

ON THE ISSUE OF THE CENTER OF SATRAPIC ARMENIA

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Abstract

In the period of Achaemenid domination the issue of the center of Satrapic Armenia continues to be a controversial issue even nowadays. Recent studies have shown that during VI-IV BC Armenia was not divided into two Satrapies - the XIII and the XVIII. The XIII satrapy corresponded to Armenia, and the XVIII satrapy was located between the Greater Caucasus and the River Kura).

In the article we have demonstrated that the administrative center (capital city) of Satrapic Armenia was the city of Van, which was probably also one of the residences of the Achaemenid "Great kings". As to Armavir being the center of the satrapy, after 331 BC it again became the military-political center of the independent Armenian State. Armavir had as vital economic importance for Satrapic Armenia like that of Susa for Achaemenids.

Keywords: Satrapic Armenia, Satrapic Center, Van, Erebuni, Armavir, apadana, Darius I, Xerxes I, Xerxes I's inscription at Van, Ervandids

The issue of the Satrapy of Armenia during the Achaemenid rule remains disputable, especially if we take into account that until the end of the XX century, according to widely accepted point of view, in the VI-IV centuries BC Armenia was divided into two satrapies, the XIII and the XVIII.¹ Accordingly, Van was considered the center of the XIII satrapy, and Erebuni-Arinberd was the center of the XVIII satrapy.² We have already studied the issue of the administrative division of Armenia and concluded that the XIII satrapy corresponded to Armenia, and the XVIII satrapy was situated between Kura river and the Great Caucasian Mountains.³

The Achaemenid famous monuments of Armenia

The archaeological monuments discovered during excavations in Armenia allow us to compare with similar Achaemenid architectural monuments. For example, the Draskhanakert architectural complex (second half of the V century BC), southwestern of the city of Gyumri, near the village of Benjamin, which dates back to the Achaemenid

¹ Tiratsyan 1960: 109; 1980; 1981; Grekyan 2018: 65; Kesecker 2018/1: 31.

² Tiratsyan 1979: 161; 1981: 71; Ter-Martirosov 2013: 109, 112; Beikzadeh, Ghadim 2017: 139; Tarhan 2007: 120; Dan 2015: 11, 13.

³ See especially in Harutyunyan 1999: 45-114; Khorikyan 2014, Chapter B.

period,⁴ has parallels to the similar palaces of Saritepe and Gumbati.⁵ Argishtikhinili (now Armavir) had lost its former importance during the Achaemenid period, but some items of material culture (such as bowls, lids of pots),⁶ dating back to the Achaemenid or Hellenistic periods have been found here. Cuneiform inscriptions were also found, which date back to the first half of the VI century BC or V century BC,⁷ and are not connected with the epic of Gilgamesh,⁸ as it was previously thought.⁹ However, judging by the controversial perusals of Elamite texts, it can be assumed that there were Persian rulers in Armavir, and Elamite was the language of administrative correspondence.¹⁰ In fact, taxes from the surrounding areas were collected in Armavir, and the governor of Armavir held the office of comparable to the Persian **frataraka*,¹¹ a rank lower than that of the satrap. This circumstance, probably, demonstrates that Armavir could not have been a satrapic center¹² and, probably by its significance, corresponded to the satrapic palace mentioned by Xenophon in Armenia.¹³ Yet, it is debatable whether the columned hall in Armavir dates back to the late Urartian or Achaemenid period.¹⁴ However, it is more probable that the hall dates back to the Achaemenid period.¹⁵ It should be added that during the Achaemenid period a temple center in Armavir existed, and it is not accidental that the religious significance of Armavir has been preserved in the post-Achaemenid period as well.¹⁶ According to the accepted point of view, after the battle of Gaugamela in 331 BC, Armavir was declared the capital of the newly established kingdom of Yervandid dynasty.¹⁷ As for the Erebuni fortress, the expansion and transformation of the 12-columned hall next to the temple of the god Khaldi into a large 30-column hall called "*apadana*," dates back to the Achaemenid period. The latter was built in the style of the palatial architecture of

⁴ Grekyan 2013: 337, 341; Ter-Martirosov 2013: 107-108; Vergazov 2017: 301.

