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ARTABANUS (ARSACID KINGS)

ARTABANUS (Parth. Ardawān), name borne by several Arsacid kings.

Artabanus I

Artabanus II

Artabanus III

Artabanus IV

A king supposed to have reigned from 211 to ca. 191 B.C., is mentioned quite frequently in the older literature as Artabanus I (e.g. G. Rawlinson, *The Sixth Great Oriental Monarchy or the Geography, History and Antiquities of Parthia*, London, 1873, p. 54 and elsewhere) and with reservations in the relatively recent works of N. C. Debevoise (*A Political History of Parthia*, Chicago, 1938, repr. New York, 1968, p. 16) and U. Kahrstedt (*Artabanos III und seine Erben*, Bern, 1950, p. 11 n. 1). But as A. von Gutschmid first observed (*Geschichte Irans und seiner Nachbarländer*, Tübingen, 1888, p. 36 n. 4, and p. 81), this king's supposed existence rests on an untenable conjecture by Vaillant (*Historia Arsacidarum*, 1725, p. 16) concerning a passage from the work of Pompeius Trogus (apud Justin 41).

Today, mainly thanks to the thorough investigations of J. Wolski (exemplified in *Historia* 11, 1962, pp. 138ff.), scholars replace Artabanus I in the list of Parthian kings with Arsaces II and date the reign from some time later than 214 to 191 B.C. (H. H. Schmitt, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Antiochos des*

Grossen und seiner Zeit, Wiesbaden, 1964, p. 62 n. 2, 63; G. Le Rider, *Suse sous les séleucides et les parthes*, MDAFI 38, 1965, pp. 313ff.; H. Bengston, *Griechische Geschichte von den Anfängen bis in die römische Kaiserzeit*, 4th ed., Munich 1969, p. 417; H. Volkmann, "Parthian," in *Der kleine Pauly* IV, Munich, 1972, cols. 533-34; F. Altheim and R. Stiehl, *Geschichte Mittelasiens*, Berlin, 1970, pp. 445ff.). (However, for the restoration of Artabanus I see now V. G. Lukonin in *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/2, 1983, pp. 687f.; A. D. H. Bivar, ibid., III/1, p. 31.)

Artabanus I (old numbering II), son of Phriapatius and younger brother of Mithridates I, came to the throne about 127 B.C. in succession to his nephew Phraates II (ca. 139/8-ca. 128) after the latter's death in combat with nomads in the east of the empire. To judge by the dates of his father Phriapatius's reign, he must have been rather old at his accession. He too had to fight against nomadic peoples—Sakas and Tokharians, the latter probably identical with the Yüechi—in the east and northeast; and he is said to have been obliged to pay tribute to the Sakas (Ioannes Antiochenos in *Fragmenta historicorum Graecorum*, ed. C. Müllerus, IV, Paris, 1851, p. 561).

The involvement of the Parthians on their empire's eastern frontier enabled Hyspaosines, ruler of the recently established principality of Characene in the south of Mesopotamia, to make himself independent. Cuneiform tablets and coins show that Hyspaosines gained control of Babylon not later than 128/7 B.C., and coins show that he was in command of parts of Mesopotamia in the years 125 and 124. Only under Mithridates II (124/3-88/7 B.C.) were the Parthians able to repulse Hyspaosines and conquer Characene itself (Le Rider, op. cit., pp. 382, 388; S. A. Nodelman, "A Preliminary History of Characene," *Berytus* 13, 1959-60, pp. 83ff., 90ff.). The reign of Artabanus I was thus a time of shrinkage of the Parthian domain. He must have considered the threat in the east more dangerous, as it was there that he fell in battle against the Tokharians in about 124/3 B.C. (Justin 42.2-5 and 2,2).

