

Αβασιλευτοι - THOSE WHO HAVE NO KING

On the question of the ethnicity of the autonomous tribes (who are not subject to kings) living on the banks of the Araxes, who came to the aid of the Armenian king Tigran II the Great in his fight against the Romans (Plut., Luc., 26, 4)

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Abstract

In the issue no. 1 (1992) of the journal *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* (*Journal of Ancient History*) the article by R. L. Manaseryan entitled “*International Relations in the Near East in the 80s–70s BCE (Tigranes II and the Troops from the Banks of the Araxes)*” was published. In this study, the author sought to clarify the ethnic identity of the autonomous tribes from the banks of the Araxes River who arrived at the military camp of the Armenian king Tigranes II the Great on the eve of his clash with the Romans. Manaseryan acknowledged that, given the current state of the sources, the solution he proposed was inevitably hypothetical. Through a detailed interpretation of the available evidence, he ruled out the possibility that these tribes had lived on the Armenian Highlands, specifically along the course of the Araxes River flowing into the Caspian Sea. According to Manaseryan, accepting the presence of such a tribe in Greater Armenia during the reign of Tigranes the Great would require recognition of a circumstance that he regarded as fundamentally incompatible with the political realities of the period [34:152-153]. On the basis of these considerations, R. L. Manaseryan concluded that Plutarch’s account refers not to the Armenian Araxes Rivers, but rather to the Central Asian Araxes, that is, the Amu Darya. While acknowledging a certain degree of hypothetical uncertainty in his conclusions, Manaseryan nevertheless suggested that the tribes in question were most likely the Sacaraucae. This position was reiterated without modification in the second edition of his monograph (*Manaseryan Ruben. Tigran Mets. Hayastani payk’ary Hromi yev Part’evastani dem, m.t’a. 94–64 t’t., Yerevan, 2007, 261 pp.*) [35:101-107], as well as in the

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second book of the first volume of the recent academic edition of the *History of Armenia*, 2024 [19:313-314]. However, a detailed analysis of both the primary sources and the relevant scholarly literature raises certain doubts regarding the validity of Manaseryan's conclusions and indicates possible inconsistencies with the evidence preserved in the sources. As far as I know, following Manaseryan's publications, the question of identifying the ethnic affiliation of the autonomous ("who are not subject to kings") tribes from the banks of the Araxes River has not been revisited in scholarly debate. Moreover, a number of aspects—textological, etymological, historical, geographical, and political—which could have substantially affected the conclusions reached, were not sufficiently taken into account by the respected scholar. These considerations make it necessary to revisit the issue and seek further clarification.

Keywords: *Tigranes II the Great, Great Armenia, Rome, Parthia, Artaxiad dynasty, "who have no king", "who are not subject to kings", Sacaraucae, Mardians*

First, it should be noted that Plutarch's works have been translated into almost all European languages. However, the present study is limited to the Russian and Armenian translations of Plutarch's *Lives*, specifically the *The Life of Lucullus*. At present, there are four Russian translations of this work by S. Destunis, V. Guerrier,¹ V. Alekseev, and S. Averintsev, as well as two Armenian translations: one in Classical Armenian (Grabar) by Vardapet E. Tomatchean and another in Modern Armenian by Simon Grkasharyan. From a textual and interpretative perspective, these translations differ substantially from one another. In particular, the Greek term *Ἀβασιλευτοὶ* in Plutarch's *The Life of Lucullus* is interpreted differently by the Russian and Armenian translators.

Translation by Spiridon Destunis: "At first Tigran listened with meekness, but when the Armenians and Gordians gathered to him with all their forces, when the kings of the Medians and Adiabenes joined him, when many Arabs arrived from the shores of the Babylonian Sea, and from the shores of the Caspian Sea - Albanians and Iberians neighboring them, when many of the peoples living near the Araxes, **ungoverned by the kings**, came to him, partly out of friendship, partly enticed by gifts, the royal councils were filled with great hopes, vanity and threats" [46:630].

¹ Unfortunately, this translation was not available for review [47].

Translation by Vasilii Alekseev: “At first the king willingly obeyed the advice. But when all the Armenian and Gordian armies gathered to him, when the princes of Medians and Adiabeniens appeared with all their armies, when numerous crowds of Arabs from the shores of the Persian Gulf, hordes of Albanians from the shores of the Caspian Sea and the Iberians neighbouring the Albanians arrived, when hordes of **independent nomads** from the banks of the Araxes came, partly out of favour with him, partly because of gifts, at the king’s feasts and councils, began to express one after another bold hopes and threats in the spirit of barbarians” [48:589-590].

Translation by Sergey Averintsev: “At first Tigran listened calmly to such advice, but when the Armenians and Gordians gathered to him with all their forces, and the Median and Adiabeniens kings appeared with all their forces, when hordes of Arabs arrived from the Babylonian Sea, and crowds of Albanians and neighboring Iberians from the Caspian Sea, and they were joined in no small number by **free tribes** from the banks of the Araxes, attracted by the kindness and gifts of Tigran - then, both at the royal feasts and in the royal council, only presumptuous boasts and threats in the spirit of barbarians were heard” [50:568].

Translation in Old Armenian (grabar) by vardapet E. Tomatchean: “First, Tigran calmly listened to the admonition (to the warning, word of caution). Afterward, when the armies of Armenia and Corduene gathered around him, generally the kings of the Medes and Adabids also placed their army before him (under his command). Regiments of Arabs also came to him from the coast of Babylon, many also from the Caspian [region] and Georgia, which bordered Albania. And a considerable number also came from the native peoples of Yeraskh, **who do not have a king**, either in honor of (out of respect for) Tigran, or because they were motivated there by the reward (expectation of reward) of the tributes (gifts). It was then necessary to observe that, generally, the people called at the kings invitation (those at the table; literally, the kings invitation and the tablemates), the council meeting, the court, were full of hope and the audacity of arrogance, along with the threats of the barbarians wrath”² [44:567].

