



DEIOCES

DEIOCES (Gk. *Dēiókēs*), name of a Median king; this Greek form, like Assyrian *Da-a-a-uk-ku* (i.e., *Daiukku*) and Elamite *Da-a-(hi-)(ú-)uk-ka*, *Da-a-ya-u(k)-ka*, and so on, reflects Iranian **Dahyu-ka-*, a hypocoristic based on *dahyu-* “land” (cf. Schmitt).

According to the detailed account of Herodotus (1.96-101), Deioces, son of Phraortes (Ir. **Fravartiš*; 1.96.1), father of Phraortes, and grandfather of [Cyxares](#) (1.73.3, 103.1, etc.), plotted cleverly to establish autocratic rule over the Medes, who at that time lived in separate, autonomous villages, or rather townships. In a period of great lawlessness all over Media he made every effort to enforce justice in his own village; his reputation as an impartial judge thus gradually spread, until finally he claimed that this role was too troublesome and refused to continue administering justice (1.96.2-97.1). Lawlessness then reigned anew, worse than before, so that the Medes assembled and at last resolved to elect a king to rule over them (1.97.2-3); they elected Deioces, who is said to have ruled for fifty-three years (1.98.1, 102.1).

He ordered a strong fortress city to be built, with walls arranged in seven concentric rings; all government authority was centralized in this capital, which in Old Persian was called *Hagmatāna* (Gk. *Agbātana* or *Ekbātana*; modern *Hamadān*; see [ECBATANA](#)). He retired to his palace, within the innermost of the seven rings, and surrounded himself with a kind of bodyguard; he enforced law and order by introducing “watchers and listeners” throughout his realm (1.100.2), the forerunners of the Achaemenid “king’s eyes” or “ears” (see [ACHAEMENID DYNASTY ii](#)). He also initiated a



regulated court ceremonial, so that people should regard him as “of a different kind” (*heteroîos*; 1.99.2). In other Greek sources (Diodorus, 8.16.1; Themistius, *Orationes*, ed. Schenkl, 2.131.15; Polyaeus, 7.1; Dio Chrysostomus, 2.77, 56.4, 64.22) where Deioces is mentioned almost nothing has been added to the information provided by Herodotus.

Herodotus’ account seems to have been based on an oral tradition; from it scholars have deduced that Deioces was the founder of the Median royal dynasty and the first Median king to gain independence from Assyria. But it must be stressed that Herodotus’ report is a mixture of Greek and eastern legends and is not historically reliable. It has also been supposed (cf. Diakonoff, p. 109) that the Median king on whom Herodotus’ account is centered was actually Deioces’ son Phraortes, and it is therefore impossible to give the exact dates of Deioces’ reign, which probably spanned most of the first half of the 7th century B.C.E. I. M. Diakonoff and others have suggested ca. 727-675 B.C.E., counting back from the date when [Cyrus](#) seized power.

It is thus useful to look for some corroboration from the cuneiform sources, and indeed George Smith (p. 98) noticed already in 1869 that in Neo-Assyrian texts one Daiukku is mentioned several times in the reign of Sargon II (721-05 B.C.E.). In the annals for this king’s eighth year (i.e., 715 B.C.E.; Luckenbill, pp. 6 ff. ll. 75-100; Lie, pp. 18 ff. ll. 101-26) and in the so-called Display Inscription (*Prunkinschrift*) from Khorsabad (l. 49) Deioces is named as a Mannean provincial governor (*šaknu*) ruling, somewhat independently, a district bordering both the Mannean and the Assyrian kingdoms. The exact location of his estate is not known with certainty; it was perhaps in the valley of the Zarrīnrūd. Deioces, whose son was held hostage by the Urartians, supported the Urartian king Rusā I (730-14 B.C.E.) against the Mannean ruler Ullusunu, ultimately without success, for Sargon intervened and eventually captured Deioces and exiled him and his family to Hamath (modern Ḥamāt) in Syria. Deioces may already have taken part in a rebellion against the Mannean king Iranzu the year before; one of the governors listed in the Assyrian annals for that year, the governor of Messi, is not named and may have been Deioces, but the identification cannot be made with certainty.

The so-called House of Deioces (Bît-Da-a-a-uk-ku, i.e., “place or province of Deioces”), on which scholars used to base their historical reconstructions, never existed, however; the notion arose from a misreading of [KUR *bît*]-Da-a-a-uk-ki for [KUR Ma]-da-a-a “the land of the Medes” in Sargon’s annals for the year 713 (Luckenbill, p. 28 l. 140; Lie, pp. 28-29 l. 166). The House of Deioces



cannot therefore have been one of the objectives of that year's Assyrian campaign, which was directed eastward into Ellipi and Media.

Any connection between the governor mentioned by Sargon and the Median dynasty of later periods is thus only hypothetical; there is not a single authentic cuneiform source to confirm that Sargon's Daiukku and Herodotus' Deioces were the same person. Stuart Brown (p. 76) is correct in stressing that "it is improbable in the extreme that a Mede who was the governor of a Mannean province for less than a year . . . could have become associated . . . with the founding of the Median state." Nevertheless, the onomastic evidence suggests that the relevant Neo-Assyrian sources and the classical tradition can be brought together. The Old Iranian name *Dahyuka- was not uncommon even in later periods; in the Achaemenid period the Old Persian form *Dahyuka- occurred in a variety of Elamite renderings on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets (cf. Schmitt, p. 145; for additional references to unpublished texts, see Hinz and Koch, pp. 247, 258-59, 303). These references were apparently to different officials in various administrative districts, among them one subordinate who was to apportion fodder rations for horses.

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