

THOUGHTS ON MAZDAISM AND MAZDAIST SOCIETIES IN  
CENTRAL ANATOLIA AFTER THE FALL OF THE ACHAEMENID  
PERSIAN EMPIRE

AKHAİMENİD PERS İMPARATORLUĞU SONRASI ORTA  
ANADOLU'DAKİ MAZDAİZM VE MAZDAİST TOPLULUKLAR ÜZERİNE  
DÜŞÜNCELER

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## THOUGHTS ON MAZDAISM AND MAZDAIST SOCIETIES IN CENTRAL ANATOLIA AFTER THE FALL OF THE ACHAEMENID PERSIAN EMPIRE

### AKHAİMENİD PERS İMPARATORLUĞU SONRASI ORTA ANADOLU'DAKİ MAZDAİZM VE MAZDAİST TOPLULUKLAR ÜZERİNE DÜŞÜNCELER

Arş. Gör. Okan SEZER

#### Abstract

Our knowledge regarding how Mazdaist communities in Central Anatolia managed to survive, what kind of social organization they used to have and possible alterations over their beliefs after the fall of the Achaemenid Persian Empire is sadly limited. Archaeological evidence and information gleaned from historical records do not provide direct answers to the problems, but instead allow the development of some suggestions. The relationship between the possible independent local beliefs and religions that have had worship of fire at their center, and Mazdaism is another point that deserves serious attention in the search for answers. Most of the information on the subject has been taken from historical records. Historical records—and a small number of archaeological evidence—scattered across different time periods indicate, at its greatest extent, the existence of Mazdaist communities in Central Anatolia as far back as Late Antiquity. This paper aims to evaluate some historical events that occurred after the fall of the Achaemenid Persian Empire in

#### Öz

Akhaimenid Pers İmparatorluğu'nun yıkılışından sonra Orta Anadolu'daki Mazdaizm'e bağlı toplulukların kendilerini nasıl var ettikleri, örgütlenme şekilleri ve inançlarındaki olası değişimin seyri hakkında sahip olduğumuz bilgiler maalesef kısıtlıdır. Arkeolojik kanıtlar ile tarihi kayıtlardan elde edilen bilgiler sorunlara dair doğrudan yanıtlar vermemekte, bunun yerine birtakım önerilerin geliştirilmesine olanak tanımaktadırlar. Merkezinde ateş tapınımı bulunan olası bağımsız yerel inanç ve dinlerin Mazdaizm'le olan ilişkisi, yanıt arayışında ciddi ve dikkat edilmesi gereken bir başka noktadır. Konuyla ilgili bilgi toplamının büyük çoğunluğu tarihi kayıtlardan elde edilmiştir. Farklı zaman dilimlerine dağılmış haldeki tarihi kayıtlar—ve az sayıdaki arkeolojik kanıt—en geniş haliyle Orta Anadolu'daki Mazdaizm'e bağlı toplulukların Geç Eski Çağ'a kadar var olduklarını işaret etmektedir. Çalışmada Akhaimenid Pers İmparatorluğu sonrası yaşanan birtakım tarihi etkinlikler yerel kimlik ve inanç

terms of local identity and belief and to make some suggestions about the history of Mazdaist communities and the possibility of a sect of Mazdaism peculiar to Central Anatolia.

**Keywords:** Mazdaism, Central Anatolia, Kappadokia, Antiquity, the Sassanids, History of Religions.

temelinde ele alınmış, Mazdaizm'e bağlı toplulukların tarihleri ve Orta Anadolu'ya özgü bir Mazdaizm mezhebinin olasılığı üzerine bazı öneriler geliştirilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mazdaizm, Orta Anadolu, Kappadokia, Eski Çağ, Sasaniler, Dinler Tarihi.

## Introduction

Still extant today, Mazdaism occupies a special place in the history of religions. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for its place in the history of religions is its importance at the crossroads of monotheism-polytheism. Some scholars have suggested that it represents one of the earliest monotheistic beliefs/religions<sup>1</sup>. However, as Mazdaism's past does not comprise of a monolithic unity, it needs to be evaluated by developing separate criteria, approaches and definitions for each of the periods in which it thrived in the past, together with its present form, thus indirectly proving that the religion's position on the monotheism-polytheism opposition has changed over time. Even the definitions of dualist character and/or dualist structure —hence polytheistic— for the Sassanid Period —and the corpus of religious texts written in the Pahlavi language of this period— have led to debate amongst scholars, has been suggested the Ahura Mazda-Ahriman (good-evil) balance remains on a logical plane, that it is a kind of spiritual metaphor and does not bear a theological link<sup>2</sup>.

In historical Mazdaism studies, another important topic related to the main character of religion is about possible sects. There are questions as to whether there is an identifiable anomaly/separation leading to sectarianization prior the conquest of Iran by the Rashidun Caliphate, and whether the concept of *zurvan* indicates one of the possible early sects<sup>3</sup>.

Findings unearthed as a result of the excavations at Oluz Höyük, situated within the province of Amasya in North-Central Anatolia as part of Central Anatolia<sup>4</sup>, approximately 25 km southwest of the city center, represent

<sup>1</sup> Monarchic monotheism, which ranks more than one god-goddess and/or divine power in a hierarchical sense, has been defined for a long time, even if not in theological sense, on behalf of religious practices (See Moore, 1912).

<sup>2</sup> Moulton, 1917; Framroze, Bode, Nanavutty, 1952. For an extensive analysis of the problem, where Avesta manuscripts and Pahlavi texts are used, see Boyd, Crosby, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Some scholars have suggested that the concept represents an anomaly that had a wide impact in Late Achaemenid Period, and therefore sectarianization and/or heresy. (See Boyce, 1979: 68). For a comprehensive analysis and opposing view on the problem in which the Old Armenian and Syriac texts are also used, see De Jong, 1997: 330-338.

<sup>4</sup> The borders of the region referred to as *Kappadokia* in historical records generally comprise of the geography within the Kızılırmak River bend, exhibit a dynamic structure. In the period from pre-Hellenistic Period to Late Antiquity, it was divided into more than one sub-region and its borders were sometimes narrowed and sometimes expanded in administrative terms. The aforementioned geographical term refers to the Kızılırmak bend and its vicinity (Fig. 1).

one of the earliest periods in the history of Mazdaism<sup>5</sup>. Complimenting the information obtained from the historical records regarding the existence of Mazdaism in the region, these findings date to the Achaemenid Persian Empire. Aided mainly by historical records from Hellenistic Period and Late Antiquity, suggestions produced in this study are bolstered by the region's earliest known *in situ* Mazdaism related artifacts at Oluz Höyük. Parallel to the “ground zero” settlement, the differences observed in the historical records on behalf of the communities inheriting the Achaemenid Persian Empire, which showed itself partially or indirectly, sometimes directly, with the political developments in the region after the Achaemenid Persian Empire<sup>6</sup>, will be discussed in later chapters on the basis of possible religious differences specific to Central Anatolia that became clear in the late periods.

### Local Identity and Memory

Successive victories by the Macedonian Army under the command of Alexander the Great destroyed the Achaemenid Persian Empire, but the question of who would rule the vast lands gained in a very short time — especially with the death of Alexander— remained unclear. This period led to political and military conflicts with long-lasting effects known as the *Wars of the Diadokhoi*. There is another important detail that can be seen in the picture presented by Central Anatolia amidst the aforementioned uncertainty. After his victory of Anatolia against Achaemenid Persian satraps at the *Battle of Granikos*, Alexander the Great crossed Western Anatolia from north to south<sup>7</sup> and then changed direction to reach *Gordion*, then left the city in the autumn of 333 BC to meet Darius III in the south and advanced south towards *Kilikia*<sup>8</sup>. It is assumed Alexander breached minor local resistance in Western Anatolia, but it is unclear whether he battled local forces to the south of Central Anatolia during this campaign he led prior to the *Battle of Issos*.

In addition, some historians, through some historical records<sup>9</sup>, think that due to other priorities, Alexander neglected Central Anatolia, along with *Paphlagonia* and *Armenia* but that the region passed to the Macedonians after his passing.

Historical records that refer to the defeat of Ariarathes I by Macedonian commanders<sup>10</sup> refute the possibility that Central Anatolia may have emerged relatively unscathed during Alexander's wave of strong military campaign. The region, which probably lost most of its military strength at the *Battle of Granikos*, remained defenseless for a while. Nevertheless, from historical records it is possible to follow that Ariarathes II benefitted from the conflict

<sup>5</sup> Dönmez, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> There is no substantial claim these communities were Persian in origin. The broadest definition that can be made for these communities, which are formed by the unification arising from cultural commonalities, is that they are Eastern.

<sup>7</sup> It is reported that Achaemenid Persian forces that survived the *Battle of the Granikos* with Memnon of Rhodes, took refuge in *Miletos* (Diod. XVII.22.1). Alexander the Great, who did not want to leave the enemy forces behind, may have eliminated a possible power base there before advancing eastward.

<sup>8</sup> For more information, see Heckel, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Diod. XVIII.3.1

<sup>10</sup> Diod. XXXI.19.4

between Antigonus and Seleuchus, when he mustered forces in *Armenia* and overthrew Macedonian satrap Amyntas<sup>11</sup>. It is acknowledged that Ariarathes II, Central Anatolia, especially the region to the north of the River Delice, turned into the semi-autonomous *Kingdom of Kappadokia*.

While the cultural and blood ties of the *Kappadokian* Dynasty that was founded at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE with the former Achaemenid Persian dynasty can be traced through historical records<sup>12</sup>, the *Pontic* Dynasty that was founded by Mithradates I, with the agnomen *Ktistes* (founder) at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE, similarly produced narratives about Achaemenid Persian past<sup>13</sup>. The most famous among them is the one belonging to Mithradates VI (Mithradates the Great). Mithradates the Great claims to be descended from Alexander the Great and Seleukos I Nikator on his maternal side, and Kyros II (Kyros the Great) and Dareios I (Dareios the Great) on his paternal side<sup>14</sup>. Mithradates the Great, who competed for the sovereignty of Anatolia, was introduced by the Romans as the ruler of Ancient Greek and Eastern societies, and it was reported that he had allies ready to obey his every order and formed alliances with the most important rulers of the East<sup>15</sup>.

Historical records, examples of which are presented herein, indicate that Central Anatolia and particularly, North-Central Anatolia (excluding the coastline) were under the influence of Eastern cultures until Roman Period, and contrary to popular view, there were no dominant ancient Greek influences in the region<sup>16</sup>. When the situation is approached in terms of political history, it is no doubt the result of a process that can be considered natural that the geographies/powers actually warring against each other and/or the conflicted geographies/powers wanted to centralize and polarize

<sup>11</sup> Diod. XXXI.19.5

<sup>12</sup> Diod. XXXI.19.1

<sup>13</sup> Diod. XX.111.4

<sup>14</sup> Justin. *Epit.* XXXVIII.7

<sup>15</sup> App. *Mithr.* 15

<sup>16</sup> Although they cannot be used as strong and healthy data in our effort to understand the Antiquity, there were the accounts regarding the region's demographic structure by 19<sup>th</sup> century Western travelers as well as Turkish Ottoman censuses. North-Central Anatolia constitutes the core of the historical *Pontus Kingdom* and the northern half of Central Anatolia. Leaving aside the coastal line stretching from Sinop to Samsun, and apart from the dominant Turkish population, there was a predominant Armenian population, mainly on the Eastern side of the geography in question. For example, as a result of his observations, W. F. Ainsworth stated there were 20 Anatolian Greek and 50 Armenian families living in Vezirköprü, 2000 houses were occupied by Armenians in Tokat (pop. 20,000), 5000 Armenians in Amasya (pop. 18,000), and —as an exception from the south— the non-Muslim population in Kayseri consists of 5,200 Armenians and 1,100 Anatolian Greeks. (See Ainsworth, 1842: VI, 93; XXXVII, 17-18; XXVII, 28; XIV, 222). Although the figures differ from censuses conducted by Turkish Ottoman officials in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, the ratio between the Armenian-Anatolian Greek populations was on a similar course. There were 12,564 Anatolian Greeks and 18,995 Armenians throughout Amasya (Note: today's Amasya province was a sanjak of Sivas province at that time, and districts of Vezirköprü, Havza and Ladik that are part of today's Samsun province were settlements within the borders of Amasya at the same period) 8741 Anatolian Greeks and 16,973 Armenians also resided in Tokat with an additional 4,373 Anatolian Greeks and 71,896 Armenians in Sivas (See Karpas, 1985: 196).

the societies under their rule in the cultural context through hostility<sup>17</sup>. Religion/belief must have an important place amongst the cultural context in question. Available historical records imply that the Romans, who dominated Central Anatolia after the *Mithridatic Wars*, may have granted more privileges to the region compared to other conquered regions. Although regular taxation was the main factor that determines how conquered societies would be treated, how not to contradict Roman laws and ideology was another important factor.

Mithradates the Great's successor, his son, Pharnakes II subsequently attempted to annex some parts of *Kappadokia*. Pharnakes lost his battle against the Roman Army, commanded by Julius Caesar, who took action without wasting time after the attempt, and as a result, was deposed. Julius Caesar was proud of the fact he reached the enemy army confronted it, routing it in quick order<sup>18</sup>. He donated all the loot to his soldiers and erected a victory monument<sup>19</sup>. The Latin source, from which this information was obtained, provides a few more important details regarding the subject. Firstly, that victory monument was erected in front of the monument commemorated Mithradates the Great's victory over Triarius. Secondly, rather than destroying Mithradates the Great's victory monument, Romans overshadowed it with a taller monument instead. The last one concerns not daring to destroy it. The Latin source states that Romans did not dare to destroy the local monument because it was known to be erected in the name of the gods of war.

Although we may never know the exact reason, it is interesting that an empire at the peak of its power did not destroy the local identity and memory in territory it was victorious and ruled over. Moreover, while perhaps the most important of the elements that acierage the local identity and memory in question as staunch anti-Rome, it is not enough or satisfactory to explain this situation as an empire offering some opportunities to the locals in exchange for permanence in a conquered region. It is debatable whether remaining overshadowed was a more effective and period-specific priority method than destruction. However, it is clear that local identity and memory can somehow continue to exist even if it was overshadowed. This method preferred by Rome can help develop some suggestions about the demographic structure of

<sup>17</sup> Although its origin is controversial, the way the faith and/or cult of *Zeus Stratios* was practiced by the Mithradates Dynasty —especially by Mithradates the Great himself— is a good example regarding the aforementioned situation. According to Appianus (App. Mithr. 66), first the kings would carry wood with their hands to a pile on a high hill, then milk, honey, wine and olive oil and lit incense would be placed amongst these piles, which were tightly secured. A banquet table would set on the ground in the name of the offering whereupon the pile of wood was set ablaze. The fire was so bright, it could even be seen by sailors quite some distance away. Because of the immense heat it emitted, no one could go near it for a few days. The ancient author likened the banquet offerings to those held by Persian kings in *Pasargadae*. In this context, contrary to the ancient Greek-Latin influence observed with the region's coinage iconography, the inclusion of some Iranian features of the cult operations — and/or the addition of them— can be construed as the Dynasty's desire to turn the face of the cult of *Zeus Stratios*, which was widely accepted in society, towards the East.

<sup>18</sup> Dio Cass. XLII.48.1

<sup>19</sup> Dio Cass. XLII.48.2

Central Anatolia. In Late Iron Age, particularly during the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>20</sup>, the multicultural structure of the region must have been unified at an intellectual center, facing eastwards, with certain boundaries over time and — of course, faith-based<sup>21</sup>. In territory dominated and, more importantly, desired to be permanent, it was crucial not to attract the reaction of those who constitute the majority among the local community. That is because Rome wanted to dominate was not just land, but territory suitable for tax collection with a regular functioning economy and manpower. Incidents of violence, social unrest, etc. may trigger an exodus, or a rebellion, thereby jeopardizing the targeted tax revenue. In sum, the fact that the monument left intact by a leader whose Eastern side was followed through his own narratives and other records should be concrete proof of the loyalty of the majority in the region to the leader in question, as well as to cultural inputs embodied in this leader. Of course, it is clear that additional evidence is needed for the desired context-suggestion to be captured.

It is quite possible there are those related to faith among the cultural inputs that provide commitment. At this point, the ancient Greek tradition conveyed bears certain importance. After conveying that Persians sentenced to death those who did not respect the sacred fire as desired, and how they offered sacrifices to the elements of nature<sup>22</sup>, Strabo listed the existence of many temples dedicated to Persian gods and magi, called *pyraethi* in *Kappadokia*, and the knowledge that knives were not used during sacrificial ceremonies<sup>23</sup>. The fact that Strabo did not use the phrase “today” in the said passages and that he provided precise information about the Achaemenid Persian Empire in the preceding and succeeding passages caused serious problems in dating them<sup>24</sup>. Although it is unclear whether the information conveyed needs to be dated to the Achaemenid Persian or Hellenistic Period, some scholars tend to date it to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC<sup>25</sup>. If we accept this latter date as correct and *Kappadokia*, which Strabo mentions in these passages, a close neighbor with geographical integrity including North-Central Anatolia and/or similar natural, cultural and administrative characteristics, we will end up completely deleting the local memory and identity of Rome, whereas

<sup>20</sup> In our study, it was suggested that the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE in Central Anatolia be referred to as the *Achaemenid Transitional Phase* (See Sezer, 2019).

<sup>21</sup> We are referring to a kind of mentality specific to the region that developed and settled in over time. In order to better understand its effectiveness and reach, the *Hypsistarii* religion/sect, which Gregory of Nazianzus mentioned his father was a member of, can be cited. Although the region was made open to influences from many different lands and religions in Late Antiquity, the Eastern side was able to preserve itself in some eclectic religious structures. Eastern/Persian faith elements are observed in the sect. (See Ullmann, 1833).

<sup>22</sup> Strab. XV.3.14

<sup>23</sup> Strab. XV.3.15

<sup>24</sup> Strabo mentioned in earlier pages of his work that a temple in which gods and goddesses such as Anahita/Anaïtis, Omanus and Anadatus shared a common altar was erected by Achaemenid Persians in *Kappadokia* (Strab. XI.8.4). It is known that apart from Ahura Mazda, Achaemenid Persians also performed cults and offerings on behalf of many gods and goddesses from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards. It is observed that over time, Ahura Mazda rose to a dominant position amongst the cult ceremonies and offerings made for these ceremonies, some of which are still unclear for which god or goddess they were dedicated to. For more information, see Hallock, 1969; Razmjou, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Boyce, 1979: 85.



the effort to overshadow it instead of destroying (or perhaps cannot destroying it) bears much meaning. Central Anatolia was full of temples and magi dedicated to Eastern divine beings of that time. The fact that they constituted the majority must have prevented Rome, which had the expectation or desire of balancing economic and intra-regional policies, from carrying out tyrannical policies.

In 2007, some archaeological studies were conducted at Amasya-Harşena Fortress<sup>26</sup> where a round-shaped pedestal cavity had been partially carved into a nearby rocky area (Fig. 2). Two well-cut stone blocks were identified adjacent to its western edge. Şevket Dönmez matched the pedestal void in question with the location of the fire altar (Fig. 3) depicted on a bronze coin minted in Amasya (*Amaseia*) during the reign of Severus Alexander (222-235 AD)<sup>27</sup>. The coin depicts the citadel of *Amaseia* as a settlement complex surrounded by walls and consisting of different structures, primarily a temple. It was noticed that the round shaped fire altar next to the temple structure featured four steps. Ş. Dönmez associated the fire altar with Mazdaism and suggested it may have been built during Hellenistic Period<sup>28</sup>.

### **The Sassanids and Second Great Contact with Central Anatolia**

In the early-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, the Sassanid Empire, which revolted against the Arsacid Confederation, captured the historical Iranian geography and its close neighbors, and then turned its attention westwards, achieving the most crushing routs in military campaigns launched against Rome during the same century<sup>29</sup>. The outposts on the eastern border of Rome were burned and destroyed<sup>30</sup>, large and important cities on the trade routes were devastated, and a regional regression of Rome was experienced. These historical events were verified by ancient Latin and Greek sources, and two important Eastern historical records as well. The first of these is an inscription belonging to the second shah of the Sassanid Dynasty. The inscription located in the royal burial ground called *Naqsh-e Rostam*, approximately 10 km northwest of *Persepolis*, provides important historical and geographical information about

<sup>26</sup> Doğanbaş, 2009.

<sup>27</sup> Dönmez, 2013: 35.

<sup>28</sup> Dönmez, *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> For the historical records regarding the Roman-Sassanid Wars in question, see Dodgeon – Lieu, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> The expression “frontier outposts” refers to legion-type military settlements and/or large and complex settlements that host legions. Located on the edge of the Euphrates from north to south the city of *Zeugma* was amongst these settlements. It is still being studied with the help of excavation and other research techniques. Traces of destruction of the Sassanid raids, which are thought to occur in 252/253 AD, were found in the city. However, the fact that the traces in question are found in the old settlements outside the area called *At Meydanı*, where it is assumed the Roman Period legion structure was located, is interpreted as the fact that the city residents took shelter in said structure with high fortifications during the raids whereas the structure survived the raids without serious damage (See Görkay, 2012, 2017). Sadak (*Satala*), another important settlement, has been surveyed under the direction of Assoc. Prof. Şahin Yıldırım with systematic archaeological studies conducted since 2017. Traces of destruction found at an elevation of about -5 m from present level in the area thought to be the center of the legion structure, are associated with the Sassanid raids (interview with Assoc. Prof. Şahin Yıldırım).

the Roman campaigns of Shapur I<sup>31</sup>. The inscription in question was engraved on the exterior of a structure known as *Ka'ba-ye Zartosht*. There is a second important inscription regarding this matter on the same structure. The Mazdaist high priest, so magus, Kartir, who gained a politically important position during the reign of Shapur I and expanded this position in reigns of the next shahs, had inscriptions written in his name, proving his political influence. Kartir, who accompanied Shapur I on his Roman expeditions, wrote of the religious activities he organized beyond the historical Iranian geography on this *Ka'ba-ye Zartosht* inscription<sup>32</sup>. Apart from the other lands and settlements visited by Kartir, the inscription mentioned small settlements in *Kappadokia* and extending as far as *Pontus*<sup>33</sup> where the sacred fire and high priesthood were kept in order.

Information about communities affiliated with Mazdaism continued to emerge from the correspondence of Christian bishops in the following century. These communities with their general characteristics were introduced in one such letter<sup>34</sup>. It reads that oral transmission from father to son was preferred over systematic religious education from a certain book, that fire was worshipped, and that this community had spread throughout the country (*Kappadokia*) with a considerable population. It also reported there was not a story pertaining to the lineage of magi came from the prophet Abraham, but rather, they refer to the name *Zarnuas/Zarnouas*<sup>35</sup> as the founder of the magi

<sup>31</sup> SKZ (See Maricq, 1958); In the lines describing Shapur I's second campaign against Rome (SKZ 10-19), the list of looted settlements in *Kappadokia* begins with *Sadak* (*Satala*) and ends with *Phreata*. *Phreata* is located in the *Garsauritis* division (*praefectura*) of *Kappadokia* in Karl Müller's (or Carolus Müllerus) translation of Ptolemy's work entitled *Geography* (or *Geographike Hyphegesis*, see Müller, 1883: 878). *Garsauritis* almost forms the western end of the 5 southern *praefecturas* lined up from east to west (Strab. XII.1.4). The southwest zone of the *Halys/Kızılırmak Bend* is largely incorporated into *Garsauritis*. In light of this information, it can be suggested that the Sassanid army branch advancing towards Central Anatolia over the Eastern Anatolian plateau followed the route also called the *Old Iranian Road* for a while, turning from northwest to southwest at *Suşehri* (*Nikopolis*) and/or at the previous station in the east, meeting with the main army in south of *Halys/Kızılırmak Bend* (Fig. 4). For alternative suggestions regarding the operation plan implemented by the Sassanid Army in said campaign, see Ensslin, 1949; Potter, 1990.

<sup>32</sup> KKZ 11-13 (See Back, 1978).

<sup>33</sup> There is more than one translation suggestion regarding the inscription (KKZ 11-13). The translation by Michael Back contains the phrase "districts dependent on *Kappadokia*, up to *Pontus*" (See Back, 1978, for English translation of the original text written in Middle Persian/Pahlavi, see Boyce, 1984: 113; Dodgeon – Lieu, 1994: 65). In the other translation proposal, the expression "from the country of *Kappadokia* to *Galatia*" was used (for an opposing view on this suggestion, see Chaumont, 1973). Both expressions point to the *Delice River* and the north of the river, flowing in the southeast-northwest direction –almost– within the *Halys/Kızılırmak Bend* that divides it into two and sometimes determines the cultural and political borders. At this point, I think that the expressions (Strab. XII.3.39) used by Strabo to describe the length of *Amaseia* in the north-south direction are an important indicator. Apart from a general and flexible geographical region such as *Greater Kappadokia*, which it uses for the most extreme point reached in the south, a city and/or settlement such as *Trokmii* is also referred to. My personal view is that the Mazdaist communities Kartir encountered were widely spread in the landward part of North-Central Anatolia. The *Geldingen Plain* and the *Zile Plain*, south of the present day *Amasya* city centre, may have determined the northern limits of the expansion.

<sup>34</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, CCLVIII.4 (See Jackson, 1894: 665).

<sup>35</sup> Some scholars associate the word in question with the Iranian word "*zurvān*" (unlimited time) (See Russell, 1982: 691).

ancestry. This letter also happens to be the last known historical record of Mazdaism-affiliated communities in Central Anatolia.

The population and the existence of the holy fire and magi in Central Anatolia was made known to the Sassanids during the military campaigns of Shapur I, which occurred prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, around the same time the last known historical record of the Mazdaism affiliated communities was registered. Undoubtedly, the Sassanids had information regarding Central Anatolia before said expeditions. In addition to souvenirs remaining from the Achaemenid past, Ardashir I's campaign to Rome may have been among the sources of information. According to historical records, Sassanid troops advancing west through northern Mesopotamia emerged victorious from the clashes with Roman legions, advanced as far as *Kappadokia*<sup>36</sup>, which they briefly occupied. Along with other details, the exact location where the Sassanid invasion took place and which parts of *Kappadokia* it covered has yet to be ascertained.

### Discussion

Leaving aside some exceptions, large and small political organizations that existed during Protohistoric Ages and Antiquity, added one or more religions to their own reasons for existence each time, benefitting from their sacred and unquestionable aspects in order to legitimize their political thesis and sovereignty claims. Some members of the dynasty were promoted to high priesthood, thereby establishing a relationship between religion and political organizations that, in some cases, made them mutually dependent. This process led to the dislocation of religion(s) after the disappearance of the political organization, which was to an extent the protector of religion(s). Case in point, the religions-pantheons of Urartu, who ruled Eastern Anatolia, Armenia and northwestern Iran for about nearly two centuries, disappeared with the Urartu political power, almost without a trace. However, it can not be said that similar results occurred in every instance. Instead of disappearing altogether, the changing conditions in some cases rendered the use of religious structures, theological dogmas and cosmological explanations in the subsequent generations, albeit not as effective as before, thus allowing for large and small reforms to erode and/or corrupt traditional concepts.

While the Achaemenid Persian Empire, which based its right and claim of sovereignty on Ahura Mazda<sup>37</sup> in its oldest written records dating to the reign of Darius the Great, accepted Mazdaism as the official imperial religion, it also linked the legitimacy of this religion in the eyes of the believers, to an extent, to the existence of the empire. The social perception the ruling class wanted to instill was akin to, "whatever is believed is the truth because the Empire exists." If this entity is around religion, it must have progressed in the opposite direction, as "there is an empire because what is believed is the truth." Alexander the Great's expedition to the East and the collapse of the Empire seriously deformed believers' ties with truth in some instances and severed them in others. The reforms proposed to adapt the believers to the

<sup>36</sup> Zonaras XII.15; for the said historical record, see Dodgeon – Lieu, 1994: 17.

<sup>37</sup> Behistun Inscription, *Column I, Row V* (See King, Thompson 1907: 3).

new era and to repair their ties to the truth must have produced debates, disagreements, and ultimately fractionalization (sects).

The dualist mindset that became evident in the later periods of Mazdaism may have made the fall of the Achaemenid Persian Empire one of the important pillars by including it among the reasons for its existence. The fact that an empire was even established directly by means of Ahura Mazda's power and grace could be destroyed must have given birth to the belief that things outside of his rule that could happen, which might defeat Ahura Mazda, and that there was another power in the universe that was at least as strong as him. The fact that Alexander the Great is described with an adjective (*gajastak-guzastag*) reserved for Ahriman in one of the books written in the Pahlavi language<sup>38</sup> can be perceived as a kind of an enactment of the belief in question that developed with a dualist mindset.

It is observed that Central Anatolia cannot be included in this enactment. Donning the robe of Ahriman, Alexander the Great showed himself in *Gordion*, the western border of Central Anatolia, and descended to *Kilikia* from there. Instead of advancing into the interior, he abandoned Anatolia altogether and changing his route, headed towards Egypt. Regarding Mazdaism and Eastern society in the region, there is neither archaeological data nor historical record of a great destruction as was the case of *Persepolis*. While Macedonian commanders dominated almost all this large region around the Delice River and North-Central Anatolia in Hellenistic Period, this dominance was maintained for a short period, as eventually local kings related to the Achaemenid Persian Dynasty established their own local kingdoms by reassuming their sovereignty. Strabo did not mention any dates in the passages in which he presented information regarding Mazdaism and societies belonging to this regional faith. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain whether the narrative was from Late Iron Age or Hellenistic Period and/or contemporary with Strabo. Nonetheless, thanks to the information conveyed in a letter exchange between *Kappadokian* bishops dating to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, the finds recovered from the Oluz Höyük and the sum of the architectural findings<sup>39</sup>, a rough chronological order can now be established in regards of Early Mazdaism<sup>40</sup>, which has now gained a more defined shape, thus making it possible —robustly— that the information provided by Strabo can be dated to Hellenistic Period (which, of course, was Strabo's own time).

There is no official narrative and/or record of how Mazdaism existed in the region under Roman rule. In addition to the correspondence between the *Kappadokian* bishops, a bronze coin dating to the reign of Emperor Severus Alexander is direct evidence of the strong presence Mazdaism and thus of the Eastern society in the region. The coin in question depicts the citadel of

<sup>38</sup> Arda Viraf I.3; I.4 (See Haug, 1872: 3).

<sup>39</sup> Dönmez, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> This statement does not imply a stage in the history of Mazdaism that can be framed and whose formal and theological differences can be determined with later stages of belief. The existence of the earliest archaeological evidence of the belief is emphasized. Nevertheless, scholars of Oluz Höyük excavations underscored the monotheistic and aniconic features in the archaeological evidence, making a technical distinction and indicating the existence of an important early stage, which they called the Early Zoroastrian religion (See Dönmez, 2018: 147).

*Amaseia*, one of the important settlements of the region, with a fire altar inside. Right at this point, the Sassanid historical records, and particularly the Kartir Inscription on *Ka'ba-ye Zartosht*, allow important evaluations to be made.

The Sassanid Empire did not limit itself to military activities alone in its efforts to expand its sovereignty, but also knitted ideological aspects of the sovereignty in question. The title of *Erān-šahr/Iranshahr* (the supreme sovereignty of the Iranians) mentioned in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD inscriptions was attributed to the Sassanid Empire, whereby a common identity was instilled in society. From the narrative Kartir worked into the inscription in question, it is understood that *Iranshahr* was based on Mazdaism belief to define the Iranians by drawing its borders<sup>41</sup>. Along with *Kappadokia*, practically all of Anatolia—remarkably—fell beyond the aforementioned borders. When in fact, Kartir, who participated in the Anatolia campaigns of Shapur I during the same century, was aware of the communities inherited from Achaemenid Persian Empire connected to Mazdaism in *Kappadokia*<sup>42</sup>. Kartir, who says that he put them in order<sup>43</sup> like those in other regions beyond the Iranian (Persian) core, also claims that he subsequently prevented them from being harmed, being captured, as well as enabling captives to return home. However, it seems that these communities did not have enough attributes to remain within the *Iranshahr* sphere, whose boundaries were drawn on the basis of belief. The fact that Mazdaism, which was the official belief of the Sassanid Empire, was applied in a different manner in Central Anatolia could be the biggest reason for this. Although a precise definition of sect for this difference in a theological sense can not be made, and considering the fact that they were not included in a map drawn on the basis of belief, there was the possibility of a conservative and sectarian impulse. Despite the great military routs over Rome, the fact that a strong and permanent Sassanid sovereignty could not be established in Central and Eastern Anatolia can be explained by this sectarian impulse. By the 6th century, it is understood that there was an attempt to move away from sectarianism in the imperial administration. Possibly thanks to the reforms that occurred under the rule of Kavād I and Khosrow I, those who were not affiliated with Mazdaism were also seen as part of the country<sup>44</sup>.

It does not seem possible to prove a probable sectarianization process that existed in the early stages of a past faith and the sects that are the natural result of this, without any doubt, especially with the lack of holistic

<sup>41</sup>Daryaee – Rezakhani, 2016.

<sup>42</sup>KKZ 11-13 (See Back, 1978).

<sup>43</sup>It is not clear what exactly is meant by this expression in the inscription. We are unsure about whether Kartir had the sole will or have a say in the act regarding the said expression that could be understood as “to spruce”, “to improve”, “to put in order”, etc. However, if we accept the information in the inscription that he was turned into *hērbedān hērbed* (*pad mowestān kāmgār ud pādixša*) while he was still an ordinary *ērbed/mōbad/magus*, we should consider that he had considerable influence in many decision mechanisms. Thus, these practices can be considered as an outside intervention in local communities affiliated with Mazdaism. Another risk encountered in efforts to understand the expression is that other possible beliefs that use fire in their rituals and religious officials may be seen/presented as related to Mazdaism. Sassanids may have defined the eclectic beliefs independent of Mazdaism existed since Hellenistic Period, as corrupt elements of Mazdaism.

<sup>44</sup>Daryaee – Rezakhani, 2016: 7.

written sources and archaeological evidence of the period in question. It should be kept in mind that possible data gleaned from future studies might play an important role in shedding light on the problem. However, for now, we can develop some thoughts and suggestions. Other issues that need to be emphasized are the way the problem is handled, specialties and approaches. In interpreting the differences in the past, it is essential to use the theological rules that were finalized in the late periods of the belief examined with theological knowledge. In this regard, definite judgments about whether each faction can be considered as a sect or not can only be reached by non-extant ones. Archaeologists and historians can prove some factions by reaching the differences between periods and regions. With interdisciplinary work where these divergences can be followed, it may be possible to define the shape they will take in the future stages. Even within a monolithic belief, there may be dozens of sub-branches.

Some researchers working on the topic place the emergence of the sects that once existed—and still exist—in Mazdaism, especially Mazdakism, after the conquest of Iran by the Rashidun Caliphate<sup>45</sup>. A piece of data put forward for this proposal is the sectarian break in Mazdaism—and it should also be noted; the orthodoxy center and the heterodoxy periphery - the fact that the texts in which they are narrated were written after the date presented for the relevant historical events and, in connection with it, the failure of the said text writers and the defeat of the Sassanids and, in a sense, Mazdaism, in order to explain the defeat in the face of Islam, such as corruption in religion and sectarianization, is the claim that they may have presented pseudo-anachronistic activities that did not occur in early history. According to the researchers, although it is accepted that Kartir had an influential position in Sassanid palace in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and provided information about some sectarian differences written in his name on *Ka'ba-ye Zartosht*, the absence of additional independent records proving his existence and that he was the founder of the Sassanid Mazdaism, the fact that he is never mentioned again renders the information he presented in his inscriptions unreliable on the topic<sup>46</sup>.

The course and formation dynamics of internal divisions experienced in a certain form of worship, and the set of rules and beliefs protecting them are similar to an extent. The determination of the protective person and/or institution constitutes the last stage in the institutionalization of the belief, and thus, the phase of decline-degeneration of the faith that completes the birth and development stages, begins after a while. Included in the center where power relations are built upon, the faith is flexed out for the sake of large-scale policies, and because the power turns into an instrument used to legitimize its political claims, the belief-based unity among their representatives, the clergy, is disintegrated in probable intra-dynastic factions, resulting in conflicts up to sectarian separation. Each faction in the dynasty required its own clergy. Standing against the weight of the one at the center seems to be possible with a resistance that can be built against it in the outlying regions. In other words, a group having the potential to achieve power

<sup>45</sup> Rezakhani, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Rezakhani, *ibid.*

but is unable to do so, should go into seclusion with their own understanding of religion in order to gather power away from the center.

Looking at the distant past for the origins of possible sectarianization of Mazdaism, it is observed that important historical events dated to Late Antiquity occurred in Central Anatolia. The political tension in Anatolia in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century BC resulted in revolts of the satraps against *Pasargadae* at different dates<sup>47</sup>. *Kappadokia* was one of those rebellious satrapies. A meaningful picture is revealed when these historical events are considered together with the sect formation dynamics in question. Both sides (the satraps and the administration at *Pasargadae*) may well have used faith to justify their political arguments in the eyes of Eastern society and military units, and prove they were right. In the continuation, planting the seeds of sectarianism that would grow over time and/or considering such a probability should be considered reasonable in regards to past readings.

I think that a vast area should be allocated to Anatolia for research on possible past sects within the scope of the history of Mazdaism. Compared to other beliefs, it is understood from Strabo, the Kartir inscription and the correspondence of the *Kappadokian* bishops, that the Central Anatolian Mazdaism-affiliated communities, which survived until Late Antiquity, existed in a privileged state in the Achaemenid noble powers of the Hellenistic Period. Although the historical narrative written in Latin and ancient Greek at focus of power is generally accepted, the fact they had their beliefs noticeably recognized can also be followed within the glimmer of a framework during the subsequent Roman Period. It is known the victories of Shapur I against Rome in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD dealt some quite devastating effects, advancing with his army as far as to Central Anatolia. The fact that a growing power, especially one whose western neighbor was Rome, wanted to make its victories permanent in Anatolia was the result of a natural process that would be considered reasonable. In this regard, all inheritors of the Achaemenid Persian Empire, together with those affiliated with Mazdaism, should have been regarded as a vital advantage for the Sassanid Empire. Nevertheless, from historical events that occurred after Shapur I, it is understood that permanent superiority was never achieved in the region west of the Euphrates. Thus, it becomes possible to regard the information about fire and magi, which Kartir mentioned in his inscription that he "put in order," as evidence to indicate a sectarian difference on the basis of faith and/or a separation at the stage of escalating to a sectarian level.

### Conclusion

It is surely not possible to examine a past belief with insufficient archaeological and written evidence and in its turbulent history, to follow and define probable disintegration that will turn into sectarianism in the future, and to conduct all this entirely under adverse research conditions. Another related important fact, the mordacity of which can be sensed by those concerned at the top of this article, in that despite all these negativities, it is essential for the research realm to develop suggestions and thoughts that can

<sup>47</sup> For more information, see Brosius, 2006: 28-29.

approach simple historical reality with a weight that leaves nothing to speculation.

From the aspect of the topic, information about Late Antiquity Central Anatolian ethno-religious communities mentioned in the Kartir inscription is invaluable, holding a meaningful place in an extended, rough chronological line that can be partially traced. At the same time, the inscription in question confirms the early and the late Western sources, which directly and indirectly report the vast area covered by the total population in Central Anatolia until Late Antiquity, incorporating communities considered to be affiliated with Mazdaism. After his famous Roman campaign, Shapur I aimed to be permanent in Central Anatolia west of the Euphrates, whereas these communities, which were the heirs of the Achaemenid Persian Empire, may have encouraged Sassanids for this purpose. However, what Kartir reported through his inscription indicates that, theologically speaking, these communities fell outside the central/orthodoxy boundary. The fact that the permanent border between the Sassanid Empire and its western neighbor, Roman (and later Byzantine) Empire turned back to and fixed at the Euphrates may be complementary evidence that the communities that were to be squared away were not compatible with the Sassanid orthodoxy. Whether said incompatibility is a sort of sectarian breakaway is a matter worthy of consideration and discussion.

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However, another definite point to be noted here is; the relationship between cults such as *Zeus Stratios*, which features fire worship and/or sanctity at its center, and Mazdaism, whose origin in the region goes back to Achaemenid Persian Empire. Could the cult of *Zeus Stratios* be a sect and/or a corrupted branch of Mazdaism that was formed in the region during the Hellenistic Period? If not, when the Zeus-Ahura Mazda parity, which is generally approved by researchers based on epithets in various ancient Greek texts, is also accepted, was the Mazdaism faith that existed in the region from the beginning, in the manner designed/conceptualized by ancient Greeks and Romans? Or was it another independent faith with the sanctity of fire at its center?

On one hand, there was Central Anatolia, which had a strong Eastern identity, and not having encountered the great destruction experienced in *Persepolis*, and the fact the oral tradition preferred since the beginning in the region's religious structure, with the early Persian center that had experienced great destruction and began to use the written tradition when it reconnected with Central Anatolia suggests that Mazdaism in Central Anatolia, which was quite far from its center, was vital territory as far as possible separations and dichotomy leading to sectarianization is concerned. The fact that archaeological and epigraphic-written evidence is currently insufficient to illuminate the situation deems a systematic examination necessary using ethno-archaeological methods of the related possible cultural remnants of the culture of communities living in the region today and the recent past.



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Figures

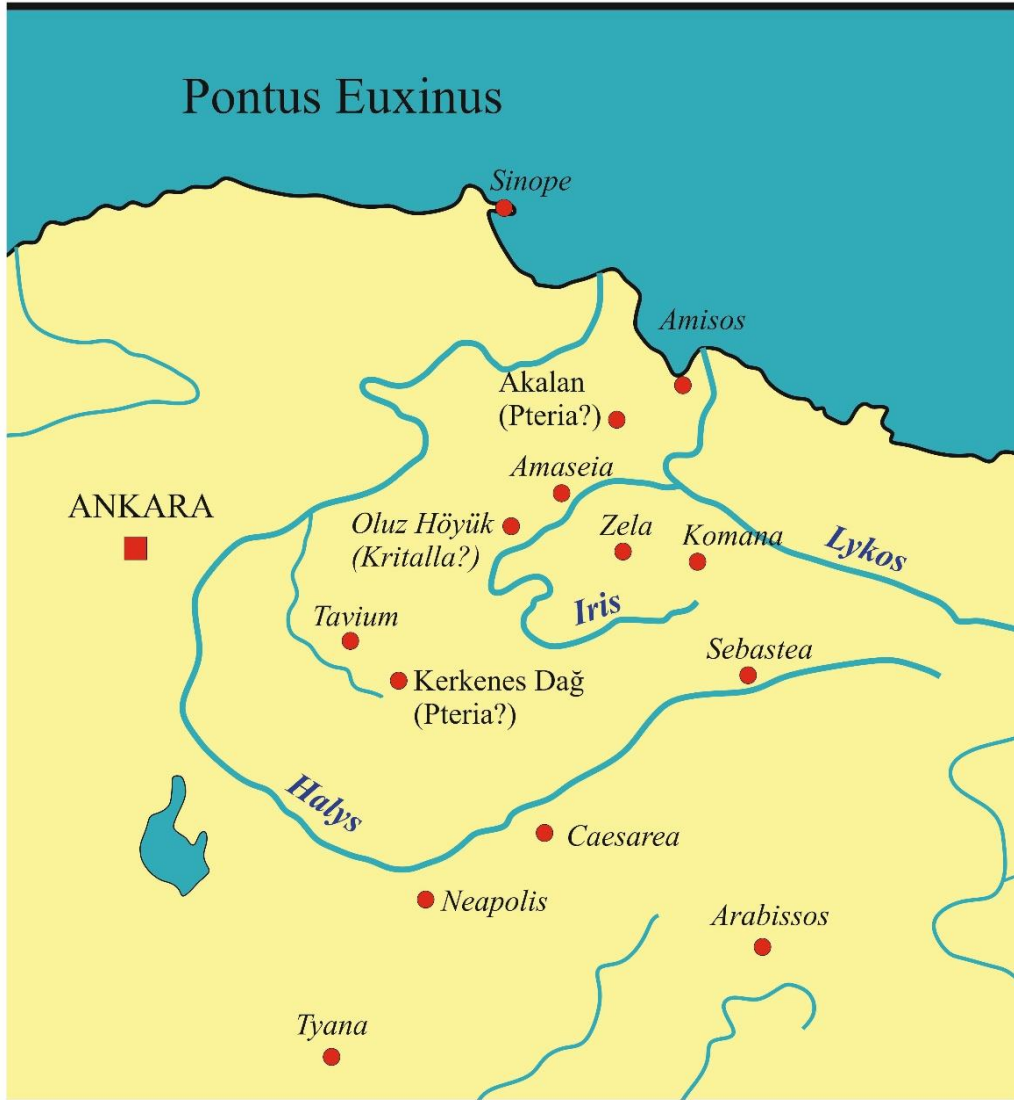


Figure 1: Central Anatolia.



Figure 2: Round-shaped pedestal cavity from Amasya-Harşena Fortress (After Dönmez, 2013).



Figure 3: Bronze coin minted in Amasya and detail of the fire altar (After Dönmez, 2013).

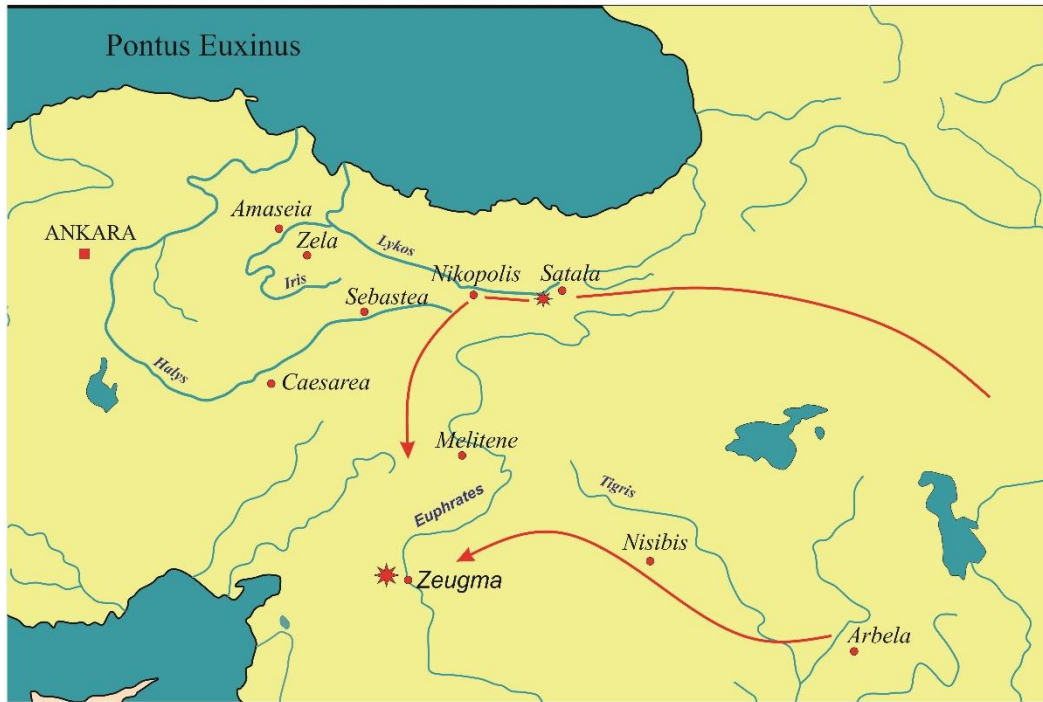


Figure 4: Possible routes of the second campaign of Šapur I against Roman Empire.