

The rise and fall of Media

9

the nations for war against her: the kings of the Medes, with their governors and deputies, and every land under their dominion!²⁰

Also in this case, the LXX version will correct “the kings” into “the king”.

Also Jer. 25, 25-26, foredooming for all the nations a fate similar to that of Jerusalem, just conquered and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, describes the political condition of the highlands in terms of a plurality of loose statehoods:

All the kings of the Cimmerians,²¹ all the kings of Elam, all the kings of the Medes, all the kings of the North, far and near, one after another.

Is this a fair description of a “Median Empire”?²²

We have hardly to remember, at this point, that although literacy had been present in the area of Media during the period of Assyrian penetration, it completely disappeared during the period of the assumed Median hegemony, ca. 610-550.²³ Not only public buildings, but also written administration (the two most obvious markers of statehood) are completely missing in the period of the assumed Median empire.

The interpretation for such an apparently “puzzling” and “contradictory” state of affairs is quite clear and coherent. The “secondary states” of the Medes had grown up at the periphery of the Assyrian empire and largely in function of the Assyrian empire. On the one hand the Zagros tribes had suffered, since time immemorial, from the repeated attacks by the lowland empire of Assyria, bringing about destruction and robberies. But on the other hand the proximity of the empire generated a notable development in their military and political apparatus, a development of their economy in function of trade and of production of strategically valuable items. The Zagros polities were true and proper “secondary” states in the sense that their very existence was dependent on relationships with the empire. Once the exasperated tribes decided to put an end to the aggressive empire, in the same time they put an end to their own political formations and reverted to the stage of tribal pastoralism.

At this point we can go back to the information provided by Herodotus and by Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*, in order to read them with this new model in mind. And we find that the stories told by the classical historians speak about features which are distinctive of chiefdoms and not of states: warfare and hunting, hospitality and gift-exchange, inter-marriage and alliance, cruelty and revenge, chivalry and bravery, banquets and conspicuous consumption. And we can figure out the fabulous Ecbatana as something like an enlarged example of those “lordly manors” with whom archaeology has made us familiar. Cyaxares and Astyages were not emperors on the model of the following Persian empire, but just a line of authoritative “chiefs”. They got a special prestige (but not an absolute power) from having been the leading family on the occasion of the great national enterprise of pulling down the “empire of evil” that had so long oppressed and exploited the Zagros pastoral tribes.²⁴

20. The passage makes use of Babylonian terminology (*tpsr* = *tupšarru*, *phh* = *pāhatu*, *sgn* = *šaknu*) in order to define the Median state officials.

21. The text has *zmry* (*hapax*), the emendation *gmry* seems obvious.

22. On the date and historical context of the passage cf. Diakonoff 2000.

23. This point has already been made by Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1988, 198. That the Old Persian script must have had a Median model is just another pre-conceived idea based on the classical view.

24. The “model” for the Median hegemony could be framed into the concept of “shadow empires” suggested for Central Asian nomadic imperial confederacies by Barfield 2001, 33-38.

7. Media or Elam at the roots of the Persian empire?

It is commonly taken for granted, on the score of the classical sources, that the Achaemenid empire was built upon a direct inheritance of the Median empire. Cyrus' victory over Astyages is assumed to have handed over to Cyrus an already built empire, stretching from the border of Lydia to central Asia (including Bactria? on the problem of pre-Achaemenid Bactria cf. Briant 1984b). In a sense, the extent of the assumed Median empire has been deduced from the extent of Cyrus' empire (detracting his eventual annexation of Babylonia and Lydia), as if no other explanation could be possible.²⁵

Now, it is a symptomatic case that when the Bisutun inscription was being deciphered, once ascertained that one version was Old Persian and the second was Babylonian, the third enigmatic and undeciphered version was assumed to be Median! This was a reasonable hypothesis, since Bisutun is located in Media and Media was assumed to lie at the basis of the Persian empire. Later on it became sure that the third version was Elamite, that no Median writing system had ever existed,²⁶ and that Elamite remained the administrative language for the Persian archives. This fact is a symptomatic parallel to the fact that the classical sources seem to have attributed to Media a role that in reality belonged to Elam instead.

Obviously, the very geographical location of the core of Persia is identical with the core of Elam. The capital city of Elam, Anšan (at Tall-i Malyan), is a few miles away from Pasargadae and Persepolis and the area left "empty" after the decline of Anšan (cf. de Miroschedji 1985; 1990a; Amiet 1992; Potts 1999, 288-307) was revitalized by the new Persian dynasty. This dynasty was quite independent already in mid-seventh century, when Cyrus I sent an embassy to Ashurbanipal after his conquest of Susiana (cf. lastly Rollinger 1999, 118-121). The idea that Persia had been a "vassal" of Media rests on later classical sources only, and seems rather improbable (Rollinger 1999, 127-135).