⁵ Knauss 2006: 100.

⁶ Arakelyan 1969; Tiratsyan 1968: 197; Tiratsyan 1969: 148; Karapetyan 1973; 2003: 11.

⁷ Knauss 2006: 100, 102.

⁸ Vallat 1997.

⁹ Diakonoff, Yankovskaya 1989.

¹⁰ Koch 1993.

¹¹ Koch 1993: 230.

¹² Beikzadeh Ghadim 2017: 138.

¹³ Xenophon 1970: 93.

¹⁴ Herles 2017: 138. It should be noted that the author is not an expert in the historical geography of Armenia in the Achaemenid period, since he leaves the basin of Lake Van outside the territory of the Armenian Satrapy and takes as face value the outdated theories about the formation of the Armenian people. For example, he states that Xenophon considers Orontas as the ruler of the satrapy of Eastern Armenia, while Xenophon literally referred to Orontas as the ruler of all Armenia (Xenophon 1970: 81).

¹⁵ Ter-Martirosov 1974: 62, 65; 2001: 16; Vergazov 2018: 278-279.

¹⁶ Krkyasharyan 1963: 55; Tiratsyan 1979: 161.

¹⁷ Tiratsyan 1979: 164.

Persepolis and had some similarities with that of the Pasargadae Palace of Cyrus II.¹⁸ The construction of two new temples in the Erebuni Citadel, the so-called "Big and Small Fire" temples, dates back to the Achaemenid period as well, and is probably connected with the religious reform of Xerxes.¹⁹ In fact, the elite of the castle was in contact with other subject countries of the Achaemenids, as evidenced by two Milesian coins of V century BC and silver rhytons dating from V-IV centuries.²⁰

It is noteworthy that the parallels of *apadana* in Erebuni with the Median pillared halls, the construction technique, as well as the absence of anchors for columns typical of Achaemenid architecture, suggest that the colonnade was built after the fall of the Urartian dynasty, approximately in 600 BC, that is, during the Median period (for example, the parallels with the 30-pillar hall of Godin Tepe II²¹) or in the so-called "early post-Urartian" period.²² Although this approach needs further rationale, the new proposal is interesting since Erebuni's significance for Armenia was important during the Median period as well.

While discussing the issue of the satrapic center or centers in Armenia,²³ one should not forget that two of the residences of the Achaemenid kings, Susa and Ecbatana, were the capitals of the ancient kingdoms of Elam and Media correspondingly, therefore the center of the Satrapy of Armenia for the Achaemenids could have been Tushpa-Van, the ancient capital of Urartu. This circumstance is possible in the sense that Xerxes, the son of Darius I, assigned to write the trilingual cuneiform inscription on the stone left by his father. Darius I could not just have left a stone in an unknown place, the content of which would undoubtedly have been different if Darius I had managed to finish the text of the inscription. It is not excluded that the inscription was supposed to symbolize the victory of Darius I in the struggle for the throne, and in Armenia the armies of the Persian king had fought five battles against the rebels. In any case, the inscription of Darius I, as stated in the Behistun inscription,²⁴ was to symbolize the latter's preservation of his kingdom and the abolition of falsehood.

¹⁸ Tiratsyan 1960: 106-108; 1964: 150; Vergazov 2016: 28; 2017: 299.

¹⁹ Tiratsyan 1969: 151.

²⁰ Grekyan 2013: 340; 2018: 63, 65; Stronach 2010. See also Tiratsyan 1960: 103; Karapetyan 2003: 10-11; Treister 2013: 343-424.

²¹ Vergazov 2017: 277.

²² Grekyan 2018: 64.

²³ We do not mention other monuments like Oshakan, Oğlankala (for details see Vergazov 2018: 275, 279-280) that were partially rebuilt in the Achaemenid period, because they could not be co-satrapic centers, and in fact, they were built for the representatives of the local aristocracy. For example, the items found in the tombs of Lori Berd mausoleum in 2008 confirm the dating of the monument to VI-V centuries BC. The tombs belonged to the representatives of the upper classes, who surrounded themselves with new items of the Achaemenid style and production, while preserving the old one - the traditional, Urartian (for details see Devedjyan, Hobosyan, Davtyan 2018).

