

## Religious Reforms in the Early Sassanid Period and the Transformation of Atropatena into the Religious Center of the Empire

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### Abstract.

The establishment of the Sassanid state was a turning point in the social, political and ideological life of Atropatena. In 224, the Sassanid ruler Ardashir I Babakan (Papak, Pabek) defeated the Arsacid ruler Artaban V in the Battle of Hormuzdegan. This put an end to the Parthian state and laid the foundation for the Sassanid state, which played an important role in world history. The founder of the state, Ardashir I Babakan, accepted the title of "King of Kings, both Iranian and non-Iranian." Following this, Ardashir I increased political pressure on Atropatena and finally incorporated Atropatena into the Sassanid state. Unlike the previous dynasties in power in Iran - namely the Achaemenid and Arsacid dynasties, Ardashir I tried to concentrate not only secular power but also religious power in his hands. In order to strengthen religious power, Ardashir I Babakan carried out extensive religious reforms.

The main goal of these reforms was to turn Zoroastrianism into the only religious ideology of the Sasanian state, so to speak, to establish the principle of "One religion and one state" as the main criterion of both the domestic and, to some extent, foreign policy of the Sasanians. As a result of these reforms, the goals set were largely achieved. Another result of the reforms carried out by the Sasanian ruler Ardashir I was the transformation of the temples of Gazaka (Atropatena) into the ideological pillars of the Sasanian dynasty's power. This situation led to the increase in the political weight of Gazaka, the capital of Atropatena, within the Sasanian state. However, this rise did not happen immediately. The transformation of Atropatena into the ideological center of the Sasanians took place during the reign of two people - Tansar, who rose during the reign of Ardashir Babakan, and then Kartir, who was appointed "mubadan-e mubadan" (mag of magi or high priest) during the reign of Shapur I.

**Keywords:** Sasanians, Gazaka, Atropatena, Zoroastrianism, Tansar, Kartir, Ardashir I

## Релігійні реформи в ранній сасанідський період та перетворення Атропатени на релігійний центр імперії

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### Анотація.

Створення сасанідської держави стало переломним моментом у соціальному, політичному та ідеологічному житті Атропатени. У 224 році сасанідський правитель Ардашир I Бабахан (Папак, Пабек) переміг аршакідського правителя Артабана V у битві при Ормуздегані. Це поклало край парфянській державі та заклало основи Сасанідської держави, яка відіграла важливу роль у світовій історії. Засновник держави, Ардашир I Бабахан, прийняв титул «Царя царів, як іранських, так і неіранських». Після цього Ардашир I посилив політичний тиск на Атропатену і зрештою включив її до сасанідської держави. На відміну від попередніх династій в Ірані – а саме Ахеменідів і Аршакідів, Ардашир I намагався зосередити не лише світську, а й релігійну владу у своїх руках. Для зміцнення релігійної влади Ардашир I Бабахан провів масштабні релігійні реформи.

Головною метою цих реформ було перетворити зороастризм на єдину релігійну ідеологію сасанідської держави, так би мовити, встановити принцип «Одна релігія і одна держава» як головний критерій як внутрішньої, так і, певною мірою, зовнішньої політики сасанідів. Внаслідок цих реформ поставлені цілі були здебільшого досягнуті. Ще одним результатом реформ, проведених сасанідським правителем Ардаширом I, стало перетворення храмів Газакі (Атропатена) на ідеологічні опори влади сасанідської династії. Ця ситуація призвела до зростання політичної ваги Газакі, столиці Атропатени, в межах Сасанідської держави. Однак це зростання не відбулося одразу. Перетворення Атропатени на ідеологічний центр сасанідів відбулося за правління двох людей – Тансара, який піднявся за правління Ардашира Бабакана, а потім Картіра, призначеного «мубадан-е мубадан» (мак магів або верховного жерця) за правління Шапура I.

