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THE HYPOTHESIS OF THE ARSACIDS' DESCENT FROM THE ACHAEMENIDS: MYTH OR REALITY?*

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Abstract

In the 40s of the last century, J. Wolski proposed a thesis, still dominant in historiography, arguing that the story of Arrian which reached us thanks to his work "Parthica" that the Arsacid dynasty, the founder of Parthian state, descended from the Achaemenids, has a fictional origin. According to J. Wolski, J. Neusner and their followers, it is an "ideological fiction", a "literary forgery", which appeared in the period between the second half of II century BC and the beginning of the I century AD and was recorded in written form by Arrian. However, the conclusion, based on the limited and often one-sided data by Strabo and Justin, is defective and does not meet the current requirements of the study of the problem. Only a comprehensive examination of the evidence provided by written sources in the field of the Parthian numismatics, epigraphy, archaeology, onomastics and other branches of science can give a complete answer to the issue. In this case, it becomes obvious that the "Arrianian" legend about the genealogical connection between the Arsacids and the Achaemenids is not just a literary fiction, but has a real historical basis.

Keywords: *Arrian, the Arsacids, the Achaemenids, the Dahae, Central Asia, Parthia, Artaxerxes, Arsaces I, Mithridates I.*

1. The source basis of the problem

In ancient historiography the theory about the Achaemenid roots of the Arsacid dynasty first appeared in an excerpt from Arrianus' "Parthica", which has reached us thanks to the duplications in the works "Bibliotheca" of patriarch Photius of Constantinople (c. 810 - c. 895) and "Chronographia" of Syncellus (VIII-IX centuries).

In the *Parthica* he (Arrian - A.M)... «considers the Parthians to have been a Scythian race, which had long been under the yoke of Macedonia, and revolted, at the time of the Persian rebellion, for the following reason. Arsaces and Tiridates were two brothers, descendants of Arsaces, the son of Phriapetes. These two brothers, with five accomplices, slew Pherecles, who had been appointed satrap of Parthia by Antiochus Theos, to avenge an insult offered to one of them; they drove out the Macedonians, set up a government of their own»¹. G. Syncellus represented the mentioned story in Arrian's "Parthica" in a relatively larger text and notable difference: «... During the reign of this Antiochos (Seleukos Kallinikos), the

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¹ **Photius:** 1994; **Photius** 1959: cod 58.

Persians, who were tributaries to them from the time of Alexander the founder, revolted from Macedonian and Antiochid rule. A certain Arsaces and Teridates, brothers tracing their lineage from Artaxerxes king of the Persians, were satraps of the Bactrians at the time of the Macedonian Agathokles, the Persian eparch. According to Arrian, this Agathokles fell in love with Teridates, one of the brothers, and was eagerly laying a snare for the young man. But failing utterly, he was killed by him and his brother Arsaces. Arsaces then became king of the Persians, after whom the kings of the Persians were known as 'Arsacidai'»¹.

Thus, it is obvious that the two reports originating from the same source, among other differences, present the genealogy of the Arsacids in different ways. In the "Bibliotheca" of the patriarch Pothius, the founders of the Parthian state, Arsaces and his brother Tiridates, are called "descendants of Arsaces, the son of Phriapetes"², while Syncellus introduced them as "tracing their lineage from Artaxerxes king of the Persians"³. The contradictory nature of these two accounts of the origins of the founder of the Parthian state led some scholars to question their common literary origin⁴. Moreover, according to the widely accepted opinion in modern historiography, the theory of the "Achaemenid" origin of the Arsacids is fictional and penetrated into the Roman literary tradition in the beginning of Hadrian's reign (117-130), when Arrian wrote his "Parthica"⁵. In other words, the author of this legend is Arrian.

We have already shown that Arrian, the member of the Roman Senate and a high-ranking state official, could not have been the author of the lineage of the Arsacids in question⁶. It was put in literary circulation through the work of an anonymous Greek author, in which the official thesis on the genealogical connection between the Achaemenids and the Arsacids was of key importance. It is supposed that the family tree of the Arsacids had a corresponding appearance in it, which made visible the connection between the two.

The surviving fragment of Arrian's "Parthica" makes clear that in its original form (probably to a greater extent in Arrian's Parthian source), the stories of the Arsacids' descent from the Achaemenids and liberating themselves from Seleucid rule through rebellion were closely intertwined. However, in later Roman historiography, the two-faced different destinies. The first, due to its epic appeal, received wide acceptance, ousting the story by Apollodorus of Artemita about the

¹ **Synkellos** 2002: 412; **Syncellus** 1829: 539-540.

² **Photius** 1959: 58.51-52. Ἀρσάκης καὶ Τιριδάτης ἡστυνὰ δελφῶ Ἀρσακίδαί, τοῦνιοῦ Ἀρσάκου τοῦ Φριαπίτου ἀπόγονοι.

³ **Syncellus** 1829:539-540.

Ἀρσάκης τισκαὶ Τιριδάτης ἀδελφοὶ τὸ γένος ἔλκοντες ἀπὸ τοῦ Περσῶν Ἀρταξέρξου

⁴ **Gaibov, Koshelenko** 2009: 79-87; **Koshelenko, Gaibov**, 2009: 102-108.

⁵ **Stadter** 1980: 11, 183; **Nikonorov** 1998: 11.

⁶ **Melikyan** 2021: 204-227.

conquest of Parthia by the Parni¹. In particular, this is evidenced by the fact that the Roman chroniclers Herodianus², Eunapius³, and Zosimus⁴, who succeeded Arrian, presented the emergence of the Arsacid state not as the conquest of Parthia, a part of the Seleucid state, but as a rebellion against the Macedonian rule led by Arsaces and his brother Tiridates. As for the story of the Arsacid dynasty's descent from the Achaemenids, it did not spread in Western historiography after Arrian. There is no hint of the genealogical relationship between these two dynasties in the writings of the authors who lived after Arrian. Certainly, the decline of interest in Greco-Roman historiography towards the Arsacids and their genealogy was due to the weakening of the Arsacids' authority during the last century of the Parthian Empire (the Romans defeated the Parthians three times in 80 years, capturing their capital Ctesiphon). The official tradition of the new Sasanian dynasty of Iran not only halved the period of the Arsacids⁵ deliberately, but also denounced as a period of decentralization, vulgarity, corruption, respect and loss of all kinds of values⁶, and it played a negative role, as well. The Byzantine author Theophylact of the VII century mentions the Arsacids only as the first of the seven noble Iranian clans, without saying anything about their lineage⁷. Late Iranian national historiography traces Arsaces' origins, in one case to the fictional archer Arash⁸, in another to Kay Kawad⁹ or his son Kay Aresh¹⁰, and in the third case, to Darius, Homa's son¹¹.

