

## ON THE ISSUE OF THE PARTHIAN PAHLAVS' SOCIO-POLITICAL NATURE\*

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### **Abstract**

*The role of the high aristocracy, the so-called pahlavs, is undeniable in the history of the Parthian state. In the second half of III century BC the assistance of the pahlavs to the Arsacid dynasty considerably contributed to the establishment of the Dahae and organization of their own state in Parthia and Hyrcania. During the following centuries the rises and crises of the political life of the Parthian statehood and even its final decline in the first quarter of the III century was due to the attitude of the Parthian pahlavs towards the Arsacid dynasty. In spite of the key role of the pahlavs, the issues of their ethnic origin, social nature, their number and the relations with the royal power are still poorly studying in historical science. We hope that this article will bring its contribution in studying the history of the Parthian pahlavs.*

**Keywords:** *Arsacids, Parthia, Hyrcania, Dahae, Parni, Xanthii, Pissuri, Pahlav, Suren, Karen, synedrion, Strabo*

### **1. The setting of the issue**

According to the point of view accepted in the historical science the emergence of the Parthian pahlavs<sup>1</sup> occurred parallelly with the conquest of Hyrcania and Parthia by the tribe of Parni (Aparni) and was strongly influenced by this fact. After defeating Andragoras, the Seleucid ruler of Parthia, and the war with varying success against the Seleucid king Seleucus II Callinicus, Arsaces, the tribal leader of the Parni, usurped the power of the

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<sup>1</sup> For the Parthian (Dahae) high aristocracy we prefer to use the epithet **pahlav** applied by the medieval Armenian authors. It is the alternated form of the middle Persian word “parthian” «**Parthava - Parθava**» and changing its meaning, the best reflects the privileged position of the narrow elite of the Iranian aristocracy in the period of the Arsacids.

king in accordance with the scheme of “the right of spear conquest” well-known from the political history of the ancient world, and the elders of the Scythian community of the Parni occupied the social position of the Parthian high aristocracy<sup>2</sup>. All scholars more or less agree on this sequence of the events<sup>3</sup>.

In historical science, the Parthian Pahlavs were usually characterized by the epithets "**Parthian nobles**", "**wealthy houses**", "**great clans**", "**great houses**". Learning about the ethnic origin and social circle of Parthian state's high aristocracy constitutes a major problem for scholars. This is caused by the lack in sources of clear and precise information on Parthian society. The Greek and Latin authors writing about the state governed by the Arsacid dynasty were above all interested in politics: the conflicts with the Seleucids or with Rome; they paid attention to internal affairs only when these had an impact on the course of these conflicts. Most of these references are too general and circumstantial to base a credible reconstruction of the picture of the Parthian society on them<sup>4</sup>. Of course, they mostly focus on the aristocracy, and as a result the sources available on this group are sufficiently - numerous that we can determine its political status, ideological positions, political role in the Parthian state and the nature of its relations with the rulers.

Studies of the Parthian aristocracy are few. The first scholar to had thoroughly discussed this social group was J. Wolski<sup>5</sup>. In terms of studying the issue, the works of Ed. Dąbrowa<sup>6</sup>, S. Hauser<sup>7</sup> are also of great importance. Many questions have already received their answers. In this article we will try to answer questions about the ethnic origin and social circle of the highest

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<sup>2</sup> **Wolski** 1967, 1981, 1989, 1993; **Wiesehöfer** 2001: 139; **Dąbrowa** 2013: 54. This view was criticized by S. Hauser (**Hauser** 2005: 168-185; **Hauser** 2006: 295-319).

<sup>3</sup> For the period and circumstances of the emergence of the Arsacid state and issues of their elucidation in the ancient bibliography see **Assar** 2004: 69-93; **Assar** 2005: 29-63; **Gaslain** 2005a: 221-224; **Gaslain** 2005b: 9-30; **Gaslain** 2009: 27-39; **Dąbrowa** 2008: 25-31; **Strootman** 2018: 129-150; **Overtoom** 2020: 27-93.

<sup>4</sup> **Dąbrowa** 2013: 53.

<sup>5</sup> **Wolski** 1967, 1981, 1989, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> **Dąbrowa** 2013: 53-62.