**Keywords:** Sasanians, Gazaka, Atropatena, Zoroastrianism, Tansar, Kartir, Ardashir I

### Introduction.

Despite the abundance of research and studies on the history of the Sasanian state, the number of sources and studies on the history of Atropatena, which was occupied by the Sasanians in the 3rd century, is very small. Among the studies conducted, the studies related to the history of the Atropatena state can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The most problematic of all these studies and studies are the studies conducted on the religious life of Atropatena, as well as the impact of the temples and clergy of Atropatena on its neighbors and the religious life of the states it was part of during the occupations. In most of these studies, Atropatena is characterized mainly as a region of the Arsacid (Parthian) and Sasanian empires. Usually, the impression is that Atropatena adopted Zoroastrianism under the influence of the Arsacids and later the Sasanians. However, almost all Azerbaijani historians, as well as a number of world historians, note that the homeland of Zoroastrianism was the Urmia Lake basin (Southern Azerbaijan) (Меликов, 2018, p. 271; Aliyeva, 2007, p. 62).

Most of the research conducted on the spread and development of Zoroastrianism in Atropatena during the early Sasanian period is indirect. The early Sasanian period, that is, the 3rd-4th centuries AD, is a period of the revival of Zoroastrianism in the Sasanians and in Atropatena, as well as a period of almost merging religion and state. The purpose of the current research is to reflect the role of Atropatena in the implementation of religious reforms in the early days of the Sasanian state in the 3rd century AD.

Atropatena was within the sphere of political influence of the Parthian state until the establishment of Sasanian rule. Although it was subject to it in some cases, it maintained its independent governance for most of its history and even pursued an independent foreign policy at certain periods of its history. At the same time, the geopolitical situation of Atropatena made it an important factor for its close neighbor Parthia, as well as Rome, which had been waging wars with Parthia for a long time. In this situation, Parthia had to use Zoroastrianism as a political factor to strengthen its political position in Atropatena. Thus, there was also religious affinity between the two states. Even after the fall of Parthia, the Sasanians, who turned Zoroastrianism into a dogmatic state religion, also widely used the religious factor to strengthen their power in Atropatena (Kasumova, 1993, p. 39-40).

One of the interesting sources about Zoroastrianism and the religious reforms carried out by the Sasanians is the work "Kār-nāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān" (Karname-i Ardašīr-i Papakan). The work also discusses the life of Ardashir I, the founder of the Sasanian state, his rise to power, the religious reforms he carried out, and Tansar's approach to the palace.

**Level of study of the topic.** A large number of research works have been written about the revival of Zoroastrianism during the Sasanian period, the measures

taken by the Sasanians to turn Zoroastrianism into the state religion during the 3rd century, and it would be appropriate to provide information about some of them. The author of the first major research work on Zoroastrianism in Europe was the French scholar Anquetil Duperron of the 18th century (Aliyev, 1989, p. 64). However, since then, especially in our modern era, a large number of monographs and collective research works that are the products of common labor have been written about Zoroastrianism. However, within this huge research base, what is worthy of attention for the current article is the role of Tansar, who played the role of the chief priest in the state during the religious reforms carried out by the Sasanians, and the problem of the increase in the importance of the Atropatena temples, especially the Ādur Gushnasp (Azergushnasp) temple as a result.

One of the important sources for the current study is the work "Nāma-ye Tansar" or "Tansar name". The work was written approximately in the first half of the 3rd century. The letter is a letter from Tansar, the chief priest of Ardashir I, to a judge named Gusnasp. In it, he calls Gusnasp to submit to the Sassanids and introduces him to the content of the socio-economic and cultural reforms carried out in the country. The second work is the work "Karname-i Ardashir-i Papakan". Although the work was written after Ardashir I, it is an invaluable source on Ardashir's domestic and foreign policy in Iran, as well as his religious reforms.

In this regard, the "Cambridge History of Ancient Iran" occupies a special place (Yarshater, 2010). The article also uses the 3rd section of this book. The work provides interesting information not only about the establishment of the Sassanid state, but also about the revival of Zoroastrianism, and the reforms carried out by the Sassanid rulers Ardashir I, Shapur I, and his successors. The work also contains important research information about Tansar, who played an important role in the transformation of Atropatena into the religious center of the Sassanids during the reign of Ardashir I, who also went down in history as a great religious reformer, who received the rank of Erpaq during the reign of Ardashir I, and Kartir, who continued his reforms in the second half of the 3rd century.

Among the works that discuss the role of Zoroastrianism in the political life of Atropatena, we can cite V. Minorsky's (1944). The work is mainly devoted to the wars of Rome and Byzantium with the Sassanids, as well as the campaigns of the Roman and Byzantine rulers to Atropatena within the framework of these wars. The interesting aspect of the research for us is the presence of significant information about the various religious centers of Atropatena in the article.

Another work about the religious life of Atropatena is Philipp Kreyenbrock's article "Zoroastrianism in the Sassanid Period" (2013). Important and interesting information about the religious reforms carried out in

Iran and Atropatena during the early Sasanian period is collected here.

The works of Iranian and South Azerbaijani researchers also reflect the reforms carried out during the early Sasanian period, as well as the important role played by Tansar and Kartir, who are believed to have originally come from Atropatena, in carrying out these reforms. Among them, Turaj Daryayi's work "Sasanian Persia. The rise and fall of an Empire. (2009), as well as articles published on this topic, Mahir Khalifa-zadeh's "Sasanian Ideology update: From Anahita fire in Fars to Adur Gushnasp fire temple in Azerbaijan" (2026), English scholar Mary Boyce's "A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism" (1977), "A Reader in Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian (Acta Iranica Monograph Series)" (1975) and other works, T. Farhid's article "Sasanian Empire: Alliance of Religion and Politics" (2013) and the works and articles of others can be cited as examples. In these works, great attention is paid to the religious reforms carried out by the Sasanian Shah Ardashir I and their importance is shown. The works also highlight the role of the Atropatena temples in the implementation of the religious policy pursued by the Sassanids.

Among Azerbaijani scientists and researchers, there are also important research works dedicated to the spread of Zoroastrianism in Atropatena and the impact of Zoroastrianism on the social and public life of Atropatena. Among them, we can first mention the works of prominent scientists and researchers Z.I. Yampolsky, S.Y. Gasimova, I.H. Aliyev, A.Fazilin, K.Aliyev, F.K. Aliyeva and others. Among them, I. G. Aliyev's book "Historical Essays on Atropatena" (1989) should be especially noted. The advantage of the book is that it examines the laws of Zoroastrianism, its emergence, and the role played by Atropatena as one of the centers of Zoroastrianism. However, these works do not touch on Tansar's reforms much, and the reforms of Ardashir I are reflected little.

One of the interesting research works on the influence of Zoroastrianism on Azerbaijani architecture is Farida Aliyeva's "Culture of Ancient Azerbaijan - Median Atropateny and Caucasian Albania (4th century BC - 3rd century AD)" (2007). The work significantly reflects the role played by Zoroastrianism in the social life and architecture of Atropateny.

One of the interesting research works on the history of Atropateny and the role played by Zoroastrianism in the political life of Atropateny is Abdullah Fazili's "Atropateny (4th century BC - 7th century AD)" (1992). The work covers a wide period and is rich in information that helps to deeply study the topic.

Methodological basis of the study. The aim of the study is to investigate the impact of the reforms of the Sasanian ruler Ardashir I and the chief cleric Tansar he appointed on the religious and political role of Atropatena in the Sasanian state.

The article gives preference to the method of comparative analysis of sources, and at the same time, a comparative analysis of existing literature on the issue being covered was conducted. At the same time, through comparative analysis, an attempt was made to critically analyze the information provided by the available materials and literature, as well as the approaches to the issue. In this regard, a comparison of works written in this field in Azerbaijan and the CIS and an examination of the source base are of particular importance. At the same time, the works of European authors were also addressed, and a comparative analysis was conducted. In addition, the analytical synthesis method was used in the study, the information provided by the sources, as well as the facts revealed by various researchers, were correlated, and an attempt was made to reach an appropriate conclusion in accordance with the purpose of the study.