An Artabanus listed in certain works, e.g., by Junge in Pauly-Wissowa, XVIII, col. 1983, between Mithridates II and Sinatruces on the basis of an inference by Gutschmid (*Geschichte Irans*, p. 81 n. 1) from a passage in the work of Pompeius Trogus (apud Justin 41) is now unanimously rejected (Le Rider, op. cit., pp. 35 n. 1, and 391ff., with further bibliography; P. Daffinà *L'immigrazione dei Sakā nella Drangiana*, Rome, 1967, p. 68 n. 12; U. Kahrstedt, *Artabanos III*, p. 11, n. 1; J. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Artabanos," in *Der kleine Pauly* I, Munich, 1964, col. 613).

Artabanus II (r. A.D. 10/11-ca. 38). Previously reckoned as Artabanus III, he is now generally referred to as Artabanus II (Weissbach, in Pauly-Wissowa XI, cols. 483, 1515, and XVI, col. 1440; R. H. McDowell, *Coins from Seleucia on the Tigris*, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1935, p. 223; Le Rider, op. cit., p. 35 n. 1; D. Sellwood, *An Introduction to the Coinage of Parthia*, London, 1971, p. 185; M. L. Chaumont, in H. Temporini and W. Haase, eds., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II/9.1, Berlin, 1976, p. 85 n. 68; K. Schippmann, *Grundzüge der parthischen Geschichte*, Darmstadt, 1980, p. 50; Wolski in *Iranica Antiqua* 7, 1967, p. 142, n. 3).

There is also disagreement about this king's birthplace. Tacitus (*Annals* 2.3; 4.36, 41ff.) says he came from Hyrcania in the northeast, while according to Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.48) he came from Atropatene. The evidence on each side has been fully examined by Kahrstedt (*Artabanos III*, pp. 11ff.), and in the light of his research it seems most probable that Artabanus II came from Hyrcania.

Artabanus II was brought to the throne by a wave of "national consciousness" among the Parthian nobles, who disapproved of Vonones, installed with Roman backing in A.D. 8/9, and, in their eyes, "made soft" by long residence in the West. Artabanus II met with an initial reverse and only defeated Vonones at the second attempt. His accession took place in or around A.D. 10/11 (10/11 according to Le Rider, op. cit., p. 461; 11/12 according to Kahrstedt, op. cit., p. 11, and Debevoise, op. cit., p. 152); but coins of both rulers from these years have been found—*tetradrachmae* of Vonones minted at Seleucia in the years 10/11-11/12 and *tetradrachmae* of Artabanus II minted simultaneously at Seleucia in 10/11 and 11/12 (Le Rider, op. cit., p. 419)—and this suggests that Artabanus was still encountering resistance from his rival at that time. Eventually Vonones had to quit the field and flee. A little later he contrived to win for himself the throne of Armenia, which had just become vacant (Tacitus, *Annals* 2.4.2), and presumably he did so with the approval or at least acquiescence of the Romans; but before long he was forced to give up this position as the result of pressure applied by Artabanus and lack of Roman support. It seems that Tiberius, the successor of Augustus in A.D. 14, was unwilling to risk conflict with the Parthians for the sake of Vonones, particularly when the Romans could not be sure that the Armenian nobles would back him. Vonones went into exile at Antioch. Yet the Romans did not hesitate to intervene when Artabanus installed one of his sons, Orodes, on the Armenian throne in A.D. 15 or 16.

Recent research indicates that the ensuing events may have been confused with those of the year A.D. 35, when Artabanus II sent his son Arsaces to Armenia to take over the throne after the death of the Armenian king Artaxias III. (Thus Chaumont, op. cit., p. 85). The account given here, however, is a summary of what is to be found in most of the literature (e.g. Debevoise, op. cit., p. 153; Kahrstedt, op. cit., pp. 17ff.; K. H. Ziegler, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Partherreich*, Wiesbaden, 1964, pp. 57-58). Tiberius sent his nephew Germanicus with a large army to Armenia. In A.D. 18 the Romans took the Armenian capital, Artaxata, and Germanicus installed Zeno, a son of the king of Pontus, as local ruler under the name Artaxias. It seems that Germanicus also attempted to seduce vassals of Parthians; there is a mention of an envoy who contacted the ruler of Mesene-Characene. Artabanus saw fit to come to terms, and a peace treaty was signed in 18/19, providing for resumption of friendly relations between the two empires. The Romans agreed to Artabanus's request for removal of Vonones from territory adjoining the Parthian frontiers and prohibition of any further assertion of his claim to the Parthian throne; they resettled Vonones in Cilicia, where he was killed shortly afterward (A.D. 19) in an attempt to escape.