<sup>7</sup> **Hauser** 2005: 168-185; **Hauser** 2006: 295-319.

aristocracy of the Parthian state, and will address the quantitative composition of the Parthian pahlavs elsewhere.

## 2. The Genealogy of the Parthian Pahlavs

The creation of their own state in Parthia and Hyrcania and the transition from the nomadic lifestyle to sedentary one radically transformed the social structure and political system of the Dahae tribal confederation. They successfully resembled the best elements of the Persian and Hellenistic administration and were able to resist the hostile environment. However, in the first period the rule of Arsacids was predominantly based on the support of Dahae, therefore the influence of the prior relations of the Dahae tribal society on the formation of the new political realities must have been significant. Strabo, testifying that the Dahae confederation consisted of three tribes, the Parni (Aparni), Xanthii and Pissuri<sup>8</sup>, states that the Parni tribe led by Arsaces, initiated the rebellious movement against the Macedonian rule. However, it does not follow from this that the Parni had a dominant or leading position in the Dahae confederation and the leadership of Arsaces equally or partially spread on the Xanthii and Pissuri. Just the opposite, it follows from the fact of the large area of distribution of the Dahae tribes in the Trans-Aral steppes and the habitation<sup>9</sup> with the Saca-Scythian tribes that the Dahae confederation was founded on egalitarian principle. The initiation of the Parni to conquer Hyrcania and Parthia could have hardly changed it, as the Parni themselves were not capable of completing the conquest and resisting the hostile treatment of the neighbouring countries without assistance from the Pissuri and Xantii. On the other hand, for the Pissuri and Xantii participation in the conquest of Parthia became a mighty leverage for maintaining the old tribal equality in the new conditions. From this viewpoint the opinion of J. Wiesehöfer that the social elite of Arsacid state originated exceptionally from

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<sup>8</sup> **Strabo** 1988: XI, 8. 2. «...καὶ τῶν Δαῶν οἱ μὲν προσαγορεύονται Ἀπαρνοὶ οἱ δὲ Ξάνθιοι, οἱ δὲ Πίσσουροι».

<sup>9</sup> **Strabo** 1988: XI, 9. 2. About the original habitat of the Dahae see **Pyankov** 1979: 195, n. 4.; **Balakhvantsev** 2018: 80-106.

the Parni tribe, seems unacceptable<sup>10</sup>. It would be more reasonable to think that in the conditions of parity of the three tribes in the Dahae tribal confederation, the initiation of the struggle against the Macedonian rule elevated Arsaces from an ordinary tribal chief into the hegemon of the Dahae chief tribes (*primus inter pares*) but without giving real power over two fraternal tribal chiefs, and the latter formed Arsaces' entourage.

The rather slow process of the establishment of the royal authority during the reign of Arsaces I (c. 247-211 BC) must be explained by the inertia of the old tribal lifestyle<sup>11</sup>. This is apparent not only from the slow and cautious change of Arsaces I's insignia and titles<sup>12</sup>, but also from the saga in M. Khorenatsi's "History of Armenia"<sup>13</sup> about the origins of the Parthian pahlavs, which is a distant echo of the resistance of the Dahae tribal council on the rise of the Arsacids.

In the first half of 230s BC while making his second attempt to gain a foothold in the territory of Parthia, Arsaces I had to resist the anti-Dahae alliance of Seleucus II (c. 246-225 BC) and Diodotus I (c. 255-235 BC) which was possible only in the case of concentration of military potential and finding recognition in the role of all-union military leader. It is natural that this could have been at the expense of the rights of the tribal councils of the Xantii and Pissuri. As it is seen from the taking the title of «*Karen*» "Krnny"<sup>14</sup> by Arsaces I, motivated by the need to gain a foothold in the newly conquered territory, the Dahae elders agreed to this partial concession<sup>15</sup>. It is noteworthy that even after his establishment in Parthia and the official coronation in Asaak<sup>16</sup>, Arsaces I assumed not the title of "king" (*βασιλεύς*) of the Hellenistic monarchs, but the title of "autocrat" (*αυτοκρατορ*), still emphasizing the

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<sup>10</sup> Wiesehöfer 2001: 139.

<sup>11</sup> Sellwood 1980: Type 1-4. For the numismatic iconography and the changes of titles of Arsac I see Assar 2005: 29-35; Melikyan 2012: 33-69; Koshelenko, Gaibov 2013: 327-347.

