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NOTE ON ERATO, QUEEN OF ARMENIA: HISTORICAL AND NUMISMATIC STUDY*

Keywords: Greater Armenia, Artaxiad dynasty, Tigranes, Erato, Artavasdes, Augustus, romanization.

Introduction

New numismatic discoveries have led us to take a closer look at the reign of Erato, the last Artaxiad ruler of Greater Armenia, from the direct line. We published our full demonstration on this subject in 2021 (Arakelian – Yevadian 2021); in this article, we would like to present what we know about Queen Erato, her coinage, and also present a corpus of her known coins.

I-Literary Sources on Queen Erato's Reign

We'll deal with the end of the Artaxiads dynasty, whose history, especially Erato's reign, has been reconstructed by Victor Langlois (†1869) as follows:

“Tigrane III [= IV], fils et successeur de Tigrane II [= III] avait, selon l'usage d'Orient, épousé sa sœur Erato. Ces deux princes occupèrent ensemble le trône d'Arménie à la mort de leur père. Il est probable que le jeune Tigrane montrait du penchant pour les Parthes, car Rome le détrôna et donna la couronne à Artavast vers 6 avant Jésus-Christ. Tigrane, avec l'aide des Parthes, se ressaisit quatre ans après du sceptre d'Arménie. Ce fut alors que Caius César, petit-fils et fils adoptif d'Auguste, passa en Orient pour faire la guerre aux Parthes et soumettre l'Arménie. L'influence des Romains ayant suscité à Tigrane de nouveaux ennemis parmi les peuples barbares qui environnaient ses Etats, il marcha contre eux, mais son expédition fut malheureuse puisqu'il aurait perdu la vie. Cet événement eut lieu un an avant l'ère chrétienne.

[Tigranes son and successor of Tigranes had, according to Eastern custom, married his sister Erato. These two princes together occupied the throne of Armenia on the death of their father. It is likely that the young Tigranes was inclined towards the Parthians, but Rome dethroned him and handed the crown to Artavasdes around 6 B.C.

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Tigranes, with the help of the Parthians, four years later seized the scepter of Armenia. It was then that Caius Caesar, grandchild and adopted son of Augustus, went to the East to make war against the Parthians to subdue Armenia.

The influence of the Romans meant new enemies for Tigranes among the barbarian peoples surrounding his states.

He marched against them, but his expedition was ill-fated since he would have lost his life. This event took place one year before the Christian era.]” (Langlois 1859, 38.)

V. Langlois’ analysis is essentially based on Tacitus’ text. But a careful reading of the third and fourth paragraphs of Book II of the *Annals* is necessary:

“III 2. *Nec Tigrani diuturnum imperium fuit neque liberis eius, quamquam sociatis more externo in matrimonium regnumque.* [The reign of Tigranes did not last long, nor did that of his children, although they were associated by marriage and power-sharing, according to foreign custom.]

IV 1. ... *temptatoque feminae imperio, cui nomen Erato, eaque breui pulsa, incerti solutique et magis sine domino quam in libertate profugum Vononen in regnum accipiunt.* [... after trying the governance of a woman, named Erato, and after having promptly driven her out, indecisive, disunited, and rather without master than free, they brought to power the fugitive Vonones.] (Tac. *Ann.* 2,3,2–4,1; revised translation after Hellegouarc’h)

This raises the question of the identity of Tigranes III's children and successors – who, by definition, are at least one girl and one boy, since there was a marriage – and secondly, the question of the possible link between this girl and Queen Erato, the only woman mentioned in known sources as queen of Greater Armenia.

The traditional interpretation, which gives a global reading of the two paragraphs of Tacitus’ text, assimilates the children of Tigranes III to Erato and Tigranes [V]¹ by marrying them together, which leads to a questionable historical vision.

We can note that Tacitus in the third paragraph *never* mentions Erato. He only mentions Tigranes III’s children, their union through marriage, and shared power. It is not until the fourth paragraph that the existence of a government by a woman named Erato is mentioned. Tacitus does not mention any link of filiation for Erato, speaking simply of a “woman” (*femina*). But if it was indeed about the daughter of Tigranes III, we think that he would not have failed to mention it, as he used to. It does not seem to us therefore possible to make such a link today unless other sources confirm this reading of Tacitus’ text.