2. The historical study setting

Almost all researchers of the history of the Parthian state attributed the promulgation of the thesis of descent from the Achaemenid dynasty in the official ideology of the Arsacids to the territorial conquests of that state and the formation of a great power in a relatively short period of time. V. Tarn, one of the first and thorough researchers of Hellenistic civilization, considered that the Arsacids brought forward the thesis in question in order to substantiate their rule over the Seleucid territories¹². N. Debevoise addressed this issue briefly, believing that "the Parthian kings proclaimed their Achaemenid origins in order to strengthen the belief that they are the successors to the glorious deeds of Achaemenid Iran"¹³.

¹ Nikonorov 1998: 119.

² Herodian 1961: VI. 2. 7.

³ Blockley 1983: 32-33, Fragm. 3.

⁴ Zosimus 1982: I. 8. 1.

⁵ Shahbazi 1990: 208-229.

⁶ The Letter of Tansar 1968: 32; Daryaei 2015: 9.

⁷ Theophylact 1887: III, 18. 6-9.

⁸ Ferdowsi 1957: 636; Bīrūnī, 1879: 119.

⁹ Tabarī, 1987: 100.

¹⁰ Shahbazi 1986: 525-526.

¹¹ Tabarī 1987: 96 (704); Bīrūnī 1879: 118.

¹² Tarn 1929: 138-140.

¹³ Debevoise 2009: 34.

According to J. Wolski, J. Neusner, P. Stadter and others, the impressive victories against Crassus in 53 BC and Antonius in 36 BC, served as a great signal for the ideological leaning of the Arsacids towards the Iranian, especially the Achaemenid values. Nevertheless, they believed that the "false" theory of descent from the Achaemenids could have been established in the Parthian kingdom only in the beginning of the I century AD¹⁴. In general, V. Nikonorov shared this position. However, as a result of a bibliographic examination, the latter concludes that "the claims of the late Arsacids to be descended from the Achaemenids could only appear after the publication of Apollodorus of Artemita's "Parthica" (mid-I century BC)"¹⁵. G. Koshelenko initially attributed the creation of the Achaemenid origins of the Arsacids to a relatively late period of their rule. *"At a time when the Arsacid government needed other forms of justification than the right of conquest, at a time when local separatism was on the rise, it was special importance the struggle over the issue whether the Arsacids were local dynasty, heroic leaders of the Iranian liberation struggle against the Macedonian rule (as presented by Arrian) or foreigners, as represented by the late Iranian tradition emerging from the Sasanians"*¹⁶. Later, G. Koshelenko, together with V. Gaibov, proposed that the proclamation of Artaxerxes II (405-359 BC) by the Arsacids as the founder of their kingdom was a threatening message reminding the Greeks of the Achaemenid glory and power¹⁷. A. Balakhvantsev was solidar with V. Gaibov and G. Koshelenko on the ideological role of the genealogy in question. However, according to him, the message was addressed not to the Greeks, but to the population of the south-eastern regions of Iran, where the reputation of the Achaemenid dynasty had traditionally remained high. According to him, posing as the descendants of the Achaemenids, the Arsacids claimed the subjugation of the kingdoms of this region (Persis, Elymais, Characene)¹⁸.

Many modern scholars, continuing to attribute the promulgation of the ideological thesis that the Arsacids descended from the Achaemenids, to the rise of the political life of the Parthian state, believe that in the sphere of official ideology it could have appeared not earlier than the second half of the II century BC, and more precisely during the reign of Mithridates I (165-132 BC). According to J. Wiesehöfer, *"it was at this time that the Parthian state grew from a relatively small state to a great power, generating the demand for historic legitimation of sovereignty over a vast empire extending beyond the borders of Iran"*¹⁹. The author even mentions artistically. *"... looking back on their own success in creating the*

¹⁴ Wolski 1956-1957: 44-48; Neusner 1963: 40-59; Stadter 1980: 137.

¹⁵ Nikonorov 1998: 119.

¹⁶ Koshelenko 1976: 35.

¹⁷ Gaibov, Koshelenko 2009: 86.

¹⁸ Balakhvantsev 2018: 58, not. 175.

¹⁹ Wiesehöfer 2001: 133; Dąbrowa 2010: 130-132; Saeedifar, Ghazanfari 2017: 33-35.

*empire and the efforts for recognition of their rule, the Parthian kings "discovered" Parthia as their "homeland", and the Achaemenids as their "ancestors"."*²⁰

Such a methodology of studying the historicity of the theory about the Arsacid's descend from the Achaemenid dynasty and the time of its emergence, no matter how logical it may seem, is imperfect and does not meet the research requirements of the problem. First, it is rather one-sided and biased due to the prejudiced and denying attitude towards the data of Arrian's "Parthica", rooted in historiography. On the other hand, qualifying the Arsacid genealogy in question as a mere ideological trick, the vast majority of scholars did not even try to search for elements of historical truth on its basis. Finally, those evaluations are based mostly on reports from written sources, and data from Parthian numismatics, epigraphy, archeology, onomastics and other branches of sciences have not been explored relevantly. Whereas, at present, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the "Arrianian" tradition about the connection between the Arsacids and the Achaemenids was not merely a literary fiction but had a real historical basis.

3.1 The real foundations of the theory of the Achaemenid origins of the Arsacids

The dynasties of many post-Achaemenid West-Asian countries, such as Greater Armenia, Atropatene, Pontus, Cappadocia and Commagene, traced their origins to the satrapal houses of the Achaemenid period for political and ideological reasons. And the right to be called the direct heirs of the Achaemenids was reserved exclusively for the kings of the Seleucid dynasty. From this point of view, it is very remarkable that, unlike the above-mentioned West-Asian dynasties, the Arsacids claimed to be the direct descendants of the Achaemenids. This itself seems to prove the widespread notion that the theory of Achaemenid origins of the Arsacids was indeed of ideological and political significance and was directed against the Seleucid dynasty.

But in this case, two main questions arise:

1. Did the theory in question have only ideological-propagandistic significance or was based on real historical bases?

2. In reality, when did the theory in question appear?

Since in the "Arrianian" tradition the kinship of the Arsacids with the Achaemenids is attributed to the tribal past of the first, obviously, we should search for the answers to the above questions in the context of the Achaemenid relationship with the nomadic world of Central Asia.

The Dahae confederation, which migrated in the vast area between the Southern Ural²¹ and the Syr Darya river basin, since V century BC had been under the political influence of Achaemenid Iran²² and played a significant role in the

²⁰ Wiesehöfer 2001: 133.

²¹ Balakhvantsev 2018: 37-38, 118-119.