<sup>12</sup> Melikyan 2012: 69-70:

<sup>13</sup> Movses Khorenatsi 1981: II, 28.

<sup>14</sup> Sellwood 1980: Type 3.

<sup>15</sup> Melikyan 2012: 62-64:

<sup>16</sup> Isidoros 2013: 11.

military and **heavy-handed** nature of his rule<sup>17</sup>. Although this fact was interpreted in various ways<sup>18</sup>, we believe that Arsaces I's abdication of the royal title was conditioned not by relinquishing monarchic ambitions, but by the resistance of the Dahae elders. It is possible that by allegedly resigning from the monarchy Arsaces I paid a tribute to the old tribal traditions of the Dahae and the self-esteem of the Dahae elders<sup>19</sup> or provided an opportunity to the Dahae elders to live under the illusion of the old tribal (chieftaincy) equality.

In a brief narrative of Arsaces I's state-building, Justinus does not mention his social transformations. The author only mentions that "*Arsaces not only reached royal power, but also organized his kingdom ...*"<sup>20</sup>. However, the author's phrase "**organized his kingdom**" itself implies social initiatives, too, first of all, the definition of the place and role of the Dahae society and its nobility in the newly established state and its legal relationship with the royal authority. The fact that Arsaces I adopted the titles of the Hellenistic courts shows that palatial ranks of hierarchy were introduced in the earliest period of the Arsacid state<sup>21</sup>.

Unfortunately, there are no official sources that reflect the hierarchical system of the early Arsacid period, like the ones about the early Sassanid period. For this reason, the questions concerning the hierarchical system of the Arsacids and the place of the pahlavs within it were often treated based on the assumption that the Sassanids inherited the four tier hierarchy ranking of the nobility from the Arsacids and therefore the pattern of the period of the early Sassanids (subject kings (šahrdārān) members of the royal house (wāspuhragān), representatives of authoritative clans (*wuzurgān*) official (*azādān*) class) objectively reflects the administrative-political image existed during the late Arsacid period<sup>22</sup>. This opinion is yet to be supported by

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<sup>17</sup> See **Bikerman** 1985: 12; **Olbrycht** 2011: 230, footn. 4.

<sup>18</sup> **Masson, Romodin** 1964: 102-103; **Koshelenko** 1968: 65; **Koshelenko** 1971: 212; **Strootman** 2018: 129-150.

<sup>19</sup> **Melikyan** 2012: 63-64:

<sup>20</sup> **Justinus** 1886: XLI, 5.5.

<sup>21</sup> **Wiesehöfer** 2001: 139.

<sup>22</sup> **Frye** 1983: 316; **Lukonin** 1987: 120; **Khurshudyan** 2015: 7-20.

evidence<sup>23</sup>. However, even though we accept it with substantial reservations, it must be noted that his methodology does not allow to specify nor the initial social position of the Parthian pahlavs, neither their number. One can not ignore the circumstance that in the c. 500 year between the second half of the III century BC and the first quarter of the III century AD external and internal transformations of the Arsacids (evolving from a regional local state into an empire, long-lasting wars with the neighbours, permanent fights for the throne, federalism of the state, etc.) would have influenced the radical changes in that hierarchical system, as well. Therefore, the hierarchical systems, the number of the Parthian pahlavs included in it and the social-political position that existed in the first and last period of the Arsacid rule could not have been identical. Nevertheless, the investigation of Shapur I's trilingual inscription of Kaaba-i Zardusht (ŠKZ)<sup>24</sup> allows us to suppose that the hierarchical systems of the early Arsacids and the early Sassanids had principal commonalities. In ŠKZ the court lists of Papak, Ardashir I (224-241) and Shapur I (241-272) are compiled on the principle of honoral relations<sup>25</sup>. That is, the place of a courtier was determined by his nobility and then by its office<sup>26</sup>. From this one can conclude that the early Parthian royal hierarchy was created on a similar principle. In the early period of the Arsacid state, when the monarchy was still in its infancy, the king was regarded as the "first among equals" by the inertia of the old tribal coexistence, the Dahae elders must have fixed their positions and become recognizable not only in war, but also in peace<sup>27</sup>. Unfortunately, except the mythical saga by M. Khorenatsi, there is no other information about this process. Similarly, it is unknown what Iranian term defined the social position of the Parthian pahlavs. K. Toumanoff, A. Mousheghyan and others attributing an Arsacid ancestry to the Parthian pahlavs, assume that in the Parthian royal hierarchy they were the social

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<sup>23</sup> Wiesehöfer 2001: 139.