The next fifteen years or more were a time of peaceful coexistence between the two great powers. Artabanus took advantage of this lull to strengthen his position and authority within the Parthian empire, for example by eliminating the indigenous local dynasties of Media Atropatene, Mesene-Characene, Persis, and Elymais and turning their territories into apanages for younger sons of the Parthian Great King (on this development, see Kahrstedt, *Artabanos III*). Artabanus could not, however, do the same in the east, where a Parthian local dynasty, often designated "Pahlava" and probably identical with the renowned East Iranian family of the Sūrēn, had extended its sway as far as the Panjab and subjugated the Saka kingdom in that region (A. D. H. Bivar, in *Fischer Weltgeschichte* XVI: *Zentralasien*, Frankfurt, 1966, pp. 54ff.; Kahrstedt, op. cit., pp. 32ff.).

From this time, more precisely from A.D. 21, comes an important royal document from the Parthian period. It is a letter in Greek sent by Artabanus to the city elders of Susa confirming a disputed election (F. Cumont, "Une lettre du roi Artaban III," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, Paris, 1932, pp. 238-60; C. B. Welles, *Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period*, New Haven, 1934, pp. 299-306). The letter incidentally shows that there was almost certainly a Greek municipal administration at

Susa, though Artabanus's treatment of this city has been variously interpreted by scholars (see Le Rider, op. cit., p. 421 n. 3).

The peaceful coexistence of the two great powers ended in A.D. 35, when Artaxias, the king of Armenia, died leaving no heir. Artabanus took the chance to place on the Armenian throne one of his sons who is mentioned by his family name of Arsaces. In a letter to Tiberius about the matter, Artabanus referred to the territories once in the possession of the Achaemenids and Seleucids (Tacitus, *Annals* 6.31.1). If the Arsacids had a grand design (as Wolski argues in *Syria* 43, 1966, pp. 67ff., and R. Stiehl and H. E. Stier, eds., *Festschrift für F. Altheim* I, 1969, pp. 315ff.), Artabanus's words in the letter may be taken for an announcement of one part of their "program"; as successors to the Achaemenids, they claimed all the lands which had belonged to the Achaemenid empire. In the same letter Artabanus demanded restitution of the Parthian royal treasure which Vonones had taken out of the country.

At this juncture, as so often in Parthian history, internal opponents of the Great King entered the fray. Many of the nobles evidently thought that Artabanus was growing too powerful. They requested Rome to return a son of Phraates IV, also named Phraates, who had been given as hostage by his father in 20 B.C., to set him up as a counter-king (Tacitus, *Annals* 6.31). The Romans welcomed this offer, and when Phraates died in Syria on his homeward journey, Tiberius sent another prince, a grandson of Phraates IV named Tiridates, also appointing Lucius Vitellius governor of Syria with instructions to support Tiridates. Furthermore, the Romans put pressure on the Parthians by offering the Armenian throne to Mithridates, a brother of the king of neighboring Iberia. Armenia was occupied by an Iberian army and Arsaces was murdered. Artabanus then sent a large army under his son Orodes into Armenia, but the Iberians, with Albanian and Sarmatian reinforcements, beat off this attack (for details of the events, see Chaumont, op. cit., pp. 88-89). Since Vitellius was now poised to invade Mesopotamia, Artabanus had to drop his plans for reconquest of Armenia. At the same time his position at home was shaken by the revolt of a section of the Parthian nobility. He was forced to retire to Hyrcania in the east of the empire, and most of the Parthian territories fell into the hands of Tiridates, who was crowned as Great King at Ctesiphon. Before long, however, another group of Parthian nobles rebelled against Tiridates and recalled Artabanus, who ousted his rival without much difficulty, partly because the Romans did not give Tiridates any support. Tiridates was forced to take refuge with the Romans in Syria.