### **The rise of the Sassanids and the subjugation of Atropatena.**

The fact that Ardashir I truly belonged to the Sassanid dynasty remains controversial for historians. Although some authors say that he belonged to the Sassanids, some authors are skeptical about the idea that Ardashir was truly a descendant of the Sasanians. Among them, Turaj Daryayi mentioned many legends about Ardashir I being a descendant of Sasan in his work. However, according to the author, none of them clearly states that he was a descendant of Sasan (Daryae, 2010, p.243). Even historian Martin Schwartz notes that Ardashir, in accordance with ancient tradition, traced his lineage to the Aramaic god Sesen (Daryae, 2010, p.7).

As is known, the prevailing opinion in scientific literature is that Ardashir I's father, Papak, was the ruler of the Istakhr region during the reign of the last Arshakids. However, there are certain differences in the opinions of the authors on this matter. Thus, according to some researchers, Papak was only the secular ruler of Istakhr (Dyakonov, 1961, p. 257). However, according to most scholars, Ardashir's mythical grandfather Sasan and his father Papak performed both the duties of a high priest and a ruler in Istakhr. However, another misunderstanding arises here. Thus, the book "Kār-nāmag ī Ardashīr ī Pābagān" (Karname-i Ardashir-i Papakan), dedicated to the life of Ardashir I, shows that his father Papak gave his daughter to Sasan. It even says that Sasan himself belonged to the Darab dynasty. According to "Karname", Ardashir's father was Sasan, and his grandfather was Papak (The Kār-nāmag ī Ardashīr ī Babagān, 1896, p. 1). However, according to official biographical information, Ardashir I's grandfather was Sasan, and his father was Papak. However, according to most historians and sources, the Sasanians were both religious and secular rulers of Istakhr. It is this factor that formed the initial foundations of the state concept, which was intertwined with the idea of Ardashir I's "unity of state and religion".

The Sassanids' rise to power coincided with favorable historical and political circumstances. The

Arsacid dynasty, which ruled Parthia, was experiencing major problems in both domestic and foreign policy. In 217, Artabanus IV, one of the last Arsacid rulers, defeated Rome in a battle near Nisibis and concluded an agreement that effectively stabilized the borders of the Arsacids and Rome. According to the terms of the agreement concluded in 218, Rome had to give up its claims to Atropatena, Armenia, and the territories of the Ikichayara. The other Roman emperors, Elagabalus and Alexander Severus, were preoccupied only with themselves. Therefore, Rome could not pay much attention to events in the east. On the other hand, in the 20s of the 3rd century, dramatic events were taking place in the political life of Parthia. Thus, a struggle for the throne began between the newly come to power Arsacid ruler Ardavan V and his brother Artavazd. In 221-222, Artavazd even minted coins in his own name. This showed that the central power in the Parthian state was significantly weakened. At that time, the Istakhr region was actually divided into several semi-independent territories, the largest of which were the territories of Pars and Derabgerd (Dyakonov, 1961, p.258). Thus, at that time, the Parthian ruler Artabanus V had big problems and, in such conditions, did not pay special attention to the rebellion in a small territory of the state.

The Sassanids first began to take control of the Parsua territory. As early as 205-206, Ardashir's father, Papak, overthrew the local ruler of Istakhr, Gozihr, from the Barzandi dynasty, and captured Istakhr. Papak was the priest of the temple of the goddess Anahita. His rise to power began precisely under the slogan of increasing the prestige of the Anahit temple (Daryaei, 2010, p. 254).

Having captured Istakhr, Papak appointed his eldest son Shapur as his heir and ruler. Obviously, this could not have pleased Ardashir. However, Shapur died for unknown reasons. After that, the power was to pass to Ardashir by inheritance. Some sources suggest that Ardashir had a hand in Shapur's death. Papak also captured the city of Bishapur and declared it his residence (The Cambridge History of Iran Volume 3(1), 2010, p.117). Later, in 212 AD, Ardashir defeated the Persian ruler Gochihri, who had previously been his subordinate, and brought his lands under his influence. Around this time, he established a new capital, Khvarre (Firuzabad) (Dyakonov, 1961, p.252).