²² Briant 2002: 173, 553; Balakhvantsev 2018: 28.

relations between the Achaemenids and the nomads of Central Asia. In addition to economic, spiritual and cultural ties, the Achaemenids were interested in the military safeguarding and security aspects of the Silk Road²³. It was with the help of the South Ural Dahae that Artaxerxes I (465-424 BC) in 456-454 BC suppressed the uprising in Egypt. According to A. Balakhvantsev, this contributed to strengthening ties between the Achaemenid regime and the Dahae of South Urals, paving the way for some of them to emigrate to Central Asia²⁴. That migration was gradual. In the IV century BC, the presence of Dahae tribes in Khwarazm and Sogdiana is confirmed not only by written sources, but also by archaeological data²⁵. Moreover, they make it obvious that during the mentioned period, the Dahae were one of the serious ethno-political factors in the region. The nomadic peoples of central Eurasia were often subdivided into several tribes. As a rule, a select tribe within a confederacy regarded itself as a privileged or royal group, claiming rule over other groups and clans. Thus, we know of the Royal Scythians²⁶ alongside the «Scythian nomads» and other dependent groups. Likewise, there were the Royal Sarmatians²⁷ and the Royal Iazyges²⁸. A similar internal division existed within the Dahae Confederacy that embraced the Aparni (*Ἀπαρνοί*), Xanthii (*Ξάνθιοι*), and Pissuri (*Πίσσουροι*)²⁹. M. Olbrycht thinks that the Aparnoi became the most powerful tribe in the Dahae confederacy, and claim a leading position in the steppes to the north of Parthia and Hyrcania only in the mid-3rd century BC³⁰. But the historical sources' and Parthian onomastic's data show that it happened in the first half of the 4th century, when the Aparnoi tribe had not yet established itself in the steppes to the north of Parthia and Hyrcania. This circumstance creates a logical base for imagining the kinship of the Achaemenids with the leading dynasty of the Dahae confederacy.

In the "Syncellus" version of the above-mentioned fragment of Arrian's "Parthica", the lineage of the Arsacids is traced back to the Achaemenid king Artaxerxes³¹. According to Babylonian astronomical texts, three Achaemenid kings, Artaxerxes I, Artaxerxes II (405-359 BC) and Artaxerxes III (359-338)

²³ Arrian 1967: III. 11. 3; Saveleva, Smirnov 1972: 122.

²⁴ Balakhvantsev 2018: 38-40.

²⁵ For the regions of the settlement of the Dahae in the Central Asia in IV century BC see Machinskiy 1974: 128-129; Bosworth 1980: 289; Bosworth 1995: 33; Khlopina 1983: 149; Bregel 2003: 7; Klyashtorniy, Sultanov 2004: 42. Balakhvantsev 2018: 37-40.

²⁶ Herodotus 1988: 4.19-20

²⁷ Ptolemy 1991: 5. 8.16.

²⁸ Strabo 1924: VII. 3.17.

²⁹ Strabo 1961: XI, 8.2.

³⁰ Olbrycht 2019b: 162.

³¹ In Old Persian the name Artaxšaça (Artaxerxes) consists of the words Arta (fairness, justice) and xšaça (kingdom) and means "having a kingdom of justice" (Kent 1950: 170-177; Arta and Artaxšaça; 181 on xšaça; Assar 2006c: 76):

whose personal names were Arshu (Aršu)³², Arshu (Aršu)³³ and Ukamash (Ukamaš)³⁴ respectively, added this title to their names after ascending the throne.

The identification of the names Arshu and Arshak, accepted in onomastics, leaves only Artaxerxes I and Artaxerxes II in the field of research. T. Daryae identified Artaxerxes, mentioned by Syncellus, with Artaxerxes I, basing on the fact that in the Babylonian cuneiform texts he was called by his personal name Arshu (Aršu = Aršak / Arsaces)³⁵. A. Balakhvantsev agrees with him, mentioning as an additional argument the special connection of that Persian king with the Dahae³⁶. Most scholars identified Artaxerxes mentioned by Syncellus with Artaxerxes II, whose personal name, according to Babylonian cuneiform texts, was also Arshu/Arshak. The second version is more probable, because Artaxerxes II attempted to strengthen the state through marriages. Plutarch reported that Artaxerxes II, in addition to the queen and two daughters whom he had married according to Zoroastrian custom, also had 360 concubines³⁷. The facts of the marriage of his daughter Rhodogune³⁸ with Orontas, the Armenian satrap, Apama's, the other daughter's marriage with Pharnavaz, and Atosa's marriage with Tiribazus³⁹, suggest that the marriages of the other daughters of the Persian king also served his political purposes. Obviously, one of them could have married the leader of the influential Dahae tribe of the steppes of Central Asia. On the one hand, historical events⁴⁰ and newly discovered archeological materials⁴¹ confirm the possibility of the Achaemenid princess' political marriage with the leader of the Dahae, and on the other hand, from the point of view of this supposed blood connection, it makes clear the exceptional devotion with which the Dahae defended Darius III and then Bessus against Alexander the Great⁴². Moreover, judging by some facts known from previous and subsequent times, the child born from such an unequal marriage could be named after a more authoritative maternal grandfather⁴³, or even called (half) Persian.

Of course, the family tree of Arsaces I (247-211 BC) could have provided a possible hint to clarify the question of the Arsacids' origins from the Achaemenids.

³² **Sachs** 1979:131 ff.; **Sachs, Hunger** 1988: 58-59.

³³ **Sachs, Hunger** 1988: 76-77, 92-93, 96-97, 108-111, 136-139. According to Plutarch, Artaxerxes II's personal name was Arsicas/Arsaces (**Plutarch** 1962: Artaxerxes, 1. 4.).

³⁴ **Schmitt** 1982: 90-94; **Sachs, Hunger** 1988: 142-143, 146-147, 152-153, 156-157.

³⁵ **Daryae** 2015: 8.

³⁶ **Balakhvantsev** 2018: 58, not. 174.

³⁷ **Plutarch** 1962: Artaxerxes 23. 2-4 and 27. 1-2

³⁸ **Xenophon** 1921: II.4.8; **Plutarch** 1962: Artaxerxes. 27. 4-5.

³⁹ **Plutarch** 1962: Artaxerxes, 27. 4-5.

⁴⁰ **Olbrycht** 2015: 257-275.

⁴¹ **Olbrycht** 2015: 257-275; Treister, Yablonsky 2013: 313-315. For the newly found evidences about the relations between the nomads of Central Asia and the Achaemenids see Stöllner, Samašev 2013: 715-731; Olbrycht 2021: 290-291.

⁴² **Olbrycht** 2019: 180.

⁴³ **Olbrycht** 2010: 239-240; **Melikyan** 2020b: 44-45.

