



GORDYENE

GORDYENE, an ancient territory located in northern Mesopotamia, between the Bohtan, Tigris, and Eastern (Lesser) Khabur rivers, and attested in sources from 401 BCE until Late Antiquity.

Gordyene (Gk. Gordyene, Gordyaea, Lat. Corduena, Arm. Korduk', and Qardū in Semitic languages) originated as the territory of the tribe of the Karduchoi (an explicit equating of Gordyene and the Karduchoi can be found in Strabo, 16.1.24–25 and Plin., *HN* 6.44). The Karduchoi are first mentioned in ancient accounts in Xenophon's *Anabasis* (3.5.15; 4.1.1–4.3.2). Xenophon (q.v.) refers to them in his description of the route of the withdrawal of the Greek army of "the Ten Thousand" to the Black Sea (q.v.) after the Battle of Cunaxa (q.v.) in 401 BCE. The Karduchoi lived in the mountainous region north of modern Cizre in eastern Turkey and south of the Bohtan river (the ancient Kentrites river).

From a geographical point of view, the Gordyaeian mountains were frequently considered to be part of the Armenian Taurus (Strabo, 2.1.26 and Ptol., *Geo g.*, 5.12.2 in particular). Xenophon's Karduchoi are presented as an economically sufficient (including the existence of crafts and prosperous agricultural production in the mountain valleys) and warlike (highly skilled in guerilla warfare and archery) mountain people. Their identity is not explicitly stated, and we can only infer from Xenophon and Classical writers (Strabo, 16.1.24 and Plut., *Vit. Luc.* 21–36, *Vit. Pomp.* 30–36) that they were of non-Armenian origin.



After 401 BCE, the Karduchoi expanded beyond their natural borders in the mountainous zone south of the Bohtan river and came into control of the natural sway of the territory of the Upper Tigris valley between the modern Batman and Khabur rivers (especially the fertile Silopi plain). They also established an independent monarchy in the Hellenistic period, apparently in the context of a political vacuum that arose in the region out of the disintegration of the Seleucid (q.v.) state but before the advent of the Parthian (see ARSACIDS) hegemony in Mesopotamia (possibly any time between 165-164 BCE and 95 BCE). Gordyene was conquered by the Parthians either during the reign of Mithradates I in about 145–141 BCE, together with Adiabene (q.v.) or, more likely, by Mithradates II (122–87 BCE). The only king of Gordyene whose reign is explicitly attested in ancient sources is Zarbienus, who is referenced only for the year of his removal from the throne and death at the hands of the Armenian king Tigranes (II) the Great (140 BCE-55 BCE) in the winter of 71/70 BCE. After the fall of the independent monarchy (71/70 BCE), Gordyene was controlled by Greater Armenia. In the late first century BCE, Gordyene came under the control of the kingdom of Adiabene (see Joseph., *AJ*, 20:24) until at least 115 CE, and likely even longer, possibly until 298 CE, when Gordyene was seized by the Romans from the Sasanian (q.v.) sphere of influence until 363 BCE (among other *Transtigritanae regiones*).

After 363 CE, Gordyene did not return to Adiabene, but became part of the newly organized Sasanian province of Arbāyistān (q.v.; Bēt 'Arbāyē), which included the territory seized from the Roman Empire. There is evidence that in late antiquity, Gordyene (Bēt Qardū) played an important role in the context of the development of Christianity in Syriac-speaking regions. First, the diocese of Bēt Qardū (Gordyene), along with the dioceses of Bēt Arzun (Arzanene), Bēt Zabdai (Zabdicene), Bēt Rahimai (Rehimene), and Bēt Moksaye (Moxoene), belonged to Syriac-Nestorian Christianity, with its main center in Nisibis (q.v.). Second, Gordyene was widely considered as the home of the landing site of Noah's ark on the Cudi Dağı (see Harrak, 175-77). Third, Syriac sources referring to thriving monastic life in Bēt 'Arbāyē clearly show that monasteries existed not only in the Tūr 'Abdīn region (for which it is nowadays famous), but also in the mountains of Qardū (Gordyene) and Arzun (Arzanene).

Our knowledge of the cultural landscape of Gordyene over the centuries is largely limited. Gordyene appears to have originated as a cultural and political

enclave of highly distinctive local character in the late Iron Age (as indicated by the pottery assemblage gathered by the Salvage Project of the Archaeological Heritage of the Ilisu Dam Reservoir). Both Classical (Xen., *An.* 4.1.8, 4.2.22; Strabo, 16.1.24–25; Amm. Marc., 25.7.8) and Talmudic (*Pesahim* 7a.21b) sources emphasize its agricultural wealth and natural resources (wheat; wine; pasture; resources of hydrocarbon in the form of naphtha; and *amomum*, a famous spice plant; see CARDAMOM). Although Gordyene's agricultural prosperity comes to the fore even in Xenophon's description (however subtly), the area considerably developed when Gordyene took advantage of the agricultural possibilities of the newly acquired Upper Tigris valley. The archaeological record (see Algaze, 1989; Algaze et al., 1991; 2012) clearly indicates that the region experienced the peak of its economic prosperity during the Hellenistic period. The process of Hellenistic urbanization also took place in Gordyene. Namely, Strabo (16.1.24–25) tells us of three cities located near the Tigris: Sareisa, Satalca, and Pinaca (see also Amm. Marc., 25.7.9).

Of the three, Strabo's "Pinaca" (Ammanius' "Bezabde" and "Phaenicha," 20.7.1 and 20.7.16) has been firmly identified with modern Eski Finik (and Eski Hendek), while modern Eskieruh (also known as Sedukh) and Shakh have been tentatively suggested as matching both Saresia and Satalca. There can be no doubt that Gordyene's urbanized areas (also including the archaeologically examined Kazrik area and Çattepe) played an important strategic role. Their aim was to control vital lines of communication, especially mountain passes and river crossings. The two main routes in this area were the Bitlis Pass (see BEDLĪS), which led through the Taurus past Lake Van to Armenia (to Artaxata [q.v.] in particular); and the Tigris crossings, especially known as *ad flumen Tigrem* in the Peutinger Table (the ancient Roman road map), which carried the route from Nisibis to Media and Babylonia (qq.v.).

Despite common perceptions (based on the alleged similarity of the names), the ancient root Qardū (in Cordu-eni, Cordu-ena, Gordyene, and Gordyaea) is not akin to the root *Kurd-*. Therefore, ancient Gordyene and its people cannot be held as ancestors of the modern Kurds.



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