<sup>24</sup> Sprengling 1953; Honigmann, Maricq 1953.

<sup>25</sup> Daryaee 2007: 65–72.

<sup>26</sup> Khuršudyan 1992: 69-74.

<sup>27</sup> Wiesehöfer 2001: 139.

stratum of «*wāspuhragān*»<sup>28</sup>. Moreover, from the sociological and legal point of view comparing “*seven great houses of the wāspuhrān*” with the «*Caucasian lesser, non-dynastic, nobility*» Toumanoff significantly maintained that the “*political and social importance of . . . [these Parthian families] was commensurable with that of the greatest of the Caucasian [dynastic] Princes*”<sup>29</sup>. However, as we will see below, the hypothesis of the Arsacid origin of the pahlavs is the result of source study misconception. In fact, their position in the Parthian society should have been equivalent to the social class described as “*wuzurgān*” (“nobleman”) in the Sassanid lithographs with the difference that in the Sassanid court “*wuzurgān*” was the third, and in the Arsacid state, as it had not yet evolved into an empire and become federal, it should have formed the sub-peak of the social hierarchy.

### 3. The social-political nature of the Parthian pahlavs

The written sources solidarily confirm the tribal origins of the Parthian high aristocracy. Thus, there is much evidence of the Parthian nobility in the writings of Tacitus, Plutarch, and Dion Cassius. However, these Roman authors **mention** only the representatives of the two clans, Suren and Karen, not by a person (nomen), but by a lineage name (cognomen)<sup>30</sup>. This distinction speaks for itself about the special position of the Suren and Karen clans in the Arsacid state.

Seneca calls the elite of the Parthian tribal elders “*megistanes*” (Greek *μεγιστῶνες*), describing them as the heads of the noblest clans<sup>31</sup>. Suetonius describes the closest circle of the Arsacid kings with the same epithet<sup>32</sup>. Justinus (Pompeius Trogus) calls the high aristocracy of the Arsacid state

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<sup>28</sup> Toumanoff 1963: 262; Frye 1983: 316; Moushegyan 2007: 246-299:

<sup>29</sup> Toumanoff 1963: 262.

<sup>30</sup> Tacitus 1886: VI, VI. 42; XII, 12-13; Plutarch 1932: Crassus 21; 23; 24; 28-33; Dio Cass. 1955: XLVIII, 16.1; XLVIII, 20.4; XLVIII, 21.1; XLVIII, 26.1-3;

<sup>31</sup> Seneca 1996: 140-147.

<sup>32</sup> Suetonius 1914: IV. 5; Josephus 1937: XI, 3.2.

standing close to the king "rank of councillors" (*ordo probulorum*)<sup>33</sup>. In Agatangelos's "Armenian History", Karen and Anak, representatives of the high Parthian aristocracy, are characterized by the expressions "a chief **patriarch** of the Parthian state"<sup>34</sup> and "high-ranking official, **ancestor-strategus**"<sup>35</sup>, which makes apparent their patriarchal (tribal) nature. For M. Khorenatsi, too, the notion *pahlav* means socio-political status and concerns a narrow group of esteemed "Parthian lords" standing higher from other rulers and subject kings<sup>36</sup>. M. Khorenatsi repeatedly uses the phrase "*Parthian and Pahlavik nations*"<sup>37</sup>, which also has an element of social differentiation, such as existing in the contrast between "senior minister" and "junior minister" used in the Armenian reality. The author describes the social position of the pahlaviks as "most honourable", which is identical to the title of *τιμώτατα* used by Greek authors<sup>38</sup>. One can conclude from it that M. Khorenatsi's use of the term pahlav (in Tabari's History pahlavs are called "fahlav"<sup>39</sup>) within its social meaning is close if not equal to the Herodotus's term "*first Persians*"<sup>40</sup> about the earliest Achaemenid period and Xenophon's term "*honourable Armenians*"<sup>41</sup> about Yervandian (Haikazian) Armenia. Both cases concern the narrow circle of the social elite standing after the king, which had a sub-ethnic, tribal origin. Therefore, we can state with more or less confidence that the term pahlav/fahlav used in the sources had an eponym meaning in intersocietal scales.

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<sup>33</sup> **Justinus** 1886: XLI, 2. 2. «Closest to the kings in rank are the councillors [*ordo probulorum*], and from among them they choose their commanders in war [*duces*], as well as their leading politicians in peace [*rectores*]:»:

<sup>34</sup> **Agatangelos** 1983: 25

<sup>35</sup> **Chunakova** 1980: 204.

<sup>36</sup> **Olshausen** 1877: 18-19.

<sup>37</sup> **Movses Khorenatsi** 1981: II, 71: II, 72.

<sup>38</sup> Probably Tabari's use of the term "*bihkanid*" about the pahlavs must have the same meaning. (**Tabary** 1987: 77):

<sup>39</sup> **Tabary** 1987: 77 (683).

<sup>40</sup> **Herodotus** 1914: III.68-70; III. 77: **Briant** 2002: 28-29.

<sup>41</sup> **Xenophon** 1998: III, 1:



The honorary title of «*relatives*» (*συγγενοι*)<sup>42</sup> given by Strabo is more telling for the revelation of the social nature of the members of the upper strata of the Arsacid hierarchy.

Literal perception of the phrase “*relatives (of the king)*”, as well as honouring each other with the word “brother”<sup>43</sup> in the context of palatial code of conduct and in the official correspondence leaned some medieval authors and even many modern scholars to the opinion that the Parthian pahlavs were of Arsacid origin<sup>44</sup>. But in reality it was a widespread title in the Achaemenid and Hellenistic courts bestowed to the persons very close to him and brought up together<sup>45</sup>. Narrowing the social circle of the “relatives” it comes down to a close circle of the aristocracy “equal in origin”. In the Arsacid state it could be identical only to the class of the tribal elders of the Dahae.

In the Seleucid court the title of “relative (of the king)” had a personal nature<sup>46</sup>, while Plutarch's mention<sup>47</sup> of the “*clannish*” right of the patriarchs of the Suren clan to crown the Parthian kings shows that the honorary position of the pahlavs in the court of the Arsacids was hereditary. Unfortunately, the Classical sources are silent on the similar “clannish” rights of the other Parthian pahlavs. One can assume that having such functions they were practically deprived of the opportunity to interfere in the state life by right and became involved in the military and administrative affairs only by the order of

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<sup>42</sup> **Strabo** 1988: XI, 9. 3.

<sup>43</sup> **Bikerman** 1985: 43, no. 135.

<sup>44</sup> See **Buzand P'avstos** 1987: 4, 33; **Khorenatsi Movses** 1981: II, 28; **Warner, Warner** 2013: 185.

A. Mušegyan believes that the pahlavs were of Arsacid origin and tries to represent them as the social class of “wāspuhragān.” The author draws parallels with the similar phenomenon witnessed in the Armenian court from the point of view of Khorenatsi's story about distributing domains to the “Pahlaviks.” (**Mušegyan** 2007: 246-255, 291-299):

<sup>45</sup> **Xenophon** 1914: I, VI. 1; I, VI. 10; **Josephus** 1937: XI, 3. 2; **Bikerman** 1985: 4-43; **Strootman** 2013: 38-53.

<sup>46</sup> **Bikerman** 1985: 41-42.

<sup>47</sup> **Plutarch** 1932: Crassus. 21. Moreover, he enjoyed the ancient and hereditary privilege of being first to set the crown upon the head of the Parthian king”, **Tacitus** 1886: VI, VI. 42; **Lukonin** 1983: 704.

the king<sup>48</sup>. It was in the interest of the Arsacids to strengthen the royal power at the expense of the elders, although the fact is that with this method the Arsacids were not able to undermine the public authority of the pahlavs based on the "right of origin". With the territorial expansion of the Parthian state the Parthian pahlavs accumulated great economic power, partly due to war spoils and in part to their participation in international trade. Thanks to the patriarchal power and large material resources, they had spacious domains, a vast subordinate population, and a large number of private troops<sup>49</sup>.