An essential addition to this first text is *Roman History* by Cassius Dio, who speaks about another period of Erato and Tigranes' reign, probably their first reign:

“Οἱ γε μὴν Ἀρμένιοι, καίπερ τοῦ τε Τιγράνου ἐκ πολέμου τινὸς βαρβαρικοῦ φθαρέντος καὶ τῆς Ἐρατοῦς τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀφείσης” [But although Tigranes was killed during a war against barbarian peoples, and Erato abdicated...] (Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 55, 10a, 4–8)

1 By convention, after Tigranes III, whose numbering legitimacy is not debatable, we place the numbers of the other rulers in right brackets: Tigranes [IV], [V], [VI] and [VII] to emphasize the arbitrary and as yet unfixed nature of this classification.

Other sources exist on this period, but none mention Erato.²

As an initial conclusion, we can summarize the literary position and say that as Erato reigned twice:

1. a first reign with Tigranes [V], her brother, attested by Cassius Dio
2. a second reign, alone, attested by Tacitus.

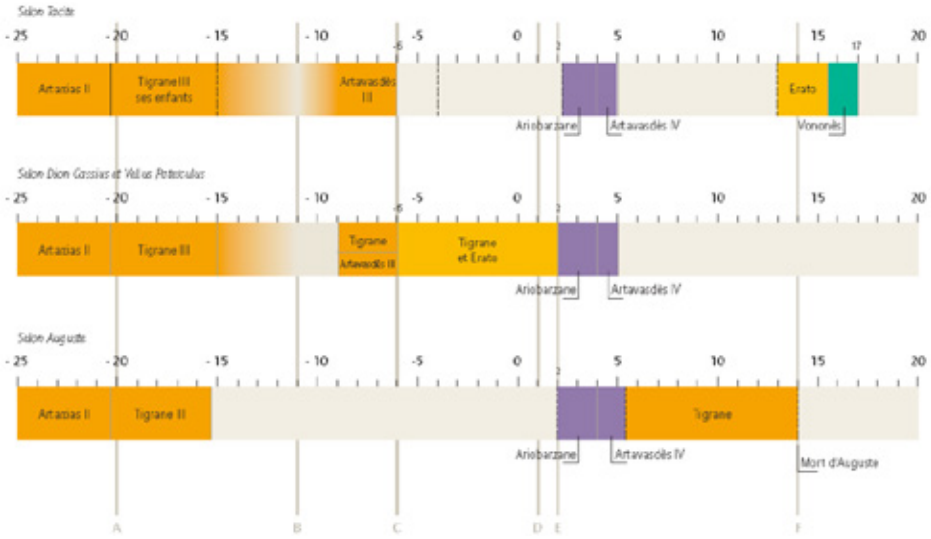


Fig. 1: Timeline on the sources about the late Artaxiad

II-Coinage of Erato Queen

After briefly analyzing the sources, we will consider the numismatic aspect. So far, 4 types are known mentioning the name of Erato.

Type 1: unique, preserved in the Cabinet des Médailles at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, with the legend BACIAEYC BACIAEQN TIIIPANH, probably under Parthian influence.

The authenticity of this coin has been debated. However, we examined it on site and consider it authentic. Several similar coins are in too bad of a condition, and we are unable to read the legend correctly.

Type 2: same type, with the legend: BACIAEYC METAC NEOC TIIIPANH.³

This legend is very rare and literarily unique in all the Hellenistic and Roman

2 Specially: the *Res gestae Divi Augusti* (finalized around the year 13), § 27; Velleius Paterculus († 31 AD), 2, 94; Flavius Josephus († ca. 100 AD) *Antiquities of the Jews*, 15,4,3 (§ 104); Suetonius (†122 AD), the historian of the first twelve emperors, *Tib.* 9; the authors of late antiquity (Florus, Festus Rufus and Eutropius) do not give any details on this period, and finally John Xiphilin and John Zonaras, Byzantine abbreviators of the text of Dion Cassius, who use certain passages for their own historical works, see Joh. Zon. *Epit.* 10, 35, p. 421.