Starting in 222, Ardashir began to expand his territories, and at the same time entered into conflict with Rome. In that year, Ardashir subjugated the territories of Kirman, Jay (Isfahan), and Khuzestan. Ardashir's rapid northward movement attracted the attention of the Parthian ruler Artabanus V. The Parthian ruler moved against Ardashir with a large army, and in 224 a decisive battle took place at a place called Hormuzgan, and Ardashir defeated the Parthian army. Ardashir, who was proclaimed shah in 226, continued his conquests, including territories such as Margiana, Sistan, and Makran under his influence. Ardashir then continued his

conquests, capturing Khorasan and the Arab-held Khira. He also continued his efforts to completely eliminate Parthian resistance after defeating Artabanus V in 224. In this process, Artavazd, the son of Artabanus and the last claimant to the Parthian throne, was removed from the political arena in 227 (this fact is also confirmed by his last minted coins). As a result, with the decisive defeat of Artavazd in 229, the rule of the Arsacid dynasty over Parthia was put to an end. (Dyakonov, 1961, p.229).

Ardashir Babakan's campaign to Atropatena is attributed to 227. It is believed that Ardashir captured Atropatena after a long struggle. This is reflected in the "Karname-i Ardashir-i Papakan". A number of researchers also take this fact as a basis (The Kārnāmag ī Ardashīr ī Babagān, 1896, p. 3).

However, there are also opinions that cast doubt on the idea that Ardashir captured Atropatena in 227. Thus, there are also possibilities that Atropatena was captured by Shapur I a little later, in 244. (The Cambridge History of Iran Volume 3(1), 2010, p. 119; Davydov, 2020, p. 32).

#### **Tansar's reforms, the transformation of Atropatena into one of the religious centers of the Sassanids.**

After Ardashir Babakan came to power, he first began to prepare and implement the ideological foundations of power. Thus, even when he started the war against the Parthian state, he had widely benefited from the active assistance of Zoroastrian clergy. That is why, after coming to power, he crowned himself with orthodox Zoroastrian laws. Even in the "Naqsh-e Rostam" monument, Ardashir I, as the ruler of Eranshahr, showed that he received the ring of power from Ahura Mazda. This both indicated that he supposedly had a divine origin, and at the same time that he received the "blessings" of Ahura Mazda when coming to power, and that he himself would rely on Zoroastrian religious figures in his future activities. In fact, Ardashir's promotion of such a concept, namely the concept of "unity of religion and state", in a way led to the increase in the importance of Atropatena as a religious center (Khalifa-zadeh, 2025). Thus, Zoroastrianism became an integral part of the imperial policy of Ardashir I and his successors. This also led to a significant increase in the influence of Zoroastrian priests in the political life of the Sassanids. The fact that the temples of Atropatena did not remain unnoticed by the Sassanids is also proven by the work "Karname-i Ardashir-i Papakan", which is the biography of the Sassanid ruler Ardashir I. There is an interesting episode in the work: "Papak did not know that Sasan was descended from Dara's son Darab. One night while sleeping, he had a dream. It was as if a sun had emerged from Sasan's head and was illuminating the world. The next night, he saw in his dream that Sasan was sitting on a richly decorated white elephant, while the state officials around him were worshipping him and praising him. On the third night, Papak saw in his dream that the sacred fire of three temples - Ādur Gushnasp (Azergüşnasp), Ādur Farnbāg

(Azerfarinbuğ) and Ādur Burzēn-Mihr (Azerbērzinmehr) - was burning in Sasan's house, illuminating the world. He was amazed by the mystery of dreams and called the wise men and dream interpreters to him and told them the dreams he had seen for three days" (The Kār-nāmag ī Ardashīr ī Babagān, 1896, p. 1). The illumination of the two temples, Ādur Gushnasp (Azergüşnasp) and Ādur Farnbāg (Azerfarinbuğ), during the reign of the Sasanians, shows that the Atropatena temples gained the respect of the Sasanians, and at the same time, the clergy of those temples played an important role in the rise of the Sasanians to power. The work "Karname-i Ardashir-i Papakan" was written towards the end of the reign of Ardashir I. The importance of its writing will be discussed below.

One of the religious figures of that time, Tansar, had a great influence on the religious reforms of Ardashir I. One of the sources that provides important information about Tansar's reforms is the work "Nāma-ye Tansar" or "Tansar name". The work "Tansar name", one of the earliest written sources of the Sasanian period, was written by Tansar in the 30s of the 3rd century to the Sasanian ruler Istakhr. It was here that he tried to justify his concept of state and religion with logical evidence (Kreyenbroek, 2013, p. 19).

Ardashir I's first act upon coming to power was to carry out religious reforms in the Sasanian Empire. To implement such an idea, Ardashir I Babakan appointed a cleric named "Tansar" (or Tosar, Tasar, Tousar) to the rank of "Erpaq" (or Erpad). In some sources, he is referred to as Mihrab Tusargan. Ardashir I Babakan set the following ideological and political tasks for Tansar:

1. To collect books and writings related to the Zoroastrian religion,
2. To cleanse the religion of disagreements and heresies within the Zoroastrian religion,
3. To establish an administrative hierarchy among the Zoroastrian clergy,
4. To secure the claims of the Sasanian government to religious power.

The temple of Ādur Gushnasp (Azergushnasp), located in Atropatena, had important political and ideological significance. This was due to the activity of this temple for a long time, which prevented the spread of the Roman and Greek religious pantheon in the geography of Azerbaijan and Iran. Therefore, the first Parthian rulers paid great attention to the activity of this temple in Atropatena. However, in later periods, the Parthian Arshaks began to prefer the temple of Ādur Burzēn-Mihr (Azerbērzinmehr). Although, according to Zoroastrian mythology, the fire of victory "Ātash-i Bahram" was located in the temple of "Azergushnasp" (Khalifa-zadeh, 2025, p. 3). This was confirmed by the work "Karname-i Ardashir-i Papakan". The book said: "The dream interpreters answered Papak's question as follows: "That person seen in the dream will accept power in the world... The light of Azerfarinbuğun represents the

wisdom of the temples, Azergüşnasp – the warrior and the commander, and Azerberzinmehr – the farmer and the world's harvest" (The Kār-nāmag ī Ardashīr ī Babagān, 1896, p. 2).

However, Ardashir I captured and destroyed the Azerberzinmehr temple during his military operations against Parthia. As a result, the rise of the Azergüşnasp temple began.

After being appointed Tansar "Erpaq", he first began to collect the scattered texts of the Avesta and successfully carried it out. It was under his leadership that the staff operating did not content themselves with collecting the "Avesta" into a single book, but divided it into nasks (parts-books). After the final editing, the "Avesta" was compiled into 21 books (Aliyev, 1989, p. 63). However, only four incomplete books (Yasht, Yasna, Visprat and Videvdat) and "Avesta Khurtak" or "Little Avesta" have survived to our time. The names of the individual books (nasks) of the Avesta, collected during the Sasanian period, came to us through "Denkart", one of the well-known books of the Sasanian period. Tansar's second goal in compiling the "Avesta" was to bring Zoroastrian myths into a form that could be explained rationally. Thus, Tansar's main idea was reflected in these words: "There is no stability in a religion that cannot be explained by logic." Nevertheless, Tansar purified the "Avesta" from purely philosophical texts and gave preference to ceremonies, legal concepts, and worship. At the same time, Tansar made other additions to the "Avesta". These additions included the fact that the father of Ahura Mazda and Ahura Manyu was Zurvan, and at the same time, he dedicated sanctity to the mythical ancestor of the Sassanids. In this way, as well as conveying to society the hierarchy of one god, the idea of a single ruler chosen by the god was also conveyed (Modi, 1906, p. 118).