But it has reached us very distorted. Written sources mention two people named Arsaces in the context of Alexander the Great's invasion. In the battle of Granicus (334 BC), Curtius Rufus names Arsaces as the commander of the cavalry of Memnon in the Persian army⁴⁴, and Arrian reported that in 329 BC, after the riot by Satibarzanes, the satrap of Aria, Alexander the Great entrusted the governing of the country to the Persian Arsaces⁴⁵. It is possible that these two are different people. However, given the historical and political situation, it is more probable that in both cases it referred to the same man who, after the disgraceful defeats of Darius III, like many Iranian nobles, sided with the winner while maintaining his social status. In any case, the fact is that the kind subjugation of the ruler of Aria to Alexander the Great did not last long. In the same 329 BC, arrested by Stasanor, the newly appointed satrap of Aria, on suspicion of having links with Satibarzanes and Bessus, he was chained and brought to Alexander at Zariaspa later that year. The sources do not say anything else about Arsaces, which suggests that he was executed on Alexander's order⁴⁶.

It is difficult to explain the reason for the shift in the political orientation of the Arian satrap. But his name Arsaces and the report by Arrian that «*Bessus with...the Dahae who dwell on this side of the river Tanais*»⁴⁷ allows us to see commonality between him and the Dahae who supported Bessus, and to attribute his behavior to the political orientation of his native ethnic community. From this we can conclude that the "Persian Arsaces" was in fact a representative of the clan descended from the marriage of the daughter of Artaxerxes II and the Dahae tribal leader, who was an intermediate link between Arsaces I and Arsaces, the eponymous forefather of his clan, the son of Phriapetes⁴⁸.

G. F. Assar also included the Arian satrap Arsaces within the Arsacid dynasty, suggesting that the phrase "the successors of Arsaces, the son of Phriapetes" be corrected as "the sons of Arsaces, the son of Arsaces, the successor of Phriapetes." In other words, he suggested identifying the satrap Arsaces with Arsaces I's father.

⁴⁴ Curtius 1946: II.

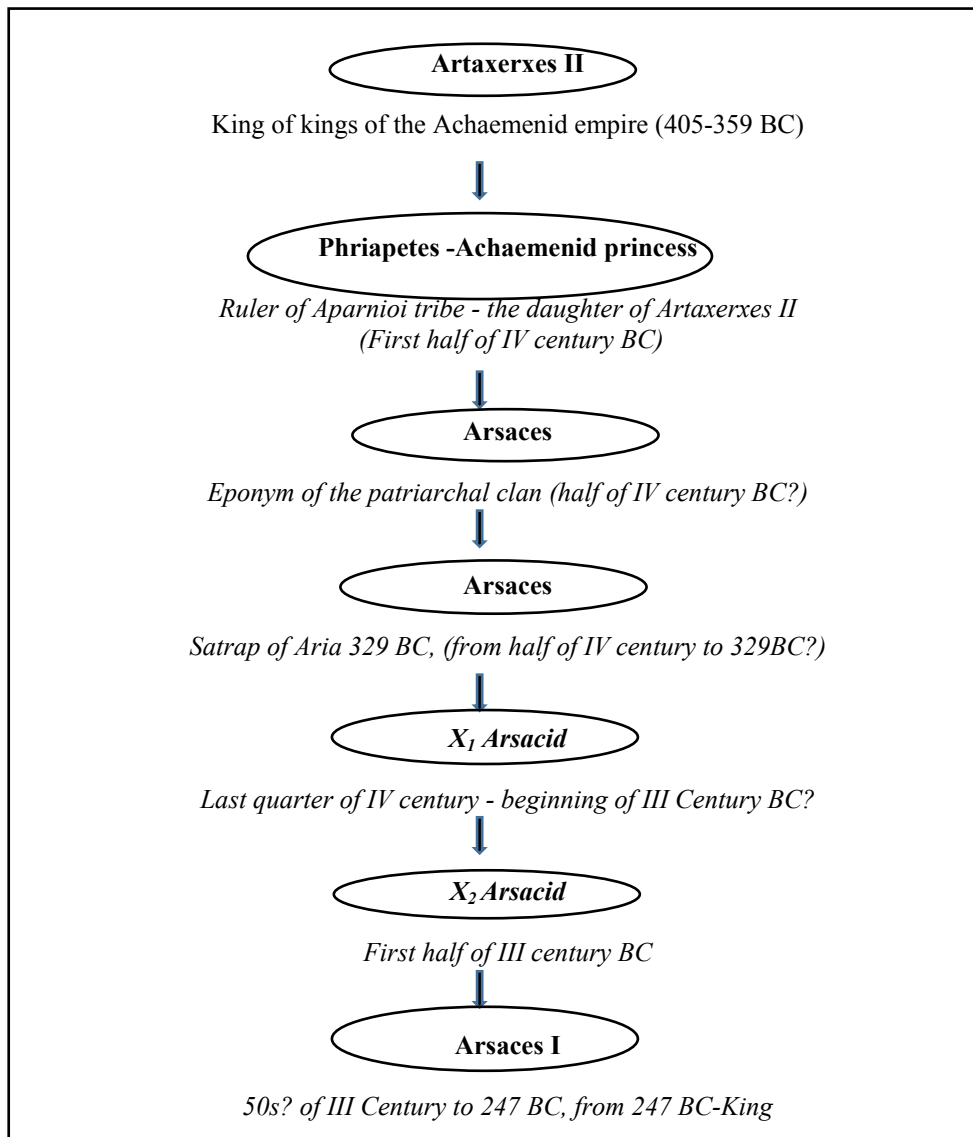
⁴⁵ Arrian 1967: III, 25. 7.

⁴⁶ Assar 2006c: 74.

⁴⁷ Arrian 1967: III, 28.8. Strabo mentioned an opinion about the original settlement place of the Aparns (Parni) tribe of the Dahae confederation, according to which «*Ἀπάρνοις Δάαις μεταναστας εἶναι ἐκ τῶν ὑπὲρ τῆς Μαιώτιδος Λαῶν* - Aparnian Däae were emigrants from the Däae above Lake Maeotis» (Strabo 1961: XI. 9. 3): However, Arrian's mention of the Dahae as a people living "on this side of Tanais" should not be explained by Strabo's influence. Arrian clearly distinguished the Tanais-Jaxartes-Syr Darya flowing into the Sea of Aral from Tanais-Don which is the border of Asia and Europe and flows into the Sea of Azov (Maeotian Lake) (Arrian 1967: III. 30. 7-9). It explains the fact that Arrian called the Scythians living north of Tanais-Jaxartes Asian Scythians. (Arrian 1967: IV. 3. 6): A. Balakhvantsev combined the evidences by Arrian and Curtius Rufus and concluded that during the period in under discussion the Dahae lived in mesopotamia between the rivers Oxus and Jaxartes (Balakhvantsev 2018: 29-30).

