**ARSACIDS,** THE (Persian Aškānīān), Parthian dynasty which ruled Iran from about 250 B.C. to about 226 A. D.

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## i. Origins

Our sources on the ancestry of the eponymous founder of the dynasty, Arsaces, vary irreconcilably. He is introduced as a bandit who seized Parthia by attacking and killing its satrap, Andragoras (Justin 41.4; Ammianus Marcellinus 23.6.2); as a Bactrian who found the rise of Diodotus unbearable, moved to Parthia, and securing the leadership of the province, rose against the Seleucids (Strabo 11.9.3); or as a Parni chief of the Dahae Sacians, who conquered Parthia shortly before Diodotus' revolt (ibid., 11.9.2). A fourth account alleges that "the Persian" Andragoras whom Alexander left as satrap of Parthia was the ancestor of the subsequent kings of Parthia (Justin 12.4.12). A fifth version had been provided by Arrian in his *Parthica*, now lost, which was epitomized on this point by Photius (*Bibliotheca* 58) and the twelfth-century Syncellus (*Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae* XIII, ed. W. Dindorf, Bonn, 1829, p. 539). Photius' epitome runs as follows: "Arsaces and Tiridates were brothers, descendants of Phriapites, the son of Arsaces [Syncellus: the brothers "were allegedly descendants of the Persian Artaxerxes"]. Pherecles [Syncellus: Agathocles], who had been made satrap of their country by Antiochus Theus, offered a gross insult to one of them, whereupon... they took five men into counsel, and with their aid slew the insolent one. They then induced their nation to revolt from the Macedonians and set up a government of their own." Finally, the Iranian national history traced Arsaces' lineage to Kay Qobād (Ferdowsī, *Šāh-nāma* VII, p. 116. Ṭabarī, I, p. 710), or to his son Kay Āraš (Ṯaʿālebī, p. 457), or to Dārā the son of Homāy (Ṭabarī, I, p. 704; Bīrūnī, *The Chronology*, p. 118), or even to the famous archer, Āraš (*Šāh-nāma* VII, p. 115; anonymous "authorities" apud Bīrūnī, op. cit., p. 119).

These reports reflect developments in political ideologies. Humble origin and robbery are folkstories told also of Cyrus, Sāsān, and other dynastic heroes. The association with Āraš the archer was occasioned by similarity in names and the fact that Arsaces is figured on Parthian coins as a bowman (cf. A. v. Gutschmidt in *ZDMG* 34, 1880, p. 743), although the bow was always regarded as a royal symbol. "The Persian Artaxerxes" in Syncellus has generally been taken to mean Artaxerxes II because Ctesias said (apud Plutarch, *Artoxares* 2) that he was called Arsaces prior to his coronation (A. v. Gutschmid, *Geschichte Irans und seiner Nachbarländer*, Tübingen, 1888, p. 30, and others). But this ignores the fact that Artaxerxes I also was called Aršak/Arsaces, Babylonian Aršu (A. Sachs, "Achaemenid Royal Names in Babylonian Astronomical Texts," *American Journal of Ancient History* 4, 1979, pp. 131ff.).

The tradition that Arsaces was a Parni chief is supported, as R. N. Frye has noticed (*The History of Ancient Iran*, Munich, 1983, p. 206), by a statement in *Bundahišn* (35.43f.) according to which Dastān (= Zāl), "Prince of the Sacas" and Aparnak, Lord of Aparšahr (later Nīšāpūr) were descendants of Sām: "Aparšahr is thus named because it is the land of the Aparnak" (corrected translation in Frye, loc. cit., with n. 3). By the middle of the third century B.C., the Parni appear to have been assimilated to the Iranian Parthians: They adopted the latter's name, bore purely Iranian—even Zoroastrian—names (Lassen, *Indische Altertumskunde* II, Bonn, 1847, p. 285 n. 3, could connect the name of Arsaces' father, Phriapites, with an Avestan *Friya. pitā "father-lover" = Greek Philopatros). On his coins, Arsaces wears Sacian dress but sits on a stool (later ampholas) with a bow in hand, as Achaemenid satraps, such as Datames, had done before. He deliberately diverges from Seleucid coins to emphasize his nationalistic and royal aspirations, and he calls himself Kārny/Karny (Greek Autocratos), a title already borne by Achaemenid supreme generals, such as Cyrus the Younger (see for details M. T. Abgarians and D. G. Sellwood, "A Hoard of Early Parthian Drachms," *NC*, 1971, pp. 103ff.). Later Parthian kings assumed Achaemenid descent, revived Achaemenid protocols (J. Neusner, "Parthian Political Ideology," *Iranica Antiqua* 3, 1963, pp. 45ff.), and Artabanus III, who named one of his sons Darius (Dio Cassius 59.27), laid claim to Cyrus' heritage (Tacitus, *Annals* 4.31). On the whole, then, onomastic, numismatic, and epigraphic considerations point to the conclusion that the Parthian dynasty was "local, Iranian by origin;" on this ground "the Zoroastrian character of all the names of the Parthian kings, and the fact that some of these names... belong to the 'heroic background' of the Avesta," afford logical explanation (G. V. Lukonin in *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/2, 1983, p. 687).

*Bibliography*: Given in the text.

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## ii. The Arsacid Dynasty

1. *History*. The rise of the Arsacids is closely linked to the history of another dynasty, that of the Seleucids (q.v.). After 308 B.C. its founder, Seleucus I, had conquered the eastern part of Iran and also, after the battle of Ipsus (301 B.C.), annexed large portions of Syria. In the following decades the Seleucids were mostly to concentrate their interest and their power on the western half of their vast kingdom, particularly as a result of their struggles against the Lagids for dominance in Syria. This led to the Seleucids losing large parts of their Iranian possessions within a period of roughly

fifteen years from 250 to 235 B.C. (Although there is some dispute amongst historians as to the chronological sequence of events, it is at least agreed that they occurred within this span of time.)

The most important role during this period was played by the Parni, an Iranian tribe belonging to the Dahae who, according to the ancient writers (Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.28.8,10; Quintus Curtius 8.1.8) lived in the territories between the Oxus and the Jaxartes at the time of Alexander the Great. About the end of the fourth or at the latest by the middle of the third century B.C. the Parni had advanced as far as the frontiers of the Seleucid kingdom, whether in the vicinity of the Caspian Sea or on the river Tejen (Turkmenistan). The movements of the Parni and Dahae, beginning in the area between the Oxus and the Jaxartes and ending in the immediate vicinity of the Seleucid satrapy of Parthava, are difficult to reconstruct and therefore a matter of dispute among historians. (cf. K. Schippmann, *Grundzüge der parthischen Geschichte*, Darmstadt, 1980, pp. 15ff.)

Around 250 B.C. at any rate, the Parni, under their leader Arsaces, penetrated into the Astauene, that is to say probably into the territory along the Atrek valley. (See however also I. N. Chlopin, *Iranica Antiqua* 12, 1977, pp. 143ff.) Shortly afterwards, probably ca. 247 B.C., Arsaces was proclaimed king in Asaak, the exact location of which has still to be identified. This event, it is widely assumed, marks the beginning of the Arsacid era. (See most recently P. H. L. Eggermont, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 32, 1975, pp. 15ff.)

In about 245 B.C., during the reign of the Seleucid monarch Seleucus II (r. 246-25 B.C.), Andragoras, the Seleucid satrap of the province of Parthava, made himself independent. Soon afterwards, ca 239 B.C., his example was followed by Diodotus, satrap of Bactria, a Seleucid satrapy which was to play a significant role for more than a hundred years as the Greco-Bactrian kingdom.

The reasons for the defection of these two satrapies in such rapid succession are not known, nor is the extent to which the inhabitants, i.e. Macedonians, Greeks, and the natives, participated in the rebellions (cf. E. Will, *Histoire politique du monde hellénistique [323-30 av. J. C.]* I², 1979, pp. 281ff.) At any rate, the Parni exploited the defection of these two eastern provinces of the Seleucid kingdom by launching an invasion into Parthia, ca. 238 B.C., in the course of which Andragoras met his death. Shortly afterwards they also occupied Hyrcania. It is likely that the term Parthians was applied to the Parni during this period after their occupation of the satrapy of Parthava and subsequently, no doubt, they came to use the designation themselves. Originally, therefore, Parthava is to be understood as a geographical term; then, in the form "Parthian," it became the name of a people when the Parni invaders started to extend their kingdom.

The Seleucids did not mount a counter-campaign in the east until the year 231-27 B.C., by which time it was already too late. Above all else it failed because unrest in Asia Minor soon forced Seleucus II to break off operations.

Fully two decades passed before the great Seleucid ruler Antiochus III made a renewed attempt, ca. 209 B.C., to regain the Parthian and Greco-Bactrian territories, but this, too, was a failure. Although he was able to register a certain degree of success, in the end the warring parties concluded treaties, according to which the Parthians and Greco-Bactrians nominally recognized the Seleucids as overlords, but the letter conceded de facto independence to the two kingdoms.

In the Parthian kingdom itself, from 217 B.C. onwards, Arsaces I had been succeeded by his son Arsaces II. (Some historians also take the view that after a reign of 2-3 years Arsaces I was replaced by his brother Tiridates, see A. D. H. Bivar in *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/3, 1983, p. 37.) Very little is known of events during the reign of Arsaces II or those of his successors Phriapatius (ca. 191-ca. 76 B.C.) and Phraates I (ca. 176-ca. 71 B.C.), but it is certainly true to say that their small kingdom had consolidated its position on the shores of the Caspian Sea.

*The Parthian empire from Mithridates I (ca. 171-39/8) to Mithridates II (ca. 124/3-88/7 B.C.).* The next ruler, Mithridates I, ushered in that great and decisive epoch in the history of his people during which Parthia rose to become a major power in the Ancient East. This Mithridates and his successors achieved in a series of campaigns against the Seleucids and later the Romans in the west, and in the east against the Greco-Bactrian kingdom and the nomadic peoples who again and again emerged from the steppes between the Oxus and the Jaxartes. More source materials are available for this period in Parthian history than for the initial phase, but the exact chronology of events is still in many ways unclear.

The first campaign of Mithridates I was probably directed against the Greco–Bactrian kingdom (between 160 and 155 B.C.) with the aim of reconquering the territories that had been lost in that region during the reign of Arsaces I, especially the area around Nisa. What is certain is that the Parthians then conquered Media in the second half of 148 B. C. (According to the Seleucid inscription of June 148 at Bīsotūn a Seleucid governor was at any rate still in office there at that point in time. Cf. L. Robert, *Gnomon* 35, 1963, p. 76; H. Luschey, *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 1974, p. 123.) On the evidence of a cuneiform text it is also known that by 12 October 141, Mithridates' power was recognized as far afield as the ancient Sumerian city Uruk in southern Mesopotamia. Shortly before this he had had himself crowned king in Seleucia. It is also possible that the capital was transferred to Ctesiphon as early as his reign.

Not long afterwards the Parthians were for the first but not the last time forced to defend themselves against a fierce attack by nomads, possibly the Sakas, in the east. Mithridates took personal command of the campaign, even though the Seleucids were just then making ready to reconquer Mesopotamia. Presumably he consi-

dered the adversary in the east to be the more dangerous, an assessment of the situation which subsequent events confirmed as correct. The invasion in the northeast was successfully repulsed, then the Seleucid ruler Demetrius II, after making initial gains, was taken prisoner. Shortly before his death in 139/8 B.C. Mithridates also went on to conquer Elymais.

His greatest achievement had been to make the Parthians a world power. It seems quite probable, as J. Wolski has suggested (in H. Temporini and W. Haase, eds., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II/9.1, Berlin, 1976, pp. 198ff.), that the western policies of the Parthian king were based on a strategy involving not only the conquest of Mesopotamia but also the subsequent overthrow of Syria in order to gain access to the Mediterranean. Certainly, the exploits of Mithridates can no longer simply be classified as a series of raids for the purpose of pillaging and capturing booty.

His son and successor, Phraates II (ca. 139/8-ca. 128 B.C.) had to face the final, fruitless attempt on the part of the Seleucids to regain their power in the east. In 130 B.C., his adversary Antiochus VII Sidetes (139/8-29 B.C.) gained fairly substantially—reconquering Babylonia and Media, but soon afterwards the inhabitants of the Seleucid garrison towns revolted and allied themselves with the Parthians. The Seleucids then suffered a crushing defeat and Antiochus VII himself met his death (on these events see Th. Fischer, *Untersuchungen zum Partherkrieg Antiochus VII im Rahmen der Seleukidengeschichte*, Tübingen, 1970). From this point on the Seleucid kingdom effectively ceased to be a rival for the Parthians.