Another reform of Tansar was the construction of Zoroastrian temples throughout the Sassanid state. In the book "Kār-nāmag ī Ardashīr ī Pābagān" (1896), it is stated that Ardashir I gave an order to Tansar to build fire temples in all parts of the country. It seems from the order of Ardashir I that during the Parthian period, the rulers avoided building many Zoroastrian temples in the country. The fact that Papak mentioned three Zoroastrian temples in his dream in "Karname-i Ardashir-i Papakan" also confirms this in a way. However, Ardashir I encouraged the construction of many temples (Modi, 1906, p. 119). The main reason for this could be explained by two main purposes. The first of these was probably that Ardashir I wanted to rely on the power of the previous temples and prevent their future political influence from increasing. Second, Ardashir I wanted to establish the concept of a single state and a single religion within the empire. As a part of this, he encouraged the construction of temples throughout the empire. However, it was during the reign of Ardashir I that the importance of the "Azergushnasp" temple in Atropatena increased significantly. After his

death, Shapur I, who came to power, gave the priests of the "Azergushnasp" temple in Atropatena the name "temple". It was during his time that Kartire, who was appointed priest in place of Tansar in the Sasanians, was given the title of "temple from temple" (magus of magi or high priest).

As a result of the above reforms of Tansar, Atropatena became the main spiritual and religious center of the Sasanians. The "Azergushnasp" temple became a permanent sanctuary of the Sasanians. This also increased the Sasanians' concern for Atropatena. Thus, first Rome, and then Byzantium, the traditional enemies of the Sasanians, tried to influence the public life of Atropatena through Christian missionaries (Davydov, 2020, p. 36). Although the Sasanian shahs initially tolerated the spread of Christianity, after the proclamation of Christianity as the state religion in Rome in 313, they did not look favorably on the spread of such sects in their states, and persecutions sometimes occurred.

Tansar's next reform was the clarification of the state calendar and state holidays. Thus, according to the authors, the beginning of the calendar during the Parthian period was celebrated on September 21, the day of harvest, as the Mehragan holiday. As a result of Tansar's reforms, a new calendar was introduced. As a result of the introduction of the calendar, March 21 was determined as the new official holiday, the Novruz holiday (Alieva, 2007, p. 26). The names of the months of the calendar were also determined in accordance with the principles of the Mazdakism religion. However, it should be noted that these reforms of Tansar have not yet been given an unambiguous assessment by modern researchers. Some researchers, for example Kreyenbroek, have characterized Tansar as the founder and propagator of Zurvanism, a branch of Zoroastrianism (Kreyenbroek, 2013, p. 24). One of the main issues in Tansar's reforms was the fight against alleged heresy. According to ancient sources, Tansar was the direct initiator of the extinguishing of the fire pots of some local rulers and tried for a long time to convince Ardashir I to do so (Kreyenbroek, 2013, p. 26). Indeed, it was during the time of Ardashir I that the state began to fight against two factors that it considered a threat to the official religion. The first of these was the extinguishing of the official fire pots in the cities of local rulers and the replacement of the symbols on them with the traditional Zoroastrian symbols of fire and Ahura Mazda. Second, it was thanks to Tansar that traditional Zoroastrian iconography, that is, anthropomorphic images, images created in honor of non-traditional gods, was banned. As a result, a significant centralization of the Sasanian state was achieved in terms of religion. All these reforms led to the increase in the religious importance of the "Azergushnasp" religious temple in Atropatena, as well as Atropatena.

The Sasanian "anti-icon" measures led to changes in the inscriptions of the Sasanian rulers, as well as in the design of the coins minted starting from Ardashir I. While

Parthian coins featured a variety of images, Sasanian coins featured only fire or fire-like, symbolic depictions of the rulers. Even in the "Naqsh-e Rostam" monument, the Sasanian kings could be distinguished more by their faces than by the symbolic images on their clothing.