Persia is the heir of Elam, not of Media.²⁷ Elam had a long tradition in statehood, in centralized administration, in written records kept in formal archives. Elam had also a long tradition as centre of large coalitions of peoples and states on the Iranian plateau, as centre of a network of relationships with the surrounding areas, not only with Susiana (these relationships being the best known because of the archaeological selection of our information) but also with regions in central, northern, and eastern Iran. Persia inherited the Elamite state organization and administration (cf. Briant 1984b, 92-96; Potts 1999, 306-307), and inherited the Elamite network of relationships, not a quite improbable network centred on the poor and illiterate pastoral tribes of the central Zagros.

In the Greek reconstruction of the sequence of empires, Media was given a role that belonged to Elam. The Greeks —and especially the Ionians of Asia— were well aware of the role of Media since Cyaxares' foray against Lydia, and could have received information through the Lydian channel. They were, on the contrary, completely ignorant about Elamite power and Elamite history, so that Elam was excluded from their sequence of empires and from their reconstruction of the genesis of the Persian empire.

To make a more peculiar case, the famous topos of the Medes as "luxury-loving" as opposed to the frugal and energetic Persians (a topos endowed with relevant moral values in Greek historiography)

25. Högemann 1992, 75, 83-85 describes a territorial empire divided into satrapies (the very same satrapies of the Achaemenid empire).

26. The same holds true for the attempt to find out tablets with Median texts in the Assyrian archives —an attempt that goes on since Sayce 1890 (cf. now Hinz 1986) and until Radner 1999a. By the way, Radner's archive belongs to the period 661-614 and the building was destroyed by a huge fire in 614.

27. It is hardly necessary to remind that Cyrus' title (in his Babylonian "Cylinder", cf. Schaudig 2001, 551-556) is "king of Anšan", certainly not "king of Media"!

does not fit at all with the Medes as known from Assyrian and Babylonian sources — both the “fierce” Medes (*Madāyu dannūti*) of the military *élites*, or the pastoralists of the common populace. On the contrary the topos fits the Elamites much better, and could even go back to Assyrian literary traditions. Just think of the Elamites at the Halule battle, as described and ridiculed by Sennacherib:

Their (= *i.e.* the Elamites) nobles ... who stood on silver chariots, were bedecked with golden ornaments, wore golden daggers, had their fingers bound with golden rings ... they let their dung go into their chariots, they ran off alone, and fled to their land (Luckenbill 1924, 89).

Yet the role of Media inside the Persian empire remains quite peculiar, at least according to the classical sources (the Old Persian royal inscriptions are more ambiguous on this point),²⁸ and we have to look for an adequate explanation thereof. If the explanation cannot have recourse to the state administration, we can suspect that some reasons did exist in the field of religious and social ideologies.

8. The “revolution” and its ideology

An unbiased evaluation of the extant data leads us to believe that in the period from 610 and 550 BC the tradition of “empires” was preserved by Chaldean Babylonia and by Anšan/Persia, while the Zagros area under Median hegemony reverted to a stage of tribal chiefdoms, with no literacy and no administrative tools, the forts and ceremonial buildings of the previous period being dismissed as no longer in line with a new social and political order.

The turning point from a process towards statehood to a process of re-tribalization is clearly the destruction of the Assyrian empire. On the motivations of such turning point we have no explicit data, but we can advance some hypotheses. It seems clear to me that the Median *élites* living in the “manors” along the trade routes could have been happy with their relationships to Assyria, providing them with additional wealth and power — while the pastoralists living in the highland villages and hamlets could have suffered most of the negative effects of the repeated attacks by the warlike and aggressive empire of the Mesopotamian plains. We can suspect some difference in strategies, or at least in feelings, in the various social groups inside the Median people, and we have to assume that at some point the strategy of reaction and vengeance got the upper hand on the strategy of interaction and profit.

The enraged fury of the mountaineers that annihilated the Assyrian empire left space to fifty years of freedom on the Zagros highlands. Such a “revolution” could have left some traces in the Iranian traditions, and I will repeat here a suggestion that I have already advanced on the occasion of another conference (Liverani 2001, 374-377), by introducing in our debate the foundation legend of the Kurdish people, celebrated every year in their Nowruz (New Year) festival. As well known, the modern Kurds pretend to be descendants of the ancient Medes.

The legend says that there was once a despotic and “satanic” king, Zohak by name, suffering from two tumours (in the shape of snakes) on his shoulders, and used to treat them with the daily application of two children’s brains. The vizier in charge of the affair took pity on the children and let them (actually one out of two, every day) fly to the mountains, providing the king with a sheep brain instead. On the mountains, the children increased in number and gave origin to the Kurdish people.

28. In the Bisutun inscription (I quote from Kent 1953), Darius uses many times the expression “both in Persia and in Media and in the other provinces” (§§ 10, 11, 12, 14, etc.), but when listing his countries Persia is followed always by Elam (§§ 6, 21, 52), not by Media.

Down in the city, Zohak continued his tyrannic rule, until a smith, Kawa by name, exasperated by the execution of his nine sons by the tyrant, decided not to tolerate any longer, and to react. He hoisted his working apron like a flag, summoned from the mountains the escaped children, and all together they attacked the royal palace, put fire on it, and killed the tyrant in its ruins. This happened on March 21, which is the date of the Nowruz, in 612 BC, which is the date of the Median entrance into history, by their destruction of Nineveh.

The historical background of such a foundation legend is highly problematic, of course, since the identification of Medes and Kurds seems more literary than popular, and the precise dating of the event to 612 BC must depend on modern rediscovery of the Babylonian chronicle on the fall of Nineveh (which has been published in 1923). Moreover, the story is just a variant of a well-known chapter in the Persian national epos, as made famous by Firdausi's *Shahnameh*, relating the despotic reign of the monster Zohak (Dahhak) and his defeat by Faridun (Yarshater 1983, 426-429). Yet the story of Zohak and the escaped children is already connected with the origin of the Kurds at least since Mas'udi historical work, written in 943. The most detailed treatment of the "foundation legend" of the Kurds is then recorded in the *Sharafnameh*, a Persian epic of the late 16th century, well before any modern knowledge about the Median destruction of the Assyrian empire.²⁹

Above all, the Kurdish legend is able to evoke the secular struggle between city and highlands, between empire and mountain tribes, the mountaineers' desire for revolt and vengeance against the oppressive rule of the imperial palace, the persistent dream about a spring during which the oppressed people will finally come down from their refuges, punish the tyrant and proclaim freedom. Such might have been the feelings of the Median tribes when they descended from the mountains in order to fight against the "empire of evil". On the other hand, it is not impossible that a decisive event like the destruction of the Assyrian empire left some traces in the Iranian legendary corpus.

A final question could be asked at this point, even though the answer is not easy at all. The question is: was the enraged, destructive action of the mountain tribes against the "empire of evil" connected to—or motivated by—some early stage of Mazdean religious ideology,³⁰ or even to the very start of Zoroaster's preaching? This is hard to say, in the lack of appropriate records: but it could explain why the role of the Medes was acknowledged as quite peculiar by the later Achaemenid rulers. And the traditional (or "low") dates for Zoroaster's "revelation" either 300 or 258 years before the collapse of the Persian empire in 330 BC (lastly Gnoli 2000) would take us to a date in 630 or in 588 BC, i.e. slightly before or slightly after the destruction of the Assyrian empire. In the first case Zoroaster's religious revolution could have been a cause, in the second case an issue, of the socio-political upheaval. In any case it is a remarkable fact that two lines of research completely unconnected to each other— one based on later Iranian and Classical traditions, one based on contemporary Assyrian sources— both arrive at fixing a pivotal and "revolutionary" period in Iranian history in the period ca. 620-550, the period of the Median hegemony and of Zoroaster's life (618-541 is the final choice by Gnoli 2000, 165).

29. Edited by Charmoy 1868, 16-17 (Ma'sudi version of the legend), 32-33 and 343-345 (comments on the *Sharafnameh* version); 1870, 25-27 and 208-209 (translation of the pertinent passage).

30. The social (we could say "populistic") aspects of Mazdean ideology are not denied by Gnoli 1980, 187 and 228, although considered as a side aspect of a "revolution" that was basically religious and ethical.

THE RISE AND FALL OF MEDIA

Mario Liverani

1. The image of Media in the classical sources

Before the archaeological discovery of the Assyrian royal palaces and cuneiform archives, in the mid 19th century, the history of the Near Eastern civilizations in the period before the Achaemenid Empire was based on the classical and biblical sources only. The Medes, like the Assyrians and the Babylonians were known from information contained in the works of Herodotus and of later historians, who had no direct knowledge on those peoples and empires, but collected information in the learned circles of the Achaemenid empire itself. This information was neither direct nor coeval, nor even based on sound archival or historical materials. No wonder that the fresh evidence coming from the archaeological discoveries of the past century —both in Assyria and in Babylonia— resulted in a complete reassessment of the history of those countries. If we compare now the histories of Assyria and Chaldea written before the mid 19th century, with those current nowadays, we have to admit that they do not resemble each other at all. In other terms: the information available to Herodotus and to his heirs had no reliability, and is now used in order to reconstruct Greek historiography and not Assyrian or Babylonian history.