3 Another type with an identical obverse and Emperor Augustus on the reverse was issued at the same time, our **Type 5**.

coinage, as we can read in Leschorn’s *Lexikon* (Leschorn 2002, 208). This legend presupposes, makes the first legend of this king mandatory ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΤΙΓΡΑΝΗΣ.

Type 3 and 4: new published types, with the legend: ΒΑ [ΣΙΛΙΣΣΑ] // ΕΡΑΤ[Ω].

On all four pieces concerned, the name “Erato” (ΕΡΑΤΩ) appears systematically.

In Artaxiad numismatics, these coins (Types 1 and 2) are the only ones known to indicate a relationship: Erato is the sister of a king named Tigranes (“ΕΡΑΤΩ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΤΙΓΡΑΝΟΥ ΑΔΕΛΦΗ”): Such mention is a significant element of Erato's legitimacy to rule, even though she is a woman. This is obviously quite exceptional in the history of this dynasty and even in the ancient history of Armenia.

In such a context and in the light of Tacitus' text, it was tempting for V. Langlois to think that a Tigranes, son of Tigranes III, had married his sister, called Erato.

The coins Types 1 and 2 have led most scholars to opt for this solution. It should also be noted that at no time during these two reigns, nor twice during the same reign, Erato is referred to as “ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΑ-queen” on these two coins. Whereas later, on two recently discovered coin types, she arrogates this title to herself, which seems to be an indication that she rules alone, Types 3 and 4.

On both coins, types 3 and 4, we can note and read the inscription “ΕΓ” in reverse. The E can stand for έτος (year) and the Γ for three. However, it is not clear whether these are three years of cumulative reign, the two reigns of Erato with Tigranes and the reign of the queen alone or if it is the total duration of a single reign: the last one.

Coin Type 3 is also characterized by the originality of the representation on its reverse. It is the only known Artaxiad coin to depict a building, in this case the walls of Artaxata, the kingdom's capital.

Finally, on the coin Type 4, the representation of the Armenian tiara on the reverse is also unique-only Roman coins used this type of representation to symbolize Armenia (see Yevadian 2018). Until then, all Artaxiad rulers wore the Armenian tiara on their heads. The only one not to do so is Artaxias III (18 – 34), but his attitude is explained by the fact that he is not an Artaxiad from the direct line but from the Pontus line.

III-Analysis of Jugate Coins

The question of jugate coins has no direct link with the reign of Erato but is associated with it as a result of numismatist analysis. We present our conclusions, focusing on coinage at Ararat, a corpus of which is reproduced in the appendix.

Jugate coins are rare in Artaxiad numismatic; only four types are known (Fig.2):

CAA	ACV	HRAC	ACCP	Type
128	122		180	5
–	–		189	6
161	178	166	200	7
162	179		201	8

Fig. 2: Corpus of the jugate Artaxiad coinage

Type 5: Legend – “BACIAEYC MEΓAC TIGPANHC” / “ΦΙΛΟΚΑΙCΑΡ”

Representation of two highly symbolic mountains for Armenians: Little Ararat and Great Ararat. Several interpretations have been suggested, see our article, (p. 96 – 97). It is our opinion that this type of coin cannot be attributed to Erato because her name does not appear on this coin and the representation of the bust on the reverse is too different from Erato's known representations.

This type may be attributed to the son and daughter of Tigranes III, Tigranes and a woman, see Family Tree (Fig. 3) in conclusion.

The mention of the word ‘Philocaesar’ on the reverse is decisive evidence, as both princes were probably born in Rome and certainly lived there for almost ten years.

Type 6 and 7: Legend – “BACIAEΩC TIGPANOY MEΓAΛOY”

Taking into account the iconography and inscriptions on these two coins, we exclude any attribution to Erato, who, as previously mentioned, always bears the indication of her name on the coins as well as a portrait represented with a very identifiable hairstyle. These two types will be studied in detail and attributed in our forthcoming study of the last Tigranes.

Type 8: Legend – “KAI TIBEΠIOΣ K ZHNOΣ”

This coin is attributed to Artaxias III. It does not concern Queen Erato in any way.