²⁴ Kent 1953: 129-130.

Let us address an issue that has attracted the attention of many researchers in recent years. It regards the *apadana* of the V-IV centuries BC of Karachamırlı, located on the right bank of the Kura River,²⁵ which repeats the palatial complexes of Susa and Persepolis.²⁶ The latter was considered one of the residences of the "king of kings", which was also used by the Armenian kings. If this point of view is more or less probable, then the opinion that Karachamırlı was the residence of the satrap of Caspiane is not correct at all.²⁷ It should be noted to the north-east of Karachamırlı, near modern Ghazakh, in the place of Sarı tepe, one of the Achaemenid defensive structures was found,²⁸ which protected the northeastern border of the XIII satrapy, that is, for the Achaemenids the natural strong defense line of the Kura river was further strengthened by the fortifications on the right bank of the river.

In our opinion, the Karachamırlı's palatial complex was the residence of the satrap of Armenia in the eastern part of the satrapy, just as Altintepe was in the western part of the satrapy, that is, Karachamırlı and Altintepe were geographically located in strategically important places. Moreover, the Karachamırlı's palatial complex was one of the residences of the satrap, not the hyparch's. Therefore, the palatial complex of Karachamırlı could not have been one of the centers of the XVIII satrapy, located north of the Kura River as well. One of the centers of the latter in the northern part, probably, may have been located in the area of the present-day village of Gumbatı, where an immense building dating back to the Achaemenid period was found and where a Persian official resided.²⁹ The archaeological sites of Gumbatı and Karachamırlı have many parallels in terms of construction technique³⁰ and, in fact, were aimed at strengthening the defense system and the centralization of tax collection in the Empire. As for Altintepe, the second phase of the construction Altintepe, dating back to the Achaemenid period, has allowed to suppose that the residence of the satrap of the XIX satrapy was located here,³¹ which is unlikely. It was probably the residence of the *hyparchos* of the administrative unit of Western Armenia or one of the satrapic

²⁵ The examination of the archeological material of the Karachamırlı palatial complex in detail see Knauss, Ludwig, Mehnert, Sens, Wicke 2007 (<http://www.achemenet.com/document/2007.002-Knauss.pdf>); Knauss 2006: 97-99; Dan 2015: 13.

²⁶ Vergazov 2017: 301.

²⁷ See in detail Ter-Martirosov 2014: 56. On the location of XI and XV satrapies see Khorikyan 2016: 23-29. Cf. Hakobyan 1983: 87-99.

²⁸ Knauss 2006: 96-97. According to A.Hakobyan, the settlement at Sarı-tepe could be identified as Hnarakert reported by the early medieval authors (unpublished).

²⁹ Vergazov 2017: 303; Knauss 2006: 89-91.

³⁰ Gagoshidze 2018: 226-227; Beikzadeh, Ghadim 2017: 132-136, 139-142; Briant et Boucharlat (éd.) 2005: 205, 208.

³¹ Kosyan 2010: 24; Summers 1993: 96. About the site of Altintepe and particularly other parallels to *apadana* see Dan 2015: 14-15.

residences,³² from where the Persians would have tried to reassert their rule in the ethnically diverse and semi-independent XIX satrapy. It should be noted that the layout of Argishtikhinili's pillared hall has obvious similarities with Altintepe's multi-column hall, the *hypostyle*.³³ It should also be noted that the *hypostyle* of the Altintepe II monument mainly reflects the influence of local architecture, based on the Urartian-Median heritage, having parallels with the arrangement of the pillared halls of the "pre-apadana" of Pasargadae.³⁴