Translation by S. Grkasharyan: “At first, Tigran listened calmly to such advice, but when the Armenians and Gordienians gathered to him with all their forces, and when they came at the head of all their forces the Median and Adiabeniens kings, when hordes of Arabs arrived from the Babylonian Sea, and

² I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Ani Arakelyan (Matenadaran Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Yerevan, Republic of Armenia) for her help in translating this fragment from Old Armenian (grabar) into Modern Armenian and English.

crowds of Albanians and neighboring Iberians from the Caspian Sea, and they were joined in no small number by **free tribes** from the banks of the Araxes, attracted by the courtesy and gifts of Tigran - then, both at the royal feasts and in the royal council, only presumptuous boasts and threats in the spirit of barbarians were heard" [45:64].

It should be noted that the term αβασίλευτοι, used by Plutarch in the original text, is rendered differently by various translators. S. Destunis, V. Alekseev, and S. Averintsev translate it respectively as "*ungoverned by kings*," "*independent nomads*," and "*free tribes*." R. L. Manaseryan, for his part, interprets this term as "*those who are not subject to kings*" (неподвластные царям) [34:155].

A.D. Weismann in his *Greek-Russian Dictionary*, interprets the term αβασίλευτος as "ungoverned by the kings", "independent" [63:1]. That is, in his dictionary, Weismann interprets them in the same way as S. Destunis and V. Alekseev had suggested before him.

J. Kh. Dvoretzkiy, in his *Ancient Greek-Russian Dictionary*, interprets the term αβασίλευτος as "*ungoverned by kings*" and "*not subject to kings*" [9:13], which generally corresponds to the interpretation proposed by S. Destunis and that adopted by R. L. Manaseryan.

In this case, it is difficult to determine which of the proposed interpretations of this term is the most applicable in the particular case, since all of the suggested options are, in principle, academically valid. However, it is noteworthy that Vardapet E. Tomatchean, in the first six-volume translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* from Ancient Greek into Old Armenian (grabar), rendered the term αβασίλευτοι as *անթագաւոր* [ant'agawork], which clearly means "those who have no king" [44:567].

In the new translation of Plutarch's *Lives* (*Lucullus* XXVI, 4) from Ancient Greek into Modern Armenian, S. Grkasharyan renders the term **αβασίλευτοι** as «**azat**» ("free") [45:64]. This interpretation clearly corresponds to the Russian translation by S. Averintsev, who likewise translates the term as "free [tribes]."

Thus, five interpretations of the term **αβασίλευτοι** exist: "ungoverned by kings," "not subject to kings," "who have no king," "independent [nomads]," and "free [tribes]." In my opinion, the most accurate rendering is the one proposed by vardapet E. Tomatchyan, who translated the term as «**անթագաւոր**», that is, "those who have no king."

From the above interpretations of the word (term) **αβασίλευτοι**, one can state with certainty that, whoever this people or tribe may have been, it was not

only subject to Tigranes II the Great but also had no kings within its own society (in its natural habitat). This, undoubtedly, should be understood as a characteristic of their socio-political (worldview) way of life. Exactly because of this interpretation, the version proposed by R. L. Manaseryan regarding the Sacaraucae or Sacavracs appears fragile, since the Sacaraucae are Scythians, and the Scythians were familiar with royal authority and had their own kings. And this is such a well-known fact that, within the framework of the present article, it does not even require references to sources or additional evidence. That is, in the case of the Sacaraucae or the Sacauracian Scythians, it is impossible to speak of them as being “not subject to kings” or “not ruled by kings” in the sense of their socio-political (ideological) organization. When considering this term, it is important to note that the Plutarch was well aware of hierarchy and understood the difference between the Armenian king Artavasdes [50:618] and the Arab chieftain Abgares [50:619]. Yet only with regard to a single tribe from the banks of the Araxes he employs the specific term ἀβασιλευτοί [50:568].

Another important consideration is the composition of the peoples and tribes allied with or vassal to Tigranes II the Great who gathered at his military camp in the Taurus Mountains. This composition should be compared with the peoples and tribes listed among his troops at the Battle of Tigranakert and the Battle of the Aratsani. According to Plutarch, the vassals and allies of Tigranes II the Great who came to his military camp included Median (both Greater Median and Atropatenian), and Adiabenean kings, as well as Arabs, Caucasian Albanians, Iberians (Iberians/Iverians), and Gordiens. In addition, a considerable number of people came from the indigenous populations of the Araxes region, tribes from the banks of the Araxes “that had no kings” (“free,” “independent,” “not subject to kings,” “ungoverned by kings”). They joined Tigranes either out of respect for him or because they were motivated by the expectation of tribute or gifts.

