



ORONTIDS

ORONTIDS (Aram. *ʾrwndkn*; Arm. Eruandid or Yervanduni dynasty), members of a dynasty of Iranian origin who ruled Greater Armenia, Sophene, and [Commagene](#) (q.v.) during the Achaemenid and Hellenistic period (ca. 6th century-ca. early 2nd century BCE).

At the end of the 5th century BCE the satrapy of Armenia (see [ARMENIA and IRAN i. Armenia](#), Achaemenid Province) was ruled by [Orontes](#) (q.v.), son of the Bactrian nobleman Artasouras and son-in-law of the Persian Achaemenid king, [Artaxerxes II](#) (q.v.) Mnemon (see [ORONTES](#) no. 2). From this powerful man descended the other Orontes who ruled the country before and after the Macedonian conquest (see [ORONTES](#) nos. 3 and 4; Schottky, pp. 76-139).

Literary sources only cursorily mention the political situation of Armenia and its partitions following the collapse of the Achaemenid empire; any reconstruction of the sequence of rulers is therefore tentative and subject to discussion, mainly based on epigraphic and numismatic evidence (Table 1). An Orontes, satrap of Armenia and friend of Peucestas, was involved in a snare contrived by Eumenes (ca. 317 BCE) against the satrap of Persis (Diodorus Siculus 19.23; Polyaeus 4.8.3; on Peucestas see Muccioli 2017). Probably following Curupedion, a “king of the Armenians” called *Ardoates* provided support to Ariarathes II of Cappadocia to free himself from Seleucid control (Diodorus Siculus 31.19.4). Another unnamed king of Armenia offered refuge to Ziaelas, son of Nicomedes in Bithynia (Memnon FGrHist 434 F 14.1), who then regained his throne-rights (255/4 BCE). All of these examples demonstrate the relevance of the dynasty in the Hellenistic royal network and the efficacy



of its political support.

Table 1

ORONTID ANCESTORS OF ANTIOCHUS I OF COMMAGENELISTED ON STELAE
OF THE TOMB-SANCTUARY AT NEMRUD DAĞI

Stele Number	Ancestor	Epigraphic Source
1	Darius I the Great	OGIS 388
2	[Xerxes ?]	OGIS 389Dörner – Young, p. 285
3	[Artaxerxes I]	Dörner – Young, p. 287
4	[Darius II ?]	—
5	[Artaxerxes II]	Dörner – Young, p. 292
6	Orontes I	OGIS 391-392
7	Orontes II	OGIS 393
8	[Bar ?]danes	OGIS 393
9	—	—
10	Samos I	Dörner – Young, p. 268
11	Arsames	OGIS 394Crowther – Facella, pp. 258-261
12	—	—
13	[Ptolemaios ?]	OGIS 402
14	Samos II	OGIS 396; 402 Dörner – Young, p. 301
15	Mithradates I Callinicus	OGIS 396

Strabo (*Geography* 11.14.5 and 11.14.15) states that following the last Orontes, Armenia was divided between two local generals (*strategoï*) of Antiochus III of Syria (see [ANTIOCHUS III MEGAS](#)): [Artaxias](#) (q.v.), who took Greater Armenia; and Zariadres, who ruled Sophene (Western Armenia) and other boundary territories. Only following Antiochus' defeat to the Romans were Artaxias and Zariadres to become independent kings. This specification and the use of the verb *hyparchein* to indicate the authority of the last Orontes have raised questions on the titulature and political autonomy of the Orontids (see [ORONTES](#) no. 4; Traina, 2017, pp. 377-88). Local sources, however, make it clear that even if formally submitted to wider powers, the Orontids effectively ruled their territories as kings and presented themselves as such (Canepa, 2018, pp. 98-100). The claim of the Orontids to descend from Hydarnes (see [HYDARNES](#) no. 1), “one of the seven” (Strabo 11.14.15), also points in this direction.