For their part, however, the Parthians were unable to rejoice in the victory for long because in the next few years they were again forced to come to terms with the nomads on their eastern frontier. As a result of the movements of the Huns in inner Asia various nomadic peoples began to appear in the region of the Oxus approximately during the period 133-129 B.C. The most important ones were the Yüeh-chih, who conquered the Greco-Bactrian kingdom and founded the empire of the Kushans (q.v.), the Sakas, and the Massagetae who turned against the Parthian empire. (For an account of these events, see P. Daffinà, *L'immigrazione dei Saka nella Drangiane*, Rome, 1967.) Both Phraates II and his successor Artabanus I (ca. 127-24/3) lost their lives in the course of these struggles. In addition to this, Hyspaosines, the ruler of the newly-founded kingdom of Characene in southern Mesopotamia, conquered fairly large parts of Mesopotamia, reaching as far up as Babylon. (For the history of this kingdom, see S. A. Nodelmann, *Berytus* 13, 1959-60, pp. 83ff.)

Under these difficult circumstances Mithridates II (ca. 124/3-88/7 B.C.), one of the most outstanding ruling figures of the ancient East, ascended the throne. First, he succeeded in defeating Hyspaosines (ca. 122/1), then he made the northern Mesopotamian kingdoms or Adiabene, Gordyene, and Osrhoene into vassal states, and conquered Dura-Europos in 113 B.C. Then he established contact between Parthia and Armenia (ca. 97 B.C.), deposed King Artavasdes, and replaced him with his son Tigranes on the throne, in exchange for which he received "seventy valleys" (Strabo 11.14.15). The two countries were henceforth to be in virtually constant contact with one another, whether on a friendly or a hostile basis.

Mithridates II, known as "the Great" and from ca. 109/8 B.C. assuming the title "King of Kings," also presided over events of a more peaceful nature. Around 115 B.C. he was visited by an embassy from the Chinese emperor Wu-ti, and the two rulers reached an agreement on the opening of the trade route later known as the "Silk Road." A meeting also took place with Rome, the major world power in the West, on the Euphrates in 96 B.C. not in 92 B.C. as hitherto accepted. (E. Badian, *Studies in Greek and Roman History*, Oxford, 1964, pp. 157ff.; see also J. Wolski, op. cit., p. 196 n. 5. On relations between Rome and Parthia since Mithridates II see E. Dabrowa, *La politique de l'etat Parthe à l'égard de Rome—d'Artaban II à Vologèse I (ca. 11-ca 72 de N.E.) et les facteurs qui la conditionnaient*, Cracow, 1983, pp. 15-69. The Parthian ambassador Orobazos offered Sulla, the propraetor of the province of Cilicia, the "friendship" and "alliance" of his master. Though the exact outcome of this meeting is unclear, the agreements with China and Rome prove Parthia's rise to world status.

Even Mithridates II, however, soon came up against an internal problem which was eventually to prove a contributory factor in the downfall of the Parthian empire: the power and influence of the Parthian nobility, represented by a few great families, were from now on in a position to oppose the monarch frequently.

The ancient writers characterize this period as a "time of internal disorder," an indication of how difficult it is to reconstruct events precisely. (Historians, especially those who take Babylonian texts as their sources, differ radically in their interpretations. For recent views, see G. Le Rider, *Suse sous les Séleucides et les Parthes*, *MDAFI* XXXVIII, 1965, pp. 391ff.; M. L. Chaumont, *Syria* 48, 1971, pp. 152ff.; K. W. Dobbins, *NC*, 1975, pp. 19ff.; D. G. Sellwood, *JRAS*, 1976, pp. 2ff.) One can not discount reports that Mithridates II had to contend at the end of his reign with a rival monarch called Gotarzes, probably the same Gotarzes who is depicted on the well-known bas-relief in Bīsotūn. (E. Herzfeld, *Am Tor von Asien*, Berlin, 1920, pp. 35ff., is firmly of the view that the two are identical, but see also M. L. Chaumont, *Syria* 48, 1971, pp. 156f.)

*Parthia and Rome.* Disorder persisted after the death of Mithridates II in 88/7 B.C., and the Armenians seized the opportunity to reconquer the "seventy valleys" they had ceded to the Parthians. At this time a series of monarchs ruled in the Parthian empire, such as Gotarzes, Orodes I, Sinatruces, and Phraates III, of whom little more than names is known. (Cf. Schippmann, *Grundzüge der parthischen Geschichte*, pp. 33f. Also Orodes and Mithridates, sons of Phraates III, who struggled for power after having murdered their father,

are obscure figures. In 54/3 B.C. Mithridates defeated his brother, averting a fraternal strife, which would surely have diminished the chances of success in the impending great conflict with Rome.

The Romans had no real reason to seek conflict. Its main cause lay rather in the ambition of Crassus. At the end of 60 B.C. or the beginning of 59 B.C. Pompey, Caesar, and Crassus had established an alliance, the so-called "triumvirate" in Rome, and shortly afterwards (55 B.C.) control of the province of Syria had been assigned to Crassus with special powers. He wanted to use this position to enhance his standing and authority by fighting a war against the Parthians.

Even in Rome opinion was against such a campaign. Nevertheless, at the end of 55 B.C. Crassus marched off to Syria, where he arrived in the late spring of 54 B.C., and set out for Mesopotamia in the spring of 53 B.C.

At this time the Romans knew little about the Parthians and their army, which explains why Crassus "in addition to the campaign itself, which was the greatest mistake of all" (Plutarch, *Crassus* 17), made every other conceivable mistake. At the beginning of May, 53 B.C. Crassus and his Roman army fell into a trap set by the Parthians under their young commander Surena at Carrhae. Roughly one half of the Roman army of about 40,000 men, including Crassus and his son perished, 10,000 men were made captive, and only ten thousand were able to escape. (For details of this campaign, see N. C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia*, Chicago, 1938, p. 78, n. 38, and E. Gabba in *La Persia e il mondo greco-romano*, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Quaderno 76, Rome, 1966, pp. 51ff.)

This victory produced a mighty echo amongst the peoples of the East without however causing any decisive shift in the balance of power. (Cf. D. Timpe, "Die Bedeutung der Schlacht von Carrhae," *Museum Helveticum* 19, 1962, pp. 104ff.) As for Surena, the victor of Carrhae, it soon cost him his life. Probably fearing that he would constitute a threat to himself, King Orodes II had him executed.

In the next few years the Parthians proved incapable of exploiting their victory, even when, after 50 B.C., the Romans were preoccupied with the conflicts between Pompey and Caesar and the subsequent civil war. Not until 41 B.C. or the start of 40 B.C. did the Parthians launch a major attack. Their army was led by Pacorus, son of Orodes, and the Roman, Quintus Labienus, who had been sent as an ambassador by Cassius, the Roman commander in chief in Syria, to conduct negotiations at the Parthian court and had remained there after the defeat of the republicans in the Roman civil war.

At the outset the Parthian attack was crowned with success: Labienus conquered large parts of Asia Minor, while Pacorus occupied Syria and Palestine. Soon, however, the situation changed. Mounting a counter-attack in the year 39 B.C., the Romans defeated first Labienus and then Pacorus, who both lost their lives.

The death of his son Pacorus caused Orodes to appoint his eldest son Phraates IV (ca. 40-3/2) as successor. This was to prove a fatal error because Phraates murdered not only his father and brothers but also his own son and persecuted the nobility, many of whom left the country. The Romans under Antony saw an opportunity to attack the Parthians when the latter rejected a peace offer, coupled with a demand to hand back the Roman standards and captives taken at Carrhae, and Antony began the war in 36 B.C. According to Plutarch (*Antonius* 37.3) he marched with 100,000 men across Armenia to Media. But this campaign, too, was destined to fail. The Parthians inflicted a crushing defeat on the Roman rearguard, destroying the siege engines, while Antony, marching on ahead with the main body of his troops, started to besiege Phraata (Phraaspa), the exact location of which remains unknown. The widely-held suggestion that it is identical with Taḵt-e Solaymān to the southeast of Lake Urmia, where excavations have been carried out by the German Archeological Institute since 1959, is unproven (see K. Schippmann, *Die iranischen Feuerheiligtümer*, Berlin, 1971, pp. 309ff.; H. Bengtson, *Zum Parther-Feldzug des Antonius*, Munich, 1974). Because his Armenian auxiliaries had withdrawn and since the season was advancing and his supplies were running low, Antony had to break off the siege and embark on what proved to be a costly retreat. Plutarch (*Antonius* 50) puts the Roman losses at 24,000 men.

Like after Carrhae, however, the Parthians were unable to use this victory, because of a civil war which lasted from 32/1 B.C. to 25 B.C. A certain Tiridates revolted against Phraates IV, probably with the support of aristocratic circles and also, it seems likely, abetted by the Romans from time to time. After certain initial successes this rebellion failed, but the difficulties of the Parthian king were by no means at an end, as can be seen from the fact that his coinage ceased in about 24/3 B.C. Also, according to Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 16.253), Phraates had to contend with a further rival king by the name of Mithridates in the years 12-9 B.C.

For their part the Romans under Augustus exploited this difficult situation of the Parthian king. In 20 B.C. they sent an army against Armenia, then ruled by King Artaxes who was hostile to Rome. In the circumstances, Phraates felt obliged to comply with the frequently expressed demands of the Romans that the captives and standards of the legions seized at Carrhae and other standards taken from Decidius Saxa (40 B.C.) and Marc Antony (36 B.C.) should be returned. In Rome this act of restoration was celebrated as if a great victory had been won over the Parthians on the field of battle. In the context of these events both sides seem also to have concluded an informal peace treaty. (For details see K. H. Ziegler, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Partherreich*, 1964, Wiesbaden, pp. 48ff., Dabrowa, op. cit., pp. 91ff.) Rome recognized the Euphrates as a frontier whilst the Parthians on their side accepted Roman overlordship over Armenia. Now, however, the "personal" difficulties of Phraates IV really began. Augustus had sent the Parthian monarch a "Greek gift," an Italian slave-girl called Musa. She rose to

become his favorite wife and bore him a son named Phraataces, the later Phraates V. Hoping to obviate any problems over the succession, Phraates IV sent his four first-born sons to Rome where they would be protected by loyal hands, but Musa seized the opportunity to poison him, and her own son mounted the throne.

Soon afterwards conflict arose between Rome and Parthia over the question of Armenia. As a result the Romans appeared with a large force in Syria. Phraates gave way, and negotiations held in A.D. 1 ended with the Parthians relinquishing any claims to influence affairs in Armenia and the Romans granting recognition to Phraataces as a legitimate and sovereign ruler. Only a few years later, however, an uprising led to his being driven from the country (A.D. 4), and he died shortly afterwards in Syria. His successor, Orodes III, was murdered two years later in A.D. 6.

The Parthian nobility now turned to one of the sons of Phraates IV who had been sent to Rome. Augustus returned the eldest of them, Vonones, to Parthia where he was crowned king in 8/9. But life in Rome, in the opinion of the Parthians at least, had made Vonones "soft," and they were unhappy about his tight budgetary control, so a rival candidate was set up by a section of the nobility. This was Artabanus who came from the northeast of Iran, probably Hyrcania. (For a comprehensive, specialist study see U. Kahrstedt, *Artabanos III. und seine Erben*, Bern, 1950.) When he first tried to seize power he was defeated by Vonones. Only at the second attempt was he successful, being crowned king in Ctesiphon in 10/11. Vonones withdrew to Armenia where he occupied the vacant throne for a short time, probably with Roman approval. However, when Artabanus threatened military action against him, the Romans withdrew their support from Vonones.

Encouraged by the Romans' willingness to yield to him in this way, Artabanus now attempted to make his own son king of Armenia, but Rome was not prepared to accept this. Instead, the emperor Tiberius sent his adoptive son Germanicus to Armenia at the head of a large army, and he appointed a son of the king of Pontus as monarch there with the title Artaxes III. After this Artabanus gave way, with the result that about 18/19, amicable relations were apparently re-established on the pattern of the treaties concluded in 20 B.C. and 1 B.C. The main loser was Vonones who was deported to Cicilia by the Romans and died there in A.D. 19 when attempting to escape.

The following decade and a half was a period of peaceful coexistence for the two powers, and Artabanus profited from this to consolidate his own position within the Parthian empire. In Media Atropatene, Mesene-Characene, Persis, and Elymais the native dynasties were removed and replaced by Parthian secundogenitures. Only in the eastern part of the empire did Artabanus encounter difficulties. Here a dynasty of Parthian provincial rulers, frequently referred to as "Pahlawa," held sway (probably the Surena family from eastern Iran; on the internal policy of Artabanus II see Dabrowa, op. cit., pp. 73ff.).