Conclusion

Erato is an Armenian queen of the Artaxiad lineage, insofar as, on the coins Types 1 and 2, she appears with her brother Tigranes, who possesses all the attributes of the Artaxiads. Erato is undoubtedly the sister of a ruler named Tigranes, as indicated on the coins Types 1 and 2. She is probably the daughter of Artaxias II, son of Artavasdes II, see Family Tree in conclusion (Fig. 3). We believe that Erato and her brother Tigranes were not married.

With the new discovery of the coins, Types. 3 and 4, we estimate that Erato ruled three times:

(a) A first period with Tigranes, and Parthian support. The coinage Types 1 must be attributed to this first reign.

(b) A second period with the same Tigranes, and the consent of Augustus. The coin Types 2 and Type 5 must be attributed to this second reign.

(c) A third and last period, her personal reign; Erato rules alone, probably with the consent of the Romans. This reign predates the arrival of Vonones. The coins Types 3 and 4 must be attributed to this third reign.

This analysis attempts to respond to the succession of short rules illustrated by typical rules, characterizing a period of destabilization and decline.

Généalogie de la dynastie des Artaxiades de Grande-Arménie

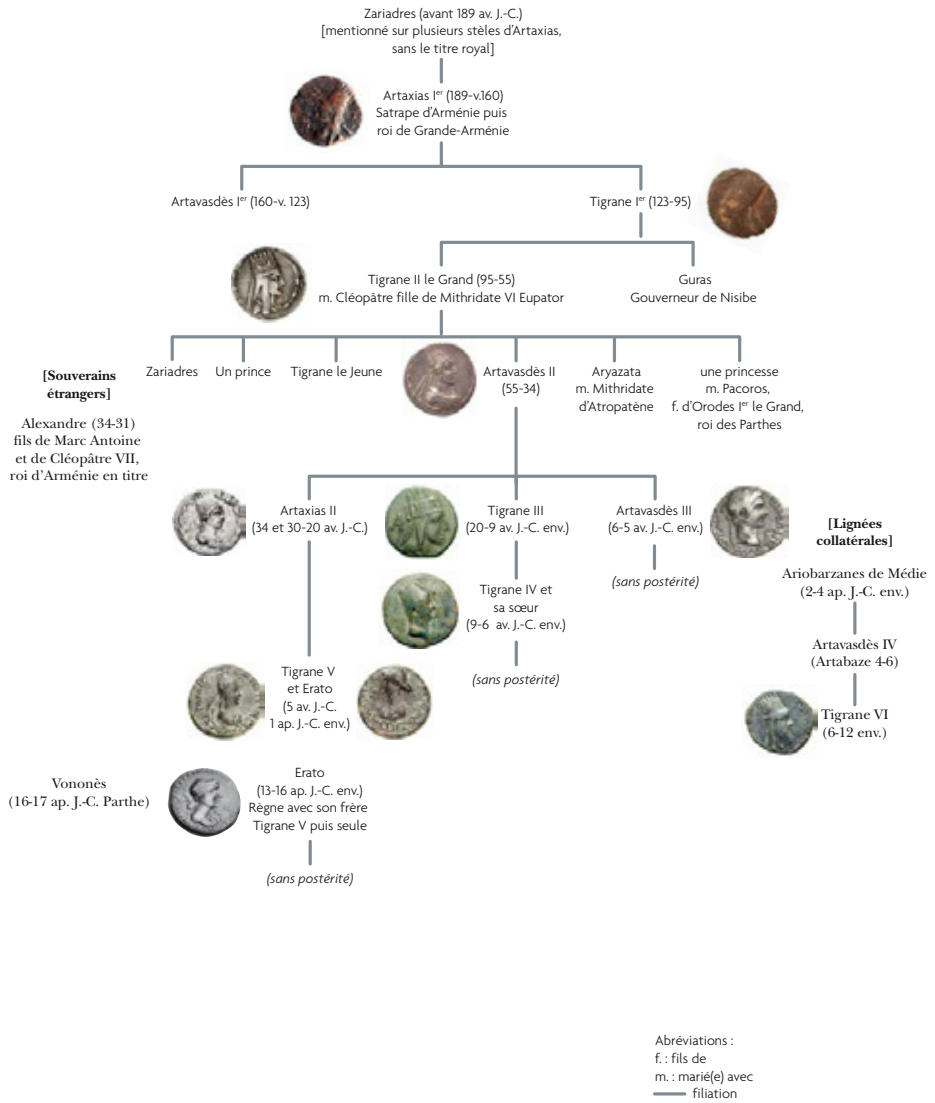


Fig. 3: Family Tree of the Artaxiads of Greater Armenia

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ՀԱՅՈՑ ԹԱԳՈՒՅԻ ԷՐԱՏՈՅԻ ՄԱՍԻՆ.