From the descriptions of Tigranes II the Great’s preparations for war and the deployment of forces before the Battle of Tigranakert, it is clear that not all of the tribes and peoples mentioned above took part in the battle. The Arabs who were marching to join Tigranes were defeated by a detachment sent by Lucullus under the command of Sextilius [50:568]. During the battle of Tigranakert, among the allies of Tigranes named by Plutarch were the Median and Adiabenean forces with their kings [50:570]. Thus, among the peoples mentioned as participating were the Armenians [50:571-572], the Medians and the Adiabeneans [50:570]. All three peoples were familiar with royal authority and were led into battle by their own kings. The Gordiens are likewise absent from the list, most likely because

their king, Zarbienus, had secretly entered into negotiations with Lucullus through Appius Claudius, being dissatisfied with (resenting) the rule of Tigranes II the Great. This was reported to Tigranes, who put Zarbienus and his family to death even before the Roman invasion of Armenia [50:564-565,572]. It is known that after the physical elimination of their king, the Gordiens themselves came to Tigranes' military camp with their troops. However, they did not take part in the battles. Presumably, Tigranes did not trust them because of the betrayal of their king, Zarbienus. As we see, the Atropatenians, Iberians (Iberians), Caucasian Albanians and the "free" ("independent," "not subject to kings," "ungoverned by kings") tribes from the banks of the Araxes did not participate in the Battle of Tigranakert. Consequently, the thesis expressed by R.L. Manaseryan about the participation of the Sacaraucae troops from the banks of Amu Darya in the battle at Tigranakert [34:155; 35:101-107; 19:313-314] has no direct confirmation in the sources.

In the next battle, at the Aratsani, Plutarch's account shows a completely different composition of the allied forces accompanying Tigranes the Great: Iberian spearmen and Mardian mounted archers, on whom Tigranes, as foreign contingents, placed particular hopes; a formidable and numerous Armenian cavalry; and Atropatenian infantry (which wavered even before the Romans came to close combat with them) [50:572-573]. It should be noted that if we compare the list of Tigranes' allies who came to him at his headquarters in the Taurus Mountains with those who took part in the Battle of Tigranakert and the Battle of the Aratsani, we see that, prior to the confrontation with the Romans, Tigranes divided the allied forces. Some were with him at the Battle of Tigranakert, while others fought at the Battle of the Aratsani. It should also be emphasized that neither in the Battle of Tigranakert nor in the Battle of the Aratsani are the Albanians living near the Caspian Sea or the Gordiens mentioned. Why the Albanians did not participate in the battles remains unclear. Why the Albanians did not participate in the battles remains unclear. However, they have no connection with the "free" tribes from the banks of the Araxes, since the latter are mentioned independently of the Albanians in Plutarch's list. Consequently, only the Mardians can be considered plausible candidates for the "free" tribes from the banks of the Araxes.

However, R. L. Manaseryan argues that in Tigranes' era, a people possessing at least a status independent of Tigranes himself (since they came to his headquarters in the Taurus Mountains not as his subjects, but only after receiving gifts and out of Tigranes' courtesy) could not have lived in Armenia. This conclusion, however, overlooks several factors: 1) the Mardians as a people were

already recorded on the Armenian Highlands prior to Tigranes' era [31:90]; 2) the decision to conquer a particular people living in Armenia itself or near its borders, was entirely made by the Armenian king of kings Tigranes II the Great. Such decisions were made based on expediency. And the Mardians were not easy people (tribes). They were professional warriors, murderers (killers), robbers, marauders (pillagers), so powerful, that according to Strabo, the Achaemenids themselves paid tribute to them [60:494]. It is worth noting that during the Achaemenid period, the Armenians themselves paid tribute to the Achaemenids [20:271], and the powerful Persian king of kings, to whom many nations paid tribute [20:269-275], themselves paid off the Mardians [60:494]. It is hard not to notice the consonance and similarity of some of the above-mentioned words (murderers, marauders) with the ethnonym "Mardians" and their specific way of life as recorded in the ancient sources. It seems likely that for Tigranes the Great, it was easier to coexist with them and, by offering gifts, to employ them from time to time for his purposes, rather than wasting lives on their conquest.

Plutarch asserts that three kings took part in the battle at the Aratsani River against Lucullus. He names Tigranes II the Great and Mithridates VI Eupator of Pontus explicitly, but he does not mention the third king. Hypothetically, this third king would have been either the Iberian (Iverian) king or the Atropatenian king, as both peoples had their own monarchs at the time—the Iberians under Artoces (Artacus) [4:367,378; 7:96-99; 11:53,104; 13:59; 39:181-182; 40:377] and the Atropatenians under Darius, [4:369,378] mentioned in the sources. Regarding the latter, Appian of Alexandria clearly notes that he had previously assisted Tigranes II the Great [4:369].

Let us pay special attention to the fact that in none of the battles, while carefully listing the tribes and people allied and vassals to Tigranes II the Great, Plutarch never mentions any Sacaraucae. Moreover, it should be noted that shortly before the events described, the Scythian-Sacaraucae of Claudius Ptolemy or, as Lucian calls them, the Sacavracian Scythians, placed their protege, Sanatruces, on the throne of Parthia [33:234-235]. This implies that he was not an independent ruler on the throne, as it might appear at first glance. He was a convenient figure for those who placed him in power—the Sacaraucae—and acted as their representative. Sources indicate that Sanatruces was hostile toward Tigranes the Great over a disputed territory between Armenia and Parthia [7:4-5], which appears in Strabo [60:500-501] refers to as the "Seventy Valleys" (εβδομήκοντα αυλώνας της Ἀρμενίας), and Memnon calls the "Great Glen" (Μεγάλους Αυλώνας) [36:289-316; 26:283-300]. It should not be assumed that Sanatruces's

