



## ARTAXIAS I

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**ARTAXIAS I** (Arm. Artašēs), reigned 189-160 B.C., founder of the Artaxiad dynasty in Greater Armenia (Mec Hayk'). At the end of the 3rd century, Armenia was a patchwork of 120 dynastic states called "kingdoms" (*regna*) by Pliny (*Natural history* 6.9); these were, presumably, the domains of local dynastic houses (Arm. *naxarans*), loosely united under the Orontid kings of Greater and Lesser Armenia. Although Alexander had not conquered Armenia, the influence of Greek culture and Seleucid power was evident in the 3rd century B.C. In Greater Armenia, Antiochus appointed Artaxias as *stratēgos*. In 191 B.C., Antiochus was defeated at Magnesia by the Romans, who confirmed their control over Asia Minor three years later by the treaty of Apamea. The two Armenian *stratēgoi*, rebelling against Antiochus, "joined the Romans and were ranked as autonomous, with the title of king" (Strabo, *Geography* 11.14.15). In 95, the Artaxiad Tigran II (the Great) annexed Sophene; the Artaxiad dynasty was to last until the first decade of the Christian era.

In his *History of the Armenians* 2.56, Movsēs Xorenac'i describes in accurate detail the stone boundary-steles that Artaxias caused to be erected on the lands belonging to towns and estates (Arm. *agarak-k*); perpetual boundary litigation, motivated by the fear of crop failure and starvation, was a marked feature of life in many lands during the Hellenistic period. A large number of these steles have been found, with inscriptions in Aramaic. The name of the king, 'RṬḤŠŠ[Y] in the inscriptions, corresponds to the Aramaic form of the name of the Achaemenid king Artaxerxes in an inscription of the first half of the 3rd century B.C. from Naqš-e Rostam, and the use of Aramaic may be seen



as a survival of the chancellery Aramaic of the Achaemenid administration in Armenia, although the steles appear to be an innovation of Artaxias, for none have been found of earlier rulers. Artaxias calls himself MLK RWNDKN (or 'RWND[KN]) "Orontid king"; the ending *-akān*, attested in classical sources for Old Persian, is widely employed in the Parthian ostraca from Nisa and in later Armenian texts. Although Artaxias had overthrown Orontes, he based his claim to legitimacy on his presumed Orontid lineage; this attitude accords at once with both Iranian and Armenian conceptions: certain status was inherited by blood, but could not be acquired.

Although Movsēs Xorenac'i (2.49) mentions that Artaxias built a temple (*mehean*) in Artaxata to which he transferred statues of Artemis (i.e., Anahit, see [Armenian religion](#)) and the royal ancestors from the Orontid holy city of Bagawan, no temples have been found. Terra-cotta figurines have been unearthed which probably depict the Anatolian divine pair, Cybele and Attis, and a large number of terra-cotta bas-reliefs of a rider in Parthian dress may represent the Zoroastrian *yazata* Mithra. A single word in Greek uncials, probably to be read PHOYHNA, *\*Rēvēna*, is incised into one terra-cotta pediment from which the figurine is missing; it may be a proper name, based on Mid. Ir. *rēw* "rich," an important attribute of Ahura Mazdā.

Nearly all the Artaxiads minted coins, unlike the Orontids, to whom only a few coins are attributed, and those only tentatively. One Artaxiad coin depicts on the reverse an eagle standing on a mountain-top; the same scene appears on a Cappadocian coin, where the mountain has been identified as Argaeus which towers over the city of Caesarea/Mazaca, (Turkish Kayseri), which was worshipped as sacred. In the Armenian case, the mountain shown may be Ararat, which the Armenians held in similar sanctity. Figurines of eagles perched atop mountains, in bronze and terra-cotta, have been found in Armenia and elsewhere in Asia Minor. The eagle, a symbol of royalty in many cultures, may represent here the Kayanian *x<sup>v</sup>arənah-* of Zoroastrianism; it appears also on the Artaxiad royal tiara.



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