ՊԱՏՄԱԿԱՆ ԵՎ ԴՐԱՄԱԳԻՏԱԿԱՆ ՈՒՄՈՒՄԱՍԻՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ

Հիմնաբառեր. Մեծ Հայք, Արտաշեսյանների արքայատոհմ, Տիգրան, Էրատո, Արտավազդ, Օգոստոս, ռոմանիզացիա:

Վերջին դրամագիտական գտածոները արդարացնում են Մեծ Հայքում Արտաշեսյան արքայատոհմի վերջին տարիների (հիմնադրվել է Արտաշես I-ին կողմից Ք.ա. մոտ 189 թ.) և, մասնավորապես, Հայաստանի թագուհի Էրատոյի գահակալության՝ քիչ հայտնի ժամանակաշրջանի վերանայումը: Ավանդական տեսակետը, որը մենք փորձում ենք վերագնահատել, սխեմատիկորեն սահմանափակվում էր նրան Տիգրան 3-րդի դուստր համարելով, ով ամուսնացել էր իր եղբոր՝ Տիգրան 4-րդի հետ և նախքան գահից հրաժարվելը մեկ-երկու անգամ թագավորել էր: Դրամագիտության մեջ հայտնի են չորս մետաղադրամներ: Առայժմ հայտնի Էրատոյի երկու մետաղադրամները կրում են նրա անունը՝ առանց որևէ երկիմաստության և ունեն հետևյալ գրությունը՝ «ΕΡΑΤΩ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΤΙΓΡΑΝΟΥ ΑΔΕΛΦΗ – Էրատո՝ Տիգրան թագավորի քույր»: Վերջերս հայտնաբերված երկու նոր մետաղադրամների վրա կարող ենք տեսնել դիմերեսին նրա պատկերը, իսկ դարձերեսին՝ գրություն. «ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΑ ΕΡΑΤΩ» – Թագուհի Էրատո»:

Հանգել ենք այն եզրակացության, որ նա հավանաբար Արտաշես II-ի դուստրն է, մի անգամ թագավորել է իր եղբոր՝ Տիգրան 4-րդի հետ՝ առանց նրա կինը լինելու, մեկ անգամ՝ միայնակ՝ նախքան գահից հրաժարվելը:

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NOTE SUR L'ERATO DE LA REINE ARMÉNIENNE.
ÉTUDE HISTORIQUE ET FINANCIÈRE

Les mots clés: Grand-Arménie, dynastie artaxiade, Tigrane Erato, Artavazdes, Auguste, la romanisation

De récentes découvertes numismatiques justifient un nouvel examen de la période malconnue des dernières années de la dynastie des Artaxiades en Grande-Arménie (fondée vers 189 av. J.-C. par Artaxias I^{er}) et en particulier les règnes d'Erato, reine d'Arménie. La vision traditionnelle, que nous tentons de réévaluer, se limitait schématiquement à la considérer comme la fille de Tigrane III, qui épousa son frère Tigrane IV, puis régna une ou deux fois avant d'abdiquer. Le corpus numismatique se limite à quatre types monétaires. Les deux types d'Erato connus à ce jour portent son nom, sans aucune ambiguïté, et la légende "ΕΡΑΤΩ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΤΙΓΡΑΝΟΥ ΑΔΕΛΦΗ- Erato, sœur du roi Tigrane." Sur les deux nouveaux types récemment découverts, nous pouvons identifier à l'avant son buste et au revers la légende: "ΒΑ[ΣΙΛΙΣΣΑ] ΕΡΑΤ[Ω]- ReineErato".

Nous sommes arrivés à la conclusion qu'elle est probablement la fille d'Artaxias II, elle a régné une fois avec son frère Tigranes IV, sans être son épouse, d'abord avec le soutien des Parthes puis l'ascendant des Romains et une seconde fois seule, avant d'abdiquer.