hostility toward Tigranes was merely a personal whim. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine that the Sacaraucae were so delighted with Tigran's favor that, forgetting about the disputed territories, they decided to come to his aid in exchange for gifts. It should also be noted that in the short period between the Battle of Tigranakert (October 69 BCE) and the Battle of the Aratsani (autumn–early winter 68 BCE), the Armenian king Tigranes II and his father-in-law, the Pontic king Mithridates VI Eupator, were seeking ways to involve the Parthian king Sanatruces in an anti-Roman alliance [4:356-357; 7:4-5; 7:6-9; 14:117-120]. However, the Parthian king did not rush to respond. Meanwhile, envoys arrived from Lucullus with threats if he sided with the enemy and promises if he sided with the Romans. In reply, Sanatruces sent an embassy to Lucullus, offering friendship and alliance. Lucullus welcomed this and, in turn, sent ambassadors to the Parthian king [50:572; 7:6-9]. However, the envoys discovered his treason: he had secretly asked Tigranes II for Mesopotamia as payment for an alliance with him. Upon learning this, Lucullus even considered marching against the Parthians, leaving Tigranes II and Mithridates VI unmolested. But a mutiny in his own troops prevented him from carrying out this plan (Plut., *Luc.*, 30). Moreover, according to Cassius Dio, the embassy sent by Lucullus was exposed by the Parthian king for espionage, since it secretly gathered information about the Parthian country [7:6-9]. From this it must be concluded that an anti-Armenian Roman–Parthian alliance did not materialize. At the same time, Sanatruces, according to Cassius Dio, decided to maintain neutrality, believing that an equal struggle between the two sides would be most advantageous for him. Soon afterward, Sanatruces died, and the kingdom passed to his son Phraates III [7:74-77]. Meanwhile, Lucullus was replaced by Pompey. Mithridates VI Eupator, seeking to accelerate events, sent envoys to Phraates III, but Pompey preempted him. In order not to lose control of the situation, Tigranes II the Great decided to raise the stakes and add Adiabene and the Great Glen to the previously discussed Mesopotamia [36:289-316; 26:283-300]. Regardless of whom exactly Tigranes II was negotiating with—whether with Phraates III (representing the interests of the Sacaraucae) or with the Sacaraucae themselves—such an alliance could not have been anti-Parthian, as R. L. Manaseryan argues [34:156], at least because, according to Manaseryan's own hypothesis, the Sacaraucae were supposed to fight on the Armenian side against the Romans, not against the Parthians. Even if one assumes the existence of a conflict between Phraates III and the Sacaraucae, a logical question arises: what would the Parthian king lose if his enemies were to perish in a battle against the Romans? From the facts presented above, it is already clear that the Sacaraucae do not fit the role of the “free” and

“kingless” tribes that came to the aid of Tigranes II. This means that by the Araxes, Plutarch may have meant not only the Central Asian Araxes—the Amu Darya, as R. L. Manaseryan assumed, but also one of the two rivers named Araxes that originate in the Armenian Highlands [61:8-13]. A careful analysis of Plutarch’s *Lives* of Alexander the Great [49:152-153], Pompey [49:82], and Mark Antony [49:424], shows that Plutarch refers to the Amu Darya exclusively as the Oxus [49:152-153]. At first glance, this would suggest that by the river Araxes, Plutarch could only have meant one of the two Araxes of the Armenian Highlands. [61:8-13]. However, the problem is that Plutarch himself was neither a participant in the campaigns of Lucullus and Pompey, nor a participant in Mark Antony’s Parthian campaign, nor, of course, in the campaigns of Alexander the Great. When composing the biographies of Lucullus, Pompey, Mark Antony, and Alexander the Great, Plutarch relied on secondhand information. We do not know how well the source on which he based his account of Lucullus [50:568] was acquainted with geography, nor whether that source distinguished between the Armenian Araxes [49:82,424; 61:8-13] and the Central Asian Araxes (the Amu Darya) [60:485]?

The oldest written references to the Mardians date back to about the turn of the VII-VI centuries BC [20:48-49,71-72; 38:269-270]. For the first time the Mardians and their commander Xanthius are mentioned as part of the Achaemenid army in Aeschylus' tragedy ‘The Persians’ [10:45]. However, the events described in this work belong to the 5th century B.C., to the time of the unsuccessful campaign of the Persian king Xerxes against Greece. Herodotus mentions them as a Persian nomadic tribe who were persuaded by Cyrus II the Great to break away from the Medians [20:72]. According to Nicholas of Damascus, the parents of Cyrus and Cyrus himself were Mardians [38:269; 60:677]. The same Herodotus mentions a Mard named Giread, who distinguished himself at the capture of the capital of Lydia - the city of Sardis [20:48-49]. However, despite the fact that the Mardians themselves were an Iranian people, in the very Persian environment, they had a separate way of life. They are known as a powerful bandit tribe, so formidable that even the Achaemenids paid them tribute [60:494].

On the Armenian Highlands, the earliest references to the Mardians date back to 401 BCE. Xenophon of Athens, in his *Anabasis*, mentions Armenians, Mardians, and Chaldeans among the mercenary troops of the Achaemenid satraps of Armenia, Orontas and Artukh [31:90]. According to Flavius Arrian, in the Battle of Gaugamela, the army of Darius III also included Mardian archers, who were positioned in the very center near Darius, opposite Alexander the Great and the royal cavalry [5:119,121]. Curtius Rufus notes that the Persians, along with the

Mardians and Sogdians, were led by Ariobarzanes and Orontobates. Each of them commanded their own contingent, while overall command belonged to Orsin, a descendant of one of the Seven Persians who traced his lineage back to Cyrus [32:73]. After Darius' defeat, Alexander the Great passed through much of their territory and subdued them. Arrian notes the inaccessibility of their land, the poverty of its inhabitants, and their belligerence [5:132-133]. Curtius Rufus, describing Alexander's campaign against the Mardians writes: "Having then ruined the fields of Persia, the king came to the tribe of the Mardians, warlike and very different from the rest of the Persians in their way of life. They dig caves in the mountains and hide there with their wives and children, eating the meat of livestock and wild animals. And their women have not milder manners in accordance with their nature: their hair sticks out shaggy, their clothes are above their knees, and they tie their heads with slings, which are both ornaments and weapons." [32:101].