⁴⁸ Assar 2006c: 75, note 94.

However, this identification does not seem very convincing due to the lag of about 80 years. Arsaces, the satrap of Aria, could have been the grandson of Phriapetes, and Arsaces I's grandfather, at best, and more likely, the father of the grandfather.



Arrian's report about Phriapetes, the grand forefather of Arsaces I, is unique, and as such it should not have received much attention. However, the dilemma of the Arsacids' descent from the Achaemenids is solved when we look at this unique mention from the point of view of the canonical principle of genealogy in ancient historiography. According to it, while presenting the genealogy of a person, it was

obligatory to reach the founding forefather of the clan. Undoubtedly, Arrian presented the complete family tree of Arsaces I in his "Parthica". But later Patriarch Photius and Syncellus, following the canonical principle of the ancient genealogy, epitomized it in a different way. Syncellus, as the ancestor of Arsaces and Tiridates mentioned the Achaemenid king, whose daughter's marriage "Achaemenized" the leading clan of the Dahae, and Photius, as the ancestor of Arsaces and Tiridates mentioned the Dahae leader Phriapetes, who thanks to the marriage with the daughter of Artaxerxes gave his family the opportunity to be called the generation of the Achaemenids. Undoubtedly, the son of Phriapetes was named Arsaces in honor of his maternal grandfather, the glorious Arshu / Arsic / Artaxerxes II, making the latter the real eponymous forefather of the leading Dahae clan. From the partial restoration of the very incomplete family tree by Arrian, it is apparent that the use of that name in the leading clan of the Parni was not sporadic but periodical. In the case of Artaxerxes's grandson and son of Phriapetes, it is still a personal name. But after him, in about 100-year period, the mention of the name Arsaces at least twice suggests that in the pre-state period the name was changed to the name of a clan or more probably the name of the branch of the clan - Arsacid, emphasizing his Achaemenid descent and legitimacy of the power.

The main source for Pompeius Trogus in the history of the Parthians was the work "Parthia" by Apollodorus of Artemita. Therefore, it is not surprising at all, that Justin, who epitomized the work of Pompeius Trogus, being unaware of the theory that the Arsacids descended from the Achaemenids, or deliberately silencing it, praised the role of Arsaces I in the creation of the Parthian state⁴⁹ and considered him the eponym of the dynasty: «...cuius memoriae hunc honorem Parthi tribuerunt ut omnes exinde reges suos Arsacis nomine nuncupent»⁵⁰. The publishers of Justin's "Epitome" in English translated the above passage. «... the Parthians paid this honour to his memory, that they called all their kings thenceforth by the name of Arsaces»,⁵¹ or "... the Parthians revered his memory by giving all their subsequent kings the name Arsaces,"⁵² not noticing that their translations contradicted the logic of the original manuscript (XLI, 5, 6): In fact, Justin wrote in the above mentioned sentence *Arsacis nomine nuncupent* to make sure that Arsaces I's descendants bore the name Arsaces not as a personal name but as a second, family name⁵³. The use of the clan name Arsaces as an official name

⁴⁹ **Jvstinvs**, 1985: XLI, 5.5: "Thus Arsaces, having at once acquired and established a kingdom, and having become no less memorable among the Parthians than Cyrus among the Persians, Alexander among the Macedonians, or Romulus among the Romans, died at a mature old age".

⁵⁰ **Ivstinvs** 1985: XLI, 5, 6.

⁵¹ **Watson** 1882: 276.

⁵² **Justin** 1994: 256.

⁵³ Justin's evidence about the Parthian king Phriapatius confirmed: "The third king of the Parthians was Priapatius (**Phriapatius**); but he was also called Arsaces, for, as has just been observed, they distinguished all their kings by that epithet (tr. name), as the Romans use the titles of Caesar and Augustus".

by the Parthian kings is evidenced by the Babylonian cuneiform texts⁵⁴ and numismatic data⁵⁵. Strabo, agreeing with Justin, states: “*Such is also the custom among the Parthians; for all are called Arsaces, although personally one king is called Orodes, another Phraates, and another something else*”⁵⁶. From the above data of Arrian, as well as from our observations on the genealogy of the pre-state period of the Arsacids, the question arises whether Arsaces I, the founder of the Parthian state, bore that name as a personal name⁵⁷ or as a family name. Due to the extreme scarcity of source material, it is impossible to confidently choose between the two possible options. However, we are more inclined to believe that Arsaces I's descendants were called Arsac by virtue of an old dynastic custom, and that the Roman author, unaware of its origins, associated it with Arsaces I. Apart from the onomastic expressions, this is indirectly evidenced by the passive manifestations of representing themselves as Achaemenid heirs visible in the coinage of the first Arsacid rulers⁵⁸. These are the Zoroastrian custom of creationenthronement fires in Asaak⁵⁹, the combination of the diadem and kurbasi in the headdress⁶⁰, the title krny (* kārana) of Arsaces I⁶¹, the use of pictorial motifs of the archer king⁶² and fire temple⁶³ on coins, and so on. From this follows that the opinion of Y. Wolski, J. Neusner, Y. Wiesehöfer and others about the time and significance of the promulgation of the idea of the Arsacid origins from the Achaemenids is not firm at all. Indeed, one cannot disagree that the reign of Mithridates I was a milestone in the history of the Arsacid state, as his conquests transformed the Arsacid state into an empire stretching from Bactria to the Euphrates, from the Armenian Taurus to the Persian Gulf. Indeed, during his reign the idea of the Arsacids' descent from the Achaemenids was promulgated in a clearer way. However, we must also accept that it was not a question of seeking a new ideological thesis, but of supplementing

⁵⁴ Cf. **Assar** 2006a: 90-149; **Assar** 2006b: 62-95.

⁵⁵ There are also a significant number of Parthian coins carrying both the proper names of the kings and their dynastic epithet. Cf. **Sellwood** 1980: 41.1, S41.17, S48.18, S60.1- 10, S62.12, S66.1-4, and 233-299 with both the personal and throne names struck up on the coins, including, in several cases, the Aramaic version of the proper names, either abbreviated or in full.

⁵⁶ **Strabo** 1930: XV.1.36. τοιοῦτο δὲ καὶ τὸ παρὰ τοῖς Παρθυαίοις· Ἀρσάκαι γὰρ καλοῦνται πάντες, ἰδίᾳ δὲ ὁ μὲν Ὀρόδης, ὁ δὲ Φραάτης, ὁ δ' ἄλλο τι.

