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A Spatial Analysis of the Borders of Ancient Armenia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive spatial analysis of the geographical boundaries of ancient Armenia. In antiquity, Armenia represented a significant geopolitical region, encompassing Eastern Anatolia, the Caucasus, and the Iranian Plateau. This article offers a meticulous reconstruction of Armenia's ancient boundaries, employing an integrated methodology that synthesizes ancient and contemporary written sources alongside archeological evidence. Moreover, it presents an in-depth analysis of the political, military, and sociocultural dynamics that have shaped these borders over time. This study investigates the temporal and spatial evolution of ancient Armenia's frontiers, with a particular focus on the Eastern Anatolian region and the implications of historical changes for the region's ethnic and cultural composition. The results indicate that both natural geographical barriers and human interactions were instrumental in delineating the borders of ancient Armenia. Consequently, this spatial analysis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the historical geography of the region and elucidates the complex processes that underpinned its ancient political and cultural boundaries.

Keywords: Armenia, Ancient geography, Exonym, Ancient sources, Iron Age Armenia

Introduction

The boundaries of ancient Armenia were shaped by a complex intersection of geographical, political, and cultural dynamics, and analyzing these factors has become a focus of widespread interest in the study of West Asian antiquity. However, studying the area's boundaries is a field that requires the collaboration of several academic disciplines, including historical geography, classical philology, archeology, ethnography, and linguistics. The spatial analysis of Armenia's ancient borders thus requires an interdisciplinary approach that focuses not only on the geomorphological features of the region but also on the variability of its political boundaries, the impact of its cultural identity, and how these elements were reflected in ancient sources.

This study analyzes the interplay between the determining role of geographical features in the political structures of ancient Armenia and how ancient authors interpreted this geography. Therefore, it presents a comprehensive evaluation from both perspectives. First, the physical geography of ancient Armenia and its impact on the political boundaries of the region requires a thorough analysis of historical geography and regional spatial analysis. Although natural boundary markers such as mountain ranges, valley systems, and riverbeds are thought to have shaped the physical borders of the region, the political role of these borders was much broader. In this sense, major mountain ranges, such as the Taurus and Caucasus, and the Euphrates, Arakses, and Kyros Rivers defined the external borders of the region and formed internal borders that preserved ethnocultural differences within the region. In particular, bodies of water such as Lake Thospitis (now Lake Van) and Lake Urmia functioned as not only geographical barriers but also cultural symbols that determined the relations between the Armenian subregions. Thus, these natural geographical features of ancient Armenia were physical barriers that defined political borders while playing a central role in delimiting specific subcultures and local political structures.

The information from ancient sources on ancient Armenia's borders also plays a crucial role in understanding how geographical analyses were linked to ancient perceptions of the world. Ancient authors such as Herodotus, Strabo, Gaius Pliny, and Ptolemy described the borders of Armenia as outside observers according to the political realities and cultural perspectives of the time. For example, Strabo's description of Armenia in his *Geographica*, in which he uses Eratosthenes' calculations, reflects the perceived authorities of ancient geographical knowledge in the Hellenic world and the way these authorities determined how the region's strategic position was perceived. Conversely, the detailed descriptions in Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* indicate the influence of the border politics of the Roman Empire and imperial discourses of dominance over its peripheral territories. This external perspective in ancient sources emphasizes the geographical elements of Armenia as a frontier while highlighting the region's role as a political buffer between multiple empires. The works

of these external observers help us understand how Armenia's borders were shaped by the geopolitical vagaries of the time and show how the region's physical features were used as political boundary markers.

Another important factor in shaping Armenia's borders is the diversity of political and cultural interactions in the region. During the Persian Empire, Armenia was understood as a regional administrative unit, and its borders were thus defined according to the administrative needs of the Empire. In this context, the satrapal system transformed Armenia into a region with defined external borders but internally independent administrations. However, the Roman Empire's influence in the region redefined the internal borders of Armenia and revealed the differences between Armenia Major and Armenia Minor. This distinction implies a military and cultural restructuring of the region for imperial interests. The presence of different ethnic groups and cultural influences within Armenia also suggests that these boundaries were shaped for political purposes and to preserve cultural identities and the autonomy of subregions.

However, the study on the boundaries of ancient Armenia faces significant historical and methodological challenges. The lack of locally written sources means that the available information is largely based on external observers, thereby emphasizing the biases of ancient authors and the dominant geopolitical perspectives of the time. This increases the influence of a subjective approach in determining the boundaries of a region and makes the fluid nature of border determination even more challenging to reconstruct. However, contemporary archeological evidence and analysis can address this by allowing us to verify or reassess the information provided by ancient sources. Modern spatial analysis techniques provide a deeper understanding of the historical variability of Armenia's borders, revealing the more objective functions of ancient geographical elements in boundary creation.

The spatial analysis of the borders of ancient Armenia thus requires a comprehensive understanding of the interactions between geography, politics, and culture. The region's natural elements are described in ancient sources as physical boundary markers and strategic territorial elements that could be reorganized according to both local and imperial political interests. The analysis presented in this paper will thus revisit the historical evolution of Armenia's borders from the perspective of ancient authors and the influence of geography on the political structure to create a broad overview of how borders were defined in antiquity. In particular, this study will focus on the region of Eastern Anatolia, a key area in terms of ancient Armenia's geography, politics, culture, and historical border disputes.

Ancient and modern sources of ancient Armenian borders

High mountain ranges, river valleys, and gorges, which are prominent natural choices for boundary markers, significantly influenced ancient Armenia's strategic position for multiple empires, including the Roman and Persian empires. In this context, it is essential to also recognize that ancient Armenia's borders had a multifaceted significance that extended beyond their military or political connotations. They also played a crucial role in safeguarding the region's distinctive cultural and ethnic structure.

The Armenian borders were shaped as the product of multilayered geographical, cultural, and political interactions throughout ancient history. This study first analyzes these borders referring to data provided by ancient sources. This study also draws on information from modern sources and findings to analyze the geographical barriers and political factors that shaped Armenia's boundaries.

The Analysis of Ancient sources

The most comprehensive information about the borders of ancient Armenia can be found in the works of Herodotus, Strabo, Pliny, and Ptolemy. However, it is essential to interpret their descriptions in the context of the geographical knowledge and political circumstances prevailing during their respective eras.

Herodotus.[1] In his *Histories* (Ἱστορίαι), written in the late 5th century BC, Herodotus (Ἡρόδοτος, c. 484–425 BC) provides a detailed account of the geographical features that shaped the boundaries of Armenia. Herodotus, described by Cicero as the "Father of History" (*Pater Historiae*), sets out the borders of Armenia in the context of the administrative regions of the Persian Empire. Here, Herodotus states that the Media region surrounds Armenia to the east and the Colchis region borders Armenia to the north (Hdt. III.93; Asheri et al. 2007). The definitions provided by Herodotus were shaped by the administrative arrangements of the Persian Empire during this period. The administrative nature of these arrangements suggest that the borders of ancient Armenia were in constant flux (Dandamaev & Lukonin 2004).

Strabo. In his *Geographica* (Γεωγραφικά), Strabo (Στράβων, c. 64 BC–AD 24) provides a more detailed account of the physical boundaries of Armenia. Using Eratosthenes' (Ἐρατοσθένης, c. 276–195 BC) calculations, he delineated the function of geographical impediments as potential boundary markers (Strab. XI.1ff.). In this context, he states that the Arakses and Euphrates Rivers and the Taurus and Caucasus Mountains were perceived as Armenia's natural boundaries (Roller 2014). Accordingly, Strabo states that the ancient Armenian Kingdom was bordered by the regions of Iberia (part of modern-day western Georgia) and Colchis (also part of modern-day western Georgia) to the north, Media (modern-

1 For more information on the place and importance of Herodotus in ancient historiography, see Demir (2005).

day western Iran) to the east, and Pontus and Cappadocia (modern-day Turkey) to the west. These descriptions demonstrate Strabo's interpretation of the strategic importance of ancient Armenia (Strab. XI.14.1-14.9; Roller 2014; Roller 2018).