A letter to the *basileus* (“king”) Orontes from the otherwise unknown king Mithras (according to Waldmann, pp. 39-40, Mithras was the “dynastic god” of the Orontids) is recorded among the rock inscriptions found at the feet of the acropolis of [Armavir](#) (q.v.) between 1911 and 1927 (IK Estremo Oriente 12). This Orontes has been identified by Hakob Manandyan and with further arguments by Jean-Pierre Mahé (pp. 567-86) with the ruler mentioned by Strabo and with the king Eruand, the founder of [Eruandašat](#) (q.v.) in the story of [Movsēs Xorenac’i](#) (q.v.; 2. 37-46; tr. Thomson, pp. 181-82; Ter-Martirosov, pp. 77-86). The historical context between the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd century fits the paleography of Armavir inscriptions, which points to a date in the Hellenistic period (J. and L. Robert, no. 176, pp. 181-85). However, it has been suggested that the inscription might be a later engraving of a much older document referring to Orontes, founder of the dynasty (Traina, 2018, p. 302).

From Strabo’s passages emerges a caesura between the rule of the last Orontes and that of Artaxias and Zariadres. On the contrary, in a few Aramaic inscriptions found in various regions of Armenia, especially around Lake Sevan (Dupont-Sommer, pp. 53-66; Perikhanian, pp. 169-74), king Artaxias calls himself Orontid (*rwndkn*). The name of Artaxias father is recorded as *zrytr/zryhr*, for which the Greek correspondent is Zariadres; whether he is to be identified with the other *strategos* is uncertain, but if this is the case (for example, Hewsen, pp. 347-48), then Zariadres might also have claimed a kinship with the Orontid house (Marciak, pp. 117-20 with full discussion).

Strabo’s narrative also raises a question on the division of Orontid Armenia, more precisely on the separation of Sophene from Greater Armenia. The involvement of Ardoates/Orontes in the Cappadocian royal struggles of the Ariarathids seems to imply that Armenia was one large territory that reached the Euphrates at that time (Toumanoff, p. 13; Jacobs, 2002, pp. 77-8). It has been assumed that a division of land was made only with the appointment of Zariadres (for example Toumanoff, p. 17 and ff.); yet, the possibility that a different branch of the Orontids separately ruled Sophene even prior to then is strongly suggested by a comparison of literary data with epigraphic and numismatic evidence. As far as the epigraphic material is concerned, the most telling documents come from the *hierotherion* (tomb-sanctuary) of [Antiochus I of Commagene](#) (q.v., ca. 70-36 BCE) at present-day [Nemrud Dağı](#) (q.v.; see in addition Brijder; Versluys, pp. 108-84; Canepa, 2018, pp. 240-50). In his *hierotherion* Antiochus displayed an Orontid descent. The king dedicated a



row of 15 stelae to his paternal ancestors who preceded him in the rule of Commagene (Dörner and Young, pp. 254-306; Jacobs, 2002, pp. 75-88); the satrap Orontes (here called *basileus*, as all his successors) is a key figure because his marriage with [Rhodogune](#) (q.v.), daughter of Artaxerxes II, provided the link with the Achaemenid family and to [Darius I](#) (q.v.; Messerschmidt, pp. 37-43; Jacobs, 2017, pp. 235-48). Unfortunately many of these stelae are fragmentary and the identity of several ancestors is hypothetical (Dörner, pp. 361-77; Facella, 2009, pp. 381-91), but the following sequence can be reconstructed (Table 2).

Table 2

ORONTID RULERS ATTESTED IN GREATER ARMENIA AND SOPHENE(N.B.: Insufficient evidence prevents complete lists of the rulers of these countries)

(Greater) Armenia	Sophene
Orontes I (ca. 401-post 362/1)	
Orontes II (ante 331-ca. 317/6)	
[Bar ?]danes (end 4th- beginning 3rd)	
Orontes III (ante 280)	Samos (middle 3rd)
	Arsames (around 227)
Orontes IV (ante 190)	Xerxes (around 212)
Artaxias (king since 189)	Zariadres (king since 189)