The Romans now wanted an understanding with Artabanus. Following a precedent set in A.D. 1, Vitellius and Artabanus met on the bank of the Euphrates in the spring of 37. The exact terms of the agreement are not given in the sources, but the pact evidently restored the *status quo ante*, with Roman recognition of the independence and existing frontiers of Parthia and a Parthian promise not to interfere in Armenia. In addition to this, Artabanus gave one of his sons, named Darius, as a hostage (for details see Ziegler, op. cit., pp. 62-63). Despite this settlement, the Parthian empire did not regain stability. A rebellion in its biggest city, Seleucia, is known to have lasted from 36 to 42. Some see this as a conflict between an indigenous party supported by Tiridates and the city's Greek upper class supported by Artabanus (McDowell, *Coins from Seleucia on the Tigris*, pp. 224ff., cf. Kahrstedt, op. cit., p. 425 n. 6) while N. Pigulevskaia (*Les villes de l'état iranien aux époques parthes et sassanides*, Paris, 1963, pp. 61ff., 85) interprets it as class struggle between rich and poor.

Artabanus's promise of noninterference in Armenia in his pact with Vitellius may perhaps have been the reason why some of the Parthian nobles again rebelled, forcing him to take refuge with Izates, the king of Adiabene. On this occasion a new pretender came forward, an adoptive son of Artabanus with the name Cinnamus. Kahrstedt (op. cit., pp. 21, 80) speculates that this unusual name may conceal the person of Gotarzes II, who later contested and won the throne in 43/44. Izates succeeded in reconciling the two parties and Artabanus returned to the capital as Great King; but he did not have much chance to reassert his authority before he died in 38. His reign of 28 years had been a long one by Parthian standards. (See now E. Dabrowa, *La politique de l'état parthe à l'égard de Rome—d'Artaban II à Vologèse I (ca. 11-ca. 79 de N.E.) et les facteurs qui la conditionnaient*, Cracow, 1983.)

An Artabanus, perhaps a son of Artabanus II (thus W. Schur, in Pauly-Wissowa, XVIII/4, col. 2011; and J. Duchesne-Guillemin, in *Der kleine Pauly* I, col. 613) was murdered together with his family by Gotarzes (Tacitus, *Annals* 11.8) who was either his brother (thus Gutschmid, op. cit., p. 124; Debevoise, op. cit., p. 167) or his cousin (cf. Kahrstedt, loc. cit.; Duchesne-Guillemin, loc. cit.).

Artabanus III, a son of Vologases I (Great King from ca. 51 to ca. 76 or 80) and a brother of Pacoros II, contended for power with his brother in the years A.D. 79-81 (Le Rider, op. cit., p. 459) or A.D. 80-81 (Sellwood, op. cit., p. 233), but appears to have gained little support except in Babylonia (Schur, in op. cit., col.

2021). His most noteworthy step was his offer of aid from Asia Minor to the first Pseudo-Nero to appear on the scene, a Roman citizen named Terentius Maximus (see Debevoise, op. cit., p. 214). Since there are no coins of Artabanus III from after 81, it was presumably then that Pacoros definitely won.

Artabanus IV, the last Parthian Great King, was a son of Vologases V (190/1-206/7) and a younger brother of the latter's successor Vologases VI. He launched a revolt against Vologases VI in or around 213 (Gutschmid, op. cit., p. 154; Debevoise, op. cit., p. 263; Ziegler, op. cit., p. 133; Le Rider, op. cit., p. 459) and took possession of large parts of Iran; since his coins were almost certainly minted at Ecbatana, he must have gained control of Media. The contest between the two brothers went on for several years, at least until A.D. 216.