⁵⁷ One of the sons of Artabanus II, who reigned in the Greater Armenia in 34-35, also had the name Arsaces (**Debevoise** 2008:144): Among the Arsacids of Greater Armenia, two kings are known, who bore the family name of Arsaces as a proper name - Arsaces II (350-368) and Arsaces III (378-387):

⁵⁸ For the influence of the Iranian-Achaemenid traditions on the ideology of the Arsacids see **Wolski** 1966: 63-89; **Wolski** 1976: 195-214; **Olbrycht** 1997: 27-65; **Olbrycht** 2013a: 37-62; **Olbrycht** 2018: 198-220; **Shayegan** 2011; **Saeedifar, Ghazanfari** 2017: 28-32.

⁵⁹ **Isidoros**, 1976: 11.

⁶⁰ See **Gaslain** 2005: 9-30.

⁶¹ **Farrokh** 2007: 39; **Melikyan** 2012: 62-63; **Olbrycht** 2013b: 63-74.

⁶² **Melikyan** 2012: 53-57:

⁶³ Phraates IV- **Sellwood** 1980: 51.49, 52.40, 54.9, 53.18; Phraataces - **Sellwood** 1980: 57.16; Artabanus II **Sellwood** 1980: 63.22, 63.13; Osroes I - **Sellwood** 1980: 80.11; Vologases III-**Sellwood** 1980: 78.13, 78.15.

the old (inheritance) ideological declaration with a new one (direct descent from the Achaemenids) in line with the current capabilities and aspirations of the state. In other words, the dynamics of the official ideology of Mithridates I should be outlined not as a sharp rise, but a smoothly growing curve. The smooth transition from one ideological level to another was best expressed in his coinage.

In the iconography of the early silver coins (S 7.1 and S 8.1), Mithridates continued the theme of indirect investiture via the "Parthian archer", widely announcing the legitimacy of his rule⁶⁴. However, by seating the deified founder of the Arsacid dynasty on the omphalos, at the same time, Mithridates tried to show his Greek subjects that the Arsacids, not renouncing their rights of conquest, aspired to play the same key socio-political role that the Seleucids had previously played for them⁶⁵. In the composition of the bronze coins S 7.2, S 8.2 and S 8.3 intended for internal circulation, Mithridates I completely abandoned the iconography expressing the right of the Arsacids to conquer, instead proposing the idea of a government under divine patronage (divine investiture)⁶⁶. After the conquest of Media, Mithridates I took the official title of "Great King"⁶⁷. At first glance, it can be assessed as an act of introducing itself as the political successor of the Achaemenids. However, it would be more correct to condition the adoption of the new title on the fact that Mithridates I maintained the state status of that country after the conquest of Media and settled for appointing his brother Bagasis as its king⁶⁸. The emergence of a subordinate king in the administrative-political system of the state automatically required the Arsacid ruler to accept the higher title of "Great King". After the conquest of Mesopotamia, on the tetradrachms minted in Seleucia on Tigris in 141/140 BC, Mithridates I was depicted with a Hellenistic diadem knotted near the neck, a short (Greek) beard and haircut, and an honorary title of "«φιλέλληνος- hellenophile»" in addition to the official title of "King Arsaces the Great"⁶⁹. On the reverse of the coins, instead of the image of the "Parthian archer", in one case naked Apollo is depicted with a club and a horn of abundance, in the second case Zeus sitting on the throne holding a sceptre in his left hand and in his outstretched right hand holding a falcon looking to his side. According to R. Fowler, Mithridates I's attribution of the title "*φιλέλληνος*" was due to "agreement to enter into a friendly dialogue with the Greek communities of Mesopotamia"⁷⁰. And according to A. Gariboldi, the adoption of the mentioned title was aimed at gaining the sympathy of the Greek and Hellenized population of

⁶⁴ Melikyan 2020: 173.

⁶⁵ Erickson, Wright 2011: 165.

⁶⁶ Melikyan 2020: 173-178.

⁶⁷ Sellwood 1980: Type 10. 1-14; 18-19; Type 11. 1-6; Type 12. 1-5; 7-8; 11-13; 16-18; 21-25.

⁶⁸ Ivstins 1985: XLI, 6.7; Sellwood 1980: 12. 4-5, 12. 13, 12. 17-18, 12. 23-24; Assar 2006a: 89; Melikyan 2017: 199ff; Melikyan 2020b: 39 ff.

⁶⁹ Sellwood 1980: 13. 1-10.

⁷⁰ Fowler 2005: 152; See also Porada 1965: 183.

Mesopotamia⁷¹. And the compositions on the avers and the reverse of the above-mentioned coins together signaled the people of Mesopotamia the idea, that the power of the Parthian ruler was as God-pleasing and merciful as the power of the Seleucids, perhaps more transparently alluding to the Mithridates's readiness to respect the traditional rights of the Greek-Hellenistic population⁷². In general, the pictographs of that coin and coins S 7.2, 8.2 and 8.3 minted earlier by Mithridates I signaled the renouncing his predecessors' policy of "land occupation"⁷³ and the ambition of establishing a multi-ethnic and multi-lifestyle coexistence - an empire.

Some researchers, based on the fact that the on a cuneiform tablet dating back to 140/139 BC, discovered in the city of Orca in Babylon, Mithridates I is referred to as "King of Kings",⁷⁴ conclude that this great-power title was taken by Mithridates I⁷⁵. However, there is no official confirmation of it. This tablet is not of an official nature, so the fact that Mithridates I was honored with the imperial title of Achaemenids should be considered as nothing more than an attempt by the Orca population to please the new ruler of Mesopotamia under the threat of a Parthian attack. Ignored by the Parthian ruler, it did not become an official phenomenon. The last expression of Mithridates I's ideological rise was the creation of his own rock relief in Hung-e Azhdar, next to an ancient Elamite rock relief, where he was depicted receiving power, blessing and patronage from the Zoroastrian gods Ahura Mazda, Verethragna, Mithra and Tir⁷⁶. If we consider the possible influence of the Behistun monument of Darius I on this rock relief, its creation can be regarded as an expression of Mithridates I's return to Iranian roots after ideological quest. But even in this case, we can not fail to notice that the idea of descent from the Achaemenids is passive in that declaration.

According to popular opinion, the thesis of the descent from the Achaemenids finally became a key point of the official ideology of the Arsacids during the reign of Mithridates II (124-91 BC). In addition to the Nisa ostracons, which we will discuss below, the argument for this is the adoption by Mithridates II the pompous title "King of Kings" of the Achaemenids in 112/111BC⁷⁷, the creation of his own rock relief⁷⁸ next to the majestic monument of Behistun of Darius I (522-486 BC) with the scene of a royal reception, and finally in the official portrait, the renunciation of the Greek-Hellenistic elements of clothing and headdress and the transition to the Iranian (Achaemenid) style⁷⁹.

⁷¹ **Gariboldi** 2004: 376.

⁷² **Melikyan** 2017: 178.

⁷³ **Strabo** 1961: XI. 9.2.