Satrapic Armenia - "microcosmos" of the Persian state

When studying the history of the Achaemenid Persia one must take into account that the subject countries were separate "microcosmoses" of the Persian empire, governing system of which resembled the functions of the central court. Therefore, in the states under their rule the satraps appeared as small kings who resembled the king of kings and had several satrapic centers similar to the latter. For example, the satrap of Armenia had several residences, including Altintepe, Arin-berd, Karachamırlı, Van, etc. In this regard, it should be noted that from the ancient sources we know that the king of kings resided in different residences at different times of the year - in Susa (Shosh), Babylon, Ecbatana, Persepolis or from time to time in Bactra.³⁵ The mention of the latter indicates that Bactra could have been one of the mobile residences. The interesting thing is that all the mentioned residences were the centers of the ancient kingdoms, therefore in the case of Armenia we can conclude that Van, at least during the period from Cyrus II to Darius I, was also considered a satrapic residence, where the worked stone prepared for the inscription of Darius I remained. On the other hand, Xerxes' preparation of the text of the inscription in three languages (Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian) shows that Van continued to be considered a royal/satrapic residence for the Achaemenids. We think that the spiritual and cultural significance of Van was preserved by the Armenian satraps as well, who generally were kings at the same time.³⁶ It is no coincidence that the Yervandunik province known from *Ashkharhatsuyts*, named after Yervandunis-Orontases, was located southeast of the province of Tosp, which included the city of Van.

Below we quote the inscription of Van translated from Old Persian and answer several questions.

"A great god is Ahuramazda, the greatest of the gods, who created this earth, who created the yonder sky, who created man, created happiness for man, who made Xerxes king, one king of many, one lord of many.

³² Vergazov 2017: 300.

³³ Vergazov 2017: 300.

³⁴ Vergazov 2018: 273-274.

³⁵ Dio Chrysostom 1949, 6.1, p. 251. For the information regarding other primary sources about the residences of the Persian kings see Tuplin 1998: 64-66.

³⁶ Xenophon 1970: 75, 81; Khorikyan 2014: 58-59.

I am Xerxes, the great king, king of kings, king of all kinds of people, king on this earth far and wide, the son of Darius the king, the Achaemenid.

*Xerxes the great king proclaims: King Darius, my father, by the favor of Ahuramazda, made much that is good, and this niche he ordered to be cut; as he did not have an inscription written, then I ordered that this inscription be written. Me may Ahuramazda protect, together with the gods, and my kingdom and what I have done.*³⁷

It should be noted that the inscription of Van, in terms of the structure and template form, corresponds to other inscriptions of Darius I and Xerxes, for example, *Naqsh-e Rostam* (= DNa, lines 1-4, 11-3), *Elvend* (= DE, line 12-9) of Darius I, the inscriptions of Persepolis (= XPa, lines 1-6, 6-11; XPb, lines 27-30) of Xerxes,³⁸ etc. Undoubtedly, the inscription of Van should be viewed in the context of Xerxes' religious reform, therefore the old capital of Urartu remained a satrapic center in the Achaemenid period where Xerxes imposed the worship of Ahuramazda in Armenia,³⁹ especially, if we notice that the Iranian influence on the territory of Armenia was significant.⁴⁰ The cultural and religious significance of Van was undoubtedly preserved in the first half of the V century BC, and possibly, the satrap-kings of Armenia were buried in Van, which is evidenced by some rock-cut tombs dating to the Achaemenid period⁴¹ (the so-called "Small Hollow", which has similarities with the *Naqsh-e Rostam* rock-cut tomb of Darius I),⁴² like Persepolis which later became the royal burial place. The result of this inscription was the construction of the "Big and Small fire" temples in the Erebuni Citadel, which symbolized the struggle against demons, that is, the ancient gods. With the inscription of Van, Xerxes reaffirmed his supremacy over the northern regions of the empire, the *toparchy*, with Van as its center, as Sardis was the center of the western part of the empire. Despite the lack of archaeological material in Van from the Achaemenid period,⁴³ the existence of the inscription indicates that Van was a satrapic center. The trilingual rock relief inscription of Van, outside the borders of Iran itself, undoubtedly testifies to the importance of Armenia.⁴⁴

As a scale model of the Achaemenid Empire, the Satrapic Armenia resembled the central governing regime of the Achaemenids, therefore like the Persian kings having a

³⁷ Kent 1953: 152-153; Lecoq 1997: 263-264; Vallat 1977: 218-220. Cf, also Santaljyan 1901: 224-226 and Movsisyan 2003: 188-189.