Interesting information about the relations between the Parthians and the Mardians is mentioned by Justin [66:352] and Isidore of Charax in "Parthian Stations" [21:410; 22:6-7]. All of these references concern the wars of the Parthian king Phraates I (176–165 BCE) with the Mardians. Justin [66:352], dedicating several sentences to the reign and rule of Phraates I, mentions among his deeds the subjugation of the powerful Mardian tribe. Exactly when and how the process of subjugating the Mardians took place is unknown. From the *Parthian Stations* of Isidore of Charax, we only know that the conquered Mardians were initially relocated by the first king Phraates I to the city of Charax in Media, which was situated at the base of the Caspian Mountains, beyond which lay the Caspian Gates. It is important to note that by using the term "first" in reference to this incident, Isidore emphasizes the episodic and temporary nature of this relocation — meaning that Charax was not their permanent settlement, but rather a transit point on the way to a further, unknown resettlement destination. The Russian translation by N.V. Zhuravleva is inaccurate. In the ancient Greek original, the phrase reads "the first king Phraates", whereas in the Russian translation, the words "the first king" are inexplicably omitted before the name of the king. Thus, there is no doubt that both Justin and Isidore of Charax are referring to Phraates I.³

³ A. Balakhvantsev, in a recently defended dissertation, questions the existence of royal titles for the Parthian kings before Mithridates I the Great. [6:282-287; 27:109]. The researcher believes that Isidore of Charax's account refers not to Phraates I, but to Phraates II. [6:282-287; 27:109-111]. This opinion is based entirely on the classification of

numismatic material, (the presence of the royal title among the Parthian kings, based on information from narrative sources, A.S. Balakhvantsev considers not supported by numismatic evidence) which in turn relies on the research of David Sellwood. [59:20-32; 27:109-111]. However, there are other points of view on this matter. In their study, G. A. Koshelenko and V. A. Gaibov attributed coin types 9.1–9.4 (which Sellwood had assigned to the minting of Mithridates I [59:20-32 (type 9.1-9.4)]) to the minting of Arsaces I. [30:327-347]. As a result, this supports the presence of a royal title among the Arsacids in numismatic evidence prior to Mithridates I. I would like to add a few of my own observations: the existence of a royal title among the Arsacids, dating back to 247 BCE, undoubtedly reflects a significant event for the Parthian dynasty, marking the beginning of their kingship. If we add evidence from a range of narrative sources, it becomes clear that for twenty years the Seleucids made no attempt to punish Arsaces I and his supporters for overthrowing Seleucid rule. The first attempt, as is known, was made only by Seleucus II Callinicus in 228 BCE. Arsaces (Tiridates) retreated before him and ultimately found refuge with the Apasiaks [51:619-620; 60:485-486]. Internal unrest within the Seleucid state forced Seleucus to return to Syria, preventing him from consolidating his initial success and subjugating the Arsacids. The next attempt occurred only after 209 BCE, when Antiochus III the Great, continuing his famous Eastern campaign, began gradually to reclaim the lost Central Asian possessions. During these 38 years, the Arsacids were independent and not subordinated to the Seleucids. What, then, prevented them from adopting the royal title? According to Polybius [51a:33-34], Justin [51:353] and John of Antioch [24], it is clearly evident that “the Persian kingdom was reconquered” by Antiochus III the Great. The example of the relationship between Antiochus III and the Bactrian king Euthydemus makes it evident that Antiochus III the Great did not oppose the Bactrian ruler retaining the royal title, given he acknowledged his subordinate position to Antiochus III [51a:33-34], especially since this in no way diminished the dignity of Antiochus III the Great, and automatically reinforced his own title of “Great King”, which was recognized not only by the peoples of Asia, but also by Europe, who recognized in him a man worthy of royal power [51a:33-34]. Consequently, the conclusion of peace (signifying the elimination of contradictions) and the acceptance of Arsacids as allies by Antiochus III, gives rise to a logical question in light of A. Balakhvantsev’s theory: What was the status of Antiochus III’s Parthian ally? What title did the Arsacids allied to the Seleucids hold before Mithridates I, if not the royal one? How should this have been reflected in the numismatic material? Moreover, on a number of Arsacid coin issues predating the appearance of the title ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ (“basileus”), there is indeed either only the name “Arsac,” or, in addition to it, the titles ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΩΡ (“autokrator”) and “karan” (*krny*). Both titles are examined in considerable detail by A. Balakhvantsev in his dissertation, where he argues that they had an exclusively military function. However, this is not entirely accurate. I. Dvoretzky, in his ‘Ancient Greek-Russian Dictionary’, gives a rather exhaustive list of the meanings of the word ‘autocrator’: independent, autonomous, possessing unlimited powers, unlimited, autocratic, autocratic, not dependent on anything external, sovereign, unlimitedly owning, having unlimited right, willful [27:109-111]. Moreover, even if these titles are considered purely from a military perspective, it should be noted that ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ (“basileus”) primarily denotes the leader of a tribe in war (as the word itself indicates: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ = German *Herzog* = Russian *voevoda*); secondly, the

In Strabo's time, the Mardians are mentioned as tribes of robbers living both in Persia and in Armenia (scattered across Zagros and Niphat Mountains). It should be emphasized that Armenian sources are familiar with Mount Npat (Nifat) and the Nifat Mountains on the Armenian Highlands. According to Strabo, the sources of the Tigris were located near Mount Niphat [60:498-499]. Tacitus, describing Corbulo's campaign from Artaxata, which had been destroyed by the Romans, to Tigranakert, notes that his route passed through the territory of the Mardians, who were accustomed to raiding. Protected by the mountains, they attacked him, but were defeated by the Iberians (Iverians) sent against them by Corbulo, and their lands were ruined [29:250-251]. Tacitus calls the territories inhabited by the Mardians the "Land of the Mardians."