From the gallery of Antiochus I of Commagene it is possible to infer that the family of the Orontids not only ruled Greater Armenia almost as a hereditary province, but also established a separate royal line in western parts of the country, such as Sophene and Commagene (see Honigmann, col. 980 and [COMMAGENE](#)). This emerges when comparing the data offered by the literary tradition with other sources, as it is possible to do in the case of king Arsames (see [ARŠĀMA](#)). The ancestor of Antiochus can in fact be identified with the Armenian ally of Antiochus Hierax, Seleucus's younger brother, in the fight against [Seleucus II](#) (q.v.; Polyaeus, *Strat.* 4.17; 227 BCE); Arsamosata (Ir. **Aršāmašat*), a royal capital of Sophene and two other cities of Commagene, Arsameia on the Nymphaios, near modern Eski Kâhta, and Arsameia on the Euphrates, near modern Gerger (Adıyaman province in Turkey), were probably named after him (Facella, 1999, pp. 135-37; Marciak, pp. 70-72). In

contrast with the eastern branch of the Orontids, who are not known to have issued coins, Arsames struck a variety of monetary types where he is called *basileus* (Facella, 1999, pp. 138-41; see also Bedoukian, 1978 and 1985; Nercessian, 1995 and 2006; for a revised corpus of Armenian coinage in the classical period see Kovacs).

After Arsames, we find on the throne of Arsamosata a certain [Xerxes](#) (q.v.), who was besieged by Antiochus III of Syria (Polybius, 8.23; 212 BCE). Xerxes came to an agreement with the Seleucid: in exchange for a tribute, he received back his dominions and the hand of Antiochis, sister of Antiochus, in marriage. According to John of Antioch (II. 122, Roberto), she later poisoned him on the orders of the brother. If Xerxes' rule in Sophene, which is confirmed by various coins (Kovacs, p. 3), was around 212 BCE, then he was a contemporary, rather than successor, of the last Orontes (no.4), hence Sophene had already been separated from Greater Armenia before the appointment of Zariadres (so already Manandyan, 1965, pp. 30-40; Schottky, p. 120). Whether Xerxes had a space in Antiochus' gallery (and ever ruled over Commagene) cannot be determined (Marciak, pp. 72 and 123).

Certainly, the destiny of Sophene and Commagene split with the reorganization of Antiochus III. In Commagene around 163/2 BCE we find a certain Ptolemaeus, a Seleucid officer, who revolted and made Commagene an independent kingdom (Diodorus Siculus, 31.19a). The Orontid house of Commagene, as traced by Antiochus, probably included Ptolemaeus among the ancestors, but he has left only faint traces in our documentation (Facella, 2006, pp. 199-205). His successor Samos II (ca. 130 BCE), Antiochus I's grandfather, is known to us only from two types of coins and a couple of appearances in Antiochus' monuments (Facella 2006, pp. 205-8; Kovacs, p. 39). A huge relief was dedicated to him by his grandson at Arsameia on the Euphrates (cf. OGIS, no. 402), where Antiochus built a *hierotherion* for his royal ancestors (Canepa, 2015, pp. 81-84). He seems to be distinct from a previous Samos (I) who gave his name to Samosata, the capital of Commagene already mentioned by Eratosthenes (Honigmann, col. 983). More is known about Antiochus I's father, Mithradates I Callinicus (ca. 130 BCE-70 BCE; Facella 2006, pp. 209-24). He married a Seleucid princess, Laodice VII Thea, daughter of [Antiochus VIII](#) (q.v.) of Syria and adopted the epithet *Kallinikos*, which appears on his coins (Kovacs, p. 40), after a victory in competitions whose nature is unknown. His *hierotherion* was located at Arsameia on the Nymphaios, where a long inscription records the cult established for him by his son (Dörner and Goell,



pp. 37-91).

None of Antiochus' successors (on whom, see [COMMAGENE](#)) appears to have recalled the kinship with Orontes and his successors, a sign that the reference to the Persian past was no longer useful.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Paul Z. Bedoukian, *Coinage of the Artaxiads of Armenia*, London, 1978.

Idem, *Coinage of the Armenian Kingdoms of Sophene and Commagene*, Los Angeles, 1985.

Herman A.G. Brijder, *Nemrud Dağı: Recent Archaeological Research and Conservation Activities in the Tomb Sanctuary on Mount Nemrud*, Boston, 2014.

Matthew P. Canepa, "Dynastic Sanctuaries and the Transformation of Iranian Kingship between Alexander and Islam," in S. Babaie and T. Grigor, eds., *Persian Kingship and Architecture: Strategies of Power in Iran from the Achaemenids to the Pahlavis*, London, 2015, pp. 65-117.

Idem, *The Iranian Expanse: Transforming Royal Identity through Architecture, Landscape, and the built Environment, 550 BCE-642 CE*, Oakland, Calif., 2018.

Charles Crowther and M. Facella, "New Evidence for the Ruler Cult of Antiochus of Commagene from Zeugma," in G. Heedemann and E. Winter, eds., *Neue Forschungen zur Religionsgeschichte Kleinasiens: Elmar Schwertheim zum 60. Geburtstag gewidmet*, Bonn, 2003, pp. 41-80.

François de Callataÿ, "Abdissare l'Adiabeniens," *Iraq* 58, 1996, pp. 135-142.

Friedrich K. Dörner, "Epigraphy Analysis," in D. H. Sanders, ed., *Nemrud Dağı. The Hierothesion of Antiochus I of Commagene: Results of the American Excavations Directed by Theresa B. Goell, 2 vols.*, Winona Lake, 1996, pp. 361-77.

F.K. Dörner and T. B. Goell, *Arsameia am Nymphaios*, *Istanbuler Forschungen* 23, Berlin, 1963.

F.K. Dörner and J.H. Young, “Sculpture and Inscription Catalogue,” in D. H. Sanders, ed., *Nemrud Dağı: The Hierothesion of Antiochus I of Commagene*, 2 vols., Winona Lake, 1996, pp. 175-360.

André Dupont-Sommer, “Deux inscriptions araméennes trouvées près du lac Sevan (Arménie),” *Syria* 25, 1946-1948, pp. 53-66.

Margherita Facella, “Basileus Arsames: Sulla storia dinastica di Commagene,” in B. Virgilio, ed., *Studi Ellenistici XII*, Pisa and Rome, 1999, pp. 127-58.

Idem, *La dinastia degli Orontidi nella Commagene ellenistico-romana*, Pisa, 2006.

Idem, “Darius and the Achaemenids in Commagene,” in P. Briant and M. Chauveau, eds., *Organisation des pouvoirs et contacts culturels dans les pays de l’Empire achéménide*, Paris, 2009, pp. 379-414.

Maciej Grabowski, “Abdissares of Adiabene and the Batas-Herir relief,” *Światowit: Annual of the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Warsaw* 9 (50), 2011, pp. 117-39.

R. Hewsen, “Introduction to Armenian Historical Geography III: The Boundaries of Orontid Armenia,” *Revue des Études Armeniennes* 18, 1984, pp. 347-66.

Ernst Honigmann, “Kommagene,” in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Suppl. IV, 1924, cols. 978-990.

[IK Estremo Oriente =] Filippo Canali de Rossi, *Iscrizioni dello estremo oriente greco: un repertorio*, Bonn, 2004.

Bruno Jacobs, “Die Galerien der Ahnen des Königs Antiochos I. von Kommagene auf dem Nemrud Dağı,” in J. M. Højte, ed., *Images of Ancestors*, Aarhus, 2002, pp. 75-88.

Idem, “Tradition oder Fiktion?—Die ‘persischen’ Elemente in den Ausstattungsprogrammen Antiochos’ I. von Kommagene,” in R. Strootman and M.J. Versluys, eds., *Persianism in Antiquity*, Stuttgart, 2017, pp. 235-48.

Frank L. Kovacs, *Armenian Coinage in the Classical Period*, Lancaster, Penn., and London, 2016.



Jean-Pierre Mahé, “Moïse de Khorène et les inscriptions grecques d’Armawir,” *Topoi* 4/2, 1994, pp. 567-86.

Hakob Manandyan, *Armaviri hunaren arjanagrut’yunnerə nor lusabanut’yamb/Armavirskie grecheskie nadpisi v novom osveshchenii* (A new interpretation of the Greek inscriptions of Armavir), Yerevan, 1946.