In A.D. 35 conflict with Rome was to break out again, and once more Armenia was the cause: King Artaxes had died without leaving an heir, and Artabanus moved to install his eldest son Arsaces on the throne. However, fearing that Artabanus was becoming too powerful, the nobility negotiated with the Romans against him: Emperor Tiberius then sent them Phraates, one of the four sons of Phraates IV, and when he died en route in Syria, Tiridates, a grandson of Phraates IV, was sent in his place. The Romans in addition appointed Mithridates, a brother of the ruler of Iberia, as king of Armenia. An Iberian army then conquered Armenia and beat off a counter-attack by the Parthians. With the backing of a Roman army commanded by L. Vitellius, the governor of Syria, Tiridates was crowned supreme king in Ctesiphon, and Artabanus withdrew to Hyrcania. However, Rome's efforts to maintain "Roman" Parthians on the throne met with little success. Very quickly the Parthians became dissatisfied with Tiridates; indeed, before the year 36 was out, a section of the nobility was inviting Artabanus to take over the monarchy again. The Romans therefore arranged a meeting on the Euphrates between Vitellius and Artabanus in the spring of A.D. 37. The precise outcome of these negotiations is not known, but in all likelihood "status quo" was re-established: the Parthians agreed not to intervene in Armenia, and the Romans recognized the existing frontiers as well as Parthian sovereignty. (On the foreign policy of Artabanus, see Dabrowa, op. cit., pp. 103ff.)

However, the internal political problems of Artabanus were not over yet. Seleucia, one of the most important cities in the Parthian empire rose in rebellion from A.D. 36 to 42 perhaps due to a struggle between the indigenous and the Greek aristocracies (so R. H. McDowell, *Coins from Seleucia on the Tigris*, Ann Arbor, 1935, pp. 224ff.; but see also U. Kahrstedt, *Artabanos III.*, pp. 25ff., 44ff.) or possibly because of a "class struggle" between rich and poor (thus N. Pigulevskaja, *Les villes de l'état iranien aux époques parthes et sassanides*, Paris, 1963, pp. 61ff., 85). Furthermore, Artabanus had to contend with a rival who enjoyed the support of the Parthian nobility, Cinnamus, one of his own foster sons. Eventually the ruler of Adiabene, Izates II, into whose kingdom Artabanus had withdrawn, managed to reconcile the two rivals. Artabanus probably died in A.D. 38 after a reign of some twenty-eight years.

He was succeeded by his son Vardanes I (ca. 39-ca. 45, thus Le Rider, *MDAFI*, 1965, p. 461, who does not rule out the possibility that Vardanes reigned until 47/8, see p. 426 n. 1; Kahrstedt, *Artabanos III.*, pp. 24ff. et alibi; R. Hanslik, Pauly-Wissowa, VIII/A, 1, 1955, col. 369, and others name Gotarzes as direct successor). A rival monarch, Gotarzes II, (43/4-51), a nephew of Artabanus caused several years of conflicts which ended with the murder of Vardanes.

Dissatisfied with Gotarzes, the Parthians requested the return of a rival, Meherdates, son of Vonones, who lived in Rome. In A.D. 49, however, Gotarzes managed

to win a decisive victory over his new rival in Kurdistan. A famous bas-relief on the rock at Bīsotūn may refer to this event. (Thus E. Herzfeld, *Am Tor von Asien*, p. 46, and others, who take the view that the Gotarzes mentioned in the accompanying inscription is identical with Gotarzes II, whereas M. L. Chaumont, *Syria* 48, 1971, pp. 156f. argues against their identity.) The joys of victory were, however, short-lived since Gotarzes died in A.D. 51.

It is not clear whether a certain Vonones, brother of Artabanus II and king of Armenia now took over the reins of power, to be followed by his son Vologases, or whether the latter succeeded directly. Certainly, Vologases I (ca. 51-77/9) reigned for a long time by Parthian standards; even though he too had to come to terms with a series of political problems at home and abroad.

In A.D. 53 Vologases succeeded in appointing his brother Tiridates king of Armenia after King Mithridates had been murdered. At first the Romans were unable to do much about the situation because of the poor condition of their forces in the region, and merely wrote to Vologases, recommending him to make peace and to give hostages.

In 58, however, the Romans proceeded to attack. They enjoyed some initial success, but in the winter of 62 Vologases managed to surround a Roman army near Rhandeia (on the Arsanias, a tributary of the Euphrates) and force it to capitulate. After negotiations, the Parthian lifted their siege and the Romans withdrew from Armenia, leaving Vologases to apply directly to Rome to have Tiridates invested with the Armenian crown in fief (on the relations between Parthia and Rome from 63 to 79, see Dabrowa, op. cit., pp. 154ff.). In A.D. 66 Tiridates traveled to Rome, where he received the crown of Armenia from the hands of the emperor Nero himself (see Dio Cassius 53.5, 2). The two empires then co-existed peacefully for a few decades.

Vologases died in A.D. 80 or perhaps earlier if certain coins are to be ascribed to him (see R. H. McDowell, op. cit., pp. 119ff., 230, but also Le Rider, *MDAFI*, London, 1965, pp. 174f. and G. D. Sellwood, *An Introduction to the Coinage of Parthia*, 1971, p. 220). Parthian history in the next few decades is difficult to reconstruct. Various pretenders to the throne, Pacorus II, Vologases II, and Osroes must have held sway over fairly large territories within the Parthian empire. In view of the apparently very long reign of Vologases II (A.D. 77/8-146/7), Le Rider, op. cit., introduced a further king, to whom he ascribed the coinage of the years 77/78, 89/90, and 106/08; the ruler referred to as Vologases II thus becomes Vologases III; according to Le Rider's account, he ruled from A.D. 111/12 (see also E. J. Keall, *JAOS* 95, 1975, p. 630 n. 36). At any rate, after the internal conflicts came to an end (from 114) Osroes probably occupied the Parthian throne; he was the adversary of the Romans in the Parthian war begun in 114 under the emperor Trajan. The precise reasons for this war are unknown. Economic factors may have played a part, such as the desire to gain control of the trade routes through Mesopotamia (thus J. Guey, *Essai sur la guerre parthique de Trajan*, Bucharest, 1937, or military aims such as the attainment of a secure frontier by annexing Armenia and northern Mesopotamia (thus F. A. Lepper, *Trajan's Parthian Way*, London, 1948, or simply the pursuit of personal glory on the emperor's part (thus Dio Cassius 68.17.1). It may well be, however, that all three reasons played a part.

In 114 the Romans marched into Armenia, killing Parthamasiris whom Osroes had installed as king there. From there Trajan conquered northern Mesopotamia (by the end of 115) and shortly afterwards the Parthian capital Ctesiphon. The Romans even managed to advance as far as the Persian Gulf, but then the reverses began. Trajan was in Babylon on the march back when he heard that a rebellion had broken out in many parts of the territory he had conquered. In addition, a revolt by the Jews had begun in Cyrenaica and was spreading throughout the Levant as far as Egypt. In the end the Romans once again proved masters of the situation, but not without suffering losses, both materially and in terms of prestige. Trajan also profited from power struggles within Parthia itself, but ultimately his victory cost too much. The Parthian Great King still had sufficient military forces at his disposal, and Trajan's attempt to conquer Hatra, one of the main Parthian bulwarks in northern Mesopotamia, ended in failure. Before he could contemplate a new campaign Trajan died in the summer of A.D. 117.

His successor Hadrian recognized only too clearly that apart from a few spectacular but momentary successes, such as the capture of Ctesiphon and the advance to the Persian gulf, Trajan's campaign had produced little of value for Rome. Thus more peaceful times returned. The Euphrates once again became the frontier and Rome relinquished Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Assyria, a province re-established by Trajan, which corresponded roughly to the territory of ancient Babylonia. No doubt the peace must have been welcome to both sides.

Osroes, however, had conflicts with his rival Vologases III, which must have ended in victory for Vologases after 129 since Osroes' coinage ceased to appear in Seleucia in 127/8.

Vologases III (after 129-146/8), too, had to contend with a rival king: Mithridates IV, who met with little success. Probably more dangerous were the Alans who between 134 and 136 attacked Albania, Media, and Armenia, penetrating as far as Cappadocia. The only way Vologases was able to persuade them to withdraw was probably by paying them. The Romans, too, under Hadrian's successor Antoninus Pius (138-161), were active, installing a new king in Armenia. The Parthians did not react possibly because their forces were inadequate or in order to preserve peace and the flourishing, highly profitable caravan trade that came with it.

Peaceful conditions also prevailed in the early part of the reign of Vologases IV (147/8-190/1 or 192/3). On the death of Antoninus Pius, the Parthians reopened hostilities and gained some successes against Marcus Aurelius: they conquered Armenia, installing a new

king named Pacorus, and also marched into Syria. But a Roman counter-offensive in 163 won back Armenia, where a new ruler by the name of Sohaemus was crowned king by the grace of Rome, and in 164 they forced the Parthians to give up Syria, and their general Avidius Cassius began to march into Mesopotamia. At the end of 165 or the beginning of 166 the Romans took Seleucia and Ctesiphon, but once again the Parthians were fortunate: an epidemic, probably of small pox, broke out forcing the Romans to retreat in the spring of A.D. 166. In the process they suffered heavy losses.

For the next three decades peace reigned, partly perhaps because various Roman emperors struggled for power. Finally Septimius Severus gained the upper hand, and began a new war against the Parthians, who by this time were ruled by Vologases V (190/1 or 193-208/09). This war lasted from 195 to 199, but although Seleucia and Ctesiphon again fell to the Romans, and Hatra was besieged, shortage of food and supplies forced Septimius Severus and his army to withdraw. Still, the Romans had managed this time to secure their frontier against Parthia by creating two new provinces, Osrhoene and Mesopotamia. According to some recent investigations (see M. G. A. Bertinelli, in Temporini and Haase, op. cit., II, 9/1, pp. 41ff.) the southeastern frontier ran from Alaina (Tell Ḥayal) via Singara (Beled Sinǰar) further east via Zagurae (ʿAin Sinu) to Vicat (Tell ʿIbra) and possibly up to the Tigris (Mosul).

After 207/8 Vologases VI followed his father on the throne, but soon (ca. 213) had to fight his younger brother Artabanus IV. In the year 216 the emperor Caracalla asked Artabanus IV for the hand of his daughter in marriage, in itself a clear evidence of the fact that the latter was then monarch, even though the coinage of Vologases VI continued to appear in Seleucia until at least 221/2.

Artabanus turned down Caracalla's request, thus giving the Roman emperor a pretext for a new Parthian war. Although Caracalla and his army succeeded in advancing as far as Arbela, the capital of Adiabene, he does not appear to have achieved any decisive victory over the Parthians.

In April 217 the Parthians mounted a fairly big offensive to avenge Caracalla's action, demanding from his successor, Macrinus, the withdrawal of the Romans from Mesopotamia and restitution for the damage they had caused. Macrinus was neither able nor willing to agree to these demands, so the war continued and the Romans were defeated at Nisibis, as suggested by the terms of the peace treaty: The Romans paid the Parthian king and the nobility a total of fifty million dinars in cash and gifts at the beginning of A.D. 218.

The peace brought little advantage to Macrinus and his successors, Elagabal (218-222) and Severus Alexander (222-35), since the Parthian era now came to an end.

It was Ardašīr (q. v.), a minor Parthian vassal in Persis, who was to bring about the demise of the Parthian empire. From roughly A.D. 220 onwards he began to subjugate nearby territories and others further afield, such as Kermān. (For details of of these events, see G. Widengren in *La Persia nel Medioevo*, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Quaderno 160, Rome, 1971, pp. 711ff.) When Artabanus IV proceeded to take counter-measures it was too late. The decisive battle, probably on 28 April 224 in the region of what is now Golpāyegān, between Isfahan and Nehāvand (see Widengren, op. cit., p. 743-44), cost the Parthian Great King his life and in practice meant the end of the Parthian empire, even though Ardašīr only had himself crowned "King of Kings" some years later, probably in A.D. 226. At all events it can be assumed that the Sasanian dynasty, so named after an ancestor of Ardašīr, possibly his grandfather Sāsān, already exercised power throughout the Parthian empire before the year A.D. 230.

*Résumé.* The Parthian empire remained in existence for roughly 475 years and constituted, even during its periodic weak phases, the most significant power factor in the ancient East alongside the Romans. Though even today the Parthians are frequently classified as "barbarians" (thus, for instance, A. R. Bellinger, "The End of the Seleucids," *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences* 38, 1949, p. 75) or as "princes on horseback" for whom the conquering of Iran and Mesopotamia meant nothing more than new grazing grounds or feudal tenure, and who, unlike the Achaemenids and Sassanians, had no great political aim in mind, this is a view which is no longer tenable. The Parthians have every right to be considered on a par with the Seleucid and Sasanian dynasties not only politically but also culturally. One must also not view Parthian history solely in terms of the struggles against the Seleucids and the Romans, for the Parthian empire was not only aligned against the West, but also occupied a position between the Greco-Roman world to the west and that of Central Asia to the east.

There is also ample evidence to show that the Parthians felt themselves to be the heirs of the Achaemenids. Thus, for example, they adopted the Achaemenid title "King of Kings" on their coinage. The figure of the seated archer that appears very early on the reverse of their coins also derives from the Achaemenids, for whom the bow, as depicted on coins, seals, and reliefs, symbolized royalty (see R. Ghrishman, in Temporini and Haase, op. cit., II, 9/1, 1976, p. 215). In addition, Tacitus (*Annals* 6.31) records that the envoys of Artabanus II demanded from the Romans the return of all the territories that had once belonged to the Achaemenids (for a detailed account, see J. Wolski, in Temporini and Haase, op. cit. II, 9/1, 1976, pp. 204f.)

On the basis of details like these and others, J. Neusner (*Iranica Antiqua* 3, 1963, pp. 40ff.) and Wolski have arrived at the opinion that the Arsacids had a political idea, central to which was a commitment to Iran as a national concept. The somewhat disparaging term "Philhellenes," which even today is sometimes used to characterize the Parthians, was no doubt justified to a certain extent, given the very poor state of findings and historical research in the early days.

However, quite aside from the fact that new findings have now established Iranian elements also in the art of the period, it is possible that the Parthian kings deliberately used the designation "Philhellene" on their coinage as a political device to make it easier for them to ensure the cooperation of the Greeks in their empire, especially in Mesopotamia.

One question remains to be answered: What were the reasons for the downfall of such an important empire or, more precisely, how did a minor Parthian vassal contrive to bring about its destruction? No doubt there were several reasons. One was the latent antagonism between the monarch and the nobility or even, as was frequently the case, the dependence of the ruler on this group. Another important reason was the fact that the Parthian empire often fought or frequently had to fight wars on two fronts, for in addition to the Seleucids and Romans in the west they had great adversaries in the east, such as the Greco-Bactrians, the Kushans who succeeded them, the Sakas, the Alans and other peoples of Central Asia. In the long run these conflicts overtaxed both the military and the economic strength of the Parthian empire (see also Dabrowa, op. cit., pp. 174f.).

2. *Parthian society from the third century B.C. to the third century A.D.* As a result of archeological research, particularly the work carried out by the Russians in Turkmenistan and Chorasmia, it must now be accepted that political entities of some considerable size existed in Parthia and Margiane, i.e. in the territory of the present-day SSR Turkmenistan, as early as the first millennium B.C. and not just from the times of the Achaemenids or the Seleucids (see V. M. Masson and V. I. Sarianidi, *Central Asia*, London, 1972, pp. 155ff.). The existence of fairly large towns can also be assumed, such as Samarkand, Marv, Elken Tepe, and Yaz Tepe, to name only a few. For the most part, however, there were villages of varying sizes, and large irrigation systems played a significant role (Polybius 10.28, pp. 3ff., Justin 41.5.4). Life in southern Turkmenistan was dominated by big landowners who had large numbers of serfs at their disposal. Beyond this there was certainly a considerable number of slaves, although village communities with free peasants also existed.

Such were the prevailing conditions when the Parni arrived. To label the latter simply as nomads from the steppes would be injudicious. Soviet Russian excavations in the territories adjacent to southern Turkmenistan, such as Chorasmia, have demonstrated that in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. the area was inhabited by the so-called "Massagetae Federation," an association of different tribes who lived a sedentary life, raising cattle and tilling the land (for details, see S. P. Tolstov, *Auf den Spuren der altchoresmischen Kultur*, Berlin, 1953, pp. 101ff.). After the Parni chieftain had been crowned king in Asaak, conditions must have changed, for now he had to rule not only over the Parni but also over the inhabitants of the conquered territory, who were predominantly Parthians. In other words, he had to try to strengthen his position. (J. Wolski estimated that despotism was established as early as the first half of the second century B.C., cf. Deutsche Historiker-Gesellschaft, *Neue Briträge zur Geschichte der Alten Welt*, ed. E. Weiskopf, I, Berlin, 1964, pp. 379ff.).

It is reasonable to assume that a further change in the social structure of the empire took place from the time of Mithridates I (ca. 171 to 139/8 B.C.). Then and in the following period the Parthian empire increased enormously in size, especially as a result of the conquest of Mesopotamia, so that it now had large Hellenistic cities such as Seleucia, Dura-Europos, and Susa. The rulers now had to administer and direct the affairs of an empire of world status, which must frequently have made it necessary for them to disregard old tribal traditions. One instance of this was the accession of Mithridates I. It was customary for the eldest son to succeed to the throne, but in this case Phraates I passed over his numerous sons and appointed as king his brother Mithridates. The execution of Surena, the victor at Carrhae shows the relatively unlimited power of the supreme monarch in Parthia.

In this period the nobility must also have extended its power and influence considerably, not least as a result of the vast estates it acquired in the course of the various conquests (J. Wolski, "L'aristocratie foncière et l'organisation de l'armée parthe," *Klio* 63, 1981, pp. 105ff.).

Historians differ in their judgement as to whether it is legitimate to talk of a feudal system at this epoch in Parthian history. The view that such a state of feudalism did exist is taken by Widengren (Temporini and Haase, op. cit., II, 9/1, 1976, pp. 249ff.) and others (for example N. C. Debevoise, *Political History*, p. xlii, and E. Herzfeld, *AMI* 4, 1932, p. 54). In my opinion, however, Parthian history falls into different stages of development, and it is therefore impossible simply to refer to the state of Parthia as a single feudal state (thus also K.-H. Ziegler, *Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Partherreich*, Wiesbaden, 1964, pp. 16f.; F. Altheim and R. Stiehl, *Geschichte Mittelasiens*, Berlin, 1970, p. 528). Thus we know little about Parthian history from the beginnings until into the first century B.C., and what information we have about the subsequent period derives predominantly from the western part of the empire, i.e. Mesopotamia.

Soviet-Russian historians, who define the concept of feudalism quite differently by focusing attention on the conditions of production (see B. F. Porschnew, *Sowjetwissenschaft*, Gesellschaftswissenschaftliche Abteilung 1, 1954, pp. 75ff., 84), view the system as one of slave ownership. According to their interpretation, the existence of a feudal system can not be assumed before the subsequent Sasanian era (thus, for instance, N. Pigulevskaja, *Les villes de l'état iranien*, p. 136 and A. Perikhanjan, *VDI*, 1952, pp. 14ff.).

3. *Economic life in the Parthian empire.* Agriculture undoubtedly played the most important role in Parthian economy, but few details are known about it. The same applies to handicraft. Our best information con-

*Table 12*

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

| Dates | Ruler | Events |
|---|---|---|
| B.C. | | |
| 312-281 | Seleucus I | Conquest of Syria. Transfer of capital city from Seleucia on the Tigris to Antiochia on the Orontes. In 293 he appoints his son Antiochus as co-regent. |
| 281-261 | Antiochus I | |
| 261-246 | Antiochus II | First and second Syrian Wars. |
| ca. 250 | | Parni under Arsaces conquer Astauene. |
| 248/7 | | The beginning of the Arsacid era (q.v.). Coronation of Arsaces in Asaak? |
| 246-225 | Seleucus II | Third Syrian War. |
| ca. 245 | | Andragoras, Seleucid satrap of Parthia, makes himself independent. |
| ca. 241/40-before 236 | | Fraternal strife between Seleucus II and Antiochus Hierax. |
| ca. 239 | | Diodotus, Seleucid satrap of Bactria, makes himself independent. Beginning of the era of the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom. |
| ca. 238 | | Arsaces invades Parthia. Andragoras is killed. |
| soon afterwards | | Conquest of Hyrcania. |
| between 231-227 | | Seleucus II begins his campaign against the Parthians. |
| after 217 | | Death of Arsaces. |
| after 217-ca. 191 | Arsaces II | |
| 223-187 | Antiochus III the Great | Ca. 209, campaign against the Parthians. |
| ca. 191-ca. 176 | Phriapatius | |
| ca. 176-ca. 171 | Phraates I | |
| ca. 171-139/8 | Mithridates I | Beginning of a war on two fronts against East and West. |
| between 160-155 | | Campaign against the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom. |
| after 148 | | Conquest of Media. |
| by July, 141 | | Conquest of a large part of Mesopotamia. |
| ca. 140ca. 138 | | Mithridates I defeats Demetrius II. Conquest of Elymais. |
| ca. 139/8-ca. 128 | Phraates II | |
| 130 | | Campaign of Antiochus VII Sidetes against the Parthians. |
| 129 | | Death of Antiochus VII and end of Seleucid empire as a significant power. |
| ca. 128 | | Death of Phraates II in battle against the Scythians. |
| between 133-129 | | The Yüeh-chih nomads overrun the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom and found the Kushan empire. |
| ca. 127-ca. 124/3 | Artabanus I | Imperial territory shrinks, loss of a large part of Mesopotamia. Artabanus dies in battle against nomads in the east. |
| ca. 124/3-88/7 | Mithridates II | Parthian power at its zenith. Re-conquest of Mesopotamia; capture of Dura-Europos. Conquests in the east, influence in Armenia. |
| 96 | | Parthians and Romans (Sulla) come together on the Euphrates. |
| 91/90-ca. 80 | Gotarzes | "Rival king" in Babylonia. Beginning of the "time of internal disorder." |
| ca. 80 (or earlier)-78/7 | Orodes I | |
| 78/7-71/70 | Sinatrukes | |

*Table 12 (Cont.)*

| Dates | Ruler | Events |
|---|---|---|
| 71/70-58/7 | Phraates III | Unsuccessful invasion of Armenia. Relations between Parthia and Rome start to deteriorate. |
| 58/7 | | Phraates III murdered by his sons Orodes and Mithridates III. Struggle for power between the two brothers. |
| 58/7-ca. 39 | Orodes II | |
| 54 | | Romans under Crassus invade Syria. Battle of Carrhae, total defeat of Romans, death of Crassus. |
| 51 | | Parthians invade Syria under Pacorus. |
| 41 or 40 | | Parthian campaigns under Pacorus and Labienus in Syria/Palestine and Asia Minor. |
| 39/8 | | Defeat of the Parthians. Death of Pacorus and Labienus. |
| ca. 40-3/2 | Phraates IV | |
| 36 | | Roman offensive under Mark Antony against Media from Armenia. Defeat of Romans at Phraata and retreat. |
| 32 or 31-ca. 25 | | Civil war in Parthia between Phraates IV and Tiridates. |
| 20 | | Roman invasion of Armenia. Return of Roman eagles captured at Carrhae. Rome and Parthia recognize the Euphrates as boundary. |
| between 12 and 19 | | "Rival king" Mithridates. |
| A.D. | | |
| 3/2-4 | Phraates V (Phraataces) | Became king after Musa, the wife of Phraates IV, had poisoned her husband, his father. |
| 1 | | Parthians and Romans again meet on the Euphrates. Rome recognizes Parthia as an independent state with equal rights. |
| 4-6 | Orodes III | Murdered after a short reign. |
| 8/9 | Vonones | Some Parthian nobles ask Augustus to send the eldest son of Phraates IV, Vonones, who is living in Rome, so that he may assume the throne. After a short time, he makes himself unpopular with the people. |
| 10/11-ca. 38 | Artabanus II | Placed on the throne by the nobility. Emerges as victor from struggles with Vonones, and Parthian power is re-established throughout the empire. |
| ca. 39-45 | Vardanes I | Son of Artabanus II becomes king. |
| from 43/4-51 | Gotarzes II | Emerges as "rival king." Vardanes is murdered. |
| from 48 | | New "rival king" named Mehradates is also defeated (49). |
| ca. 51-ca. 76-80 | Vologases I | Conflict with Rome and Armenia. Parthian successes. A brother of Vologases, Tiridates, journeys to Rome (66) and receives the royal crown of Armenia from the hands of Nero in fief. |
| from 77/8 | | At the end of Vologases' reign a longish period of civil war begins. Three rulers, Vologases II [newly introduced by Le Rider], Pacorus II, and Osroes I struggle for power. |
| 77/8-78/9 | Vologases II | Coinage has been discovered for all these rulers, each of whom probably operated from sovereign territories of varying size within the Parthian empire. |
| 77/8-86/7 | Pacorus II | |
| 79/80-80/1 | Artabanus III | |
| 89/90 | Vologases II | |
| 89/90 | Osroes | |
| 92/3-95/6 | Pacorus II | |
| 108/9-127/8 | Osroes | |
| 111/2-146/7 | Vologases III | |