Plinius, Tacitus, and the Roman Perspective. Following Strabo, who lived during the Roman period and whose work has served as a source of reference for centuries, were the Roman historians Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus (or Pliny, 23–79 AD) (Anguissola 2021; Anguissola & Grüner 2021) and Gaius Cornelius Tacitus (56–120 AD) (Birley 2000; ten Berge 2023). Pliny and Tacitus emphasize the strategic importance of Armenia between the Roman and Parthian Empires. Additionally, Pliny offers comprehensive geographical descriptions. However, it should be noted that Tacitus' work differs in this respect. In his *Annales*, Tacitus instead elucidates the role of Armenia as a buffer zone for the Roman Empire and how its borders were delineated for this purpose (Tac. *ann*. II.56-60; Syme 1958).

However, Pliny greatly emphasizes the strategic importance of ancient Armenia in his *Naturalis Historia*, providing detailed information on the region's natural resources and their utilization by the Roman Empire. Moreover, he highlights the economic and strategic significance of the region by providing detailed information on the natural resources and military routes of ancient Armenia (Saller 2022). The data demonstrate how the natural and strategic riches of ancient Armenia were instrumental in determining its borders and highlight the region's role as a buffer zone for the Roman Empire. Pliny's information, particularly regarding military passageways and border points, shows that Armenia was strategically positioned on the eastern borders of the Roman Empire for its defensive interests (Plin. *nat*. 6.10; Beagon 2005).

Ptolemy. Ptolemy's (Πτολεμαῖος, c. 100–c. 170 AD) *Geography* (Γεωγραφικὴ Ὑφήγησις) is notable for defining the borders of Armenia according to mathematical coordinates, a feat that marks a significant advancement in cartographic precision. This coordinate system formed the basis of modern geography and allowed for a more precise analysis of Armenia's borders in line with today's geographic information systems (Talbert 2012). Of particular note is the coordinate-related information on Eastern Anatolia, which demonstrates the scientific approach of Ptolemy's geographical observations in his efforts to determine its borders.

Ptolemy subdivided Armenia into 21 subregions, providing detailed descriptions of each, including their cities and subregions. These sub-regional divisions were administrative units recognized by the kings of Armenia at the time (Ptol. V.13.1–22; AŠX. V.21, V.22; Hewsen 2001, p. 64ff.). This reflects the region's geographically and politically complex nature and reveals the historical origins of the weakness of centralized authority.

Movses Khorenatsi. Notably, Movses Khorenatsi (Մովսէս Խորենացի, c. 410–490s AD), regarded as the Armenian Herodotus, is the first known ancient Armenian author to write on the borders of his homeland. His oeuvre, which does not otherwise encompass the temporal scope of this article, is thus pivotal as the inaugural indigenous historical account of the region. His work, *History of the Armenians* (Պատմութիւն Հայոց), provides information about the origins and historical development of the Armenian people. In defining the borders of ancient Armenia, Khorenatsi synthesizes the mythological and historical elements of the region. This work shows how the borders of ancient Armenia were embedded in the Armenian people's collective memory and how these boundaries were culturally defined. Khorenatsi's account thus holistically encompasses the borders of ancient Armenia from a historical, cultural, and mythological perspective (Garsoïan 1989).

Anania Shiragatsi. Anania Shiragatsi's (Անանիա Շիրակացի, c. 610–c. 685 AD) *Ashkarhatsuyts* (Աշխարհացոյց) subdivided Armenia in detail.

As an Armenian scholar, mathematician, and cosmographer who lived in the 7th century, Anania Shiragatsi made distinctive and significant contributions to the historiography of ancient Armenia. His works played a pivotal role in preserving and advancing the intellectual heritage of the ancient Armenian cultural and scholarly tradition of his era. Notably, Anania is renowned for his cosmographic treatises, which compile historical and geographical knowledge. These works systematically address the physical and cultural geography, historical background, and regional significance of ancient Armenia.

Shiragatsi's writings reflect a unique methodological approach to the Armenian historiography of the period, recounting historical events and analyzing their geographical contexts. This integration of geography and history marked a paradigm shift in medieval Armenian historiography, influencing subsequent historians and fostering a model wherein spatial and temporal dimensions were intricately intertwined. Beyond providing chronological data on the history of ancient Armenia, Anania's works also offer insights into the social and political structures of the region (Hewsen 1992; Greenwood 2011)[2].

His contributions are vital for understanding Armenia's position under Byzantine and Sasanian influence. The detailed descriptions and meticulous data presented in his works enhance our comprehension of Armenia's strategic and cultural significance during this period.

2 Greenwood, T. (2011). "A Reassessment of the Life and Mathematical Problems of Anania Širakac'i". Revue des Études Arméniennes, 33, 131-186.
Hewsen, R. H. (1992). The Geography of Ananias of Širak (AŠXARHAC'OYC'): The Long and Short Recensions. Reichert Verlag.

Modern Sources

In recent years, archeological excavations within the borders of ancient Armenia have contributed to the discovery of material cultural elements that were used to define its ancient borders (Zimansky 1995; Badalyan et al. 2003; Smith & Badalyan 2009; Konyar 2006; Konyar 2011; Smith 2012; Siddiq & Işıklı 2024). In particular, the Urartian remains in and around Armenia provide evidence that the country's ancient borders were largely shaped in harmony with natural barriers. These findings also demonstrate that the determination of ancient borders was not solely based on geographical elements but also the presence of military garrisons and settlement networks (Adontz 1970; Hewsen 2001; Badalyan-Smith-Khatchadourian 2010).

A comparison of these sources with ancient material reveals that the two primary sources for defining ancient Armenia's borders often overlap. For instance, Strabo's identification of the Caucasus and Taurus Mountains as natural boundaries aligns with contemporary spatial analyses highlighting their strategic crossing points (Roller 2014). However, it is essential to note that contemporary geopolitical concerns and external perspectives shaped the definitions present in the ancient sources. The fact that the Roman Empire saw Armenia as a buffer zone to strengthen its borders and that ancient authors like Pliny defined the region's borders according to these interests point to a political perspective that can differ considerably from the geographical realities presented by modern scientific data.

Identifying the borders of ancient Armenia with modern archeological technologies contributes to our understanding of the impact of geographical features on border definitions and reveals how political and cultural factors shaped these borders. Although ancient authors identified mountains, rivers, and valleys as natural boundary elements[3], modern spatial analysis techniques have demonstrated that these boundaries were also utilized as economic and military transit areas. Evidently, the borders of ancient Armenia were shaped by not only physical geography but also the military and political dynamics of the period.

Eastern Anatolia and historical ancient Armenia borders

The physical geography of the *high country*[4]

Eastern Anatolia, or the "*high country*" (Erinç 1953, p. 1), is of significant geographical importance, as it encompasses the mountain ranges that extend east to west along the Anatolian Peninsula's north and south axes before reaching their highest peaks and converging. The

3 Strab. XI.14.4-6; Plin. *nat.* VI.10.27-28; Tac. *ann.* II. 56; Ptol. V.13.1-4; Xen. *Anab.* IV.4.3-4; Pomp. Trog. XLII.2

4 The term "high country," first used by the geographer Sırrı Erinç (1953, p. 1), succinctly encapsulates the elevated region of Eastern Anatolia, which is akin to an autonomous entity in its own right, separated from the Anatolian Peninsula by its topography.

region's high altitude and rugged topography have been pivotal in forming natural borders, serving as a natural defense line against external expansionist forces throughout history. This geological uplift both determined ancient geographical boundaries and reinforced the region's historical and strategic importance (Burney & Lang 1971, p. 7; Tarkan 1974, p. 7; Atalay-Mortan 2006, p. 441; Çiğdem-Can 2006; Işıklı-Can 2007).

The geographical structure of the high country significantly influenced the formation of the surrounding natural environment and the development of local social and economic processes. The region's dominant geomorphological features, climatic conditions, and vegetation have significantly influenced the population density, the organization of agricultural production, and the development of transportation networks. As emphasized by Erinç (1953) and Işıklı (2005), this natural structure has been a fundamental dynamic that has guided the region's history in terms of both opportunities and constraints (Erinç 1953, p. 1; Işıklı 2005, p. 20).