Idem, *O trgovle i gorodakh Armenii v svyazi s mirovo ĭ trgovle ĭ drevnikh vremen*, 2nd ed., Yerevan, 1954 (English tr. by N. G. Garsoian, *The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade*, Lisbon, 1965).

Michał Marciak, *Sophene, Gordyene, and Adiabene: Three Regna Minora of Northern Mesopotamia between East and West*, Leiden, 2017.

Wolfgang Messerschmidt, “Die Ahnengalerie des Antiochos I. von Kommagene: Ein Zeugnis für die Geschichte des östlichen Hellenismus,” in J. Wagner, ed., *Gottkönige am Euphrat: neue Ausgrabungen und Forschungen in Kommagene*, Mainz am Rhein, 2000, pp. 37-43.

Movsaēs Xorenac’i, *Patmut’iwn Hayoc’*, ed. M. Abelean and S. Yarut’iwnean, Tiflis, 1913, repr., New York, 1981, Yerevan, 1991; tr. and comm. Robert W. Thomson, as *Moses Khorenats’i: History of the Armenians*, Cambridge, Mass., 1978, rev. ed., Ann Arbor, 2007.

Federicomaria Muccioli, “Peucesta, tra lealismo macedone e modello persiano,” *Electrum* 24, 2017, pp. 75-91.

Yeghia T. Nercessian, *Armenian Coins and Their Values*, Los Angeles, 1995.

Idem, *Silver Coinage of the Artaxiad Dynasty of Armenia*, Los Angeles, 2006.

[OGIS =] Wilhelm Dittenberger, *Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae. Supplementum Sylloges Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 2 vols., Leipzig, 1903-1905.

Michael J. Osborne, “Orontes,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 22/4, 1973, pp. 515-51.

Anahit Perikhanian, “Les inscriptions araméenes du Roi Artachès,” *Revue des Études Armeniennes* 8, 1971, pp. 169-74.

Jeanne Robert and Louis Robert, “Bulletin Épigraphique,” *Revue des Études Grecques* 65, 1952, pp. 124-202.

Umberto Roberto, *Ioannis Antiocheni Fragmenta ex Historia chronica: Introduzione, edizione critica e traduzione*, Berlin and New York, 2005.

Martin Schottky, *Media Atropatene und Gross-Armenien in hellenistischer Zeit*, Bonn, 1989.

M. Rahim Shayegan, "Persianism: Or Achaemenid Reminiscences in the Iranian and Iranicate World(s) of Antiquity" in R. Strootman and M.-J. Versluys eds., *Persianism in Antiquity*, Stuttgart 2017, pp. 401-55.

Richard D. Sullivan, "The Dynasty of Commagene," in H. Temporini and W. Haase, eds., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms in Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, II/8: *Politische Geschichte Provinzen und Randvölker Syrien, Palästina, Arabien*, Berlin, 1977, pp. 732-98.

Felix I. Ter-Martirosov, "Ervandachat: Des Orontides aux Artaxiades" in P. Donabédian and C. Mutafian, eds., *Les douze capitales d'Arménie*, Paris, 2010, pp. 77-86.

Cyril Toumanoff, "A Note on the Orontids," *Le Muséon* 72, 1959, pp. 1-36 and 73, 1960, pp. 73-106.

Giusto Traina, "Rois ou dynastes? Les territoires Arméniens à l'époque d'Antiochos III," in Chr. Feyel and L. Graslin-Thomé, eds., *Antiochos III et l'Orient (Journée d'études franco-allemandes, Nancy 6-8 juin 2016)*, Paris, 2017, pp. 377-88.

Idem, "Les inscriptions grecques d'Armawir (Arménie): considérations préliminaires," in S. Magnani, ed., *Domi forisque: omaggio a Giovanni Brizzi*, Bologna, 2018, pp. 289-304.

Miguel J. Versluys, *Visual Style and Constructing Identity in the Hellenistic World: Nemrud Dağ and Commagene under Antiochos I*, Leiden, 2017.

Helmut Waldmann, *Der kommagenische Mazdaismus*, Tübingen, 1991.