*Table 12* (*Cont.*)

| Dates | Ruler | Events |
|---|---|---|
| from 114 | | Trajan's Parthian war. In Roman eyes Osroes was then probably supreme ruler in Parthia. |
| ca. 116 | | Conquest of Ctesiphon. |
| 117 | | Retreat of the Romans. |
| 123 | | Meeting of Osroes and Hadrian. The Euphrates again becomes boundary. |
| from 129-146/8 | Vologases III | After a struggle lasting decades, Vologases emerges as victor over Osroes. |
| 147/8-190/1 or 192/3 | Vologases IV | |
| 161 | | Vologases IV declares war on the Romans under Marcus Aurelius. After initial successes the Parthians are forced to withdraw from Armenia and are then driven out of Syria. |
| 165 | | Seleucia and Ctesiphon fall to the Romans. |
| 166 | | Epidemic breaks out and forces Romans to retreat. |
| from 190/1-206/7 | Vologases V | |
| 195 | | Roman offensive against northern Mesopotamia under Septimius Severus. Conquest of Osrhoene and Nisibis. Then Roman retreat as a result of difficulties in Gaul. |
| 197 | | Septimius Severus resumes Parthian campaign. |
| end of 198 | | Conquest of Ctesiphon. |
| 199 | | Romans withdraw. |
| 199? | | Conclusion of Peace. |
| ca. 207/8-221/2 | Vologases VI | |
| ca. 213 | | Revolt of Artabanus IV, a younger brother of the king. |
| 216 | | Caracalla's Parthian War. Romans march into Adiabene. |
| ca. 216-224 | Artabanus IV | |
| 217 | | Caracalla murdered by his own troops. |
| 218 | | Peace treaty between Macrinus and Artabanus. |
| from 220 | | Ardašīr, local ruler in Persis, starts to expand. |
| 224? | | Ardašīr defeats Artabanus IV. |
| 226? | | Coronation of Ardašīr as the first Sasanian ruler. |
| 228 | | Date of the last known coin of Vologases VI (?). |

cerns trade. Numerous routes existed for the traffic of goods between East and West, not only the Silk Road. Although trading of some kind must surely have been carried on beforehand, it only began on a significant level in connection with the sending of an embassy by the Chinese to the court of Mithridates II. 114 B.C. is the first known date on which a caravan traveled from China to the west (thus A. Herrmann, *Das Land der Seide und Tibet im Licht der Antike*, Leipzig, 1938, p. 4 [repr. Amsterdam, 1968]). Isodorus of Charax has supplied us with some sort of survey of the routes in his *Parthian Stations*, written around the beginning of the Christian era. From Antiochia on the Orontes various routes led via Dura-Europos or across the Syrian desert via Palmyra to Seleucia, Ctesiphon, and Vologasia. (For details of the last named town, the location of which is still not identified exactly, see A. Maricq, *Syria* 36, 1959, pp. 264ff.; Chaumont, *Syria* 51, 1974, pp. 77ff., and G. A. Koshelenko, *Studi in onore di Edoardo Volterra* I, Milan, 1971, pp. 761ff.)

From there the route led across the Zagros mountains to Kermānšāh and Hamadā, then on to Marv (Antiochia Margiana). Here it divided, one branch leading via Bukhara and Ferghana past the Issyk Kul into Mongolia, the other, more important one going to Bactria, then on to the "Stone Tower" (probably indentical with Tashkurgan or with Darautkurgan in the Alai valley (Kirghizia), where Chinese traders took over the merchandise.

Maritime trade also deserves to be mentioned. The most important port was Charax Spasinu on the Persian Gulf, from where merchandise was shipped to India or sent overland to Seleucia. Besides, the Euphrates with its ramified system of canals played an important part in the trade of Mesopotamia. Here the Parthians acted primarily as middlemen, making their profits

from the numerous customs posts they set up and from the various taxes they levied on goods in transit. The well known "Palmyrenian Tariff," an extensive inscription in Palmyra of the year 137, provides us with an example of these taxes and also of the sorts of merchandise bought and sold at the time. With regard to economic conditions in the Parthian heartlands the ostraca from Nisa are now beginning to yield a certain amount of information (see I. M. Diakonov, M. M. Diakonov, and V. A. Livshits, *Sowjetwissenschaft*, Gesellschaftswissenschaftliche Abt. 4, 1954, pp. 557ff.).

4. *The army in the Parthian empire.* Unfortunately there is no comprehensive account of the Parthian army. The numerical size of the Parthian army can only be estimated approximately. At the battle of Carrhae 10,000 cavalry are said to have taken part on the Parthian side (see Plutarch, *Crassus* 17; Dio Cassius 41.12) and in the struggle against Mark Antony in 36 B.C. their cavalry reportedly numbered as many as 50,000 (Justin 41.2.6). Probably the latter figure represented their maximum strength.

The most important types of forces in the Parthian army were the lightly armed cavalry equipped with bows and arrows and the so-called cataphracts, cavalrymen who were both heavily armed and heavily armored so that both horse and rider were protected by coats of chain mail. Their weapon was the lance or sometimes also the bow. It is not clear whether the terms clibanarii and catafracti were used to designate different kinds of armored cavalry, armed respectively with the lance and the bow (thus R. N. Frye, *Persien*, Essen, 1975, p. 391), or whether they are merely different terms for one and the same type of force (thus E. Gabba, op. cit., p. 65, n. 66).

The social composition of the armed forces is unclear. Justin (41.2.6) claims that of the 50,000-strong army that fought against Mark Antony 4,000 were "freemen," by which it is likely that he means nobles. Plutarch (*Crassus* 21) reports that at the battle of Carrhae the army was composed partly of *pelátai* (serfs) and partly of *doûloi* (retainers), but the precise distinction between the two is a matter of dispute. (See G. Widengren in Temporini and Haase, op. cit., II, 9/1, 1976, p. 282, nn. 336, 252; J. Wolski, *Iranica Antiqua* 7, 1967, pp. 141; Altheim and Stiehl, *Geschichte Mithelasiens*, p. 464, on the other hand, translate *doûloi* [*servi*] as "slaves" as do Pigulevskaja, *Les villes de l'état iranien*, pp. 81ff., and Wolski, "Les relations de Justin et de Plutarque sur les esclaves et la population dépendante dans l'empire Parthe," *Iranica Antiqua* 18, 1938, pp. 148ff.). Finally, mention must be made of the mercenaries in the Parthian army, although historians differ in assessing their significance (see Widengren, op. cit., pp. 285ff. and Wolski, *Iranica Antiqua* 5, 1965, pp. 103ff.). [See also ARMY i.]

*Bibliography*: See also for Parthian history: W. W. Tarn, "Parthia," in *CAH*[2] X, pp. 574-613 (especially the bibliography pp. 946ff.). J. Wolski, "The Decay of the Iranian Empire of the Seleucids and the Chronology of the Parthian Beginnings," *Berytus* 12, 1956-58, pp. 35-52. M. A. R. Colledge, *The Parthians*, Nijmegen, 1967. Archeology: G. A. Pugachenkova, *Puti razvitiya arkhitektury Yuzhnogo Turkmenistana pory rabovladeniya i feodalizma* (The development of architecture in Southern Turkmenistan during the periods of slavery and feudalism), Yuzhno- Turkmenskaya Arkheologicheskaya Kompleksnaya Ekspeditsiya VI, Moscow, 1958. G. A. Koshelenko, *Kul'tura Parfii*, Moscow, 1966 (detailed review by G. Glaesser in *East and West* 17, 1967, pp. 148-51). M. Oppermann, "Beiträge zur parthischen Festungs- und Sakralarchitektur," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Halle* 17, 1968, G, pt. 6, pp. 43-115. G. Frumkin, "Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia," in HO 7, 2/1, Leiden, 1970 (especially the section on "The Parthians"). T. N. Zadneprovskaya, "Bibliographie de travaux soviétiques sur les Parthes," *Studia Iranica* 4, pp. 243-60. L. Vanden Berghe, *Bibliographie analytique de l'archéologie de l'Iran ancien*, Leiden, 1979 (especially pp. 256-71). Idem and E. Haerinck, *Bibliographie analytique de l'archéologie de l'Iran ancien. Supplément 1. 1978-80*, Leiden, 1981. Arts: D. Schlumberger, *Der hellenisierte Orient*, Baden-Baden, 1969. M. A. R. Colledge, *Parthian Art*, London, 1977. G. A. Koshelenko, *Rodina parfyan* (The homeland of the Parthians), Moscow, 1977 (detailed review by P. Bernard in *Studia Iranica* 8, pp. 119-39). Economy: M. Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, 3 vols. Oxford, 1948. H. Kreissig, *Wirtschaft und Seleukidenreich, Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur der Antike* 16, 1978. The following chapters in *Camb. Hist. Iran* III, Cambridge, 1983, deal with the Arsacids and contain extensive bibliographies: A. D. H. Bivar, "The Political History of Iran under the Arsacids," III/1, pp. 21-101; D. Sellwood, "Parthian Coins," III/1, pp. 279-98; O. Kurz, "Cultural Relations between Parthia and Rome," III/2, pp. 681ff.; D. Schlumberger, "Parthian Art," III/2, pp. 1027-54; M. Boyce, "Parthian Writings and Literature," III/2, pp. 1151-65.

(K. SCHIPPMANN)

## iii. ARSACID COINAGE

Under this heading are treated coins which were minted in Iran under the Arsacids and which superseded Seleucid currency in the territories successively taken from the Seleucids. In essentials such as denominations, iconography, and script, they are markedly Hellenistic, but in varying degrees they also show Iranian features. They form a substantial complex of royal issues consisting of different denominations from mints in different places.

*The start of Arsacid minting.* This may be placed soon after the middle of the 3rd century B. C., when the internecine conflict between Seleucus II and his brother Antiochus Hierax opened the way for the irruption of the nomadic Parnians into the satrapy of Parthava (after which they became known as Parthians). The subsequent establishment of the Parthian empire took

place in two main stages: under Mithradates I (ca. 171-139/38 B.C.) and under Mithradates II (ca. 124/23-88/87 B. C.), when the territorial expansion was completed and the need for provision of adequate circulation media became acute. Arsacid minting ceased when the Sasanians seized power in A. D. 224. Thereafter the typology was entirely different, but not all the denominations were changed; the Attic drachm was retained.

*Metals, denominations, mints.* The principal metal used was silver; there was no gold coinage. Copper was minted to meet local market needs for petty cash, and in some periods the output of copper coins was substantial.

In contrast with the Seleucid model, the leading denomination is the drachm, minted mainly at Ecbatana. Tetradrachms are not so abundant; as a rule they were minted solely at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and in increasing volume from the reign of Phraates IV onward. Silver denominations lower than the drachm are rare, the most current being the obol mainly minted for festive occasions. The drachms are of the Attic standard (ca. 4 grams); in fineness and weight they remain virtually unchanged for four centuries, adulteration of the silver content being found only in drachms from a few mints in the northeastern frontier provinces. The tetradrachms however, soon show considerable debasement in both assay and weight. In copper the values range from the *octachalkon* (worth 8 *chalkoi*) to the *chalkos*. *Chalkoi*, being the lowest denomination, are the most abundant.

Coin production, when required, was normally done in the well-established mints at Seleucia-Ctesiphon and Ecbatana; others are working at Rhagai, Mithradatkart-Nisa, Susa, and elsewhere. Each mint's issues are usually marked with the mint's monogram, though in some cases no satisfactory identification has yet been found. The tetradrachms bear monograms of mint officials on the Seleucid model. Coins specially minted for war purposes were specially signed with the name of the province most concerned, e. g. *Areîa* (Herat), *Margiánē* (Marv), *Traxiánē* in the reigns of Phraates II and Sinatruces (according to Mørkholm); sometimes they were also produced in moving mints (expressed by terms such as *katastráteia*).

Regular annual minting does not appear to have been practiced. The tetradrachms however are marked with the year of the Seleucid era and the month according to the Macedonian calender. Dates are seldom found on the drachms, but sometimes occur also on copper coins of the later period.

*Typology.* The designs appear in Hellenistic manner, but various traces of Iranian tradition can be seen in the details.

The obverse always shows the head of the king wearing either the Hellenistic diadem or an Iranian royal tiara, in some instances with details of obviously nomadic origin (e. g. a string of deer on the crest of the crown of Phraates II). The first Arsacid kings still wear the leather cap of the steppe warrior. The king's head usually faces left, and always so from Mithradates II onward; but in coins of Mithradates I from mints in the west of the empire, rightward direction on the Seleucid model is retained. Frontal depiction is very rare, but there are no given reasons for imputing any political significance to this fact. The royal attire appears to be an elaborate form of armor, the neckband (*torques*) with griffin carvings on the ends being a conspicuous feature.

The reverses of the drachms bear the stereotyped figure of the dynasty's founder, Arsaces I, enthroned to the right, copied from the seated Apollo on the reverses of Seleucid coins—at first like Apollo sitting on the *omphalos* (Mithradates I), later like Zeus on the throne (Mithradates II onward). The tetradrachms show the enthroned king holding a bow or a Nike (as *nikēphóros*), others a scene such as praise given by Tyche (several variants); rare types show the king mounted, probably in connection with his investiture.