Pomponius Mela mentions the Mardians (Amardians) twice in his "Chorography". "To the interior, beside Caspian Bay, are the Caspians and Amazons (at least the ones they call the Sauromatidae); alongside the Bay of Hyrcania are the Albani, the Moschi, and the Hyrcani; and on Scythian Bay are the Amardi, the Pestici, and, at this point near the strait, the Derbices. Many rivers, great and small, flow into that bay, but the famous one, the <... >, descends in a single bed from the Ceraunian Mountains and makes its outlet into the Caspian in two beds" [52:112].

"The rivers Iaxartes go from the regions of the Sogdiani, through Scythia's deserts, into Scythian Bay. The former is large at its source, but the latter becomes larger by the incursion of other rivers. The latter rushes for a considerable distance from east to west, bends for the first time beside the Dahae, and, with its course turned to the north, opens its mouth between the Amardi and the Pestici" [52:113].

Pliny the Elder (Plinius Major), in Book VI of his "Natural History", mentions Mardians three times, and in completely different places - the eastern Black Sea region, the Caspian region and Central Asia. Describing the eastern Black Sea coast, he writes: "The town of Heracleum is 100 miles from Dioscurias and 70 miles from Sebastopol. The tribes here are the Achaei, Mardi and Cercetai, and after these the Serri and Cephalotomi" [42:322-323; 43:348-349].

Pliny the Elder's next mention of the Mardians is in his description of the coast of the Caspian Sea: "For the sea actually forces a passage from the Scythian Ocean to the back of Asia, where the inhabitants call it by a variety of names, but it is best known by two of them, as the Caspian Sea and the Hyrcanian. Clitarchus is

judge of the tribe; and finally, the representative of the tribe before the gods, the high priest [41:6].

of opinion that the Caspian is as large as a Black Sea; Eratosthenes also gives its dimension on the south-east side along the coast of Cadusia and Albania as 725 miles, from there through the territories of the Atiaci, Amardi and Hyrcani to the mouth of the river Zonus 600 miles, and from there to the mouth of the Syr Daria 300 miles, making a total of 1575 miles. Artemidorus subtract 25 miles from this total” [42:352-355; 43:362-365].

And finally, another mention of the Mardians is given by Pliny the Elder in his description of the Margiane country: “Next comes the Margiane country, famous for its sunny climate – it is the only district in that region where the wine is grown; it is shut in all round by a beautiful ring of mountains, 187 miles in circuit, and is difficult of access account of sandy deserts stretching for a distance of 120 miles; and it is itself situated opposite to the region of Parthia” [42:366-367; 43:372-373].

“In Margiane Alexander had founded a city bearing his name, which was destroyed by the barbarians, but Antiochus son of Seleucus re-established a Syrian city on the same site, intersected by the river Murgab, which is canalized into Lake Zotha, he had preferred that the city should be named after himself. Its circuit measures 8, 3/4 miles. This is the place to which the Roman prisoners taken in the disaster of Crassus were brought by Orodes. From the height of Merv across the ridges of the Bactrians extend the fierce tribe of the Mardi, an independent state” [42:367-369; 43:372-373].

Pliny’s testimony regarding the Mardians deserves special attention for two reasons: 1) the tribe that Pliny the Elder describes as *sui iuris*, that is, “independent,” clearly corresponds to one of the meanings of the term *αβασίλευτοι* (“independent”), judging by V. A. Alekseev’s proposed translation of the corresponding term of Plutarch and by the definition given by A. D. Weismann in his *Greek–Russian Dictionary* [42:367; 48:589; 63:1]; 2) because of the mentioned boundaries of this tribe’s habitation between the river Marg and the area inhabited by the Bactrians, along the ridges of the Caucasus.

The river Marg mentioned in the sources is undoubtedly the Murghab River, and Antiochia Margiana is Old Merv (the archaeological sites of Erk-kala and Gyaur-kala). Today, as in earlier times, the Murghab does not flow into any body of water but disappears into the sands of the Karakum Desert, south of the cities of Mary and Bayram-Ali, in the form of dried-up channels, apparently the remnants of former canals. In antiquity, however, a large river, the Kelif Uzboy, flowed north of its lower reaches. This river can be identified with Pliny’s Zotal with good reason, since it should be emphasized, apart from the Kelif Uzboy there

is no other river (except for the Tejen) or any other body of water (let alone a sea) north of Old Merv into which the river Marg (the Murghab) could have flowed. Actually, V. A. Obruchev had already noted that the Murghab flowed into the Kelif Uzboy [54:26].

Zotal—the Kelif Uzboy—was in antiquity one of the main branches of the Amu Darya, flowing parallel to it at a short distance as far as the eastern edge of the Merv oasis, near the modern railway stations of Uch-Adzhi and Repetek, and then toward Unguz and onward to the Caspian Sea via the Uzboy [54:26-27].

The area of Bactrian habitation is Bactria.

Bactria (Bactriana in Ancient Greek; Bahlika in Old Indic; Bactrish in Old Persian; Bakhlo / Balkh—possibly of Tocharian origin; Bahdi in Avestan) was a historical and cultural region extending along both banks of the Amu Darya (the Oxus), from the Hindu Kush (in present-day Afghanistan) in the south to the Hisar Range in the north, and from the Amu Darya in the west to the Pamirs in the east. Its capital was the city of Bactra (medieval Balkh), located in northern Afghanistan. According to Pliny the Elder [42:364-367, 368-371; 43:370-373, 372-375] and Strabo [60:486, 488], the city was also known as Zariaspa, a name meaning “golden-horse” [54:7-8]. Zariaspa in Bactria is also mentioned by Polybius [51:620-621; 28:12-13].

With regard to the western border of Bactria, which ran along the Amu Darya [54:8], it is necessary to clarify why E.V. Rtveladze at the same time defines Bactria as a historical and cultural region extending along both banks of the Amu Darya [54:7], implying the present-day Amu Darya flowing into the Aral Sea. The point is that, in the understanding of ancient geographers, the western border of Bactria was identified with one of the tributaries of the Amu Darya (the Oxus), specifically the one that flowed into the Caspian Sea [51:619-620; 60:79, 480, 482-483, 485-486, 488-489]. At the same time, Strabo also defines this same river as the boundary between Bactria and Sogdiana [60:79, 485-486, 488]. Given that Sogdiana lay east of the Amu Darya and, accordingly, east of Bactria, the Bactrian–Sogdian boundary must be understood as another branch of the Amu Darya (the Oxus), namely the one that flowed into the Aral Sea. It therefore seems logical to assume that in antiquity part of Bactria also extended between the now-desiccated channel of the Amu Darya that flowed into the Caspian Sea and the present course of the Amu Darya that flows into the Aral Sea.

Analyses of ancient sources show that the tradition of naming the Amu Darya ambiguously, i.e. both Araxes and Ox lived at least for a millennium. [53:96-103; 3:36-51]. For example, Herodotus [20:110-117], author of the 5th

century BC and Paul Orosius, who lived in the IV-V centuries AD [39:49; 40:152], describing the campaign of the Persian king Cyrus against the Massageteans, call the Amu Darya Araxes. While Marcus Junianus Justin [66:20], an author (II-III centuries AD), who abridged the work of Pompey Trogus, who wrote in the I century AD, calls this river Oax (Oxus), when describing the same campaign.

It should be noted that the damaged word [?]-r-a-x-[?]-a (DB V, 74 (20, 27)) reconstructed by Harmatta [17] as [a]-r-a-x-[s]-a “Arakhsha river” in column V of the Behistun inscription of Darius I (DB, V, 74 (20, 27)) is disputed and not accepted by modern authors. They propose a different reconstruction [d]-r-a-x-[t]-a? [55:76; 23:397,399; 56:89-90; 57:90,171]. However, judging by the question mark at the end of the proposed term, the authors themselves are not confident in the correctness of this variant, which to some extent does not rule out the reconstruction proposed by Harmatta.

As for the “ridges of the Caucasus” mentioned by Pliny the Elder as being inhabited by the Mardians, these should be understood as the slopes of the Hindu Kush, since in this sector of the interfluvium of the Murghab and the Oxus (Amu Darya), flowing into the Caspian Sea, there are no other mountain ranges that could correspond to the name “Caucasus.” According to the evidence of ancient sources, the term “Caucasus” was also used to denote the Indian mountains.

The cause for this was the information provided by Strabo, who says the following about the Caucasus: “The stories that have been spread far and wide with a view to glorifying Alexander are not accepted by all; and their fabricators were men who cared for flattery rather than truth. For instance, they transferred the Caucasus into the region of the eastern sea which lies near those mountains from the Euxine; for these are the mountains which the Greeks named Caucasus, which is more than thirty thousand stadias distant from India; and here it was that they laid the scene of the story of Prometheus and of his being put in bonds; for these were the farthest mountains towards the east that were known to writers of that time” [60:479; 51:619-620; 51a:33-34; 66:353; 25:24-26].

Claudius Ptolemy, when mentioning the Mardians (Μάρδοι) in his work, notes that the territory they inhabited was located adjacent to the region of Gordyene (Γορδύνη; Gordiena, Arm. Korduk) and south of the region of Kotaya (Κόττα) [16:317-318, 369]. The *Armenian Geography of the Seventh Century* (attributed to Movses Khorenatsi, Anania Shirakatsi, or an anonymous author of the 610s) mentions, along the route of Corbulo’s march, the gavars (regions) of Mardastan [64:137] and Bun-Mardastan (variant: Bun Marastan) in the province of Vaspurakan [7:103], as well as the gavar of Mardakhi (Mardali) in the province of

Turuberan of Greater Armenia [7:99-100; 64:130-131], These are presented as settled areas whose names are associated with the ethnonym of the Mardians. It is especially noteworthy that within the territory of this gavar lies Mount Byurakn, from the northwestern slope of whose Sermants peak originates the Yegr River (modern Yegri-chay), which gives rise to the Araxes River [65:65,98,107,116].

At the same time, ancient Armenian sources (Agathangelos, Faustos Buzand [12], Movses Khorenatsi, Ghazar Parpetsi, Yeghishe, Sebeos [58], Ghevond, ‘Ashkharatsuits’, Tovma Artsruni [62], Grigor Magistros and others), do not mention the Mardians as a people or a separate tribe on the territory of the Armenian Highlands (15:129-157). But, the same sources universally mention such terms as ‘Mardpet’, the principality of Mardpet or the Mardpet’s principality [2:233], which Gregory Magistros also calls Mardpetakan [16:65], the department “Mardpetutyun”, as well as a special regiment - ‘Mardpetakan gund’ at the disposal of Mardpet. According to Movses Khorenatsi, this department was first organised during the reign of a representative of the younger line of Parthian Arsacids - King Vagharshak I (129-108 BC) [25:27-30; 27:125; 28:10,11,14]. There, the Mardpets are mentioned as rulers of lands from Atropatene to Chuash and Nakhchavan [37:63]. In the hierarchy of state administration, they were eunuchs of the royal court, and since they were in charge of the royal harem, concubines and royal chambers, they were especially close dignitaries of the king of Great Armenia evolved into the institution of the *mardpetut’iwn*., and its head was called ‘mardpet’, as well as “*hAyr*”, i.e. ‘father of the king’.

