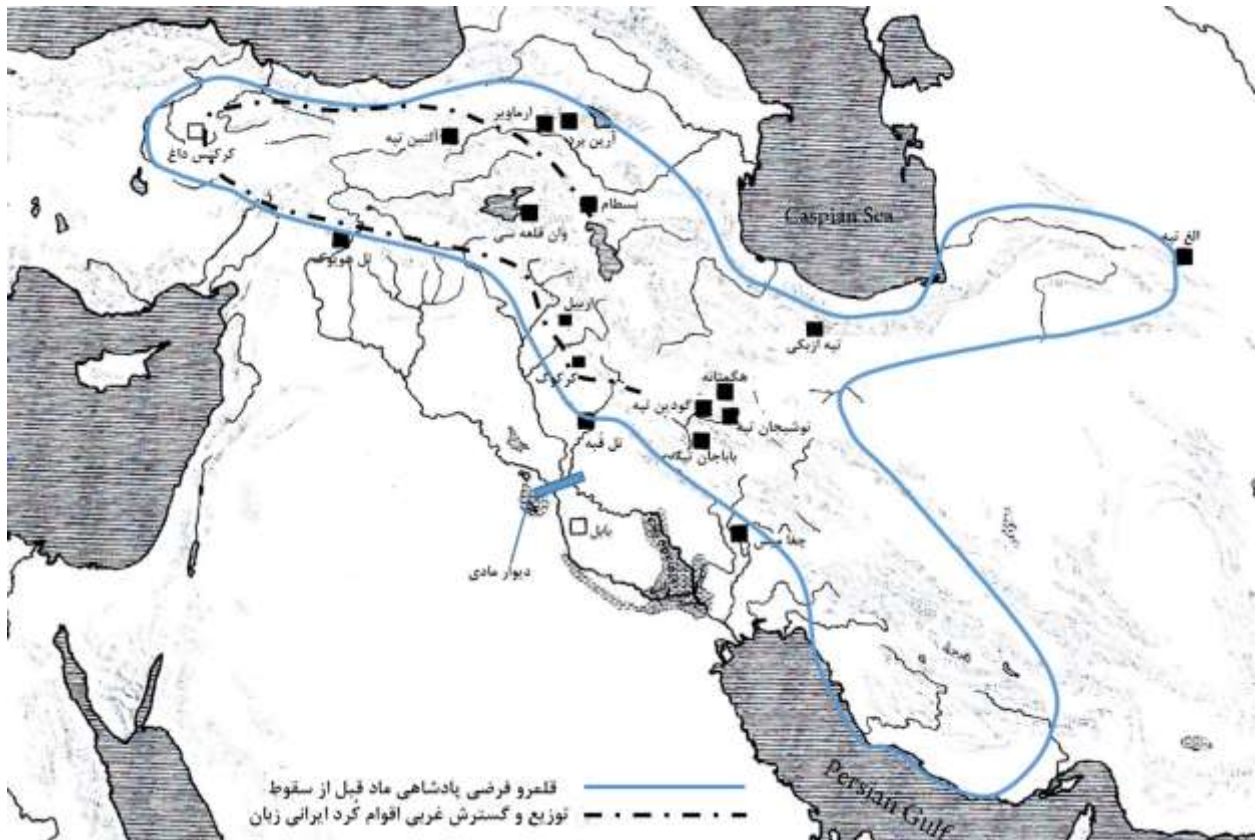


Figure 1: Map of the Iranian Plateau and the sites attributed to Media and adjacent areas, showing the extent of the Median kingdom, as well as the distribution and expansion of Iranian-speaking Kurdish tribes and its correspondence with the western extent of the Median kingdom. (Base map from Raof, 2008 and redrawn by Mollazadeh)



Figure 2: Distribution of Kurds in the Middle East (Kamel, 2018)

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