



ARTAXATA

ARTAXATA (Gk. also Artaxiasata, Arm. Artašat), a city of ancient Armenia founded ca. 176 B.C. by King Artaxias I (Arm. Artašēs, 189-ca.161) as his new capital, located on the Xor Virap hills where the river Mecəməwr (Garni) enters the Araxes (Movsēs 2.49). The city was built on a peninsula-shaped spur of land surrounded by water on three sides and protected by a ditch and palisade on the fourth. The name means “joy of Arta” (cf. Old Pers. *šiyāti*) and there is a tradition that the site was chosen by the Carthaginian general Hannibal, who was a guest of Artaxias after his defeat by Rome (Strabo 11.14.6, Plutarch, *Lucullus* 31). Artaxata had a distinct advantage over Armavir and Eruandašat, the previous capitals of Armenia, in that it was much more easily defensible and closer to the international trade routes of the day. By the 1st century B.C. it already had a reputation for size and beauty. Although the Parthians failed to capture Artaxata in 6 B.C., it was successfully taken by the Romans under Corbulo in A.D. 58 and was razed by them the following year. In 66, however, the emperor Nero sent Roman architects to aid the new endorsed king, Tiridates I (Arm. Trdat, 63-ca. 98 A.D.), brother of the Parthian Arsacid Valaxš I, in rebuilding it at great expense (Dio Cassius 58.6.5ff.), after which it was officially, if only briefly, renamed Neroneia (Magie, *Roman Rule*, p. 561). In A.D. 163, Artaxata was again destroyed by the Romans, who established a garrison at nearby Vaħaršapat (Kainepolis/Nor K‘alak‘, now Eĵmiacin), which shortly afterwards replaced Artaxata as the Armenian capital, at least for a time. Artaxata was totally destroyed by the Persians during their punitive campaign in the 360s, but by the treaty of 387 (Manandyan, p. 80) it was one of the three places which alone served as points



of commercial exchange between the Roman and Persian empires. Artaxata was again destroyed by pro-Iranian Armenian forces during the Vardananc' war ca. 450 (Eliše, p. 3) and thereafter rapidly declined as the Armenian capital became fixed at nearby Dvin. It is believed that the changing course of the Araxes and serious inundations led to the permanent abandonment of the site (Hakobyan, p. 152).

A flourishing mercantile center, Artaxata was also a focal point for what little Hellenistic culture had penetrated Armenia, and here was constructed the first permanent theater in the country. The citadel of Artašat, probably known as Xor-Virap (Hakobyan, p. 151), stood on a hill and was surrounded on three sides by the course of the Araxes. St. Gregory the Illuminator, apostle of the Armenians, was imprisoned here early in the 4th century A.D. The fortress was surrounded by a ditch which could be filled with water in case of attack. A large bridge linked the city with the right bank of the Araxes (Łazar, p. 79) and carried the road from Artaxata west to Tigranokerta. A major center of the international transit trade of the ancient world, the city was linked by other major arteries with Persia, Iberia, Colchis, and the Black Sea ports of the Roman empire. Artaxata had a population of several thousand, including Armenians, Greeks, Jews, and Syrians, which consisted of artisans, craftsmen, and merchants, the last group largely foreigners. While the population figures for Armenian cities of the 4th century given by P'awstos (4.55) can not be taken at face value, his figure of close to 20 percent for the Jews of Artaxata may well be accurate. Capital of Armenia, with some interruptions, for close to 350 years, Artaxata and its district was known as Ostann Hayoc' "court" or "seat of the Armenians" (Eremyan, p. 41).

The remains of Artaxata consist of two mounds about 15 km/9.3 miles south of Erevan. Soviet archeological excavations, still in progress, have revealed among other things a huge Latin inscription giving the full titles of the emperor Trajan. This inscription which probably stood on the governor's palace, can only date from the brief period when Greater Armenia was annexed as a Roman province (114-17), at which time Artaxata must have remained the capital.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

P'awstos Buzandac'i (Faustus of Buzanda), *Patmuṭ'iwn Hayoc'* (History of Armenia), Venice, 1933.

Łazar P'arpec'i (Lazarus of P'arpi), *Patmuṭ'iwn Hayoc'* (History of the Armenians), Tiflis, 1907.

Movsēs Xorenac'i, *Patmuṭ'iwn Hayoc'*, Tiflis, 1913; tr. R. Thomson, *History of the Armenians*, Cambridge, Mass., 1978.

C. F. Lehmann-Haupt, *Armenien einst und jetzt* I, Berlin, 1910, pp. 173ff.

D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*, Princeton, 1950, pp. 339, 345, 357-58, 498, 508, 552, 556, 561, 661, 1225.

S. T. Eremyan, *Hayastanə əst "Ašxarhac'oyec"-i* (Armenia according to the "Geography"), Erevan, 1963, p. 41.

T. X. Hakobyan, *Hayastanə patmakan ašxarhagrutyvun* (Armenian historical geography), 2nd ed., Erevan, 1968, pp. 150-53.

Y. Manandyan, *O trgovle i gorodakh Armenii v svyazi s mirovoĭ trgovleĭ drevnikh vremyon*, Erevan, 1945; tr. N. Garsoian, *Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade*, Lisbon, 1965, passim.

A. Šahnazaryan, "Artašat (patmaašxarhagrakan tesuṭ'yun)," *Ašxatuṭ'yunner Hayastani petakan patmakan ṭ'angarani*, Erevan, 1952, p. 4.

"Artashat," *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, New York, 1973, II, pp. 371-72.

S. Krkyasaryan, *Hin Hayastani ew P'ok'r Asiayi K'alak'neri patmuṭ'yan drvagner*, Erevan, 1970. *Hay žolovrdi patmuṭ'iwn* I, Erevan, 1971.

B. N. Arakelyan, "Osnovnye rezul'taty raskopok drevnego Artashata v 1970-73," *Patmabanasirakan Handes* 4, 1974.

(R. H. Hewsen)