⁷⁴ **Wolski** 1993: 99; **Fowler** 2005: 146.

⁷⁵ **Saeedifar, Ghazanfari** 2017: 32.

⁷⁶ **Melikyan** 2017: 185-211, 247-260, Pic. 2.

⁷⁷ **Sellwood** 1980: Type 27. 1-13; 27. 28; **Balakhvantsev** 2018: 58; **Olbrycht** 2019: 182.

⁷⁸ **Melikyan** 2017: 128-129.

⁷⁹ **Dąbrowa** 2008: 28.

The last two arguments can be accepted unconditionally. As for the adoption of the title of "King of Kings" by Mithridates II, it could be due to the sophistication of the administrative-political system of the Arsacid state, and first, of all, to the increase in the number of people holding royal titles in the territories of the Arsacid state. No matter what, the fact is that almost a hundred years after the death of Arsaces I, the Parthian state became the true owner of the political and cultural heritage of the Achaemenids⁸⁰, and the ruling Arsacid dynasty presented itself as the direct heir of that glorious dynasty.

3.2 The Epigraphic evidence of the Arsacids genealogical connection with the Achaemenid dynasty

As a result of the excavations of Old Nisa, the Arsacid royal residence, starting from 1948, more than 2,500 potsherds with 2,758 texts have been found⁸¹. They mainly contain information about the supply of wine or other natural products from various temples or estates owned by individuals. The names of the vineyards mentioned in the documents of Nisa, Friyapātikān, Mihrdātakān, Artabānukān, Gotarzakān, are derived from the names of the Parthian kings of II-I centuries BC and correspond to the names of the temples to which they supplied their products⁸². Obviously, those temples are dedicated to the worship of deified kings, the natural rent of which had the meaning of sacrifices for the peace of the souls of the above-mentioned Parthian kings.⁸³ One of the vineyards mentioned in at least sixty-eight ostracons⁸⁴ dating to 92-30 BC⁸⁵, called Artaxšahrakān. "(of or cult of) Artaxšahr/Artaxerxes". This must have been dedicated to a dead king since, as commended above, it is highly unlikely that private citizens could adopt the regal epithet Artaxerxes as their personal names⁸⁶. In the II-I centuries BC, there was no king named Artaxerxes in the Arsacid royal list. It is also difficult to attribute the founding of the Artaxšahrakān vineyard to any of the Achaemenid kings named Artaxerxes, as there is no evidence of their activity in the Old Nisa documents. On this basis, it is unequivocally accepted in science the idea that the Arsacids set up the Artaxšahrakan endowment to perpetuate the name of king Artaxerxes II, alluded by Syncellus as their distant ancestor⁸⁷.

⁸⁰ Wolski 1966: 74.

⁸¹ Nosudi. Nazanin 2017: 59.

⁸² Olbrycht 2019: 181.

⁸³ Assar 2006c: 76.

⁸⁴ Diakonoff, Livshits 1977: 19-24 (Nos.128-174), 131 (No. 270); Diakonoff, Livshits 1998: 128 (No. 1501), 131 (Nos. 1524-1525), 137 (No. 1566), 139 (No. 1589), 139 (No. 1592), 140 (No. 1593); Diakonoff, Livshits 2003: 164 (No. 2573), 172 (No. 2625).

⁸⁵ Assar 2006c: 76.

⁸⁶ Assar 2006c: 76.

⁸⁷ Diakonoff, Livshits 1960: 20; Lukonin 1983: 697; Bader 1996: 272; Assar 2006c: 76-77; Olbrycht 2019: 181.

In the 90's BC, the existence of Artaxšahrakān vineyard in Old Nisa and a cult institution dedicated to Artaxerxes as the ancestor of the Arsacid dynasty, invalidates the opinion of J. Wolski, Neusner, P. Stader, V. Nikonorov, G. Koshelenko and their followers that the theory of Arsacids' origins from the Achaemenids was formulated in the middle of I century BC or later. Outwardly, it is in harmony with the theoretical approach of J. Wiesehöfer, Saedifar, Ghazanfari and others, according to which the genealogy in question was published during the reign of Mithridates I and was due to the success of his conquest policy. But, in fact, this hypothesis has no historical basis, as well. The thing is that there are three documents (Nos. 1592, 1593, 2625) that mention the "Artaxšahrakān" vineyard mentioned in Nisa ostracons, which date back to 151/150 BC⁸⁸ and are considered to be the oldest documents found from that residence of the Arsacids. According to their date, the lower time boundary for the existence of "Artaxšahrakān" vineyards should be descended from 92 BC to at least 151/150 BC. As for the institution dedicated to the posthumous cult of Artaxerxes, it could have existed in the Arsacid cult center in Old Nisa⁸⁹ from earlier times. In any case, the change in the chronology of the "Artaxšahrakān" vineyard makes it clear that the establishment of the cult of Artaxerxes II as the ancestor of the Arsacids, preceded, not followed, the stunning success of Mithridates I. That fact alone is sufficient to demand a rejection of the existing conception about the fictional nature, significance, and time of promulgation of the Arsacids descent from the Achaemenids. In particular, to make sure that the idea of descent from the Achaemenids was not due to the success of the Arsacids' expansionist policy, it is enough to examine the territory of the Parthian state and its internal content in the II century BC.

In 151/150 BC, the Arsacid state was still modest in size, incorporating only Hyrcania, Parthia and Nisaya. It is true that Phraates I (168-165 BC) conquered the land of the Amardi⁹⁰ as early as 165 BC⁹¹, and in 163 BC⁹², not long after him, Mithridates I seized some of the bordering provinces from the Greco-Bactrian kingdom⁹³, but the Arsacids had not any achievement in the western direction yet. The date of the sculpture of "lying Hercules" in Behistun (Panemos month of 164 according to the Seleucid calendar (June / July 148 BC))⁹⁴ shows that even the conquest of Media chronologically followed the establishment of the religious institution in "Artaxšahrakān" vineyard in Old Nisa. In general, the iconography of the coins in the reign period of Mithridates I clearly demonstrates that the most

⁸⁸ **Diakonoff, Livshits** 1998: 139 (No. 1592), 140 (No. 1593); **Diakonoff, Livshits** 2003: 172 (No. 2625).

⁸⁹ **Dąbrowa** 2011: 247-249.

⁹⁰ **Isidoros** 1976: 2.7; **Ivstinvs** 1985: XLI, 5. 9.

⁹¹ **Tacitus** 1962: V. 6; **Josephus** 2006: XII. 7, 293; **Ivstinvs** 1985: XLI, 5. 9-10.

⁹² **Assar** 2006a: 89.