In the historiography devoted to the Mardpets, there exists a theory proposing their identification as noble representatives of the Mardian tribe (Μάρδοι), who allegedly found their place within the hierarchical institutions of ancient Armenia [1:417]. Over more than a century, this viewpoint has found both its supporters [15:146 (footnote 89)] and opponents [15:146 (footnote 89)], yet it has remained insufficiently clarified, contested, and in many respects contradictory [15:129–157]. In particular, scholars note that the names of administrative and military offices in the Armenian language containing the component *-pet* (such as *aspet*, *sparapet*, *hazarapet*, *mogpet*, and others) are not derived from tribal names. While Armenian contains numerous toponyms, personal names, surnames, and even designations of everyday objects whose meanings are narrowed or specified through reference to tribal names, no such derivations are attested for administrative titles [15:147]. At the same time, it should be noted that among the offices listed by these authors—specifically *mogpet* (also rendered as *magpet*)—an apparent exception may be observed. The *Mogs* (*Mags*), identified in ancient

sources as one of the Median (Iranian) tribes, are well documented in the classical tradition [20:59, 62–63, 69–70, 73, 75–76, 79–80, 254–257, 261–264, 553, 588]. It is well known that representatives of this tribe later formed the priestly caste of the Persians, whose head bore the title Mogbed or Magpet.

At the same time, extensive data on the Mardians, together with information from ancient sources about their habitats near the Araxes River, which may be understood either as the Araxes flowing from Mount Byurakn (Bingöl Dağ) in the Armenian Highland or as the Amu Darya (given that the Mardians are also attested in that region) does not, within the scope of this article, allow for a definitive conclusion as to which riverbank they came from to assist Tigranes II the Great. Nevertheless, it appears more likely that these allies were the Mardians rather than the Sacaraucae.

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Familiarity with *Yakobean A., Ashkharhatsuyts E' dari Ananowni. Gita-qnnakan bnagir, Hande's Amso'reay (Handes Amsorya), Vienna – Yerevan, 2013, 35-194 (in Armenian) [Hakobyan A. Ashkharhatsuyts of the 7th-Century Anonymous Author]* was made possible thanks to the generosity of Alexan A. Hakobyan (Doctor of Historical Science, Institute of Oriental Studies, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia (NAS RA), who kindly provided me with a copy of this book. I take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation, respect and gratitude to my friend for such a valuable gift and his warm wishes that support and inspire me.

Familiarity with *Ashkharatsuyts (Armyanskaya geografiya V–VII vv.) Movsesa Khorenatsi i Ananiya Shirakatsi. Predislovie, perevod i kommentarii A. Zh. Arutyunyana, Belgorod: Zebra Publishing House, 2023 (in Russian) [Ashkharatsuyts (Armenian Geography of the 5th–7th Centuries) by Movses Khorenatsi and Anania Shirakatsi. Preface, translation, and commentary by A. Zh. Arutyunyan]* was made possible thanks to the generosity of Hakob Zh. Harutyunyan (Professor, Doctor of Historical Science, Institute of History, Yerevan State University of the Republic of Armenia), who kindly provided me with a copy of this book. I take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation, respect and gratitude to my friend for such a valuable gift and his warm wishes that support and inspire me.

αβασιλευτοι

**«Թագավորների իշխանություն չճանաչող» եւ «թագավորների կողմից
չդեկլարվող»**

Հռոմեացիների դեմ պայքարում Հայոց արքա Տիգրան Բ Մեծին օգնության
եկած՝ Արաքսի ափին բնակվող «անթագավորք» ցեղերի էթնիկական
պատկանելության հարցի շուրջ (Plut., Luc., 26, 4)

Ռուսլան Կոբզար

Հիմնաբառեր. Տիգրան Բ Մեծ, Մեծ Հայք, Հռոմեական Հանրապետություն,
Պարթևաստան, Արտաշիայաններ, «անթագավորք» («թագավոր
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Ամփոփում

1992 թ. Ռ. Լ. Մանասերյանի կողմից փորձ էր արվել՝ պարզելու «Արաքսի
ափին բնակվող ազատ ցեղերի» էթնիկական պատկանելությունը, որոնք
ներկայացել էին Տիգրանի ռազմական հռոմեացիների հետ նրա
բախման նախօրեին: Հեղինակը, նշելով իր եզրահանգման որոշ չափով
վարկածային լինելը, կարծում է, որ նրանք, ամենայն
հավանականությամբ, սագարաուկներն էին: Ռ.Լ. Մանասերյանի
հետազայում հրատարակված (2007, 2024) աշխատություններից հստակ
երևում է, որ հեղինակը չի փոխել այդ հարցի վերաբերյալ իր կարծիքը:
Սակայն, աղբյուրների և հետազոտությունների մանրամասն
վերլուծությունը թույլ է տվել վիճարկել հեղինակի եզրահանգումներն ու
կրկին անդրադառնալով քննարկվող խնդրին, եզրակացնել, որ «Արաքսի
ափին բնակվող անթագավորք (αβασιλευτοι) ցեղերը» (Plut., Luc., 26, 4),
իրենց էթնիկական պատկանելությամբ, ամենայն հավանականությամբ,
մարդեր էին: