CHAPTER 12

IRAN, ARMENIA AND GEORGIA

POLITICAL CONTACTS

I

The geographical, historical and cultural links between Iran and the Caucasian area extend into remote antiquity. The Caucasus range has been from time immemorial the barrier separating the Eurasian steppe lands from more advanced civilizations centred on Mesopotamia and Anatolia. The Armenian plateau, with its mighty volcanic peaks, later imposed a formidable barrier to the westward drive of the Iranian people, once they were firmly established in their historical habitat. There is little doubt that some of the ancestors of the Iranians, like the Hittites and other Indo-European warrior aristocracies, entered Armenia from the north along the Caspian littoral, which was to be for centuries the classic invasion route for northern nomads attracted by the wealth and economic opportunities of the ancient Near East.

During the Early Bronze Age, extending through the 3rd millennium B.C., north-western Iran formed a single cultural zone with Armenia and southern Georgia,[1] which all entered into the orbit of what is generally known as the Kuro-Araxes culture. This in turn links up with the Khirbet-Kerak pottery culture of Palestine and Syria. The connections between the Armenian and Iranian Middle and Late Bronze Ages are well known,[2] while the Luristān bronzes are sometimes now attributed to Cimmerians who had entered Iran by way of the Caucasus (pl. 36(*a*)).

During recent decades, archaeologists have devoted increasing interest to the civilization of Urartu, the mighty rival of Assyria. The kingdom of Urartu flourished in a vast region centred on Lake Vān in Armenia, and incorporated at one time the advanced culture of the

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[1] C. A. Burney, "Excavations at Yanik Tepe, north-west Iran", *Iraq* XXIII (1961), pp. 138–53; XXIV (1962), pp. 138–52; XXVI (1964), pp. 54–61; T. Burton Brown, *Excavations in Azarbaijan, 1948* (London, 1951).

[2] "Anatolia and Armenia was the original centre from which metallurgy spread over the lands of the Ancient East as well as over Europe and eastern Asia." – E. Herzfeld, *Iran and the Ancient East* (Oxford, 1941), p. 160.

Mannians, around Lake Urmīya. The influence of Urartian art and architecture on that of the Medes and Persians has long been suspected. The latest in a series of scholars who have studied this question is David Stronach, who has published a suggestive study linking the lofty Urartian tower temples with Persian Achaemenian structures known from examples at Pasargadae and Naqsh-i Rustam.[1] The Urartians, incidentally, live on in the pages of Greek authors under the name "Alarodians"; both these ethnic terms correspond to the name Ararat, traditionally given to Armenia's highest mountain, which the Armenians themselves know as Masis.

During the heyday of the Achaemenian dynasty, the Armenians and the ancestors of the Georgians came under the aegis of the Great Kings of Iran.[2] Herodotus informs us of the tribute which the various tribes paid to their Persian overlord, while Xenophon's *Anabasis* provides the classic account of the life of the Armenians and south-western Georgian tribes whom he encountered on his toilsome march from Mesopotamia to Trebizond.

The transition from tribal-patriarchal organization to independent monarchies in both Armenia and Georgia is traditionally linked with the campaigns of Alexander the Great, and the eventual replacement of the Achaemenian empire by the much weaker Seleucid state.

In Armenia, the initiative in building up a unified state was taken by the dynasty of the Orontids, who were descended from the satrap Orontes who is mentioned by Xenophon.[3] This Orontes was married about 401 B.C. to the Princess Rhodogune, daughter of the Persian Great King Artaxerxes II. During the fraternal strife between Artaxerxes II and his brother Cyrus the Younger, in which Xenophon and his Ten Thousand played a role, Orontes took the side of his father-in-law Artaxerxes, thus contributing to his victory.

Artaxerxes II turned out to be a feeble ruler, under whom the Persian empire fell into decay. Profiting by this, Orontes set himself up in Armenia as a virtually independent dynast, and became extremely wealthy, having a personal fortune of three thousand talents of silver.

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[1] D. Stronach, "Urartian and Achaemenian Tower Temples", *JNES* XXVI (1967), pp. 278–88.