The reverses of the copper coins (in contrast with the silver coins) bear a rich and varied range of designs which scarcely will be found elsewhere and of which some plainly refer to investiture, e. g. an eagle with a wreath, a ram, or the wreath of investiture alone. Also represented are deities, particularly Artemis-Nanaia, Nike, and the bust of Tyche, horses, stags, and elephants, bow in case, and in some instances a city wall.

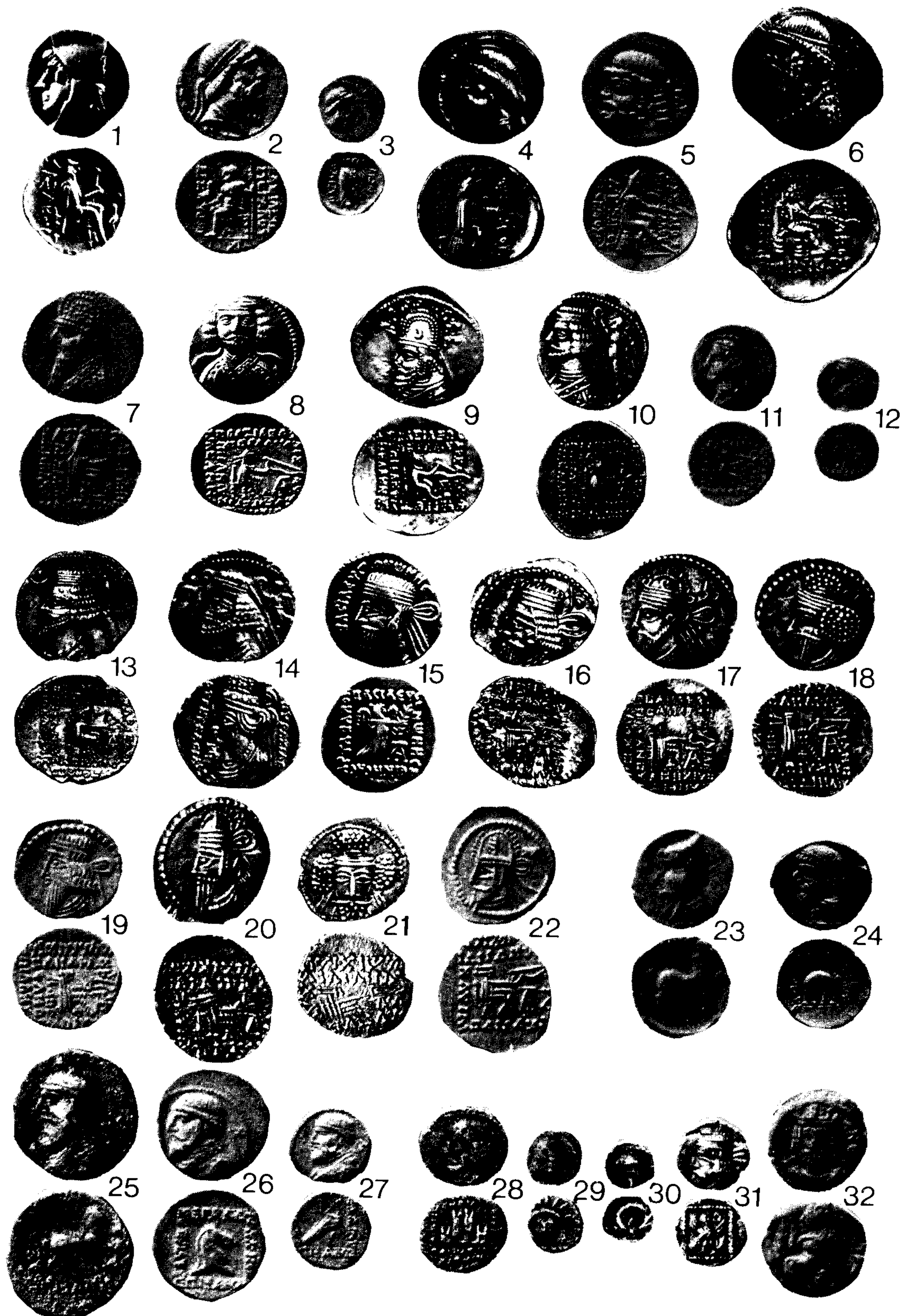
*Legends, names, epithets.* The legends are usually on the reverse and always in Greek. From the reign of Vologases I (ca. 51-ca. 76 or A.D. 80), additional legends in Parthian script appear exclusively on drachms first sporadically, and later on more frequently. They are limited to the king's name and title, and when on the obverse are always abbreviated.

The Greek legends, almost invariably in the genitive case, are set in a square, and always include the dynastic name Arsaces in addition to the royal title Great King (*basiléōs megálou*) or, from Mithridates II onward, more often King of the Kings (*basiléōs basiléōn*) and to epithets which gradually become more numerous. The epithets are at first manifestly political assertions, but later become stereotyped strings of words losing their immediate political sense (e.g. *basiléōs basiléōn Arsákou euergétou dikaiou epiphanoûs philéllēnos*). The king's personal name is only mentioned in exceptional circumstances such as struggles for the throne when rival kings held power in different areas (e.g. *epikalouménou Mithradátou* on coins of Mithradates III; *kekalouménos Gōtérzēs* on coins of Gotarzes II). After Vologases I, however, the king's personal name appears regularly on the tetradrachms. On the drachms the Greek legends become increasingly corrupt from about Orodes II onward, first in the mints of the northeastern frontier provinces.

On account of the fact that several kings bear the same name (homonymy) and the tendency to standardization of royal epithets, attribution of some coins to a certain reign must still remain in question in some cases.

*Imperial coinage, local currency, and circulation.* In addition to the imperial currency, copper coins for local use were struck in the city of Seleucia on the Tigris,

Tetradrachms from Seleucia, attributable, according to Sellwood, to the reigns of: 1. Mithradates I; 2. Artabanos I; 3. Mithradates II; 4. Phraates III; 5–6. Orodes II; 7. Phraates IV; 8. Phraates V (with the queen Musa); 9. Vonones I; 10. Artabanos II; 11. Vologases II; 12. Vologases IV.
(Courtesy of the Institut für Numismatik, University of Vienna)




1–22 drachms (except 3 and 12 which are obols and 11 which is a half drachm), 23–32: copper coins attributable, according to Sellwood, to the reigns of: 1. Arsaces II (?); 2–4. Mithradates I; 5. Phraates II; 6–7. Mithradates II; 8. Darius (?); 9. Phraates III; 10–12. Orodes II; 13. Phraates IV; 14. Phraates V (with Musa); 15. Vonones I; 16. Vologases I, 17. Vologases II, 18. Osroes I, 19. Mithradates IV, 20. Osroes II; 21. Vologases V; 22. Artabanos IV; 23. Mithradates I (*chalcos*?); 24. Mithradates I (*chalcos*); 25. Mithradates II (*tetrachalcon*); 26. Mithradates II (*dichalcon*); 27. Mithradates II (*chalcos*); 28. Orodes II (*chalcos*); 29. Phraates IV (*chalcos*); 30. Artabanos II (*chalcos*); 31. Vardanes I (*chalcos*); 32. Vologases IV (*dichalcon*).
(Courtesy of the Institut für Numismatik, University of Vienna)

which held a special minting franchise in Arsacid times. Although these coins can be classed as autonomous on a narrow definition, they are always coordinated with the imperial issues. Under Phraates IV, Susa enjoyed the same privilege in 31/30-27/26 B. C.

The indigenous dynasties which governed Elymais, Characene, and Persis also exercised the right of coinage and largely displaced the Arsacid currency from their domains. Their mints were at Susa and Seleucia on the Hedyphon in Elymais, at Spasinou Charax in in Characene, and at Staxr (Eṣṭaḵr) near Persepolis in Persis. These so-called "sub-Parthian" dynasties had begun to mint coins well before the Parthian conquest (in Persis as early as the beginning of the 2nd century B. C.); they continued to do so until the Sasanian conquest.

In Elymais and Characene, only copper was minted from the first half of the 1st century A. D. onward (mainly drachms in Elymais and tetradrachms in Characene). On the other hand, the local coinage of Persis is consistently pure silver (drachms and fractions thereof); in respect of design and script it prefigures the Sasanian coinage. Elsewhere the typology is initially Hellenistic, as in coins of Characene which often portray Heracles in the Greco-Bactrian style, but Parthian elements emerge in the later period, particularly in coins of Elymais. In contrast, the coins of Persis, the stronghold of Achaemenid tradition, are always purely Iranian in type. The legends are predominantly in Greek, but are in Parthian on the coins of Elymais from the middle of the 1st century A.D. onwards. On the coins of Characene legends in Aramaic only appear at the end of series, whereas on the coins of Persis the legends are at first in correct Aramaic and later in the Middle Persian script as used under the Sasanians.

In eastern Iran, in Sacastene, the Pahlavas, a local dynasty of Parthian origin and perhaps of the Sūrēn family began to overstamp coins with the name Otannes at the end of the 1st century B. C., and later to produce imitations of Arsacid drachms.

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(M. Alram)

## iv. Arsacid Religion

Nothing is known of the religion of the Parni before they entered Parthia, but it seems likely that it was essentially the ancient Iranian polytheism, perhaps already influenced by Zoroastrianism. The immigrants are known to have adopted the Parthians' language, and with it they presumably took over elements of their culture, including their more evolved, Zoroastrian religion. Since, moreover, it is politically expedient for ruler and ruled to be of one faith, it may reasonably be assumed that, at least from the time they seized power, the Arsacids were professed Zoroastrians.

Evidence concerning their religion remains scanty, considering the length of their rule. It is possible nevertheless to trace some important developments in observance, notably in the fire cult. Temple fires had been established only late in the Achaemenian period, and it is possible that the Parthian sacred fire of Ādur Burzēn-Mihr (q.v.) was the first one to enjoy more than local fame. It is likely that the Arsacids deliberately promoted its legendary sanctity and encouraged pilgrimage to it, as later Shah ʿAbbās encouraged pilgrimage to Mašhad in the same region, for religious, political, and economic motives. Further, the first known regnal fire seems to be that recorded by Isidore of Charax (*Parthian Stations* 11): "Beyond is Astauene...and the city of Asaak, in which Arsakes was first proclaimed king; and an everlasting fire is guarded there." The custom of establishing a temple fire at a king's coronation appears to have been a regal development of the age-old one of a new householder kindling his hearth fire; and it spread under the Arsacids to their vassal-kings (see *Nāma-ye Tansar*, ed. M. Mīnovī, Tehran, 1932, p. 22, tr. M. Boyce, Rome, 1968, p. 47 with pp. 16-17).

Another Arsacid development of the cult of temple fires was perhaps that of endowing such a fire for the

soul (*pad ruwān*) of an individual. This development is in accord with traditional Zoroastrian care for the soul (which was held to benefit from the merit of the fire's consecration and that of all pious acts performed for it thereafter); but it could not have taken place before the institution of temple fires had become well established. The earliest evidence relating possibly to such foundations comes from ostraca excavated from the Arsacids' first capital of Nisa (q.v.), and relates to deliveries of goods from estates which formed part of some royal endowment. The kings concerned are Priapatius (ca. 191-76 B. C.), Mithradates I (ca. 171-38), Artabanus I (ca. 127-24/3), and Gotarzes I (ca. 90-78). In the case of the last-named, the record comes from his lifetime; and it may be that all the foundations concerned were made by the kings for their own souls (a pious custom attested also in the Sasanian period; see I. M. D'yakonov and V. Livshits, *Dokumenty iz Nisy*, Moscow, 1960, pp. 20-21; A. Perikhanian, *VDI*, 1972 [1], pp. 12-13). Arsacid Nisa provides the oldest term known for a priest tending a sacred fire, namely *'twršpt* "master of a fire" (cf. Av. *ataršˇ*, nom. sing. of *ātar-* "fire" and °*pati-* "lord [of]"). The Western Iranian title *maguš* (spelt *mgwšh*) for priest also occurs, suggesting the spread of a common terminology among Zoroastrian communities in Achaemenian times. The Nisa ostraca show further that the Arsacids continued the Achaemenian innovation of shrines dedicated to particular divinities.

Another Achaemenian practice adopted by the Arsacids (and continued by the Sasanians) was that of embalming the bodies of kings and laying them in mausoleums. The royal tombs are said by Isidore (*Parthian Stations* 12) to have been at Nisa. (On the misconception that later Arsacids were entombed at Arbela see J. Hansman in this Encyclopaedia, under Arbela.) The practice conformed, though elaborately, to the Zoroastrian law that the earth must be protected from the impurities of a corpse. That the Arsacids' subjects widely practised exposure of the dead is attested by Pompeius Trogus (apud Justin 41.3)

The Nisa ostraca also show that the Arsacids used the Zoroastrian calendar (created under the Achaemenians, probably in the fourth century B. C.), in conjunction with their own era, in daily life. The earliest ostracon so dated belongs to 90/89 B. C. (D'yakonov and Livshits, *Dokumenty*, p. 69 no. 16; *Corp. Inscr. Iran.* II/II, *Texts* I, p. 33 no. 294). Arsacid use of this calendar is further attested by the Parthian legal document from Awromān (q.v.; "year 300, month of Arwadād ['rwtt]," see Henning, "Mitteliranisch," p. 29), and an inscription of Ardabān V ("year 462, month of Spandārmad (*spndrmty*), day of Mihr," see W. B. Henning, *Asia Major*, N.S. 2, 1952, p. 176.