⁹³ **Strabo** 1961: XI, 11. 2; **Ivstinvs** 1985: XLI, 6. 3. According to G. Assar, Mithridates I conquered Tapuria and Traxiane from the Greek-Bactrian kingdom (**Assar** 2006a: 89):

⁹⁴ **Melikyan** 2017: 59.

important internal political problem of that Arsacid monarch was the improvement of relations with the local Greek-Hellenistic population of the conquered territories. He tried to achieve this goal not by advocating the ideology of descent from the Achaemenids, but by using a more flexible ideological toolkit. The evidence of the Nisa ostraca 1592, 1593, 2625 about the cult of Artaxerxes II as the ancestor of the Arsacid dynasty, clearly demonstrates that the idea of being descended from the Achaemenids existed *by itself* both during and before Mithridates I, as a component of the Arsacid dynasty's self-consciousness and until 34 AC⁹⁵ had no links with the foreign policy of their empire.

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⁹⁵ After the death of Zeno-Artaxias, Artabanus III installed his son Arsac (34-35) on the throne of Greater Armenia and at the same time, demanded that emperor Tiberius return the treasures left by Vonones I in Syria and Cilicia. He also threatened to annex all the territories that once belonged to the Achaemenids and Seleucids. (**Tacitus** 1963: IV. 31; **Dio Cassius** 1955: LVIII. 26; **Suetonius** 1914: Tiber., 66).

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**ԱՐՇԱԿՈՒՆԻՆԵՐԻ ԱՐՔԱՅԱՏԱՆ ԱՔԵՄԵՆՅԱՆՆԵՐԻՑ ՍԵՐՎԱԾ ԼԻՆԵԼՈՒ
ՎԱՐԿԱԾԸ. ԱՌԱՍՊԵԼ ԹԵ՞ ԻՐԱԿԱՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ**

Արթուր Մելիքյան

Բանալի բառեր՝ *Արրիանոս, Արշակունիներ, Աքեմենյաններ, դահեր, Կենտրոնական Ասիա, Պարթևստան, Արտաքսերքսես, Արշակ I, Միհրդատ I:*

Պատմագրության մեջ պարսկական Արքեմենյան և պարթևական Արշակունի տոհմերի ուղղակի ծագումնաբանական կապի մասին առաջին վկայությունները վերաբերում են Արրիանոս Ֆավիուսի «Պարթևկա» աշխատությանը: Այն մեզ է հասել Փոթ պատրիարքի «Գրադարան» և Գ. Սինկելլուսի «Ընտրյալ ժամանակագրություն» աշատություններում կատարված կրկնապատումների ձևով և պարունակում է որոշակի տարբերություններ. Փոթի տարբերակում Պարթևական պետության հիմնադիրներ Արշակն ու Նրա եղբայր Տրդատը եղել են «Արշակի՝ Հրիապիտեսի որդու հետևորդներ»-ը, մինչդեռ Սինկելլուսը նրանց ներկայացել է որպես «Պարսից արքա Արտաքսերքսեսի զարմից սերող անծինք»: Պատմագիտության մեջ Արշակունիների ծագումնաբանության վերաբերյալ Արրիանոսի «Պարթևկա»-ի տեղեկությունները Ստրաբոնի և Հուստինոսի տվյալների հետ դրանց անհամաձայնության պատճառով համարվել են ոչ պատմական և ստեղծածին: Սակայն գրավոր վկայությունների և անվանաբանության, հնագիտության, դրամագիտության տվյալների համադիր քննությամբ ցույց է տալիս, որ Արրիանոսի տեղեկությունները Աքեմենյանների հետ Արշակունիների ծագումնաբանական կապերի մասին բնավ էլ անհիմն չեն: Կենտրոնական Ասիայի քոչվորական աշխարհի հետ Աքեմենյանների վերաբերությունների քննությունը թույլ է տալիս կարծել, որ Արտաքսերքսես II-ի կողմից դինաստիական ամուսնությունների միջոցով տերության վարչաքաղաքական սուբյեկտներին Աքեմենյան արքունիքին կապելու քաղաքականությունը չի շրջանցել նաև այդ տարածաշրջանում ազդեցիկ դեր ունեցող դահական ցեղամիությանը և պարսից այդ արքայի բազմաթիվ դուստրերից մեկն էլ կնության է տրվել դահական ցեղառաջնորդ Հրիապիտեսին: Այդ ամուսնությունից ծնված որդին անվանակոչվել է հեղինակավոր մորական պապի՝ Արտաքսերքսես II-ի անձնական Արշու/Արշակ անունով և դարձել դահերի ցեղառաջնորդական տոհմի կամ տոհմաճյուղի անվանադիր նախնին: Նրա հաջորդների օրոք Արշակ անունը անձնանունից վերածվել է տոհմական անվան, որով ընդգծվել է դահերի ցեղառաջնորդների Աքեմենյան արմատները և նրանց իշխանության օրինականությունը: Այս ավանդույթը շարունակվել է նաև դահերի կողմից սեփական պետության ստեղծումից հետո: Եվ թեպետ Հուստինոսը Արշակ I-ին հաջորդած պարթևական արքաների պաշտոնական Արշակ անունը համարում է պետության հիմնադրի նկատմամբ հարգանքի նշան, ակնհայտ է, որ Արշակ գահակալական ան-

վան կիրառությունը ավելի խորը պատմական արձանագրություններ է ունեցել և եղել է հին տոհմական ավանդույթի վերափոխման ավարտական շարունակությունը:

Պատմագիտության մեջ մինչ օրս տիրապետող է այն տեսակետը, որ Արշակունիների Աքեմենյաններից սերված լինելու մասին տեսությունը հրապարակվել է Միհրդատ I-ի օրոք կամ ավելի ուշ: Իրականում Աքեմենյան նախնիներին Արշակունիների անվանաբանական, կրոնական, պատկերագրական հղումները տեսնում ենք նրանց պետության ամենավաղ շրջանից: Դրա լավագույն արտահայտությունները Հին Նիսայում «Արտաքսերքսական» կոչված խաղողուտի և Արտաքսերքսես II-ի հոգու հանգստությանը նվիրված պաշտամունքային հաստատության գոյությունն են: Դրանց մասին վկայող ամենավաղ նիսայական օստրակոնները թվագրվում են Ք.ա. 151/150 թ.: Դա ինքնին ցույց է տալիս, որ կատարելապես անհիմն է Արշակունիների արքայատան Աքեմենյաններից սերված լինելու գաղափարը Միհրդատ I-ի նվաճողական քաղաքականության հետ կապելը: Այդ գաղափարը որպես Արշակունիների տոհմական ինքնագիտակցության առանցքային բաղադրիչ, ձևավորվել է դեռևս նախապետական ժամանակաշրջանում և որոշակի վերափոխությամբ շարունակել է գոյություն ունենալ մինչև այդ արքայատան կառավարման վերջը: