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## ASSYRIA

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### CHAPTER V. Language and Writing

On the language of the ancient Medes a very few observations will be here made. It has been noticed already that the Median form of speech was closely allied to that of the Persians. The remark of Strabo quoted above, and another remark which he cites from Nearchus, imply at once this fact, and also the further fact of a dialectic difference between the two tongues. Did we possess, as some imagine that we do, materials for tracing out this diversity, it would be proper in the present place to enter fully on the subject, and instead of contenting ourselves with asserting, or even proving, the substantial oneness of the languages, it would be our duty to proceed to the far more difficult and more complicated task of comparing together the sister dialects, and noting their various differences. The supposition that there exist means for such a comparison is based upon a theory that in the language of the Zendavesta we have the true speech of the ancient people of Media, while in the cuneiform inscriptions of the Achæmenian kings it is beyond controversy that we possess the ancient language of Persia. It becomes necessary, therefore, to examine this theory, in order to justify our abstention from an inquiry on which, if the theory were sound, we should be now called upon to enter.

The notion that the Zend language was the idiom of ancient Media originated with

Anquetil du Perron. He looked on Zoroaster as a native of Azerbaijan, contemporary with Darius Hystaspis. His opinion was embraced by Kleuker, Herder, and Eask; and again, with certain modifications, by Tychsen and Heeren. These latter writers even gave a more completely Median character to the Zendavesta, by regarding it as composed in Media Magna, during the reign of the great Cyaxares. The main foundation of these views was the identification of Zoroastrianism with the Magian fire-worship, which was really ancient in Azerbaijan, and flourished in Media under the great Median monarch. But we have seen that Magianism and Zoroastrianism were originally entirely distinct, and that the Zendavesta in all its earlier portions belongs wholly to the latter system. Nothing therefore is proved concerning the Zend dialect by establishing a connection between the Medes and Magism, which was a corrupting influence thrown in upon Zoroastrianism long after the composition of the great bulk of the sacred writings.

These writings themselves sufficiently indicate the place of their composition. It was not Media, but Bactria, or at any rate the north-eastern Iranic country, between the Bolor range and the Caspian. This conclusion, which follows from a consideration of the various geographical notices contained in the Zend books, had been accepted of late years by all the more profound Zend scholars. Originated by Rhode, it has also in its favor the names of Burnouf, Lassen, Westergaard, and Haug. If then the Zend is to be regarded as really a local dialect, the idiom of a particular branch of the Iranic people, there is far more reason for considering it to be the ancient speech of Bactria than of any other Arian country. Possibly the view is correct which recognizes two nearly-allied dialects as existing side by side in Iran during its flourishing period--one prevailing towards the west, the other towards the east--one Medo-Persic, the other Sogdo-Bactrian--the former represented to us by the cuneiform inscriptions, the latter by the Zend texts. Or it

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may be closer to the truth to recognize in the Zendic and Achsemenian forms of speech, not so much two contemporary idioms, as two stages of one and the same language, which seems to be at present the opinion of the best comparative philologists. In either case Media can claim no special interest in Zend, which, if local, is Sogdo-Bactrian, and if not local is no more closely connected with Media than with Persia.

It appears then that we do not at present possess any means of distinguishing the shades of difference which separated the Median from the Persian speech. We have in fact no specimens of the former beyond a certain number of words, and those chiefly proper names, whereas we know the latter tolerably completely from the inscriptions. It is proposed under the head of the "Fifth Monarchy" to consider at some length the general character of the Persian language as exhibited to us in these documents. From the discussion then to be raised may be gathered the general character of the speech of the Medes. In the present place all that will be attempted is to show how far the remnants left us of Median speech bear out the statement that, substantially, one and the same tongue was spoken by both peoples.

Many Median names are absolutely identical with Persian; e.g., Ariobarzanes, Artabazus, Artaeus, Artembares, Harpagus, Arbaces, Tiridates, etc. Others which are not absolutely identical approach to the Persian form so closely as to be plainly mere variants, like Theodoras and Theodosius, Adelbert and Ethelbert, Miriam, Mariam, and Mariamne. Of this kind are Intaphres, another form of Intaphernes, Artynes, another form of Artanes, Parmises, another form of Parmys, and the like. A third class, neither identical with any known Persian names, nor so nearly approaching to them as to be properly considered mere variants, are made up of known Persian roots, and may be explained on exactly the same principles as Persian names. Such are Ophernes, Sitraphernes,

Mitraphernes, Megabernes, Aspadas, Mazares, Tachmaspates, Xathrites, Spitaces, Spitamas, Ehambacas, and others. In Ophernes, Sitra-phernes, Mitra-phernes, and Mega-bernes, the second element is manifestly the pharna or frana which is found in Arta-phernes and Inta-phernes (Vida-frana), an active participial form from pri, to protect. The initial element in O-phernes represents the Zend hu, Sans, su, Greek ev, as the same letter does in O-manes, O-martes, etc. The Sitra of Sitra-phernes has been explained as probably Ichshatra, "the crown," which is similarly represented in the Safrópates of Curtius, a name standing to Sitra-phernes exactly as Arta-patas to Arta-phernes. In Mega-bernes the first element is the well-known бага, "God," under the form commonly preferred by the Greeks; and the name is exactly equivalent to Curtius's Bagfophanes, which only differs from it by taking the participle of pa, "to protect," instead of the participle of pri, which has the same meaning. In Aspa-das it is easy to recognize aspa, "horse" (a common root in Persian names,) e.g., Aspa-thines, Aspa-mitras, Prexaspes, and the like, followed by the same element which terminates the name of Oromaz-des, and which means either "knowing" or "giving." Ma-zares presents us with the root meh, "much" or "great," which is found in the name of the ilf-aspii, or "Big Horses," a Persian tribe, followed by zara, "gold," which appears in Ctesias's "Arto-awes," and perhaps also in Zoro-aster. In Tachmaspates, the first element is takhma, "strong," a root found in the Persian names Ar-tochmes and Tritan-taechmes, while the second is the frequently used pati, "lord," which occurs as the initial element in Pak-zeithes, Pafa-rampes, etc., and as the terminal in Pharna-jjates, Avio-peithes, and the like. In Xathrites we have clearly khshatra (Zend khshathra), "crown" or "king," with a participial suffix -ita, corresponding to the Sanscrit participle in -it. Spita-ces and Spita-mas contain the root spita, equivalent to spenta, "holy," which is found in Spitho-hates,

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Spita-mens, Spita-des, etc. This, in Spita-ces, is followed by a guttural ending, which is either a diminutive corresponding to the modern Persian -efc, or perhaps a suffixed article. In Spit-amas, the suffix -mas is the common form of the superlative, and may be compared with the Latin -mus in optimus, intimus, supremus, and the like. Ehambacas contains the root rafno, "joy, pleasure," which we find in Pati-ramphies, followed by the guttural suffix.

There remains, finally, a class of Median names, containing roots not found in any known names of Persians, but easily explicable from Zend, Sanscrit, or other cognate tongues, and therefore not antagonistic to the view that Median and Persian were two closely connected dialects. Such, for instance, are the royal names mentioned by Herodotus, Deioces, Phraortes, Astyages, and Cyaxares; and such also are the following, which come to us from various sources; Amytis, Astibaras, Armamithres or Harmamithres, Mandaucēs, Parsondas, Eamates, Susiscanes, Tithaeus, and Zanasanes.

In Deioces, or (as the Latins write it) Dejoces, there can be little doubt that we have the name given as Djohak or Zohak in the Shahnameh and other modern Persian writings, which is itself an abbreviation of the Ajis-dahaka of the Zendavesta. Dahaka means in Zend "biting," or "the biter," and is etymologically connected with the Greek.

Phraortes, which in old Persian was Fravartish, seems to be a mere variant of the word which appears in the Zendavesta as fravashi, and designates each man's tutelary genius. The derivation is certainly from fra, and probably from a root akin to the German wahren, French garder, English "ward, watch," etc. The meaning is "a protector."

Cyaxares, the Persian form of which was "Uvakhshatara," seems to be formed from the two elements it or hu, "well, good," and akhsha (Zend aršnd), "the eye," which is the final element of the name Cyavarswa in the Zendavesta. Cyavarsna is "dark-eyed;"

Uvakhsha (= Zend Huvarsna) would be "beautiful-eyed." Uvakhshatara appears to be the comparative of this adjective, and would mean "more beautiful-eyed (than others)."

Astyages, which, according to Moses of Chorene, meant "a dragon" or "serpent," is almost certainly Ajis-dahaka, the full name whereof Dojoces (or Zohak) is the abbreviation. It means "the biting snake," from aji or azi, "a snake" or "serpent," and dahaka, "biting."

Amytis is probably ama, "active, great," with the ordinary feminine suffix -iti, found in Armaiti, Khnathaiti, and the like. Astibaras is perhaps "great of bone," from Zend agta (Sans, asthi), "bone," and bereza, "tall, great." Harmamithres, if that is the true reading, would be "mountain-lover" (monticolus), from hardam, ace. of hara, "a mountain," and mithra or mitra, "fond of." If, however, the name should be read as Armamithres, the probable derivation will be from rama, ace. of raman, "pleasure," which is also the root of Rama-tea. Armamithres may then be compared with Rheomithres, Siromitras, and Sysimithres, which are respectively "fond of splendor," "fond of beauty," and "fond of light." Mandaucēs is perhaps "biting spirit--esprit mordant," from mand, "coeur, esprit," and dahaka, "biting." M Parsondas can scarcely be the original form, from the occurrence in it of the nasal before the dental. In the original it must have been Parsodas, which would mean "liberal, much giving," from pourus, "much," and da, "to give." Ramates, as already observed, is from rama, "pleasure." It is an adjectival form, like Datis, and means probably "pleasant, agreeable." Susiscanes may be explained as "splendidus juvenis," from quc, "splendore," pres. part, cao-cat, and kainin, "adolescens, juvenis." Tithaeus is probably for Tathaeus, which would be readily formed from tatka, "one who makes." Finally, Zanasanes may be referred to the root zan or jan, "to kill," which is perhaps simply followed by the common appellative suffix -ana.

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From these names of persons we may pass to those of places in Media, which equally admit of explanation from roots known to have existed either in Zend or in old Persian. Of these, Ecbatana, Bagistana, and Aspadana may be taken as convenient specimens. Ecbatana (or Agbatana), according to the orthography of the older Greeks was in the native dialect Hagmatana, as appears from the Behistun inscription. This form, Hagmatana, is in all probability derived from the three words ham, "with" (Sans, sam, Latin cum), gam, "to go" (Zend gd, Sans, 'gam), and ctana (Mod. Pers. -stan) "a place." The initial ham has dropped the m and become ha, and cum becomes co- in Latin; gam has become gma by metathesis; and gtan has passed into -tan by phonetic corruption. Ha-gma-tana would be "the place for assembly," or for "coming together" (Lat. comitium); the place, i.e., where the tribes met, and where, consequently, the capital grew up.

Bagistan, which was "a hill sacred to Jupiter" according to Diodorus, is clearly a name corresponding to the Beth-el of the Hebrews and the Allahabad of the Mahometans. It is simply "the house, or place, of God"--from бага, "God," and gtana, "place, abode," the common modern Persian terminal (compare Farsi-stan, Khuzi-stan, Afghani-stan, Belochi-stan, Hindu-stan, etc.), which has here not suffered any corruption.

Aspadana contains certainly as its first element the root acpa, "horse." The suffix dan may perhaps be a corruption of ctana, analogous to that which has produced Hamadan from Hagma-ctan; or it may be a contracted form of danhu, or dairihu, "a-province," Aspadana having been originally the name of a district where horses were bred, and having thence become the name of its chief town.

The Median words known to us, other than names of persons or places, are confined to some three or four. Herodotus tells us that the Median word for "dog" was spaka; Xenophon implies, if he does not expressly

state, that the native name for the famous Median robe was candys; Nicolas of Damascus informs us that the Median couriers were called Angari; and Hesychius says that the artabe was a Median measure. The last-named writer also states that artades and devas were Magian words, which perhaps implies that they were common to the Medes with the Persians. Here, again, the evidence, such as it is, favors a close connection between the languages of Media and Persia.

That artabe and angarus were Persian words no less than Median, we have the evidence of Herodotus. Artades, "just men" (according to Hesychius), is probably akin to ars, "true, just," and may represent the ars-data, "made just," of the Zendavesta. Devas (Seven), which Hesychius translates "the evil gods" is clearly the Zendic daiva, Mod. Pers. div. (Sans, deva, Lat. divus). In candys we have most probably a formation from qan, "to dress, to adorn." Spaka is the Zendic cpa, with the Scythic guttural suffix, of which the Medes were so fond, cpa itself being akin to the Sanscrit cvan, and so to hvoov and canis. Thus we may connect all the few words which are known as Median with forms contained in the Zend, which was either the mother or the elder sister of the ancient Persian.

That the Medes were acquainted with the art of writing, and practised it--at least from the time that they succeeded to the dominion of the Assyrians--scarcely admits of a doubt. An illiterate nation, which conquers one in possession of a literature, however it may despise learning and look down upon the mere literary life, is almost sure to adopt writing to some extent on account of its practical utility. It is true the Medes have left us no written monuments; and we may fairly conclude from that fact that they used writing sparingly; but besides the antecedent probability, there is respectable evidence that letters were known to them, and that, at any rate, their upper classes could both read and write their native tongue. The story of the

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letter sent by Harpagus the Mede to Cyrus in the belly of a hare, though probably apocryphal, is important as showing the belief of Herodotus on the subject. The still more doubtful story of a despatch written on parchment by a Median king, Artseus, and sent to Nanarus, a provincial governor, related by Nicolas of Damascus, has a value, as indicating that writer's conviction that the Median monarchs habitually conveyed their commands to their subordinates in a written form. With these statements of profane writers agree certain notices which we find in Scripture. Darius the Mede, shortly after the destruction of the Median empire, "signs" a decree, which his chief nobles have presented to him in writing. He also himself "writes" another decree addressed to his subjects generally. In later times we find that there existed at the Persian court a "book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia," in which was probably a work begun under the Median and continued under the Persian sovereigns.

If then writing was practised by the Medes, it becomes interesting to consider whence they obtained their knowledge of it, and what was the system which they employed. Did they bring an alphabet with them from the far East, or did they derive their first knowledge of letters from the nations with whom they came into contact after their great migration? In the latter case, did they adopt, with or without modifications, a foreign system, or did they merely borrow the idea of written symbols from their new neighbors, and set to work to invent for themselves an alphabet suited to the genius of their own tongue? These are some of the questions which present themselves to the mind as deserving of attention, when this subject is brought before it. Unfortunately we possess but very scanty data for determining, and can do little more than conjecture, the proper answers to be given to them.

The early composition of certain portions of the Zendavesta, which has been asserted in

this work, may seem at first sight to imply the use of a written character in Bactria and the adjacent countries at a very remote era. But such a conclusion is not necessary. Nations have often had an oral literature, existing only in the memories of men, and have handed down such a literature from generation to generation, through a long succession of ages. The sacred lore of Zoroaster may have been brought by the Medes from the East-Caspian country in an unwritten shape, and may not have been reduced to writing till many centuries later. On the whole it is perhaps most probable that the Medes were unacquainted with letters when they made their great migration, and that they acquired their first knowledge of them from the races with whom they came into collision when they settled along the Zagros chain. In these regions they were brought into contact with at least two forms of written speech, one that of the old Armenians, a Turanian dialect, the other that of the Assyrians, a language of the Semitic type. These two nations used the same alphabetic system, though their languages were utterly unlike; and it would apparently have been the easiest plan for the new comers to have adopted the established forms, and to have applied them, so far as was possible, to the representation of their own speech. But the extreme complication of a system which employed between three and four hundred written signs, and composed signs sometimes of fourteen or fifteen wedges, seems to have shocked the simplicity of the Medes, who recognized the fact that the varieties of their articulations fell far short of this excessive luxuriance. The Arian races, so far as appears, declined to follow the example set them by the Turanians of Armenia, who had adopted the Assyrian alphabet, and preferred to invent a new system for themselves, which they determined to make far more simple. It is possible that they found an example already set them. In Achaemenian times we observe two alphabets used through Media and Persia, both of which are simpler than the Assyrian: one is employed to express

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the Turanian dialect of the people whom the Arians conquered and dispossessed; the other, to express the tongue of the conquerors. It is possible--though we have no direct evidence of the fact--that the Turanians of Zagros and the neighborhood had already formed for themselves the alphabet which is found in the second columns of the Achaemenian tablets, when the Arian invaders conquered them. This alphabet, which in respect of complexity holds an intermediate position between the luxuriance of the Assyrian and the simplicity of the Medo-Persic system, would seem in all probability to have intervened in order of time between the two. It consists of no more than about a hundred characters, and these are for the most part far less complicated than those of Assyria. If the Medes found this form of writing already existing in Zagros when they arrived, it may have assisted to give them the idea of making for themselves an alphabet so far on the old model that the wedge should be the sole element used in the formation, of letters, but otherwise wholly new, and much more simple than those previously in use.

Discarding then the Assyrian notion of a syllabarium, with the enormous complication which it involves, the Medes strove to reduce sounds to their ultimate elements, and to represent these last alone by symbols. Contenting themselves with the three main vowel sounds, a, i, and u, and with one breathing, a simple h, they recognized twenty consonants, which were the following, b, d, f, g, j, k, kh, m, n, n (sound doubtful), p, r, s, sh, t, v, y, z, ch (as in much), and tr, an unnecessary compound. Had they stopped here, their characters should have been but twenty-four, the number which is found in Greek. To their ears, however, it would seem, each consonant appeared to carry with it a short a, and as this, occurring before i and u, produced the diphthongs ai and au, sounded nearly as e and o, it seemed necessary, where a consonant was to be directly followed by the sounds i or u, to have special forms to

which the sound of a should not attach. This system, carried out completely, would have raised the forms of consonants to sixty, a multiplication that was feared as inconvenient. In order to keep down the number, it seems to have been resolved, that one form should suffice for the aspirated letters and the sibilants (viz., h, kh; ch, ph or f, s, sh, and z), and also for b, y, and tr; that two forms should suffice for the tenues, k, p, t, for the liquids n and r, and for v; and consequently that the full number of three forms should be limited to some three or four letters, as d, m, j, and perhaps g. The result is that the known alphabet of the Persians, which is assumed here to have been the invention of the Medes, consists of some thirty-six or thirty-seven forms, which are really representative of no more than twenty-three distinct sounds.

It appears then that, compared with the phonetic systems in vogue among their neighbors, the alphabet of the Medes and Persians was marked by a great simplicity. The forms of the letters were also very much simplified. Instead of conglomerations of fifteen or sixteen wedges in a single character, we have in the Medo-Persic letters a maximum of five wedges. The most ordinary number is four, which is sometimes reduced to three or even two. The direction of the wedges is uniformly either perpendicular or horizontal, except of course in the case of the double wedge or arrow-head, where the component elements are placed obliquely. The arrow-head has but one position, the perpendicular, with the angle facing towards the left hand. The only diagonal sign used is a simple wedge, placed obliquely with the point towards the right, which is a mere mark of separation between the words.

The direction of the writing was, as with the Arian nations generally, from left to right. Words were frequently divided, and part carried on to the next line. The characters were inscribed between straight lines drawn from end to end of the tablet on which they

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were written. Like the Hebrew, they often closely resembled one another, and a slight defect in the stone will cause one to be mistaken for another. The resemblance is not between letters of the same class or kind; on the contrary, it is often between those which are most remote from one another. Thus g nearly resembles u; ch is like d; tr like p; and so on: while k and kh, s and sh, p and ph (or j) are forms quite dissimilar.

It is supposed that a cuneiform alphabet can never have been employed for ordinary writing purposes, but must have been confined to documents of some importance, which it was desirable to preserve, and which were therefore either inscribed on stone, or impressed on moist clay afterwards baked. A cursive character, it is therefore imagined, must always have been in use, parallel with a cuneiform one; and as the Babylonians and Assyrians are known to have used a character of this kind from a very high antiquity, synchronously with their lapidary cuneiform, so it is supposed that the Arian races must have possessed, besides the method which has been described as a cursive system of writing. Of this, however, there is at present no direct evidence. No cursive writing of the Arian nations at this time, either Median or Persian, has been found; and it is therefore uncertain what form of character they employed on common occasions.

The material used for ordinary purposes, according to Nicolas of Damascus and Ctesias, was parchment. On this the kings wrote the despatches which conveyed their orders to the officers who administered the government of provinces; and on this were inscribed the memorials which each monarch was careful to have composed giving an account of the chief events of his reign. The cost of land carriage probably prevented papyrus from superseding this material in Western Asia, as it did in Greece at a tolerably early date. Clay, so much used for writing on both in Babylonia and Assyria, appears never to have approved itself as a convenient

substance to the Iranians. For public documents the chisel and the rock, for private the pen and the prepared skin, seem to have been preferred by them; and in the earlier times, at any rate, they employed no other materials.