One of the Greek Awromān documents (E. H. Minns, "Parchments of the Parthian Period from Avroman in Kurdistan," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 35, 1915, pp. 28 [Gk. text] and 31 [translation]) establishes moreover that the Arsacids practised the Zoroastrian custom of close-kin marriage (xwēdōdah. q.v.), a custom also well-attested among their subjects.

In A.D. 62 the Arsacid king Vologases I put his younger brother Tiridates on the throne of Armenia. Tiridates was noted for his strict piety; and under him and his descendants Armenia became predominantly and devoutly Zoroastrian (see Armenia, religion.).

Either this Vologases (Valaxš), or one of the other Arsacid kings of that name, is honored in Zoroastrian tradition for taking measures to preserve "in each province whatever had survived in purity of the Avesta and Zand, as well as every teaching derived from it... whether written or in oral transmission" (*Dēnkard* IV, p. 412, tr. M. Shaki, *Archiv Orientalní* 49, 1981, pp. 114-25). A coin of Vologases IV (A.D. 147-91) has on its reverse a fire-holder, which, it has been suggested, may indicate a strengthening of the iconoclastic movement which was to triumph under the next dynasty. (See Iconoclasm, Zoroastrian.)

The Arsacids maintained in general the Achaemenian tolerance regarding the beliefs of non-Iranians; but during their epoch Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist proselytizing gathered strength, and the need for Zoroastrianism to defend itself among its own people, the Iranians, clearly contributed to the change to greater harshness which characterized their successors, the Sasanians.

See also Calendar, Zoroastrian.

*Bibliography*: See also for the Nisa documents Ph. Gignoux, *Glossaire des inscriptions pehlevies et parthes, Corp. Inscr. Iran.*, Supplementary Series I, London, 1972, p. 43 (bibliography), 45-68 (glossary). I. M. Diakonoff and V. A. Livshits, *Parthian Economic Documents from Nisa*, ed. D. N. MacKenzie, *Corp. Inscr. Iran.* II/II, London, 1976-79, *Plates* I-III; London, n.d., *Texts* I (with complete bibliography).

(M. BOYCE)

## v. THE "ARSACID" ERA

As an indication of their imperial aspirations, the Parthians established their own dynastic era, beginning with the vernal equinox (in Babylon with 1 Nisan = 14 April) 247 B.C. Long doubted, the historicity of this era was proved by a Babylonian tablet equating the Seleucid year 208 with 144 of the Arsacid era (G. Smith, *Assyrian Dictionary*, London, 1875, p. 389). Since then numerous documents attesting to the wide use of the era have been discovered from Nisa, Dura-Europos, and other places. In purely Iranian contexts (as in recovered Nisa ostraca from ca. 100 B.C. to A.D. 13), the Arsacid era was used without specified appellation, and with Zoroastrian month and day names. A good example is the stele of Xwāsak, whom Artabanus (Ardawān), the last Parthian Great King, appointed satrap of Susa; this is dated to "year 426, month of Spandārmat, day of Mihr [= 14 September 215]" (W. B. Henning, "The Monuments and Inscriptions of Tang-i Sarvak," *Asia Major*, N.S. 2, 1952, p. 176). After the conquest of Mesopotamia, its people were allowed to use a double date, with Babylonian or Macedonian months, first mentioning the Royal (i.e.,

the Arsacid) reckoning and then the "former" or "ancient" (i.e., the Seleucid year) (C. F. Lehmann-Haupt, "Zur Arsakiden-Ära," *Klio* 5, 1905, pp. 128-30. E. H. Minns, "Parchments of the Parthian period from Avroman in Kurdistan," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 35, 1915, pp. 31-36; F. X. Kugler, *Sternkunde und Sterndienst in Babel* II/2, pt. 2, Münster in Westfalen, 1924, pp. 443-63). Thus a Greek letter sent by Artabanus III in A.D. 21 to Susa was dated by the royal scribe to "year 268" but its receipt was dated "in the year 268 according to the royal reckoning, in the year 333 according to the ancient numbering" (B. Welles, *Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period*, New Haven, 1934, no. 75 [p. 301]). And a parchment contract in Greek from Dura-Europos is dated "in the reign of Arsaces, King of Kings,..., year 368 according to the reckoning of the King of Kings but according to the former reckoning 432, on the twenty-sixth day of the month Daesius" (M. Rostovtzeff, *Yale Classical Studies* 2, 1931, pp. 7-8, 39ff.). The use of the Macedonian and Babylonian months meant that a single Parthian year could be given two beginnings: a Macedonian-style New Year and a Babylonian New year several months later.

The interpretation of the Arsacid era has been much debated (A. D. H. Bivar in *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/1, 1983, pp. 28-29), but the only occasion in the first years of the Arsacid rule sufficiently important to have been counted by Parthian kings as an epoch-making event was the coronation of Arsaces, the eponymous founder and deified hero of the dynasty. Upon mounting the throne, each Iranian king founded a royal fire, counting his regnal year from that moment (Diodorus 17.114; A. Christensen, *Revue des arts asiatiques* 10, 1937, p. 127). Arsaces, too, founded his royal fire at his town of Aršak or Asaak (near Qūčān) when he was crowned, but his fire was kept burning throughout centuries (Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations* 11 [ed. and tr. W. H. Schoff, Philadelphia, 1914]), thereby providing the means for an uninterrupted dynastic era (A. von Gutschmid, *Geschichte Irans und seiner Nachbarländern*, Tübingen , 1888, p. 31).

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## vi. ARSACID CHRONOLOGY IN TRADITIONAL HISTORY

The Parthian rule lasted 474 years, longer than any dynastic period in Iranian history. Throughout this period, the Arsacid era (q.v.) and the Seleucid era which preceded it by 64 years, were both in use, and so it would have been easy to recall that the Ctesiphon accession of Ardašīr I occurred in the 538th year of the Seleucid era and in the 474th year of the Arsacid era. Yet post-Sasanian sources give various figures for the duration of the Arsacid rule, which may be divided into the following categories. 1: *200 ud and* (200 odd) years (*GreatIranian Bundahišn*, Codex DH, p. 109 lines, 10-11 [Tehran, 1971], $TD_1$ p. 207, lines 1-2 [Tehran, 1971], $TD_2$ p. 240, lines 4-5; Ferdowsī: "*sāl-ī dovīst* (some two hundred years)" (*Šāh-nāma* VII, p. 116); both may be for 203 years, see A. Sh. Shahabazi, "The 'Traditional Date of Zoroaster' Explained," *BSOAS* 40, 1977, p. 27 n. 19. 2: 266 years, with variants (*Šāh-nāma-ye* Abū Manṣūrī apud Bīrūnī, *The Chronology*, p. 117; Ṭabarī, I, pp. 706 and 813; Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 97; Balʿamī, *Tārīḵ*, p. 874; Moqaddasī, III, p. 155); this frequently recorded tradition was the official Sasanian reckoning, as Masʿūdī says (see below), and is found also in Agathias (270 years: *History* 4.24) who used Sasanian royal chroniclers (ibid., 4.30.2-5). 3: 284 years, with slight variants (Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 96; *Indian Bundahišn* 34.9). 4: 400 years, with variants (Balʿamī, *Tārīḵ*, p. 874; *Nāma-ye Tansar*, ed. M. Mīnovī, Tehran, 1311 Š./1932, p. 43; *Mojmal al-tawārīḵ*, p. 59 [411 years]; Moqaddasī, loc. cit.). 5: 523 years, with variants (Ṭabarī, I, 813, hence Balʿamī, *Tārīḵ*, p. 874; Abu'l-Faraj Zanjānī apud Bīrūnī, *The Chronology*, p. 119).

The last category is of non-Iranian origin, as Ṭabarī specifies, being clearly based on Syrian sources using the Seleucid era: Alexander was usually claimed as the initiator of the Seleucid era (hence the era of Alexander), and was assigned a reign of 14 years (Shahbazi, op. cit., pp. 27ff.); since Ardašīr's Ctesiphon coronation occurred "538 years after Alexander" (Agathias 4.24), one subtracted his reign from this number and obtained (537-14 = ) 523 years for his successors, the Petty Kings (Pahl. *kadag-xwadāy*, Ar.-NPers. *molūk al-ṭawāʾef*). The fourth category is a rough estimate by historians unconvinced of the authenticity of the official reckoning. The third group is a re-adjustment of the figure 266 in a scholastic version (Shahbazi, op. cit., p. 30). The first two categories are, however, based on sound historical—albeit unauthentic—traditions. Masʿūdī (*Tanbīh*, pp. 97f.) and Bīrūnī (cited by S. H. Taqizadeh, *BSOS* 9, 1937, p. 125) have noted the great difference of opinion between the Iranians and other nations concerning the post-Alexander chronology, and they have accused Ardašīr of having distorted the facts. "One of the state and religious secrets of the Iranians," says Masʿūdī, is that Zoroaster foretold that his religion would be disturbed 300 years after him but the religion and empire would be stricken by a calamity at the end of his millennium. Now Ardašīr appeared when only two centuries of the millennium were left, and fearing the approach of the calamity, he "reduced almost by half the 500-year period separating him from Alexander, counting from the petty kings only some rulers with a total reign of 260 years and ignoring the rest... And so the chronology was thus officially fixed, and published" (*Tanbīh*, p. 98). H. Lewy ("The Genesis of the Faulty Persian Chronology," *JAOS* 64, 1944, pp. 1977ff.), S. H. Taqizadeh ("The 'Era of Zoroaster'," *JRAS*, 1947, pp. 33ff.) and W. B. Henning (*Zoroaster: Politician or Witch-doctor*?, Oxford, 1951, pp. 37ff.) have explained this "secret" more convincingly: under the Sasanians the Seleucid era had come to be identified as the era of Zoroaster, and Alexander had been placed 258 years after Zoroaster; the appearance of Ardašīr in the 538th year of the Seleucid era was then re-interpreted as his

rise in the 538th year of the millennium of Zoroaster; of these 538 years, 258 separated Zoroaster from Alexander and 14 belonged to the latter; so (538-258 + 14 = ) 266 years were left for the Parthian period. The Sasanian measure was taken, then, not because the Parthian period was to be reduced, but because the widely used Seleucid era had to be Zoroastrianized.

The first category—the importance of which is evidenced by its attestation in two major Iranian sources—has so far remained unexplained. But it is clearly based on the re-interpretation of the Arsacid era (q.v.) as the epochal year of the millennium of Zoroaster: Ardašīr's Ctesiphon coronation was in the (247 + 227 = ) 474th year of the Arsacid era; allowing 258 years for the interval between Zoroaster and Alexander, and assigning 14 years to the latter, one obtained (474-258 + 14 = ) 202 years for the Parthian period. This Zoroastrianization of the Arsacid era must have been the work of the Parthian families who resented the Sasanian re-interpretation of the Seleucid era as the "era of Zoroaster," so they countered claiming that *their* era had been initiated by Zoroaster. In this way they sanctified their dynastic symbol at the expense of sharply reducing the period of their rulership.

*Bibliography*: Given in the text.

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## vii. THE ARSACID DYNASTY OF ARMENIA

Third dynasty of Armenia (in Armenian, Aršakuni), from the first to the mid-fifth century. The preceding dynasty of the Artaxiads became extinct about A.D. 12, amid a successional chaos caused by the perennial struggle of Iran and Rome over Armenia—the second throne, after Media, in the Iranian scheme of vassal kingdoms. It was then that the ex great king of Iran, Vonones I became king of Armenia. After him, seven Arsacid princes from Parthia came at different times to occupy the Armenian throne, interchangeably with six others, candidates of Rome. A compromise was finally attempted in 63 (Treaty of Rhandeia). An Arsacid, Tiridates I, was recognized by both empires as king of Armenia. Roman "friendship" was imposed upon him—and in 66 he journeyed to Rome to be crowned by Nero—and, at the same time, as a Parthian prince, he was bound to accept the family ascendancy of the head of the Arsacids, the great king. The balance thus established between political and dynastic allegiance proved, however, precarious. Dynastic allegiance often became political as well, and Armenia continued to oscillate between the two rivals. None of the first eight Arsacids who reigned in Armenia founded a line of kings; it was left to the ninth, Vologases (Vałarš) II (180-191), to achieve this: his posterity of thirteen kings formed the Armenian Arsacid dynasty.

The Armenian historical tradition (found chiefly in Ps.-Movsēs Xorenacʿi) represented the earlier, national Artaxiads as also a branch of the Iranian Arsacids, and the Armenian Arsacids as their direct continuation, creating thus an imbroglio from the effects of which Armenian historiography has only recently succeeded in freeing itself. A list of the Arsacid kings of Armenia will be found at the end of this article.

Arsacid rule brought about an intensification of the political and cultural influence of Iran in Armenia. Whatever the sporadic suzerainty of Rome, the country was now a part—together with Iberia (East Georgia) and (Caucasian) Albania, where other Arsacid branched reigned—of a pan-Arsacid family federation. Culturally, the predominance of Hellenism, as under the Artaxiads, was now followed by a predominance of "Iranianism," and, symptomatically, instead of Greek, as before, Parthian became the language of the educated. However, since the Iranian Arsacids themselves took pride in being philhellene, Armenian Hellenism was not destroyed

After a while, however, the Armeno-Iranian symbiosis came to an end. Early in the third century, the Arsacids of Iran were overthrown by the Sasanians; the family federation existed no longer; instead, a family feud separated the Armenian Arsacids from the "usurping" new rulers of Iran. Next, in 314, under King Tiridates (Trdat) the Great and through the apostolate of St. Gregory the Illuminator, Armenia, nearly simultaneously with the Roman empire, officially accepted Christianity, a turning point in its history. An unbridgeable gulf between the militant Mazdaism of Sasanian Iran and Armenia's no less uncompromising Christianity, now replaced the unity of the easy syncretistic paganism of the Armeno-Iranian symbiosis. Politically, religiously, and culturally, this was a victory of the Roman empire and Hellenism. But this, the "neo-Achaemenianism" of the Sasanians could not tolerate. So the struggle of empires went on, more intensely than before, until, finally, the Roman empire, occupied elsewhere, was obliged to come to terms with Iran and to agree to the partitioning between them of the apple of discord, especially as, quite conveniently, the latter had just itself effected its division.

Parallel to the tension of imperial rivalries outside, there was also a tension at home, one between the crown and the great nobility. Armenia was a highly aristocratic society, its peculiar feature being the presence, above the lesser, *azat* nobility, of a group of dynastic princes, descendants and successors of prehistoric tribal chiefs, who regarded themselves as minor kings and the king of Armenia as a *primus inter pares*. The crown endeavored to enhance its ascendancy over the princes. In an attempt to replace the purely political subordination of sovereign princes to a more powerful sovereign, the king, feudalism was introduced, reaching its fullest development in the Arsacid period, with its fundamental conception of the derivation of all authority from the king. The princes, on their part, strove to preserve the older conception, their traditional dynastic position. Hence both conceptions coexisted, in a typically Armenian—and Caucasian—blend. Hence, also, the inner tension. So, while the crown was drawn towards the autocratic and bureaucratic empire, the princes, albeit Christians, gravitated towards the com-

*Table 13*

KINGS OF ARMENIA, CA. 12-428
(Arsacids are numbered)

| | King | Dates | Status |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Vonones I | ca. 12-15/6 | ex-great king |
| 2. | Orodes I | ca. 15/6-ca. 18 | vassal of Iran |
| | Zeno-Artaxias III (Polemonid of Pontus) | 18-34 | vassal of Rome |
| 3. | Arsaces I | 34-35 | vassal of Iran |
| 2. | Orodes I again | 35 | vassal of Iran |
| | Mithridates I (Pharnabazid of Iberia) | 35-37, 41-52 | vassal of Rome |
| | Rhadamistus I (Pharnabazid of Iberia) | 51-ca. 52 | vassal of Rome |
| 4. | Tiridates I | 54-60 | vassal of Iran |
| | Tigranes VI (Herodian of Judaea) | 60-61/2 | vassal of Rome |
| 4. | Tiridates I again | 63-75 | vassal of both |
| 5. | Axidares | 75-113 | vassal of both |
| | Parthamasiris, anti-king | 113/14 | vassal of Iran |
| | Roman annexation | 114-17 | |
| 6. | Sanatruces I in southern Armenia | 114-117 | king of Osrhoene |
| 7. | Vologases I | 117-40 | vassal of both |
| | Sohaemus I (of Emesa) | 140-60 | vassal of Rome |
| 8. | Aurelius Pacorus I | 161-63 | vassal of both |
| | Sohaemus I again | 163-80 | vassal of Rome |
| 9. | Vologases II* | 180-91 | later great king |
| 10. | Chosroes I | 191-216/7 | |
| 11. | Tiridates II | 216/7-52 | |
| | Hormisdas Artašir/Artavasdes IV (Sasanian) | 252-71 | later great king |
| | Narses I (Sasanian) | ca. 273-279/80 | later great king |
| | in eastern Armenia | 279/80-93 | |
| 12. | Chosroes II in western Armenia | 279/80-87 | |
| 13. | Tiridates III in western Armenia | 287-93 | |
| | in united Armenia | 293-98 | |
| 14. | Tiran (Helios)-Tiridates IV the Great | 298-330 | |
| | Interregnum | 330-35 | |
| | Flavius Hannibalianus (Constantinian) | 335-37 | |
| | Sanesan/Sanatruces, anti-king | ca. 335-36 | |
| 15. | Arsaces II | 337, 338-67 | |
| 16. | Pap I | 367/8-74 | |
| 17. | Varazdat I | 374-78 | |
| | Interregnum | 378-79 | |
| 18. | Arsaces III | 379-84 | |
| | in western Armenia | 384-90 | |
| | Vologases, co-king | 379-ca. 386 | |
| | Abolition of the monarchy in western Armenia | 390 | |
| 19. | Chosroes III in eastern Armenia | 384-89 | |
| | Interregnum | 389-401 | |
| 20. | Vr̃amšapuh I | 401-17 | |
| 19. | Chosroes III again | 417 | |
| | Sapor (Sassanid) | 417-21 | |
| 20. | Artaxias IV | 422-28 | |
| | Abolition of the monarchy in eastern Armenia | 428 | |

paratively more aristocratic Iranian monarchy. During one of the internal crises, the kingdom was divided in 384 between the pro-Roman Arsaces (Aršak) III and the pro-Iranian Chosroes (Xosrov) IV. With this *fait accompli* before them, the Emperor Theodosius I and the Great King Šāpūr III hastened to ratify in 387 the existence of two Armenian kingdoms, one, western, a Roman, and the other, eastern and vastly larger, an Iranian vassal. Arsaces III died in 390 and the western kingdom became a part of the Roman empire; but the eastern kingdom (Persarmenia) continued to exist. The crown, however, was fatally weakened; and, finally, the princes, weary of all immediate authority over them, deposed with Iranian connivance the last king, Artaxias (Artašēs) IV in 428 and brought about the abolition of the monarchy. Thereafter Armenia was a part of the Iranian empire, with the princes as its sovereign oligarchs, vassals of the distant great king, whose suzerainty expressed itself in the presence of his viceroy (*marzpan*) and in the obligation of fealty and military aid imposed on them.

An event of importance in the Arsacid period was the invention, on the threshold of the fifth century, of the Armenian alphabet by St. Maštocʻ (Mesrop). With this Armenian became the language of the educated; it was introduced into the liturgy; and national literature was born (under Hellenistic and Syrian influences). Armenia's identity and individuality were thus saved and an absorption by either Byzantine or Iranian civilization was precluded.

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**ARŠAK.** See ARSACIDS, THE.

**ARŠĀMA** (Greek Arsámēs, Aramaic ʾršm), name of several Achaemenid notables. It is a compound of *aršan* "male, hero" and *ama* "strength," thus meaning "having a hero's strength;" the femine form *Aršāmā (Greek Arsamē) is also attested, in the name of the daughter of Darius the Great (Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 29; W. Hinz, *Altiranisches Sprachgut der Nebenüberlieferungen*, Wiesbaden, 1975, p. 206).

1. The earliest-known and most famous Aršāma was the grandfather of Darius the Great, who counts his forebears as follows (DB 1.4ff.): Darius, son of Vištāspa (Hystaspes), son of Aršāma, son of Ariyāramna, son of Čaišpiš, son of Haxāmaniš(a) (Achaemenes). Herodotus (7.2) also names Aršāma (Arsames) the son of Ariyāramna (Ariaramnes) and grandson of Čaišpiš (Teispis). According to Darius (DB 1.10f.), eight kings of his family preceded him. From this it may be inferred that Ariyāramna and Aršāma had been local kings ruling over a region in Fārs (Persis). The short Old Persian text allegedly found in Hamadān (Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 116, bibliography p. 107), which begins "Aršāma, the great king, king of kings, king (in) Persia," however, is not authentic (H. H. Schaeder, "Über die Inschrift des Ariaramana," *SPAW*, 1931, pp. 635-45), and can not be regarded as a serious source document (contra P. Lecoq, *Acta Iranica* 3, 1974, pp. 48-52). Aršāma came to the throne in about 590 B.C., but was still alive when Darius ascended the throne in 522 (DSF 13; XPf 19-20); he thus must have lived no less than ninety years (W. Hinz, *Darius und die Perser* I, Baden-Baden, 1976, p. 59). The fact that he called his son Vištāspa, a name which had been borne by the royal patron of Zoroaster, may indicate that Zoroastrianism had by his time been accepted by the Achaemenid family (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, 1982, p. 41).

*Bibliography*: Given in the text. See also under Ariyāramna.

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2. An Achaemenid prince who supported the ascent to the throne of Darius II against Xerxes II (424-23 B.C.) and was the satrap of Egypt at least until 406-05 B.C. (Ctesias, *Persica* 63-67, 78-79; Polyaenus, *Strategemata* 7.28). Various administrative matters in his satrapy are discussed in some surviving Aramaic papyri (see A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*, Oxford, 1923; G. R. Driver, *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century B.C.*, Oxford, 1954; B. Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, Los Angeles, 1968; P. Grelot, *Documents araméens d'Égypte*, Paris, 1972, pp. 280ff.; E. Bresciani, "La Satrapia d'Egitto," *Studi Classici e Orientali* 7, 1958, pp. 132-34, 142-46). These documents are dated between 428 (the 37th year of Artaxerxes I) and 406 B.C. A group of letters in Aramaic written on *diphterai* (leather scrolls) found in Egypt deal with the administration of his own estates in the western delta of the Nile. These included the vine-growing districts of Papremis (see Bresciani, "Ancora su Papremi; proposte per una nuova etimologia e una nova localizzazione," ibid., 21, 1972, pp. 299-300). Arsames wrote these letters from Susa, where he lived between 411 and 408 B.C., to various addressees, among them Artavant (ʾrtwnt), who was probably functioning as satrap in Arsames' absence.

During this period, July-August, 410 B.C. (14th year of Darius II), symptoms of disorder and rebellion appeared in Egypt. For example, the Temple of Yahu on the island of Elephantine (q. v.) was destroyed by the Egyptians who associated themselves with the local high officials of the Achaemenid government against the Hebrew colony, which was loyal to the great king of Persia (see Driver, *Aramaic Documents*, pp. 4-5; E. G. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Papyri*, New Haven, 1953, pp. 100ff.; Porten, *Archives*, pp. 278-89; Grelot, *Documents*, pp. 386ff.; on the motivation of the Jewish and Egyptian conflict at Elephantine, cf. ibid., pp. 398-405, and Bresciani, "Egypt in the Persian Age," *Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. W. D. Davis, I, Cambridge, 1984, p. 363 n. 3. The report on this episode specifies that it happened while Arsames "was with the king;" Arsames' responsibility or even knowledge of this happening is excluded also in the appeal that the Hebrew community made in 407 B.C. (Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, no. 30-31) to Bagōhī, the govenor of Judea, soliciting the reconstruction of their temple. We know nothing of the whereabouts of Arsames after 404 B.C., when Darius II died and Amyrtaeus (q.v.) seized power in Egypt as pharaoh. A group of small cuneiform panels in Neo-Babylonian concern Arsames' land holdings in Babylonia from 464/63 to 408 B.C. (Driver, *Aramaic Documents*, pp. 6, 44-53).

See also Aramaic i, ii.

*Bibliography*: Given in the text.

(E. BRESCIANI)

**ARSAMES.** See ARŠĀMA.

**ARSANES.** See NARSE.

**ARSANJĀN**, a small town in Fārs on the north-eastern fringes of the Zagros mountain massif. It is situated 30 miles to the east of Persepolis and 55 miles northeast of Shiraz; to its southeast lies Lake Nīrīz. There do not seem to be any mentions of Arsanjān in the older classical Arabic and Persian geographers, although Ḥamdallāh Mostawfī mentions villages in the region of Ābāda, including K̲abraz, modern K̲abrīz, 9