



KAMSARAKAN

KAMSARAKAN, Armenian noble family that was an offshoot of the Kāren Pahlav, one of the seven great houses of Iran claiming Arsacid origin. The Kamsarakans reigned in two princely states, both situated in the region of Ayrarat (Ararat)-Aršarunik', with the old Armenian capital of [Eruandašat](#) as their capital and with the fortresses of [Bagaran](#) (presend-day Pakran) and Artagers (Artogerassa), and Širak (Sirakenē) with the fortress (and later city) of Ani. The family's chief name was derived from Prince Kamsar, who died in 325. It derived also the name of Aršaruni from one of its principalities, which distinguished it from the related houses of Abelian (princes of Abełunik'), Gabelian, Havenni and, possibly, Dziunakan; after the 8th century, it bore, in memory of its origin, the surname of Pahlavuni. Enjoying from the beginning the prestige of being the cousins of the royal Arsacids (Movsēs Xorenac'i, 2.72, 90), the Kamsarakans also acquired, after the downfall of the Arsacids in 428, a considerable political weight owing to their quasi-margravian position on the northern frontier of the realm. Of the four broad classes in the relative precedence of the Armenian princes, the Kamsarakans can be placed in the second, and the feudal aid they were expected to render to their suzerain, the king of Armenia, was fixed at 600 horses.

The geographical situation of its principalities prevented this house from being in any special way involved in Armino-Iranian relations. Upon the Roman annexation of the west Arminian kingdom in 390, Gazavon II Kamsarak, hitherto the leader of the pro-Roman princes, moved, together with some of them, to the side of the Iranian vassal, the king of east Armenia. On



the other hand, the Kamsarakans, under Aršavir II, took part in the anti-Iranian insurrection of 451 and, again with his son and successor Narses, in that of 482-84. On the whole they followed a pro-Byzantine policy and took an active part in the life of that empire. Three Kamsarak brothers were generals in the imperial service under Justinian I: Narses, duke (*dux*) of the Thebais, Aratius or Hrahat, duke of Palestine (Adontz, pp. 164, 447-48), and Sahak (Isaac), executed by Totila, the king of Ostrogoths, in 546. Another Isaac, who appears to have been a member of the Kamsarakan family, was imperial exarch of Italy in 625-43. Narses II Kamsarakan was the presiding prince of Armenia for the emperor in the years 689/90-691 and held the high Byzantine position of *curopalate*; and another presumable Kamsarak, the patrician Arsaber or Aršavir, rose against the emperor in 808.

The Kamsarakans took part in the anti-Arab revolt of Armenia in 771-72. After its failure, they found themselves among the victims of the disaster and were obliged to sell their double principedom to the [Bagratids](#). Nevertheless, in the last years of the Armenian monarchy, as restored by the Bagratids, they, as Pahlavuni princes Bdjni and Nig, again rose to play a significant role. Upon the destruction of the Bagratid monarchy and the abdication in 1045-46 of Prince Gregory II (who received from the court of Constantinople the rank of magistros and the office of duke of Mesopotamia, Vaspurakan, and Taraun) in favor of the emperor, the Pahlavunis moved to Armenia-in-exile in Cilicia, where, known now as Het'umids, they dominated this last phase of Armenia's political history as princes of Lambrun and, after 1226, as kings of Armenia. On their extinction in the 14th century, the rights to the Armenian crown passed through inheritance to the Lusignans of Cyprus and, subsequently, to the house of Savoy. Another branch of this house, the Zachariads-Mkhargrdzeli, played a decisive role in the history of Georgia from the 12th to the 14th century and has survived to this day.

Culturally, the Kamsarakans, and especially the Pahlavunis, but also the Mkhargrdzelis, contributed greatly to the development of Armenian architecture, raising splendid churches, such as the 10th-century church of St. Gregory built by Abughamr I Pahlavuni, palaces, and castles.



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