[2] Armenia and the Armenians feature prominently in the Behistun inscriptions of Darius, in which we hear of an Armenian named Dadarshi, sent by the Persians to crush an insurrection in his homeland. See Roland Kent, *Old Persian* (New Haven, Conn., 1950), pp. 117–24, Mention of Armenia also occurs in Persepolis E (Kent, p. 136) and Naqsh-i Rustam (Kent, p. 138); also in the inscription of Xerxes, Persepolis H (Kent, p. 151) and the inscription of Xerxes at Vān itself (Kent, pp. 152–3). See further a Persepolis inscription of Artaxerxes II or III: "This is the Armenian" (Kent, p. 156).

[3] *Anabasis* II. iv. 8, 9, v. 40; III. iv. 13, v. 17; IV. iii. 4.

In later years, Orontes turned against his father-in-law and overlord, Artaxerxes, and led the revolt of the satraps which broke out in 366 B.C. Eventually Orontes submitted and was pardoned; he obtained the satrapy of Mysia and died in 344 B.C.

The name Orontes is itself of Iranian origin, deriving from Avestan *aurand* ("mighty, hero"), and being related closely to Pahlavī *arvand*, with the same meaning. The local, Armenian forms of the name are Erwand, Arawan, and also Hrant. The Orontid dynasty spans the gap between the old Urartian kings (the First Monarchy in Armenia), and the Third Armenian Monarchy of the Artaxiads, in Classical times. Until recently, little was known about the offspring and successors of Orontes I, but their existence as a regular dynasty over three centuries is attested by the inscriptions on the funeral monument of King Antiochus I of Commagene (69–34 B.C.) at Nimrūd Dāgh in eastern Turkey (pls. 37, 38). Antiochus was himself a scion of the Orontid line, and evidently proud of his Armenian royal ancestors, many of whom he enumerates, making it possible to compile a provisional list of this most interesting dynasty:[1]

A. *Satraps of Armenia*

Orontes I, 401–344 B.C.
Orontes II, 344–331 B.C.

B. *Kings of Armenia*

Orontes II (*continued*), 331 B.C.
Mithranes, 331–317 B.C.
(Neoptolemus, satrap, 323–321 B.C.)
Orontes III, 317–260 B.C.
Samus, 260 B.C.
Arsames, 260–228 B.C.
Xerxes, 228–212 B.C.
Abdissares, *c.* 212 B.C.
Orontes IV, 212–200 B.C.

C. *Kings of Sophene*

Zariadris (Zareh), Strategos, 200 B.C.; King, 190 B.C. and after
Mithrobuzanes I, a contemporary of Artaxias I of Greater Armenia, around 170 B.C.
Orontes V, about 95 B.C.; annexation of Sophene by Tigranes II of Greater Armenia

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[1] Toumanoff, "The Orontids of Armenia", in *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, pp. 277–354.

Under the last Persian king of the Achaemenian dynasty, Armenia enjoyed peace and prosperity. The rulers of Iran now interfered little in Armenian internal affairs, and trade and agriculture flourished. This state of things was abruptly shattered by the invasion of Alexander the Great of Macedon. The battle of Arbela (Gaugamela) on 1 October 331 resulted in decisive victory for the Macedonians and Greeks over the last of the Achaemenians, Darius III Codomannus. Loyal to the last, the Armenians furnished 40,000 infantry and 7,000 horsemen to the Persian Great King, under the personal command of their own sovereign, King Orontes II. The Armenian cavalry made up the right flank of the Persian line of battle at Arbela.

During this catastrophic defeat, Orontes II apparently lost his life. At any rate, Alexander the Great celebrated his victory by sending Mithranes, a son of Orontes II, to be satrap of Armenia in his father's stead. It is interesting to note that this Mithranes was a former Iranian governor of Sardis in western Asia Minor, who had defected to the side of the Macedonians, and thus found himself ranged at the battle of Arbela on the opposite side to his own father.

Alexander the Great died at the zenith of his power, at the age of thirty-three; but his cultural and imperial heritage lived on (pl. 36(*b*)). Far to the east, in Bactria, Parthia, and at many sites in modern Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, Greek or rather Hellenistic cities grew up almost overnight. Stagnant, sleepy backwaters were revitalized, and decayed trade routes brought swiftly back into operation. Greek taste in building, sculpture and the arts, and knowledge of Greek literature and philosophy spread to out of the way corners of Anatolia and Central Asia. Greek science and technology produced rapid improvements in living standards, hygiene and sanitation, and in domestic amenities, at least for the select few. Greek ingenuity in engineering and construction left its mark over many regions of the old Persian empire.[1]

Armenia, which lay close to Alexander's expansion route towards India, could not escape the impact of the new Greco-Oriental world civilization which he helped to create. At the same time, in this new world of Hellenism, the vestiges of the earlier world of "Iranianism" were not effaced, nor were the elements of local advanced culture inherited from Urartu. Armenia now found herself in close touch with a number of Hellenistic countries, and thus open to new economic and social influences. The exclusively agricultural economy and rural exis-

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[1] J. M. Cook, *The Greeks in Ionia and the East* (London, 1962), pp. 154–72.

tence of Achaemenian Armenia, where the use of coined money was scarcely known, were suddenly altered. The important overland route of transit trade, connecting China, India and Central Asia with the Mediterranean world, passed through Armenia, while there was a parallel northern route through Caucasian Albania (Āzarbāijān), Iberia and Colchis debouching on the Black Sea.

Great cities arose along these routes, which became homes of foreign merchants and centres of diffusion for Greek culture. The growth of a money economy and of urban life generally made for the decay of Armenia's traditional tribal-patriarchal society, and for the emergence of new patterns of urban stratification, including the growth of a town bourgeoisie and artisan class, and the commercial exploitation of slaves, though this latter institution never reached the massive proportions which it did in Greece and Rome. From the 3rd century B.C., Armenian royal authority grew more absolute, and the administrative machinery more complex, especially in regard to the royal court and the taxation and fiscal systems. The clan chiefs and rustic headmen began to turn into a more sophisticated courtier and squire class, enjoying greater luxury and ease, and accustomed to a higher standard of living.

To appreciate Armenia's international position within the Hellenistic world, we must take stock briefly of the general situation in the Near East and Asia Minor. After Alexander's sudden death in 323 B.C., his generals quarrelled over the partition of his dominions. Ptolemy created a Greek kingdom in Egypt; Seleucus did the same in Syria and Mesopotamia, with his capital first at Seleucia, replacing ancient Babylon, and then at Antioch on the Orontes. Antipater conserved the old kingdom of Macedon, with its European dependencies as far as the Black Sea and also the Adriatic, with sovereignty over the city states in Greece. The attempts of Lysimachus to create a kingdom of the Bosphorus, with a capital on the Gallipoli peninsula, united his rivals against him, and failed at his death in 281 B.C.

Hardly had Alexander's successors established an uneasy balance of power in the Near East and Aegean region, when new disturbances burst upon the civilized world from outside. Celtic tribes from the middle Danube shattered Macedon, devastated Thrace and Phrygia, and established themselves on the Asia Minor plateau to the west of Armenia, under the name of Galatians. Here they remained until Roman and Christian times, being the recipients of one of St Paul's epistles. Soon afterwards the Iranian-speaking people of Parthia overran the

Persian plateau and deprived the Seleucids of their possessions east of the Euphrates. The Parthians effectively separated the Seleucids of Syria, as well as the Armenians, from those eastern provinces of Alexander's realm which developed into the Greek kingdom of Bactria and also took in large regions of the Indus valley. These eastern losses led the Greco-Syrian kings of the Seleucid dynasty to seek compensation at the expense of Egypt to the south, and of Armenia and other independent states of Asia Minor to the north.

During the Seleucid period, Armenia became divided into several virtually independent kingdoms and principalities. The classification adopted at this epoch persisted, with certain changes, well into the Byzantine era.[1] The most important region, of course, was Greater Armenia, situated east of the upper Euphrates, and including vast areas all round Lake Vān, along the Araxes valley, and northwards to take in Lake Sevan, the Karabagh, and even the southern marches of Georgia. Lesser Armenia, on the other hand, was a smaller and less fertile kingdom, to the west of the upper Euphrates; it included the present-day districts of Sīvās and Erzinjān, and bordered on ancient Cappadocia. To the south-west lay the two little kingdoms of Sophene and Commagene, separated from one another by the middle Euphrates, and having the fertile and desirable Melitene (Malatya) plain running between them. Sophene and Commagene often featured as buffer states between Parthia and Armenia on the one hand, and Syria and Rome on the other. Their royal houses had strong dynastic links with the Armenian Orontid house. Through their proximity to such great cities as Antioch and Palmyra, the kingdoms of Sophene and Commagene early became great centres of Hellenistic and then of Roman art and civilization, which they in turn helped to transmit eastwards into Greater Armenia and Transcaucasia.