The Eastern Anatolia Region is Turkey's most extensive geographical area, covering 163,000 km² (Atalay & Mortan 2006, p. 441; Arınç 2011, p. 1). The region's modern borders were formally defined at the First Turkish Geography Congress in 1941. These utilized the North Anatolian Mountains to the north, the Euphrates and Kızılırmak Rivers to the west, the Southeastern Taurus Mountains to the south, and the political borders of Turkey to the east. The region extending from the Hakkâri Mountains to the Iraqi border now endows Eastern Anatolia with strategic geopolitical importance as it shares borders with five countries (Erinç 1953, pp. 1-2; Atalay & Mortan 2006, p. 441).

This demarcation also needs to reflect the historical and cultural integrity of the region. Notwithstanding the geographical boundaries, the northeastern part of the high country should be considered a subcultural region due to its historical and cultural ties with Transcaucasia[5] (Erinç 1953, pp. 2-3; Erzen 1992, pp. 15-16; Hewsen 1997, p. 2; Işıklı 2005, pp. 21-22; Işıklı 2010, p. 15). The area's geographical and cultural richness has resulted in a significant sphere of influence, which is evinced in its social structure and cultural interactions throughout history.

The high country is most distinguished by its elevated topography. The average altitude of Central Anatolia is approximately 1,100 m. However, in Eastern Anatolia, this almost doubles to 2,000 m. Furthermore, it should be noted that this is merely an average value applicable to the relatively flat areas within the region. Eastern Anatolia thus truly earns its moniker as "*high country*," with vast plains above 2000 m and a distinctive geographical profile (Erinç 1953, p. 2; Tarkan 1974, p. 8; Hewsen 1997, p. 5).

5 For a more comprehensive examination of this subject and the concept of the Trans-Caucasus-Eastern Anatolia Cultural Region, please refer to the following sources: Işıklı (2005, pp. 21-22; 2010, p. 15; 2005; 2010.).

A predominantly harsh continental climate characterizes the high country. The specific morphological structures have played a pivotal role in the formation of these harsh climatic conditions. This is particularly evident in the interior and eastern areas of the region. The winters in Eastern Anatolia are characterized by prolonged periods of cold, snowy conditions, whereas the summers are relatively short and hot (Erinç 1953, p. 20; Tarkan 1974, pp. 11-12; Atalay-Mortan 2006, p. 457).

These climatic characteristics have significantly determined the region's vegetation, agriculture, settlement patterns, and daily life and have shaped its socioeconomic dynamics throughout history. The forest cover in Eastern Anatolia is richer than that in Central Anatolia. The region's upper limit of forest cover is 2800 m, which contributes to the region's status as a natural resource. Several ancient sources, from Aššur to Xenophon, have highlighted the richness of these forests. However, throughout history, the forests have suffered significant degradation due to human exploitation. Furthermore, the extensive alpine meadows, plateaus, and depressions have rendered Eastern Anatolia an optimal habitat for pastoral communities and agriculture (Erinç 1953, pp. 4-5; Erzen 1992, p. 20; Belli 1996, p. 633).

Despite the challenging climatic and geographical conditions, the geomorphological structure of the high country provided favorable ecological niches for settlements through its plains and basins. From the fourth millennium BC onward, there was a notable concentration of pastoral communities in these plains, which directly impacted the region's cultural and political structure (Çiğdem-Can 2006; Işıklı-Can 2007; Işıklı 2010; Işıklı 2015, p. 55ff.; Pekşen 2018[1]; Pekşen 2018[2]). The mountainous and rugged terrain formed a dispersed, confederative sociopolitical order with weak central authority. Consequently, Eastern Anatolia was historically considered a peripheral region susceptible to external penetration by foreign powers (Erinç 1953, p. 73; Lang 1970, p. 27, 3; Işıklı 2005, p. 20; Çiğdem-Can 2006, Işıklı-Can 2007; Bournoutian 2011, p. 15; Grousset 2019, pp. 17, 20). The region, which was organized as a satrapy under Persian sovereignty (c. 585–330 BC) after the fall of the Urartian Kingdom (c. 860–585 BC), retained this fragmented structure of various feudal authorities even during the Armenian Kingdom (331 BC to 428 AD). This illustrates that the structural disadvantages of geography have had a detrimental impact on the political stability and unity of the region throughout history.

Eastern Anatolia from Protohistory to the Middle Iron Age[6]

In antiquity, the region now known as Eastern Anatolia was characterized by dynamic geography and politics, with shifting boundaries and a multiplicity of exonyms. Ancient written sources, particularly Mesopotamian documents, frequently emphasized the region's high altitude and rugged topography. The first written sources from the protohistoric periods reveal Eastern Anatolia's complex geographical structure and strategic importance.

Relations between protohistoric Mesopotamian civilizations and Eastern Anatolia were generally shaped by military expeditions, exploitation, and plunder. Its mineral deposits and natural resources were subject to repeated plunder and capture by Mesopotamian powers during their expeditions to the region. The confederative local structures were also subjected to taxation, which further impeded the development of a central authority. Consequently, Eastern Anatolia remained an unstable border region susceptible to exploitation and control by external powers throughout protohistory.

The earliest surviving documents on Eastern Anatolia are found in sources from Aššur, a Mesopotamian civilization. These sources refer to the region by various eponymic names and emphasize its high altitude. During the Middle Kingdom of Aššur (1400–1050 BC), under the reign of Šalmanesser I (1274–1245/1263–1234 BC), the first plundering expedition was organized (ARAB I: 112; Messerschmidt 1911, no. 13; Luckenbill 1912, pp. 40, 226; Erzen 1992, p. 24; Çilingiroğlu 1997, p. 16; Kuhrt 2010, pp. 457, 460).

During this period, the kings of Aššur[7] organized increasingly frequent expeditions to the region stretching from the southern borders of Eastern Anatolia to the basin of Lake Van. During these expeditions, information about the physical geography, vegetation, and sociopolitical structure of the region was recorded (Piotrovskiĭ 1967, p. 2; Tarhan 1978, p. 145; Barnett 1982, p. 329; Russel 1984; Çilingiroğlu 1984, p. 30; Çilingiroğlu 1994, pp. 5-6; Salvini 2006, p. 30; Salvini 2011, p. 77; Köroğlu 2011, p. 21; Pekşen 2018[1]; Pekşen 2018[2]; Konyar 2022; Pekşen-Topaloğlu 2024). The Assyrian sources use the terms "Uruadri" and "Uruatri," along with the designation "Upper/Mountainous Country," which collectively encapsulate the region's distinctive topographical characteristics. These records show that Eastern Anatolia's rich natural resources were exploited frequently and that the region remained open to the control of foreign powers throughout protohistory (Lehmann-Haupt

6 The period between 1300 and 900 BC is considered the Protohistoric or Early Iron Age of Eastern Anatolia. This period, for which the only surviving source of information about the region are Near Eastern written artifacts, ended with the reign of Sarduri I (840–330 BC), one of the founding kings of the Urartu Kingdom, which united the region under one ruler (Belli 1978, p. 45; Erzen 1992, p. 27; Kuhrt 2010, pp. 228, 457; Salvini 2011, p. 76; Dönmez 2016, p. 3). Meanwhile, the Middle Iron Age is c. 900–600 BC.

7 For other Aššur kings who organized expeditions to eastern Anatolia, see Luckenbill (1926; 1927), Grayson (1972; 1976; 1987; 1991; 1996), and Frayne (1993).

1928, pp. 60-61; Adontz 1946, p. 28; Melik´išvili 1960, p. 69; Loon 1966, p. 6; Salvini 1967, pp. 24, 32; Piotrovskiĭ 1969, p. 43; Tarhan 1978, p. 87; Sevin 1979, p. 105; Barnett 1982, p. 329; Belli 1982, p. 139; Pehlivan 1991, pp. 1-28; Erzen 1992, p. 24; Çilingiroğlu 1994, p. 62; Konyar 2022).

The region's mountainous geography made political control difficult. Nevertheless, the attraction of its resources led the Aššur kings to capture these riches. During these attacks, the rugged terrain further prevented the development of a centralized authority and increased the dispersed political structure. Modern sources describe this political structure as the "Proto History of Urartu" (Loon 1966, p. 6) or the "Archaic Age of Urartu" (Tarhan 1986, p. 285; Erzen 1992, p. 24).