³⁸ Kent 1953: 137, 147, 148.

³⁹ Dandamajev, Lukonin 1980: 341.

⁴⁰ Xenophon 1970: 98: The Greek mercenaries in long-term military service for in Persia could hardly confuse Persian with the Armenian language.

⁴¹ The burial in rock-cut tombs meant that we are already dealing with Zoroastrian beliefs (see Boyce 1994: 69, 76), thus, it is not excluded that the influence of Zoroastrianism in the city of Van, as an administrative center, was strong.

⁴² Tarhan 2007: 122-123; Vergazov 2018: 274-275.

⁴³ Dan 2015: 13.

⁴⁴ Cf. Herles 2017: 137.

number of residence-capitals, the satraps (kings) of Armenia had different residences too, but just as Persepolis was the capital of the Great kings of Persia, so Van was the residence of the satrap of Armenia. At the same time, attention must be paid on the interesting circumstance that it is alluring and possible to consider Van a residence of Achaemenid dynasty (at least until Xerxes) among other residences (Susa, Babylon, Ecbatana, Persepolis or Bactra), because Van along with the mentioned cities, was the center of an ancient civilization, and the Iranian culture of the Achaemenid period inherited many cultural realities from the Urartian civilization.

The Satrapic Armenia was important for the Achaemenids during the decline of the empire as well, when the latest king, Darius III Kodomanus was appointed the satrap of Armenia. Despite the absence of materials it is possible to believe that the residency of the Achaemenid satrap could have been only Van where his ancestor had left an inscription. It is not excluded that the inscription of Darius I symbolized the subjugation of Armenia to the Persians, and the place of the inscription is linked with the move of the administrative center from Armavir to Van and the change of the king-satrap. It is also interesting that Darius III, losing in the Gaugamela battle, fled to the north heading through the Armenian mountains (via Dasn and Npatakan mountains) to Media.⁴⁵ The problem is why Darius III would have escaped to Media via the southern border of Armenia? Probably, the former satrap of Armenia, in panic, regarding the first shelter of salvation in Armenia, however changed his way to Media for some reasons. Diodorus of Sicily wrote that after losing the battle Darius fled to upper satrapies,⁴⁶ and one of them was Armenia.

Further information provided by Diodorus allows us to make some proposals. In Ecbatana Darius collected the survivors after the battle and armed the unarmed people. At the same time, "he demanded soldiers from the tribes living nearby and sent angels to the satraps and commanders of Bactria and the upper satrapies urging them to remain loyal to him".⁴⁷ As further developments showed,⁴⁸ Armenia, one of the upper satrapies, refused to assist Darius.

In our opinion, in the period of the decline of the Achaemenid empire, Armavir was the economic, religious, cultural center of the Satrapy of Armenia which after 331 BC became the military and political center of the newly independent Armenian state. Undoubtedly, the significance of Armavir must have been important in the tenure of Achaemenids as well, which we have emphasized above. The very act of Armavir becoming the capital would have meant that before Armavir the administrative center of Armenia should have been located elsewhere. It concerns Van. On the other hand, the Yervandunis, by making Armavir the capital again, were restoring the pre-Achaemenid political status of Armenia, that is, the independent statehood. For comparison,

⁴⁵ Khorikyan 2017: 46.

⁴⁶ Diodorus of Sicily 1985: 97.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ See in Khorikyan 2017.

conditionally, Armavir had the same economic significance for the Satrapy of Armenia as Susa had for the Achaemenids. In fact, after the anti-Persian uprising of the Armenians in 522-521 BC until the 330s BC, Armavir was no longer the capital of Armenia.

Thus, our study allows us to suppose that the administrative center (capital) of Satrapy of Armenia was the city of Van, which probably was one of the seats of the Achaemenid king of kings as well.

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