The Seleucid kings never succeeded in asserting direct rule over Armenia proper. They collected tribute from local Armenian princes, whom they used to confirm in office by granting them the title of "strategos", corresponding to the old Persian viceregal title of satrap. This situation changed somewhat under the Seleucid King Antiochus III, known as the Great (223–187 B.C.), an ambitious monarch who cherished dreams of restoring the empire of Alexander the Great. The Armenian King Xerxes rashly declined to pay tribute to Antiochus, who besieged him in his capital of Arsamosata and forced him to sub-

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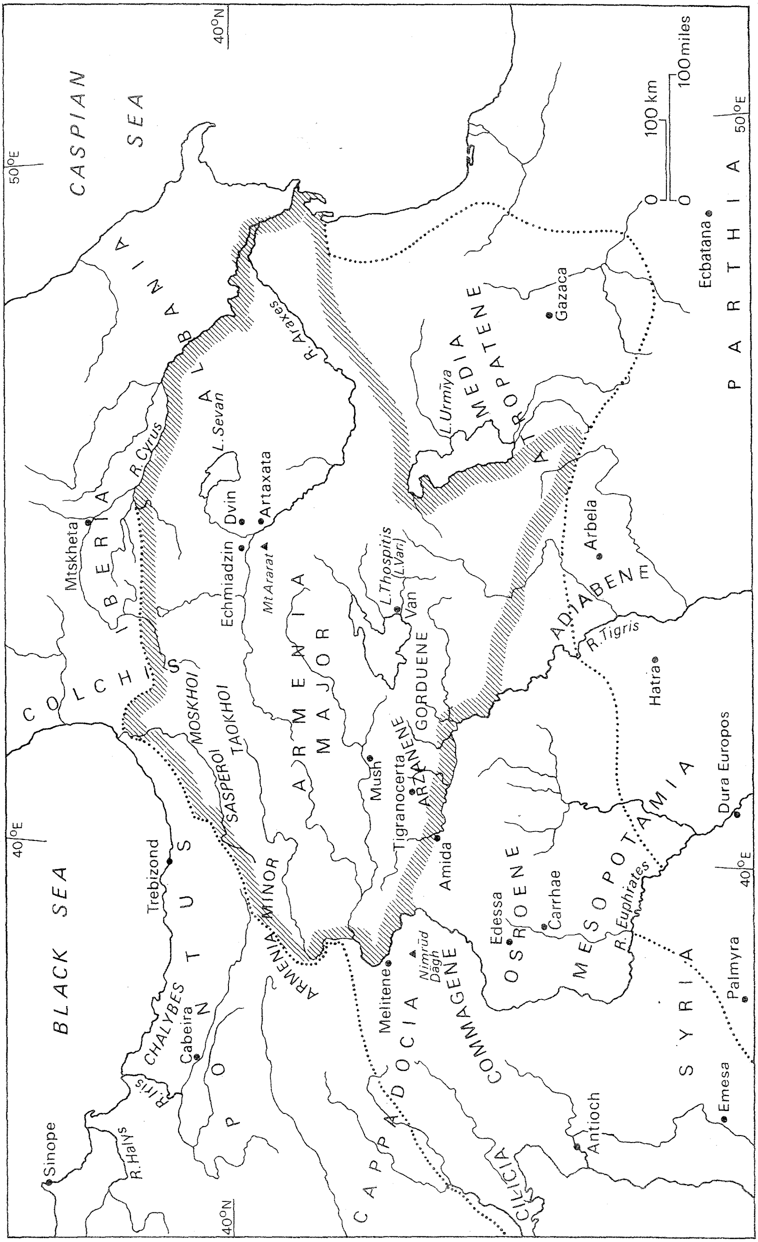
[1] The best guide to this classification is given by Adontz, pp. 7–182.



Map 9. Armenia at the time of the Parthian empire.