In 215, or perhaps as early as 214, the Roman emperor Caracalla, who had probably long been planning a new war against the Parthians, sent a demand to Vologases VI for the extradition of two fugitives—a Greek philosopher named Antiochos and a man of uncertain identity named Tiridates, who may have been either an Armenian prince or a brother of Vologases V (see Chaumont, op. cit., p. 155). Caracalla's step shows that the Romans then held Vologases VI to be the authoritative Great King. To the surprise of the Romans, Vologases handed over the two fugitives in 215, thus depriving Caracalla of a *casus belli*. It was not long before Caracalla found another pretext. In the following year he sent a demand to Artabanus for the hand of a daughter in marriage (on the import of this proposal, see Ziegler, op. cit., p. 133). The fact that Caracalla now addressed himself to Artabanus indicates that the latter had won the contest with his brother, though coins of Vologases VI continued to be minted until at least A.D. 221/2 (Schippmann, *Grundzüge*, p.70, with n. 110). Artabanus rejected Caracalla's demand and Caracalla made this the pretext to start "his war" in 216.

The exact route of the Roman expedition is not known (see A. Maricq, *Syria* 34, 1957, p. 302 n. 2). Dio Cassius's statement that the Romans devastated large areas of Media seems dubious (see D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Major* II, Princeton, 1950, pp. 15, 34); but they certainly reached Arbela, the capital of Adiabene (Dio Cassius 79 [78].1.1/2). The Parthians appear to have avoided any large-scale encounter. Early in 217, however, they went over to the offensive with an incursion into Mesopotamia. Just about the same time Caracalla, then on the way of Carrhae, was murdered at the instigation of Macrinus, the commander of his bodyguard. Macrinus showed his willingness to end the war

by returning Parthian prisoners and putting the blame for the conflict on Caracalla (Dio Cassius 79 [78].26.2), but Artabanus IV, confident of having the upper hand, demanded not only Roman withdrawal from all parts of Mesopotamia but also reconstruction of devastated fortresses and towns, compensation for destroyed royal tombs at Arbela, and other reparations. Macrinus would not consent to such extensive demands, and the war was resumed, culminating in a three-day battle at Nisibis. Although the judgments of the ancient writers differ (see Debevoise, op. cit., p. 267, n. 128; Ziegler, op. cit., p. 134), the outcome was clearly a Roman defeat. The subsequent cessation of hostilities and the terms accepted by the Romans give ample reason to infer a Parthian victory. Peace negotiations began soon after the battle and led to the conclusion of a formal treaty early in 218 (Ziegler, op. cit., p. 134), whereby the Romans paid 50 million *denarii* (200 million sesterces) in cash and gifts to Artabanus IV and the Parthian nobles; the *status quo ante* in Armenia was restored, i.e., the Armenian kingdom remained formally under Roman suzerainty (though in fact it was more or less independent); and the northwestern part of Mesopotamia remained a Roman province.

Later in the same year (A.D. 218), Macrinus was murdered by his own men. The next two emperors, Elagabalus (218-22) and Alexander Severus (222-35), had no problems with the Parthians, whose term was drawing to its end.

Probably in or around A.D. 220, Ardašīr, a petty vassal of the Parthians in Persis, began to seize adjacent and more distant areas. The Greek and Latin authors have little or nothing to say on the subject (as the Romans were not then concerned with Iranian affairs), and exact information on the course of events is very scarce (see G. Widengren, “The Establishment of the Sassanian Dynasty in the Light of New Evidence,” in *La Persia nel Medioevo*, Rome, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Quaderno 160, 1971, pp. 711ff.). Artabanus IV at first took Ardašīr’s activities rather calmly. When he at last took the field against his adversary, it was too late. In the decisive battle, which was fought in April 28, A.D. 224 (Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 408ff.; and most recently J. Wiesehöfer, *Klio* 64, 1982, p. 442 with further literature), probably in the vicinity of the present town of Golpāyegān between Isfahan and Nehāvand, the Parthians were defeated and Artabanus IV was killed. The Sasanian dynasty began its rule over all Iran soon afterward.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.

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