In the Early Iron Age, the region was mainly composed of pastoral and village communities organized into tribes or small "kingdoms." However, the ethnic origins of these groups are not clear (Köroğlu 2011, p. 17ff.; Zimansky 2011, p. 86; Konyar 2022). These "kingdoms," which were often conquered and plundered by Aššur, were independent and scattered. It is unclear whether they shared the same culture and beliefs. This structure would characterize the whole of the Early Iron Age in Eastern Anatolia (Tarhan 1978, p. 44; Salvini 2006, pp. 28-34; Zimansky 1985, pp. 48-50; Erzen 1992, p. 25; Çilingiroğlu 1997, p. 16ff.; Kuhrt 2010, pp. 225-226; Köroğlu 2011, p. 20ff.; Emir & Çiğdem 2017; Pekşen 2018[1]; Pekşen 2018[2]).

The Aššur raids, which spanned nearly four centuries, concluded with the advent of the Urartu Kingdom (840–830 BC), the inaugural centralized authority in Eastern Anatolia (Belli 1978, p. 45; Erzen 1992, p. 27; Kuhrt 2010, pp. 228, 457; Salvini 2011, p. 76; Dönmez 2016, p. 3; Emir & Çiğdem 2017; Çiğdem-Topaloğlu 2018, p. 417). This political transformation also led to changes in the region's nomenclature. The exonym *Uruatri*-Nairi (Salvini 2011, p. 76; Salvini 1995, p. 22; Çilingiroğlu 1997, p. 18ff.) used in Aššur sources was replaced by the endonym *Bianili* (bi-a-i-na-ú-e), used by the Urartians in their own language (Salvini 2006, p. 28ff; Kuhrt 2010, p. 226). Thus, the evolution of Urartu from a confederation to a centralized kingdom redefined the political and cultural identity of the region.

The fall of Urartu and the rise of the Persian-Achaemenid Empire

The fall of the Urartian Kingdom[8] (c. 585 BC)[9] (Kalkan 2008, p. 28; Salvini 2006, pp. 94; Sevin 2012, p. 363), followed by the collapse of the Aššur Empire[10] (609/612 BC) (Yakar 2007, p. 67), resulted in a profound political vacuum and widespread chaos in Eastern

8 For a recent publication on the history of the Urartu Kingdom, the glorious kingdom of Eastern Anatolia, see Konyar (2022).

9 For discussions on the process of the Urartian Kingdom's withdrawal from the historical scene, see Zimansky (1995, p. 99), Salvini (2006, p. 128), Rollinger (2008, pp. 51-65), and Sevin (2012, p. 352).

10 The Aššurids, like their rivals the Urartians, were vanquished by the ascendant warrior powers of the Near East, namely the Scythian, Median, and Babylonian alliance (Yakar 2007, p. 67).

Anatolia. Although the disappearance of the Urartians meant the end of the central authority in the region, the people who had lived under Urartian rule continued to exist (Rice 1957, p. 45; Olmstead 1963, p. 424; Salvini 2006, p. 128). In Babylonian sources of the period (609/610, 605–562 BC), the region is consistently referred to by the exonym Uraštu (Wiseman 1956, pp. 64ff.; Kuhrt 2010, p. 239; Salvini 2006, p. 129).

Following the collapse of Urartu, a transitional period of approximately two centuries ensued, during which the region was deprived of political stability. Subsequently, the Late Iron Age (600–330 BC) commenced with the Post-Urartu (Median) period (Xen. *Cyrop*. III.3.5) and was followed by the advent of the Persian-Achaemenid rule (Işıklı-Parlıtı 2019, p. 183; Wiesehöfer 2003; Can 2007; Sevin 2019, p. 9). The advent of this new period saw the region's cultural and political structure undergo significant transformation under the Persian-Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC).[11] This empire became the largest political power the world had ever seen, with vast territories extending to the Near East, India, Egypt, Anatolia, and Greece (Hewsen 2001, p. 29; Kuhrt 2010, p. 353).

During this period, Eastern Anatolia was named "Armina" or "Armenia" by the Persians and the region was reorganized within the framework of the Persian administrative system (DB 2.33–63). This region, which was previously defined by exonyms such as Urartu, Uraştu and Nairi, was now known by a name based on geography. "Armenia" began being used in epigraphic documents, and it was later widely adopted in ancient Hellenic and Roman sources. Although the administrative structure of the region changed under Persian rule, Hellenic sources mention various peoples living in this geography for the first time. Thus, Eastern Anatolia's ethnic and cultural diversity became more visible in the ancient world. Among these many groups were the Saspeiroi/Saspeirs (Hdt I.104.1, 110, 3.94, 4.37, 40, 7.79; Strab. XI.14.12; Xen. *Anab*. VII.8.25), Alarodioi (Adontz 1970, p. 352), Matienoi (Strab. XI.7.2), Khaldaoi (Hdt. I.28.1; Xen. *Anab*. IV.3.4, 5.35, 7.15-18; Strab. VII.3.28, XI.14.5, XII.3.19, 28), Chalybes (Xen. *Anab*. V.5.1; Plin. *nat*. 6.3.11), Mardioi (Strab. XI.8.8), Phasianoi (Xen. *Anab*. IV.6.5), Taokhoi (Xen. *Anab*. IV.7.), and Carduchians (Xen. *Anab*. III.5.16; Diod. XIV. 27.4). The people mentioned in the Hellenic sources provide an important indicator of the ethnic and cultural diversity of Late Iron Age Eastern Anatolia. The data presented here thus offer a robust critique of the current claims that ancient Eastern Anatolia was characterized by a homogeneous ethnicity (Dönmez 2016).

After the Persian Empire conquered Babylon, its greatest rival in the Near East, it developed an effective administrative system to manage its vast borders. The empire successfully managed communities of different ethnicities, cultures, and beliefs in the vast territories it conquered. The Persians gave new opportunities to local elites by guaranteeing continuity

11 For a critique of the negative presentation of the Persian/Achaemenid Empire under the influence of classical Hellenic and Roman sources, see Rollinger (2022).

to the peoples they defeated, and, as did Babylonia, they strengthened communities' loyalty to the new government by granting certain powers to local rulers (Kuhrt 2010, p. 371). This flexible administrative approach facilitated the coexistence of disparate peoples and ensured the maintenance of stability across the vast expanse of the empire. The administrative model designed by the Persian Empire to govern its vast territories thus continued the deep-rooted imperial traditions of Mesopotamia. In this system, called satrapy,[12] satraps appointed from the center carried out administrative, military, and tax collection functions on behalf of the emperor and ensured the flow of bureaucracy and intelligence (Hdt. III.89.1; Olmstead 1948, p. 59; Frye 1976, pp. 102ff., 112ff.; Brosius 2006, p. 20; Schmitt 2014: EnIr: AchamenidDynasty; Rollinger 2023, p. 289ff.).

However, the assassination of Cambyses II's brother Bardiya (or Smerdis) and the subsequent events led to significant chaos in the Persian Empire. During this period of uncertainty, many subjects rebelled and tried to turn the situation in their favor. Amid these conflicts, which erupted in 522–521 BC, Dareios I (Dārayavauš, also spelled Darius, 522–486 BC), who was thought to have seized the throne under dubious conditions (Kurht 2010, pp. 378–379; Axworthy 2016, pp. 35–36), succeeded in suppressing these rebellions with the support of the elite group known as the "Seven" (Cook 1983, p. 53) and became the new emperor (Hdt III. 67.1ff., 88.3ff.; Olmstead 1948, p. 107ff.; Cook 1983, p. 53). Dareios I provided an early example of the future "system of nations" by successfully establishing the coexistence of different ethnic groups and cultures in the vast territories he conquered (Hdt. III.67-88; Olmstead 1948, p. 107ff.; Frye 1976, p. 94ff.; Brosius 2006, p. 14ff.).