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چکیده

انتشار کتاب تداوم امپراتوری: آشور، ماد و پارس توسط رولینگر و روآف در ۲۰۰۳ میلادی از تمرکز مجدد بر دیدگاه سنتی شاهنشاهی ماد در تاریخ باستان خاور نزدیک خبر می‌داد. نویسندگان این کتاب، جایگاه مرکزی را که مادها به‌طور سنتی در پژوهش‌های اخیر به‌عنوان یک جزء جدایی‌ناپذیر در تداوم شاهنشاهی‌های باستانی خاور نزدیک از نوآشوری تا ایرانی داشته‌اند، بازبینی می‌کند. شواهد مربوط به کتاب مقدس و هرودوت برای تاریخ دوره حساس، اما ناشناخته، حدود ۶۵۰ تا ۵۵۰ پ.م. دیدگاه سنتی شاهنشاهی مادها، که عمدتاً به روایت هرودوت از سلسله تأسیس شده توسط دیوکس (۹۶/۱-۱۰۷) وابسته است، بازبینی برداشت‌های یونانی، اغلب کلیشه‌ای، از شاهنشاهی ایرانی هخامنشی در اوج آن است به عبارت دیگر، برای یونانیان که در قرن پنجم و چهارم می‌زیستند، این بازسازی گذشته، بر اساس درکی از معاصر بود.

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NOTES ON THE MEDES AND THEIR “EMPIRE”
FROM JER 25:25 TO HDT 1.134*

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The 2003 publication of *Continuity of Empire (?): Assyria, Media, Persia* (ed. G. Lanfranchi, M. Roaf, and R. Rollinger) heralds a renewed focus on the traditional view of the Median Empire in ancient Near Eastern history. The contributions to that volume revisit the central place that the Medes have traditionally held in modern scholarship as an integral component in a continuum of ancient Near Eastern empires from the Neo-Assyrian to the Persian. From that volume’s impetus, here are offered observations on some relevant biblical and Herodotean evidence for the history of the critical, yet poorly understood, period c. 650–550 BCE—from the denouement of the Assyrian Empire to the rise of the Persian Empire under Cyrus, i.e., the apparent zenith of Median power. The traditional view of the Median Empire, dependent primarily upon Herodotus’ account of the dynasty founded by Deioces (1.96–107), is a retrojection of Greek conceptions, often stereotypical, of the Achaemenid Persian Empire at its height. In other words, for Greeks writing in the fifth and fourth centuries, it was reconstruction of the past based on a (mis)understanding of the contemporary.

Mario Liverani’s contribution to *Continuity of Empire* highlights the use of the plural “kings” of the Medes in Jer 25:25, 51:11, and 51:27–28 in the historical context of the late seventh and early sixth centuries.¹ In

* It is my pleasure to offer these brief notes in a volume honoring my esteemed teacher, Prof. Barry Eichler. This paper is a significantly modified version of a presentation given at the conference in Barry’s honor, “Tablet and Torah: Mesopotamia and the Biblical World,” in March 2009.

¹ Liverani, “Rise and Fall of Media.” Note especially his remarks (8–9) on the switch to the singular “king” in the Septuagint (influenced by Greek historiography); the translation followed herein is that of the NRSV, available via several online resources. Compare Tuplin, “Medes in Media,” 234–35. Note also Diakonoff, “The Near East on the Eve of Achaemenian Rule,” 223–30, though Diakonoff’s focus is different from that of Liverani and that presented here. The rhetorical and stylized language of these passages must be acknowledged.

conjunction with the Assyrian and Babylonian evidence these passages provide a comprehensible depiction of the geopolitical situation across northern Iran: a plurality of kings, rather than one singular king, ruling a unified, centralized, organizational empire. In an inscription of Nabonidus from the Eḫulḫul temple in Sippar, for example, the king of the *umman-manda* (i.e., the Medes) is accompanied by additional “kings going at his side” (LUGAL.MEŠ *alik idišu*).² This description fits well with other evidence describing the Medes of this period and will be revisited below.

In Assyrian sources there are, with two potential exceptions, no named Median kings. The first Mede attested by name, a certain Ḫanaširuka, occurs in an inscription dated c. 820 (reign of Šamši-Adad V). Ḫanaširuka is associated with a royal city, Sagbita, from which it may be extrapolated that he was a king, though he is not explicitly labeled as such.³ The other prospective exception is manifest in an inscribed bronze plaque attributed to a certain Šilisuḫ. There are a number of problems with this intriguing inscription: its reading, its interpretation, its provenience, its date, and thus its historical context.⁴ It was found near Hamadan; based on internal evidence, Diakonoff (followed by Radner) associates it with Bit-Ištar, the ruler of which is labeled a city-lord in the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon.

The Šilisuḫ plaque contains reference to a king (obv. 2 and 8), though it is not evident that the king mentioned in the inscription is the Šilisuḫ who apparently commissioned it. The word “king” does not accompany Šilisuḫ’s name as a title. Unless one assumes that the king referenced is the Assyrian king, an assumption that would lead to other questions, it is unclear to whom else it could refer. The assumption that Šilisuḫ was an authority figure seems straightforward enough, but he

² Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 416–17 i 7–29 (l. 25 for LUGAL.MEŠ *alik idišu*). For the use of the pejorative *umman-manda*, see Reade, “Why Did the Medes Invade Assyria?” 153 and Rollinger, “The Western Expansion,” 297–305. Note also Zawadzki, *The Fall of Assyria and Median-Babylonian Relations*, chapter VI.

³ Grayson, *RIMA 3*, 185–86 A.0.103.1 iii 27–36; Radner, “Assyrian View,” 41. Whether or not Ḫanaširuka was considered a king by the Assyrians, it is impossible to determine whether Assyrian labels matched Median usage.

⁴ The superabundance of qualifications in this section reflects the uncertain interpretation of this inscription, which is treated only in brief here. See for discussion Radner, “Median Sanctuary,” 119–30. The inscription was (re-)published by Diakonoff, “Cuneiform Charter,” 51–59; see Diakonoff’s comments on the original find (and publication) by E. Herzfeld, with references. Note also Muscarella, *Bronze and Iron*, 238–40.

is otherwise unattested and thus his position cannot be corroborated. Locating Bit-Ištar—if that is the correct attribution—in Median territory and, by extension, assuming that Šilirsuh (king or not) was also Median is a sensible, but certainly not ineluctable, progression.⁵ Radner also notes a city-lord of Bit-Ištar named Burburazu during Sargon II's reign. If Burburazu is correctly identified as a Kassite name and if the name reflects its bearer's ethnicity, its etymology testifies to the apparently not uncommon (nor surprising) phenomenon of city lords of varying ethnicities in the Zagros region.⁶

Appellatives of the Medes vary, and it is not clear what defines particular groups of people as Median. The Assyrians generally and consistently, however, label Medes as living in settlements ruled by *bēl alāni* ("city lords"). There are dozens of these city lords in the Zagros region mentioned in the extant documentation from Tiglath-pileser III's and Sargon II's reigns.⁷ In the case of the Median *bēl alāni* in the eighth and seventh centuries, their official position appears to be on par with tributary kings in the Assyrian organizational structure, as evinced, *inter alia*, by their occurrence in *adê*-agreements. A key component observed with the title *bēl āli* is its hereditary, i.e., dynastic, nature. This ought to be considered when modeling the confluence of Median power in conjunction with the overthrow of Assyria and its aftermath in northern Iran. The coalescence of broader authoritative power presumably had its origins in the interpersonal relationships among these Median *bēl alāni*.

The transition from a collection of independent (at least from each other) Median city-lords to the force arrayed against Assyria in the 610s

⁵ Radner, "Median Sanctuary," 122–23 asserts that the name Šilirsuh is neither Indo-European nor Semitic and that the "king" in this inscription is Šilirsuh. Note Diakonoff, "Cuneiform Charter," 61: "We suppose that Šilirsuh is a name belonging to an aboriginal language, perhaps akin to Elamite."

⁶ For Burburazu, see Radner, "Median Sanctuary," 123 and R. Schmitt (*PNA* 1/2, 353). Another example of this phenomenon is Humbareš, the city lord of Median Naḥšimarti (see Radner, "Assyrian View," 60). That an Elamite—inferred from the apparently Elamite name (see *PNA* 2/1, 478)—held a position of authority in a Median area poses many questions about Assyrian administration and Median-Elamite connections, if this instance is not simply anomalous.

⁷ See especially Lanfranchi, "Assyrian Expansion," 87–89, 94–96, and 112–16 on *bēl āli* (especially 95 for its shifting use over time in the Neo-Assyrian period) and Radner, "Assyrian View," 49–50. Use and alteration of labels in these cases and others in the Neo-Assyrian period is a topic far beyond the scope of this paper and one in need of attention.

under Umakištar/Cyaxeres remains unclear. Liverani has argued that the traditional view, so heavily influenced by Herodotus and the Greek tradition, is not only skewed but wholly inaccurate.⁸ In Liverani's view there was no transition per se—i.e., an evolution from city lords to regional rulers (or kings) in some sort of hierarchical rubric—but simply a short-term unification under a primary Median king to strike at a vulnerable Assyria in the 610s and, thereafter, a rapid return to the status quo as pertained during the eighth and early seventh centuries.

Yet such a reconstruction does not allow for a Median entity that appears to have been a major force in the late seventh and early sixth centuries through the rise of Cyrus. The deconstruction of the Median "Empire" has yet to be reconciled not only with the Medes' prominent role in Assyria's downfall but also with their function as a significant power on Babylonia's eastern frontier well into the sixth century—considered as such in both Babylonian and Greek sources—as well as the Medes' distinctive positions in the military and administration of the Persian Empire subsequently. It is one thing to attribute Median involvement in Assyria's overthrow to a short-term coalition of Median (and other Iranian?) kings; it is another to extrapolate from such a coalition to a significant force—however labeled, even if many now would hesitate to term it an "empire"⁹—that appears to have played a major role in the ancient Near Eastern calculus of power for at least sixty years before Cyrus' conquest. There is much that remains opaque, both in the interpretation of the extant source material itself and in its application to historical reconstruction.

To approach this question from another perspective, one must also consider the Persians' geographically proximate forerunners in Elam.

⁸ See Liverani, "Rise and Fall of Media," 9 for just such an assessment, with which he concludes: "Once the exasperated tribes decided to put an end to the aggressive [i.e., Assyrian] empire, in the same time they put an end to their own political formations and reverted to the stage of tribal pastoralism." Note Radner, "Assyrian View," 61–62 on the significance of the lack of extant references to the Medes in documentation from the reign of Ashurbanipal; see also Lanfranchi, "Assyrian Expansion," 116–17, and Reade, "Why Did the Medes Invade Assyria?"

⁹ Rollinger's emphasis, "The Western Expansion," 296–305, on the Medes' stereotypical place in Nabonidus' inscriptions is appropriate; note also Jursa, "Observations on the Problem of the 'Median Empire'," 169–79. For a classic treatment on defining empire, see Doyle's perspective on informal vs. formal and annexation vs. control, *Empires*, 30–47 (esp. 32). Note also Parker, *The Mechanics of Empire*, esp. 8–13 and 253–60 on such questions with regard to Assyria's northern frontier.

Our knowledge of Elam at this period is also fraught with uncertainties. No less than six (at a minimalist counting) kings and rulers may be identified circa 650–550 BCE; their relationships, chronology, and extent of rule are all poorly understood, if at all traceable. Anchoring these individuals in a historical framework, within a wider rubric termed "Elamite-Persian ethnogenesis" or the like, has proven a frustrating task, despite its clear import for understanding the Persians' rise.¹⁰ That Jer 25:25's "kings of Elam" (emphasis on the plural) describes the geo-political situation in southwestern Iran well enough does not mean, of course, that the passage's corollary "kings of the Medes" for northern Iran is necessarily accurate.¹¹ But when greater primacy is given to the Near Eastern sources than to the Greek, it strikes a more consistent chord.

Cyrus' conquest of Astyages and the Medes is, again, known to us mainly from Herodotus and the Greek tradition. How does one correlate Cyrus' conquests of the Medes, the Lydians, the Babylonians, and, further, much of the rest of the Near East as well as tracts of south central

¹⁰ As a geo-political term, "Elam" in this period is essentially indeterminate and is applied herein mainly as a cultural and geographic term. For an excellent overview and discussion of the relevant issues, see Henkelman, *Other Gods*, chapter 1, with references. Note also the contributions to Alvarez-Mon and Garrison, eds., *Elam and Persia*. This rough accounting does not include the seemingly innumerable tribal groups of varying ethnicities in these areas; see the remarks of Henkelman, *Other Gods*, 36–37.

One example of such groups is the Martenians (¹²*mar-te-na-a-a*) of ABL 879 obv. 3 and 9, whom one is tempted to connect with Herodotus' Persian tribe, the Mardians (1.125). Such facile etymological bridges are always to be approached warily, of course, and this is no exception—not least among the difficulties is the geographic assignment of these groups. See Briant, *History of the Persian Empire*, 728–29 for discussion of the Mardians in classical sources and also Briant, *État et pasteurs*, 61–62, as well as Weissbach, "Μάρδοι," 1647–51 and Kaletsch, "Mardoï," 876. To illustrate the problem of etymologically based links—independent of the attendant, historical questions—note the attested *Martenoi* of the Arabian desert (Grohmann, "Martenoi," 2000).

¹¹ To recall the rhetorical character of some of these passages, cf. Jer 49:38, where the singular "king of Elam" is used, but in conjunction with plural "officials" (so the NRSV translation); contrast, e.g., May and Metzger (eds.), *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha*, 981, which translates "princes" for *sārīm*. It is difficult to ascertain what significance, if any, such interchange may imply with respect to biblical (or, at least, Jeremiah's) perspective on Elam. See, e.g., Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, 387–89. I thank Prof. Clyde C. Smith for sharing his insights on this passage.

Asia¹² The ancient Near Eastern sources (primarily Babylonian royal inscriptions and chronicles) present their own obstacles, but they offer critical chronology and perspective to balance the Greek tradition. What resounds through the sources, in varying degrees, is the prominent place afforded to the Medes both during Cyrus' conquests (e.g., Mazares and Harpagus in Asia Minor; Hdt 1.156–177) and during the flourishing empire, in context of the Achaemenid military and administration (e.g., the Medes' prominent place alongside the Persians on the Apadana reliefs).

The majority weight of *Continuity of Empire* may thus be said to have stripped the Medes of much of their "empire," though contrarian voices therein still maintain a case, especially for that nebulous but critical period under discussion here.¹³ Herodotus needs revisiting in this context, especially his description of Median rule at 1.134.3:

Ἐπὶ δὲ Μήδων ἀρχόντων καὶ ἦρχε τὰ ἔθνεα ἀλλήλων,
 συναπάντων μὲν Μήδοι καὶ τῶν ἀρχίστα οἰκεόντων σφίσι,
 οὗτοι δὲ αὖ τῶν ὁμοῦρων, οἱ δὲ μάλα τῶν ἐχομένων,
 κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν δὴ λόγον καὶ οἱ Πέρσαι τιμῶσι.
 προέβαινε γὰρ δὴ τὸ ἔθνος ἄρχον τε καὶ ἐπιτροπεύον.

When the Medes held dominion, likewise¹⁴ did the nations rule each other. The Medes ruled all together and (directly) those living nearest; and these, further, ruled their neighbors and so again, in turn, they theirs, according to the very same principle whereby the Persians esteem others. So indeed it proceeded, each nation both ruling and governing (its neighbor).

¹² Only the conquest of Babylon may be firmly dated, i.e., October, 539. The conquest of Astyages may be dated to 553 or 550, with the latter (based on the Chronicle) typically given greater credence. The date of the conquest of Lydia may, formally, be considered wide open; a date in the 540s (though no longer 547/546) is typically applied. See Briant, *History of the Persian Empire*, 35–38 and Kuhrt, *Persian Empire* 1, 53 n. 5 (and all her chap. 3 for text excerpts, discussion, and references). With regard to the Lydian conquest in particular note also Stronach, "Campaign of Cyrus the Great," 163–73 and Rollinger, "The Median 'Empire,'" 51–65.

¹³ Roaf, "The Median Dark Age" and Stronach, "Independent Media"; cf. Genito, "Archaeology of the Median Period," 317–26.

¹⁴ This "likewise" (or perhaps better, "similarly"—rendering Greek καὶ here) refers to the immediately preceding, parallel point, i.e., how the Persians valued peoples relative to how far removed from the Persians they lived. Greek text from the online Thesaurus Linguae Graecae.

Despite the compressed Greek—and the acknowledged problems with its translation and interpretation (especially the last sentence¹⁵)—Herodotus' depiction contains possibilities for reconciling the Medes' prominence during and after the fall of Assyria with their previously thin record. If one leaves aside the search for a formal, organizational structure of a Median "empire," since one seems unlikely to be found, a more productive approach converges upon questions of influence or authority, and the exercise thereof.¹⁶

Envisaging Median "domination" via a system of hierarchical, informal (but de facto) rule provides a model with which to work. Ctesias' *Persica*, the extant parts of which exhibit no shortage of interpretive difficulties,¹⁷ supports such a perspective. Ctesias presupposes a close relationship between the Medes and northeastern Iran; Cyrus' victory over Astyages resulted in the subsequent submission of the Hyrcanians, Parthians, Scythians, and Bactrians, who were subject to Astyages previously.¹⁸ If this report has any basis in historical reality, it provides a rubric for expansion of Persian authority into northeastern

¹⁵ See in particular Tuplin, "Medes in Media," 227–28 and 243–45 for discussion of this passage and its problems. Tuplin argues that the last nine words (προέβουε γὰρ δὴ τὸ ἔθνος ἄρχον τε καὶ ἐπιτροπέου) "should either be obelised or deleted as a gloss" (ibid., 245). My translation follows the sense of How and Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus*, 116, taking ἔθνος ("people, nation") as distributive; they translate: "each nation took its place in order as ruler and administrator"; similarly Liddell-Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, προβόινω 1470 mng. 3. The verb προέβουε is here rendered impersonally.

¹⁶ Tuplin, "Medes in Media," 234 and 242–43 argues for use of the word "domination" rather than "empire" or "hegemony" or the like. Note also Vogelsang, *Rise and Organisation of the Achaemenid Empire*, esp. 177. Accepting, even with all appropriate caveats, Herodotus' description here does not necessitate endorsement of his story of the foundation of Deioces' power (1.96–107), whatever historical elements may be couched within. Those difficulties, including the infamous Scythian interlude, have been treated extensively elsewhere; see, e.g., Kuhrt, *Persian Empire* 1, chap. 2 for discussion and references.

¹⁷ For text and commentary, see Lenfant, *Ctésias de Cnide*, and note Lanfranchi's remarks, "Assyrian Expansion," 118.

¹⁸ Lenfant, *Ctésias de Cnide*, 108–9 (text) and lxi (discussion) with notes; Ctesias uses the more generic term *archon* ("ruler"). See also Briant, *L'Asie centrale*, chapter 3 and Vogelsang, *Rise and Organisation of the Achaemenid Empire*, 210–11. The voluntary submission of these regions may be seen as parallel to those of the Trans-Jordan regions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire as relayed in the Cyrus Cylinder (lines 28–30; Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 553 and 556); see Briant, *L'Asie centrale*, 36.

Iran. By extension, it offers specific (and expected) names that one may associate with Herodotus' generic description of Median power at 1.134.3, as quoted above.

Based simply on brief passages in Herodotus and Ctesias, it may be precipitous to assume that Median authority extended to such points eastward. But, at the risk of unwarranted conflation of the source material, one may suggest that the rulers of the Hyrcanian, Parthian, Scythian, and/or Bactrian *ethnea* (to use the Greek term) were the "kings going at his side"—of the king of the *umman-manda* in Nabonidus' Sippar Cylinder—i.e., those who rode in support of, and presumably at the behest of, the Median king. The plurality of kings mentioned in Jeremiah ("kings of the Medes") fits such a reconstruction: Median domination over multiple, neighboring peoples, each of whom owed allegiance, directly or indirectly to a Median overlord, chief, or king, however the Median ruler styled himself.

It must be emphasized that there is no record, and it should not be presumed, that the Median kings ever used the title "king of kings."¹⁹ However, the relationships described in Babylonian and Greek sources imply subordination to a Median ruler, regardless of which specific titles are applied. The phenomenon as it related to a period of Median primacy finds echoes in classical sources via acknowledgment of other kings, for example, of Armenia, Cappadocia, and Cilicia.²⁰ One does not need to attribute a "Cyrus-sized" king to conceptualize the phenomenon at work nor does one need to insist upon consistency of specific titular in the varied source material.

The testimony for multiple kings of the Medes—in Jer 25:25 and other passages, biblical or otherwise—may be accepted at face value, if with qualification. In conjunction, Herodotus' description of Median dominion at 1.134.3 is more credible than his account of Deioces' dynasty. The evidence from Ctesias discussed above may also be read in support of a Median king holding authority over other regions without the structure of an organizational empire. Such a construct preserves Median reputation as a major power and concurrently explains why the trap-

¹⁹ I demur from the question of the Median origin, let alone use, of that title, regardless of purported etymological indications from Old Persian royal inscriptions; see Tuplin, "Medes in Media," 230–31 with references. Note Seux, *Épithètes royales akkadiennes et sumériennes*, 318–20 for the long history of the title *šar šarrāni* in Akkadian texts.

²⁰ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 3.1.31; 3.2.1–43; and 4.2.31. See Liverani, "Rise and Fall of Media," 8 and note also Petit, *Satrapes et satrapies*, 20–66 and Radner, "Assyrian View," 49–50 for the phenomenon in Neo-Assyrian times (e.g., kings in Cilicia and Cyprus).

pings of a centralized empire have not been found. For reasons that we may only speculate, the Medes did not (or could not) impose a centralized, bureaucratic structure on their dominion. That throws into greater relief the achievements of Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius in having done so with the Persian Empire, and it confirms the opinions expressed so forcefully in many contributions to *Continuity of Empire*: that continuity in the workings of empire into the Persian period should be sought mainly via the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Elamites.

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