



ZARINAIA

ZARINAIA (Gk. *Zarinaía*), legendary Saka queen during the reign of the likewise legendary Median king Astibarás. The original Greek form of her name certainly is *Zarinaía* and not *Zarína* (as previously had been read in Diodorus 2.34.3; cf. Schmitt, 2006, p. 240; 2011, p. 192); and in all probability this Greek form goes back to a two-stem hypocoristic name with the suffix OIran. *-aya- based on a compound name containing OIran. *zari- “golden” (see Schmitt, 2006, pp. 240-42).

All sources of her story found in Greek (i.e., Diodorus 2.34.3; Nicolaus Damascenus, frag. 5; the work by an Anonymus entitled “Courageous women knowing about the art of warfare,” par. 2 [see Gera, pp. 84–100]; and a short papyrus fragment [P. Oxy. 2330]) clearly go back to Ctesias (frags. 5, 7, 8a, and 8c), who in this case seems to have recounted a genuinely Iranian tale that he had heard at the Persian court (cf. Gardiner-Garden, p. 14). Zarinaia, a strikingly beautiful woman, stood out as both warrior and ruler; her achievements included the foundation of many towns (thus Diodorus). She is said to have been the sister and wife of the Saka king Kydraios, after whose death she married the Parthian king Marmárēs/Mérmeros (thus the Anonymus). We are told by the anonymous writer that, during war with the Medes (presumably that which was occasioned by the Parthians’ rejection of Astibarás’s rule and their submission to the Sakas [Diodorus]), she was wounded in battle and pursued by the Median Stryangaios (Astibarás’s son-in-law), who at her plea spared her life. When Stryangaios later was captured by Marmarēs, she rescued him, killed her husband, and handed over her land to



the Medes. Nicolaus describes some details of Stryangaios's secret love for her and relates that she rejected his courtship and admonished him to marital fidelity. Before taking his own life, the unhappy Stryangaios wrote her a farewell letter, which is preserved in part in the papyrus fragment. When Zarinaia died, according to Diodorus, she was honored with a huge pyramidal tomb by her people (i.e., the Sakas).

The old name of this famous queen was artificially revived in modern times among the Ossetes in the woman's name Oss. *Zærinæ*.

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