Continuing the imperial traditions of Mesopotamia, Dareios detailed his suppression of rebellions and consolidation of his throne in the Behistun Inscription (520/519 BC). This epigraphic text functioned as propaganda that reinforced his actions and legitimacy through its narrative. The Behistun Inscription should be regarded as a *res gestae* (Cook 1983, pp. 52, 68) of Dareios' political powers (Olmstead 1948, p. 107ff; Root 1979, p. 59ff; Casabone 2007, p. 24; Brosius 2006, p. 20), which he used to legitimize his controversial rule and re-establish central authority. "Armina" (Xen. *Cyrop*. III.3.5), which came under the rule of the Persian-Achaemenid Empire after the Medes, is listed in the Behistun Inscription among the 23 countries/satrapies under the empire (DB I. 15; King-Thompson 1907, p. 50):

King Darius says, "These are the provinces that are under me, and I have become their king by the favor of Ahuramazda[13]: Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, [the] Sea [i.e., its islands], Lydia, Ionia, Media, Armenia [Armina], Cappadocia, Parthia, Drangiana,

12 Per: *χšaçpāvan*, *ksaçapavan*, Hell: *σατράπης*: *strapes* (Protector of the Empire). See Jacobs (2011: EnIr: Achamenid Satrapies).

13 [illegible]: *Ohrmazd*, *Harzoo*, *Hormazd*, *Hourmazd*, *Hurmuz Ahûra Mazdâ*, "Lord of Knowledge" (Wilkinson 2008, p. 148–152).

Aria, Chorasmia, Bactria, Sogdiana, Gandara, Scythia, Sattagydia, Arachosia, and Maka—twenty-three countries in all" (King-Thompson 1907, p. 4).

Dareios I also recounts his conflict with Armenia, which is listed as a region that rebelled against the empire during the civil war he faced in the early years of his reign. This struggle lasted for about a year and a half (Potts 2006/2007, pp. 133–146):

King Darius says: "I sent my servant, an Armenian named Dâdaršiš, to Armenia and instructed him: 'Go, destroy this army that has rebelled and does not recognize my authority.' So Dâdaršiš set out. When he arrived in Armenia, the rebels gathered and marched forward to engage Dâdaršiš in battle. They fought at a place called Zuzza in Armenia. Ahuramazda brought me aid; with the help of Ahuramazda, my army completely defeated the rebel army. On the eighth day of the month Thûravâhara [20 May 521 BC], [14] the battle was fought by them …. The rebels gathered for a second time and marched against Dâdaršiš to engage in battle. They clashed at a fortress called Tigra in Armenia. Ahuramazda brought me assistance; by the favor of Ahuramazda, my army completely defeated that rebel force. The battle took place on the eighteenth day of the month Thûravâhara [30 May 521 BC][15] …. The rebels assembled for a third time and mobilized to fight against Dâdaršiš. They engaged in battle at a fortress called U[yam]â in Armenia. Ahuramazda provided assistance; by the favor of Ahuramazda, my army thoroughly defeated the rebel force. The battle occurred on the ninth day of the month Thâigaciš [20 June 521 BC].[16] Then Dâdaršiš waited for me in Armenia until I arrived in Media …. I sent my servant Vaumisa, a Persian, to Armenia and instructed him, 'Go and strike down the army that has rebelled and does not recognize my authority.' Vaumisa then set out. Upon his arrival in Armenia, the rebels gathered and advanced to fight against Vaumisa. They engaged in battle at a place called I[zal]â in Aššur. Ahuramazda provided assistance; by the favor of Ahuramazda, my army decisively defeated the rebel force. The battle took place on the fifteenth day of the month Anâmaka **[**31 December 522 BC**] ….** The rebels regrouped for a second time to fight against Vaumisa. They clashed at a place called Autiyâra in Armenia. Ahuramazda provided assistance, and by the favor of Ahuramazda, my army completely defeated the rebel force. The battle occurred at the end of the month Thûravâhara [11 June 521 BC]. Vaumisa then awaited my arrival in Armenia until I reached Media." (King-Thompson 1907, pp. 26–30; Vogelsang 1998, p. 197).[17]

As the text indicates, Dareios I first engaged in battle with Armenia using a Persian commander, Vaumisa, followed by an Armenian commander, Dâdaršiš, who remained loyal

14 https://www.livius.org/sources/content/behistun-persian-text/behistun-t-15/

15 https://www.livius.org/sources/content/behistun-persian-text/behistun-t-16/

16 https://www.livius.org/sources/content/behistun-persian-text/behistun-t-17/

17 The reckonings of the dates are based on those of "Behistun, Persian Text," *Livius*, February 22, 2019, accessed November 27, 2024, https://www.livius.org/sources/content/behistun-persian-text/.

to him and likely served in the Persian army. On 31 December 522 BC, Vaumisa secured a victory at Izalâ in Aššur, within the modern Tur Abdin hill complex. Subsequently, on May 20, 521 BC, Dâdaršiš defeated his fellow Armenians at Zuzza. Ten days later, Dâdaršiš achieved another victory at the fortress of Tigra. That June, Vaumisa won a second victory in the Autiyâra region of the Tiyari Mountains and Dâdaršiš declared a third victory at the fortress of Uyamâ.

However, these military victories were of limited importance, as both Vaumisa and Dādaršiš were unable to completely suppress the resistance in the region, and Dareios himself finally had to intervene. This shows how strong the resistance in Armenia was and that the Persian commanders had difficulty fully controlling local uprisings. Dareios' intervention was therefore critical to the complete suppression of the revolt (Olmstead 1963, p. 114).

Furthermore, it is challenging to ascertain the precise and locations of the satrapies and other places listed in the inscription (Cook 1985, p. 256; Wiesehöfer 2003, p. 101; Bournoutian 2006, p. 20). Although governing extensive territories, the Persian Empire under Dareios I continued to foster collaboration with local authorities, conferring upon them a degree of autonomy. This approach emphasized a governance model based on voluntary obedience and cultural integration rather than delineating clear borders (Casteluccia 2019, p. 57). This model represents a pioneering approach to administration, marking a departure from the centralized and oppressive styles previously observed in the Near East. The Persians' flexible administrative organization served as a prototype for subsequent empires, thereby establishing a lasting legacy of cultural integration.

The following suggestions are put forth regarding the localization of Izalâ in Dareios's inscription. The toponym "Izalla" or "Azalla," which originated in the Aššurian period, has survived in classical sources and the Syriac Izlō (or Tūrā d-Izlō) Izala. Accordingly, Izalâ is identified as part of the Tūr Abdīn[18] mountain range and is traditionally situated to the west of Mardin in the Assyriological literature. An alternative interpretation is that the mountain range refers to Nusaybin, or the "rugged mountains in Mardin." Nevertheless, the prevailing view among scholars of Syriac sources is that Izlō corresponds to the mountain's southeastern slope between Nusaybin and Idil, which is identified on modern maps as Mount Dibek. Nevertheless, the earliest Assyrian reference to Izalla's geographical location indicates that it is situated in the region of Turo d-Malbash (Mount Dibek) (Olmstead 1963, pp. 113–114; Radner 2006, p. 292ff.; Demir 2014, p. 194). The term "Autiyāra" is also used in the text to denote a geographical area situated at the transition zone between the Tūr 'Abdīn region to

18 A low mountain plateau in southeastern Turkey, Tur'Abdin is part of the Anti-Taurus mountain chain. The Tigris River bounds it to the north and east, the Mesopotamian plain to the south, and Mardin to the west. In Roman times, it was known as Mons Masius or Izla and was part of the province of Mesopotamia. Tur'Abdin means "Mountain of the Servants of God" in Syriac (Keser-Kayalp 2018, pp. 1530-1531).

the east and the northern region along the Tigris River. This area is located between Aššuria and Armenia's interior. Meanwhile, the locations of the Zuzza and Uyamâ fortresses are unknown. However, the Tigra fortress is known to be located in the Upper Tigris valley (Demir 2014, p. 194).

Although the Behistun Inscription details the Persian army's response to the uprisings in Armenia, it does not provide sufficient information on the nature of the Armenian forces organizing the resistance, who their leaders were, and whether they were led by a central force or a combination of local forces. Dareios' description of Dâdaršiš as an "Armenian" in his inscription creates uncertainty as to whether he is referring to his ethnic origin or only to the geographic area from which he came. Therefore, it is difficult to relate this description to modern Armenian ethnic identity.

On the other hand, the fact that the people of Armenia spoke Persian, as mentioned by Xenophon in his *Anabasis* (Xen. *Anab*. IV.5.9–11), suggests an ethnological solid or at least linguistic Persian influence in Eastern Anatolia at that time (Bournoutian 2006, p. 23). This challenges any discernable linguistic distinction between the commanders appointed by Dareios to suppress the uprisings in Armenia. The identities of the communities in the region at the time may have also been influenced by local and cultural contexts rather than their ethnic Armenian identity in the modern sense.

The designation of the satrapy of Armenia within the Persian Empire was not based on ethnic considerations but rather on a geographical classification. Accordingly, sources from the Persian tradition indicate that the term "Armenia" was primarily employed to designate the mountainous regions to the north. This exonym reflects the Persians' prospective and geographical perception of the region. However, it is notable that archeological findings from the Achaemenid period are almost nonexistent in Eastern Anatolia and Armenia compared to findings from the Urartian period. The dearth of archeological evidence from this period presents a significant challenge for researchers. Consequently, our understanding of this period is predominantly derived from Persian royal inscriptions. Descriptions of the regions by Hellenic writers would not arise until the mid-5th century BC, approximately a century after the Persian conquests (Garsoïan 1997, p. 39).

The Achaemenid inscriptions, as noted above, can be regarded as official propaganda texts that legitimized the empire's expansionist policies and justified administrative decisions based on geographical considerations. These inscriptions served as ideological instruments to reinforce the empire's geographical control and integrate disparate populations into its administrative apparatus.

What was ancient Armenia?

The above information can be integrated to create a general definition of what Armenia *was* in the ancient world, as defined by the boundaries attributed to it. When considered in a broader context, the Euphrates River has served as a central axis for the region historically known as Armenia. To the east of the Euphrates River, the territory has extended to the Caspian Sea, whereas to the west, it has encompassed part of what is generally recognized as Asia Minor. The first of these two extensive regions was commonly designated as Armenia Minor, whereas the second was known as Armenia Minor. Local historians and Byzantine scholars identified several subdivisions within these regions, each mentioned by name. However, Hellenistic and Roman geographers largely limited themselves to these two major divisions, which seem to have been established by the successors of Alexander the Great (James 1870, p. 215).

Despite being one of the most ancient sources of information on the region, the Bible does not directly discuss Armenia. However, several Hebrew names refer to Armenia as a whole or to specific areas within it in ways that reflect the world known to the ancient Hebrews. The first of these names is Togarmah, which appears in Genesis 10:3 and Ezekiel 27:14. Gomer, mentioned alongside Togarmah, is associated with Cappadocia, whereas Ashkenaz is located in the western part of Asia Minor. Mesech, Tubal (Thubal), and the Chaldeans are located to the north of Togarmah, regions identifiable with the Moschians, Tiberians, and Chaldean peoples mentioned in ancient Hellenic and Roman sources. The second name is Ararat, famously known as the land where Noah's ark came to rest (Gen. 8:4); it is also the place to which Sennacherib's sons fled after murdering their father (2 Kings 19:37; Isa. 37:38) and one of the kingdoms called upon to rise against Babylon (Jer. 51:27). The province of Ararat was central to the kingdom, and according to Movses Khorenatsi, it was divided into 20 provinces. The third Biblical name is Minni, which likely corresponds to Minyas (Gen. 8:4), a location also referenced by Josephus (I.3.6.), who cites Nicolaus of Damascus (c. 64 BC–AD 4) in relation to traditions concerning the flood (Coleman 1855, p. 10; James 1870, p. 215).

The information contained in the Bible is highly descriptive yet lacks precision in demarcating the boundaries of the region. It merely points to specific areas and serves as a corroborative reference for earlier written sources. However, these and many other sources used to delineate the borders of Armenia inevitably present various challenges. Each source was written with different purposes in mind, and as a result, they offer differing perspectives. Consequently, any attempt to define the borders of Armenia based on these sources is inherently complex and must be approached with caution.

One of the most significant challenges in determining the borders of Armenia lies in identifying the appropriate basis for these borders. The primary criteria—be they geographical, political, or historical—offer different means of defining Armenia's boundaries. When considering the exonym "Armenia," defined on geographical grounds as the Eastern Anatolian lands that have historically remained on the periphery of central powers, it becomes evident that historical, political, and archaeopolitical approaches have all played influential roles in shaping the region's borders. Throughout history, Armenia's borders have shifted in response to various political developments. For instance, during the reign of King Tigranes the Great (c. 95–55 BC), the Armenian Kingdom's borders expanded to their greatest extent, far beyond what is today defined as Eastern Anatolia. Conversely, the borders of the Armenian satrapy, which was part of the Persian Empire as the thirteenth satrapy, were far different. When examining ancient Hellenic and Roman sources, we observe that these sources tend to offer more geographically based definitions. Therefore, it is both biased and unscientific to use these historically fluid borders as a basis for addressing contemporary or recent political controversies.

In this part of the article, the boundaries of Armenia will be delineated based on ancient and modern sources, deliberately avoiding archaeopolitical interpretations. Regardless of the ethnological and linguistic origins of the name "Armenia," it has historically denoted the lands of Eastern Anatolia, often described as the "upper country" or the "high country."

The most critical sources guiding modern scholarship on this topic are the ancient Hellenic and Roman texts. These sources provide valuable information not only about the physical geography and borders but also about the political, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, architectural, economic, and livelihood structures of the region. Hekataeus of Miletus (c. 550–476 BC), who preceded Herodotus, offers the earliest chronological reference to Armenia in his *Description of the Earth* (περιήγησις). Here, he mentions the Armenioi people living south of the Chalybes, a people inhabiting the shores of the Black Sea (Εὔξεινος Πόντος) (FGrHist, Ia. F.203; Step. Byz. Ethnika=Khalybes; Lang 1970, p. 112; Chahin 2001, p. 177). Based on Hekataeus's information, it is thus possible to infer the northern border of ancient Armenia. From the 5th century BC onwards, the Chalybes were located from Themiskyra (near modern Samsun/Terme) (BAtlas 87 B3 Themiskyra) eastwards to the Paryadres Mountains (BAtlas 87 C4 Paryadres M.), opposite Pharnakeia (modern Giresun) (BAtlas 87 D4 Kerasous/Pharnakeia). The Chalybes were well-known for their expertise in blacksmithing and steel production. Based on information from other ancient Hellenic authors about the region inhabited by the Chalybes, we can identify the Paryadres Mountains as the northern border of Armenia during the 6th–5th centuries BC (Arslan 2007, p. 35; Demir 2009, pp. 82–83).

The first chronological source after Hekataeus regarding the borders of Armenia is Herodotus's *Historia.* Herodotus describes Assyria as lying south of Armenia and lists the other regions adjacent to Armenia. He indicates that the border between Armenia and the

Matiens in the southeast is marked by the Euphrates River, Cilicia lies to the southwest of Armenia, and the Caucasus Mountains form the northern boundary. The eastern boundaries of Armenia extended to the sources of the Euphrates. At this point, the Arsanias (or Murat Suyu), one of the northern tributaries of the Euphrates, served as the geographical marker for this border (Hewsen 1983, pp. 128–129).

We can thus conclude that the Caucasus Mountains defined the northern border of Armenia in Herodotus's time. The Great Caucasus Mountains also represented the natural northern limit of the Persian-Achaemenid Empire, of which he was a contemporary, and the empire rarely crossed north of these mountains (Jacobs 2006: EnIr: Achaemenid Rule in Caucasus). Herodotus also mentions the peoples living in the area from the land of Pactyes to Armenia and the Euxine Sea. The Matienoi, Saspeires, and Alarodioi (Hdt. III.94.1), which Herodotus states were within the borders of the 18th satrapy and paid 200 talents in taxes, were thus among the peoples who lived in ancient Armenia in antiquity.

However, the position of the Armenian satrapy as described by Herodotus reflects the arrangements made by Darius I. Before Darius I reorganized the Persian satrapies, the Armenian satrapy was the 10th among the 20 satrapies, with broader borders. The Moschian, Tibarenoi, Makrones, Mossynoikoi, Mares, Alarodioi, and Saspeires peoples were included within these borders. Armenia, which had been organized as a satrapie during the Median kingdom in Anatolia, was restructured as a separate unit during the Persian/Achaemenid rule and was divided into two satrapies during the reigns of Xerxes I (r. 486–465 BC) and Artaxerxes I (r. 465–424 BC) (Hewsen 1983, p. 127).

Another significant work concerning Eastern Anatolia and thus Armenia is Xenophon's *Anabasis*. Xenophon provides detailed accounts of an arduous journey of survival with his mercenaries. After they crossed the mountains of Corduena under extremely challenging conditions and attacks from local forces (Xen. *Anab*. IV.1.3ff.), they reached the banks of the Kentrites River, which separated Armenia from the territory of the Carduchians. Here, they entered the territory of Armenia, caught between two enemy forces (the Armenians before them and the Carduchians behind them) and exposed to potential danger (Xen. *Anab*. IV.3.1ff.). They established a headquarters on the plain where the ancient Kentrites River flowed, which we might identify today as the Botan Stream (James 1870, p. 585; Honigmann 1935, p. 23; BAtlas 89 D3 Kentrites). This region can therefore be defined as the Botan Valley (Saglamtimur-Schachner 2005, p. 95ff.; Schachner-Sağlamtimur 2008, p. 411).

Based on Xenophon's narrative, it is reasonable to identify the contemporary southern border of Armenia as the Kentrites River. By 400 BC, the borders consisted primarily of the southwestern part of Eastern Anatolia. The Kentrites River thus marked Armenia's southernmost boundary with the Carduchians, whereas its border with the Chalybes was

delineated by a river that Xenophon mistakenly identified as the Phasis but was actually either the Araxes River or one of its tributaries (Xen. *Anab*. IV.6.4-5). Xenophon also explicitly states that the Kentrites River separated Armenia from the land of the Carduchians (Hdt. I.72.2), thereby situating the territory of Corduena to the south.

If we trace a border from the Kentrites River, as indicated by Xenophon's recollection of entering Armenia, we can deduce the following from the above sources: the northern border of Armenia was delineated by the Chalybes, known for their blacksmithing, whereas the southern border was defined by the warlike Carduchians. Herodotus mentions that the Halys River originates in Armenia (Hdt. I.72.2), leading us to the area later known as Armenia Minor, located west of the Euphrates. Armenia's border can then be extended eastward to the sources of the Euphrates (Hdt. IV.44; Xen. *Anab*. IV.5.25). In this context, the border extends to the area north of Lake Thospitis, where the Murat River originates, or to the Araxes Valley, the territory of the Matiens. The northern boundary of Armenia was defined by the Colchians and other Proto-Caucasian tribes and extended from the west of the Trapezous (now Trabzon) to the mouth of the original Phasis (or Rioni) River in Colchis. South of this boundary lived the Sasperoi, Hesperites, or Spers, localized in the upper reaches of the Çoruh Valley. Xenophon and his troops encountered the Phasis and the Toachians in a pass in the foot of the mountains about 16 kilometers north of the Araxes River, also known as the Phasis River (Hdt. IV.6.5). Given that the Sasperoi and Phasisians resided within the borders of Armenia and, despite these groups acting independently, both were therefore subordinate to the satrapy of Armenia, as the northern border of Armenia encompassed the area in which these peoples lived. This territory included lands inhabited by peoples such as the Chalybes, Chaldians, Makrones, Colchians, Mossynoi, and Tibareans. However, it appears that there was no practical Persian-Achaemenid rule over these peoples; rather, it was a formal, propagandistic rule that existed primarily as the lists of satrapies. Although we can attempt to delineate the borders of Armenia based on ancient sources, it is therefore impossible to reach a definitive conclusion.

The concept of borders, as understood today, is a modern construct. In ancient times, although there was an understanding of territorial domains or areas of influence, the notion of borders was highly fluid and variable. Indeed, the regions through which Xenophon traveled were nominally under the sovereignty of the Persian-Achaemenid Empire, but in reality, there was no clearly defined borders or control over them by the central authorities in these areas. According to the Persian-Achaemenid central administration, their sphere of influence extended to the Caucasus Mountains, but in practice, this was a matter of contention. The Chalybes, Taokhois, Phasis, and Kardouchoi mentioned earlier were local peoples that operated with considerable independence within this system. This reflects the broader reality of ancient Anatolian history, in which the territory of Armenia was home to a diverse array

of peoples, both indigenous and migratory, of various ethnicities and cultures (Hewsen 2001, p. 4).

Undoubtedly, as mentioned earlier, the rugged topography of the Eastern Anatolia Region has played a significant role in shaping the fluid nature of borders throughout history. Consequently, during Xenophon's time and in later periods, as borders shifted, moving from one territory or people to another. When delineating the boundaries of a specific area, then, the best we can do is piece together a general view of the landscape, much like assembling a puzzle. In this chapter, the attempt has been to define the borders of Armenia in a manner that aligns with our contemporary understanding of the region. For the Eastern Anatolian plateau in the early 4th century BC and the areas to which the exonym "Armenia" was applied, this approximation holds true.

Following Xenophon, Diodorus Siculus serves as another ancient source providing chronological information about Armenia. Diodorus also provides details related to the The Ten Thousand (οἱ Μύριοι). Similar to Xenophon, he notes that the Hellenes entered Armenia after crossing the Kentrites River (Diod. XIV.27.7). However, Diodorus' account here diverges from Xenophon's. In Diodorus' narrative, Tiribazus is directly introduced as the satrap of Armenia, with no mention of Orontes I. This difference highlights some contradictions between the two accounts.

Strabo's *Geographica* is another invaluable work that offers insight into the historical geography of Armenia in the first century BC (about 24 BC). In fact, many authors relied heavily on the information provided by Strabo until the 18th century (Galichian 2014, p. 14ff.). When Strabo discusses the borders of Armenia, he references Eratosthenes, who lived about two centuries prior and is regarded as one of the founding fathers of geography. By doing so, Strabo allows for more detailed inferences about the Armenian region. According to Strabo, the distance between Thapsacus[19] and Armenia, located further north, is one thousand and one hundred *stadia*, with the western border delineated by the Euphrates River. This corroborates the information provided by other ancient authors who also identified the Euphrates as Armenia's western boundary (Strab. II.1.23/26).

Strabo also draws from Theophanes of Mytilene, who estimated the width of Armenia to be one hundred *schoenus* and its length to be twice that. However, Strabo finds these values too high and offers corrections. He suggests that the length of Armenia should be reckoned as one hundred *schoenus* and proposes also reducing the width by half, or slightly more than half, of that value (Strab. XI.14.11).

19 Thapsacus, whose location has been the subject of various suggestions, is thought to have been near the ancient Carchemish on the west bank of the Euphrates or at Seleucia at Zeugma on the upper Euphrates (Farrell 1961, p. 153).

Continuing with his description of Armenia's borders, Strabo states that the region's southern boundary is defined by the Taurus Mountains, which separate Armenia from Mesopotamia. He adds that to the east lie the Greater Media and Atropatene,[20] with the Arakses River forming the border between Armenia and Atropatene. To the north, the Parachoathras[21] Mountains, which stretch along the length of the Caspian Sea, encompass the peoples living in Albania, Iberia, and Caucasia, thereby forming Armenia's northern boundary (Strab. XI.14.1). Strabo references Apollodorus of Athens for these boundaries. According to this account, the border between Armenia and Iberia is delineated by the Arakses (or Aras) River, but primarily by the Cyrus (or Kura) River and the Moschian Mountains (Strab. I.3.21). The Arakses River, which defines the boundary between Armenia and Iberia, also serves as the border between Armenia and Albania, eventually flowing into the Caspian Sea (Strab. XI.14.4). In addition, certain sections of the Caucasus Mountains extend into the interior of Iberia and mark the borders with Armenia and Colchis (Strab. XI.3.2, 14.1). The western boundary of Armenia is meanwhile formed by the Paryadres and Skydides Mountains, which extended into Armenia Minor. The lands along the course of the Euphrates River thus separated Armenia from Cappadocia and Commagene (Strab. XI.1.7, 14.1).

In this context, Pliny the Elder provides detailed information about the borders of Armenia Major in his *Naturalis Historia*. He explains that Armenia Major begins at the Paryadres Mountains. The region is separated from Cappadocia by one of the two famous rivers, the Euphrates, and from Mesopotamia by the equally renowned Tigris River. The westernmost course of the Euphrates marks the region's western border. Pliny also notes that both the Euphrates and the Tigris originate in Armenia and that Mesopotamia lies between them. Furthermore, he states that the natural border between Armenia Major and Armenia Minor is drawn by the Absarus (or Absarros) River, which originates from the Paryadres Mountains. The northern and northeastern borders of the region are defined by the Cyrus River, which joins the Arakses and flows into the Caspian Sea. The western and northwestern borders of Armenia Major are marked by the Moschian Mountains and the Euphrates, part of the Caucasus Mountain System (the Lesser Caucasuses), which connect the Caucasus Mountains with the Anti-Taurus Mountains and are today part of Georgia. The southern and southeastern boundary is delineated by the Masius, Niphates, and the lower reaches of the Gordiæan Araxes, whereas the eastern boundary is defined by the confluence of the Cyrus and Araxes (Plin. *nat*. VI.9–10).

20 According to Strabo, the Atropatene (modern Adarbadagan, Azerbaijan), located northeast of the Matiane and adjacent to it, lies to the northwest of the Great Media, with the Hyrcanian (Caspian) Sea to its east. It is separated from Armenia to the west by the Arakses River (Strab. XI.13.2, 6, 14.1, 13; BAtlas II, 1292; Chaumont 1987: EnIr: Atropates; Schippmann 1987, pp. 211–224; Boyce and Grenet 1991, p. 69).

21 The Parachoathras mountains, which can be equated with the mountain system stretching along the north of Iran, now known as the Elbrus Mountains, are thought to derive their name from the word *Pateischoreis*, or *Pātishuvari* in Old Persian, meaning "people of the country on the sunny side of the mountain" (Brunner 2004: EnIr: Iran v. Peoples of Iran (2) Pre-Islamic; Bobek 2019).

According to Ptolemy, meanwhile, Armenia Major was bounded in the north by parts of Colchis, Iberia, and Albania along a line crossing the Cyrus River, in the west by Cappadocia and the line of the Moschian Mountains of Pontic Cappadocia extending to Colchis; and in the east by part of the Hyrcanian Sea, starting from the mouth of the Cyrus River. In the south, the region was bordered by Mesopotamia along the Taurus Mountains, which merged with the Euphrates and then the Tigris. The southern boundary continues along a straight line with Assyria, following the Niphates Mountains, and merges with the previously mentioned border near the Caspian Mountains (Ptol. V.13.1-4).

It is therefore possible to infer the borders of the satrapy of Armenia, which was part of the satrapal system within the administrative structure of the Persian Empire, by examining the written sources from Persia, Ancient Greece, and the earlier civilizations (such as Assyria and Urartu) that had once existed in the region. Some of the ancient borders of Armenia (which differ from those of the area we define today as Eastern Anatolia) extended beyond the current political borders of the country. Armenia, as defined by the ancient sources, is a mountainous region in Asia Minor, situated north of Syria and Mesopotamia, bordered by the Media Atropatene and Lake Spauta (Σπαῦτα, or Urmia) to the east, Cappadocia and Commagene to the west, and Cilicia to the southwest (Vaux 1872, p. 1031). The region known as Armenia Major, after Pompeius's reorganization of Asia Minor, lay east of the upper Euphrates and was bordered to the north by Thospitis (Θωσπῖτις λίμ, now Lake Van) and along the valley of the Arakses, which flows into the Caspian Sea, extending northward to the southern borders of the small kingdom of Iberia, south of Lychnitis (Λυχνῖτις, Lake Sevan, or Lake Gökçe), the Cyrus River, and the lower part of the Caucasus Mountains. The northeastern border of Armenia was the territory inhabited by the Matiens. Its elevation contributed to its isolation from surrounding regions, particularly from the low plains of Mesopotamia. This isolation, coupled with its rugged topography, served as a deterrent to external invasions or outright conquests. However, this same rugged terrain also created distinct subregions within Armenia, each fostering its own subcultural groups, dialects, and traditions. This fragmentation is reflected in the political landscape of the region, a reality evident throughout nearly every period of Armenia's history. There were different entry points into Armenia from Mesopotamia. These included Sophene (Tunceli/Elâzığ) from the southwest and Tomisa (Strab. XIV.2.29; Polyb. VIII.34.13), an important crossing point of the Euphrates in Cappadocia, from the southeast (Elâzığ/Baskil). The strategic significance of these regions continued to be recognized throughout the centuries. Indeed, passage through this point was necessary to access the Sophene region (Hdt. III.89ff.; Cameron 1943, p. 307ff.; Briant 2002, p. 173; Bournoutian 2006, p. 5; Payaslian 2011, p. 5; Drower et al. 2012, p. 164; Mitchell 2015, p. 363ff.; Çiğdem-Topaloğlu 2018, pp. 427-428).

Conclusions

A spatial analysis of the borders of ancient Armenia demonstrates that the concept of borders in the ancient world was multifaceted, encompassing both geographical and sociopolitical dimensions. They were shaped by a multitude of factors, including social structures, imperial strategies, and the internal dynamics of the region. The borders of Armenia assumed disparate meanings throughout the course of its ancient history, creating a nexus where local identities, cultural continuity, and imperial interests were mutually constituted.

In their writings, ancient authors such as Herodotus, Strabo, Pliny, and Ptolemy defined the borders of Armenia not only in geographical terms but also in terms of cultural, ethnic, and political elements. Herodotus' descriptions of Armenia's borders in his *Historia* were made in reference to the Persian administrative structure of the period. In contrast, Strabo's emphasis on geographical calculations and natural barriers in his *Geographica* contributed to a deeper understanding of borders in the Hellenistic world. In defining these borders, Strabo focused on Armenia's function as a strategic border region based on the Eratosthenes' mathematical calculations and his knowledge of Hellenistic geographical data. These definitions demonstrate that the borders of Armenia reflected the political and geographical imaginations embedded in the knowledge systems of the time. In other words, borders were determined not only as a result of physical geography but also as a reflection of political concerns and geopolitical strategies.

The Roman Empire's designation of Armenia as a border region provides a clear illustration of borders being used as a political instrument. Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* illustrates the strategic importance of Armenia as a buffer zone on the eastern border of the Roman Empire, with military passageways and fortifications in place to protect it. Pliny underscores the notion that borders were not merely physical barriers but also strategic points where political dominance was consolidated. This demonstrates that borders were not perceived as a mere geographical boundary between states but rather as domains of power and influence. Similarly, the organization of Armenia as a satrapy during the Persian Empire was conducted with the objective of preserving the region's sociocultural identity. In addition to military security, the continuity of local identities was taken into account when defining borders. The Persian administration therefore accorded due consideration to the cultural autonomy and ethnic diversity of the region alongside its geographical realities. These borders were thus conceived as a kind of "cultural buffer" zone.

When the impacts of the Roman and Persian Empires on Armenia are examined, it becomes evident that ancient borders were not merely lines on a map; rather, they were products of political and cultural considerations that allowed communities to safeguard their distinct identities. This illustrates the pivotal role played by the sociopolitical structure of Armenia in the maintenance of cultural diversity. The semiautonomous form of government offered by the

Persian satrapal system provided a degree of ethnic and cultural autonomy within Armenia's political borders, thereby facilitating the preservation of the region's cultural identity.

A spatial analysis of Armenia's borders thus illustrates the intricate nature of borders as a concept in antiquity. Ancient borders were not solely delineated by physical geography; they were also shaped by political and cultural considerations. They served not only as barriers but as spaces for both social segregation and interactions. By integrating the subjective appraisals of ancient authors with contemporary spatial analysis techniques, this study has ascertained the extent to which imperial policies and perspectives were reflected in border delineations, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of Armenia's historical geography. This comprehensive analysis reinforces the idea that ancient borders were the multifaceted product of geographies, regional interactions, political strategies, and cultural affiliations. They were not static structures but a process that was reshaped by constantly changing political conditions and cultural dynamics. Ancient borders can therefore be understood through a multidimensional analysis as both a physical and social reality.

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