Tansar's reforms quickly led to the rise of the prestige of both the Atropatena temples and the state government. It was as a result of his reforms that Ardashir I took the title "Shah-i Eranan ve nairan" (Shah of the Iranians and non-Iranians), instead of the title "Shah Eranshahr" he had previously adopted (Fazili, 1992, p. 118). According to the Arab author Ibn Khordadbeh, the Sasanian Shah Ardashir I granted the title of king to the rulers of some territories under his rule and with which he was reckoned for his political influence. These included names such as Aturpatakan Shah, Shirvanshah, Brashkanshah. This factor itself is an indication that the Sasanians attached great importance to the political situation of Atropatena from the very beginning of their rule (Fazili, 1992, p. 119). However, Tansar failed to achieve some of the goals set for him. These included developing the social hierarchy of Zoroastrian temples, as well as establishing the ideological system of the state based on Zoroastrian laws. Despite all this, the reforms carried out by Tansar played an important role in the formation of the ideological life of the Sasanian state. The reforms initiated by Tansar were also of great importance for Atropatena. As a result of the reforms he carried out, Atropatena began to become the religious and social center of the Sasanian state. The clergy of the "Azergushnasp" temple began to play an important, and in some cases even leading, role in the social and political life of the Sasanian state.

Tansar's reforms were continued during the reign of Kartir (or Kertir), who was first appointed "temple of the temple" by Shapur I (let us recall that Tansar bore the title Erpaq or Erpad), who is believed to have been originally from Atropatena. In fact, Kartir's reforms during the Sasanian period arose from the necessity created by the movement of Mani, who was originally from Media. Even today, Shapur I's sympathy for Mani, who was not actually a Zoroastrian, raises great controversy. However, it was precisely the struggle against Mani that played a major role in Kartir's rise (Boyce, 2008, p. 11). At the same time, the struggle against Mani led to significant changes in Zoroastrian ideology. The first of these was the miraculous component. Thus, the Sasanian writings of the period write that Kartir allegedly poured boiling liquid on his chest to prove his strength, and nothing happened to him (Boyce, 2008, p. 12). This was already an innovation in Zoroastrianism. The second major innovation was the introduction of the concept of the afterlife, which was understandable to Zoroastrianism.

However, Kartir's main reform was the establishment and completion of the Zoroastrian hierarchy. Sources indicate that almost all authority in this area was given to him by Shapur I. The creation of the title "Mobadan-e Mobad" was also due to his service. An interesting fact

was that while the Sasanian kings lived in Ctesiphon, the "Mobadan-e Mobad", which was considered the head of the Zoroastrian religion, operated in the city of Shiz, which is now called "Takhti Suleiman", located near the city of Gazaka in Atropatena.

### Conclusions.

The aim of the article was to determine the place of Atropatena in the religious policy of the Sasanians in the 3rd century, as well as its important role in the policy pursued by the early Sasanian ruler Ardashir I Papak. Zoroastrian priests played an important role in the rise to power of Ardashir I. The biographical work "Kār-nāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān" (Karname-i Ardashir-i Papakan) repeatedly emphasizes that Ardashir I's ancestors came from the Zoroastrian priestly lineage, and at the same time, their lineage was based on the Achaemenid rulers. That is why Ardashir I used the traditional political influence of Zoroastrian priests in his political struggle for power. It is likely that the Zoroastrian priests of Atropatena also played an important role in his rise to power. For this reason, in the religious reforms carried out by Tansar, a close associate of Ardashir I, to whom Ardashir I entrusted religious authority, great importance was attached to the preservation of the religious authority of the Atropatena temples, especially the "Azergushnasp" temple. It should be noted that it was on his initiative

that Ardashir I destroyed the Zoroastrian temples of the local rulers. The first step in this direction was the destruction of the Arshak religious temple. This led to the strengthening of the religious and political authority of the "Azergushnasp" temple in Atropatena.

Tansar's religious reforms led to the following results in the social life of the Sassanids and Atropatena:

1. The religious doctrines of Zoroastrianism were systematized, and the "Avesta" was collected;
2. The construction of temples and the propagation of Zoroastrianism as an ideology began in all parts of the country;
3. The religious life of the country was concentrated around the temple of "Azergushnasp" in Atropatena, which turned Atropatena into the religious center of the Sasanians;
4. The foundation for the formation of a religious hierarchy was laid;
5. Religious and civil administration were combined;
6. The ideological foundations for the administration of the Sasanian state from a single center were created.

All this, along with the strengthening of the Sasanian state, led to the transformation of Atropatena into the main religious center of the country, as well as one of the important socio-political centers.

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