According to Strabo, in Arsacid court "relatives (of the king)" formed a separate council which in fact was similar to Herodotus's "royal council" of "first Persians". It is known that the "royal court" of the Achaemenids did not have institutional existence based on special and inviolable rules issued by the king. Its sessions and discussions were exceptionally dependent on the will of the king, and the membership in the council was not imposed on the king, but the latter choosed its advisers from the aristocracy<sup>50</sup>. In the case of the Arsacid "royal council" the relations seem to be different. Strabo referring Posidonius, reports: «*Council of the Parthians, ... consists of two groups, one that of kinsmen, and the other that of wise men and Magi, from both of which groups the kings were appointed*»<sup>51</sup>. This makes apparent that in the Arsacid state life the position of "relatives (of the king)" was incomparably stable and their "council" albeit adjacent to the king, was institutional. Otherwise, Strabo referring to philosopher, geographer and historian Posidonius of Apameia (around 135-51 BC) would not have spoken about the "council of the relatives" as a fact existing in his times. Probably, the longevity of the "constitutional" rights of the Parthian "synedriion" (**Συνέδριον**), the tribal representative body of the Dahae, was due, on the one hand, to the viability of the old tribal patriarchal traditions in the Dahae society and on the other hand, to the

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<sup>48</sup> Justinus 1886: XLI, 2. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Farrokh 2007: 157; Dąbrowa 2013: 55-56.

<sup>50</sup> Briant 2002: 128-129.

<sup>51</sup> Strabo 1988: XI, 9. 3; «... ὅτι τῶν Παρθυαίων συνέδριόν φησιν εἶναι Ποσειδωνίου διττόν, τὸ μὲν συγγενῶν, τὸ δὲ σοφῶν καὶ μάγων, ἐξ ὧν ἄμφοῖν τοὺς βασιλεῖς καθίστασθαι». Josephus 1965: XVIII, 44.

intention of the Arsacids to acquire political support of the highborn elders in the newly established state. In any case, the preservation of the right of the Parthian "synedrion" to elect (**καθίστασθαι**) the king was not the result of the Arsacid tradition, but the inability to overcome the order of the old tribal past. From the abovementioned report of Strabo follows that, like in other societies transited from tribal lifestyle to early state societies, in the Dahae society, the council of elders, as the highest representative body of the people, was the supreme bearer of the state authority. Apparently, the Dahae elders clung to that right. Moreover, the right of the elders to elect a king automatically makes clear the reverse right to dethrone an already elected king<sup>52</sup>. Based on numerous source and numismatic facts, G. Koshelenko, G. Assar and others conclude that the first victim of the above-mentioned right of the Dahae elders was Arsaces I's son and successor, Arsaces II<sup>53</sup>. Justinus, speaking of the brutal rule of Mithridates III (57-54 BC), testifies that he "... *was expelled from the country by the council of the Parthian elders (Senatus Parthorum) for his cruelty*"<sup>54</sup>. There is plenty of evidence in the sources about the king-making and anti-royal activity of the Parthian elders. However, we believe that the above-mentioned examples are enough to come to an unequivocal conclusion: if the Parthian **synedrion** continued to be the supreme bearer of the state authority in the period of incomparably high level of maturity of the Arsacid state, then its role should have been greater in the earliest period of the formation of the state<sup>55</sup>. In fact, it would be right to consider the political decision on "willingly accepting the kingdom of Ardashir, son of Sasan" instead of the Arsacids, made by the Parthian Pahlavs at the beginning of 220s, within the bounds of the above-mentioned competencies of the Parthian synedrion, which became the reason for the fall of the c. 500 year old state of the Arsacids.

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<sup>52</sup> See. **Dąbrowa** 2010: 125.

<sup>53</sup> **Koshelenko** 1976: 33-34. **Assar** 2004: 81.

<sup>54</sup> **Justinus** 1886: LXII, IV. 1, «*Mithrdates rex Parthorum... propter crudelitate a senatu Parthico regni pellitur...*»: see. **Tacitus** 1886: II, 2.1.

<sup>55</sup> **Melikyan** 2012: 69:

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## ՊԱՐԹԵՎԱԿԱՆ ՊԱՀԼԱՎՆԵՐԻ ՍՈՑԻԱԼ-ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆ ԷՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀԱՐՑԻ ՇՈՒՐՋ

*Արթուր Մելիքյան*

**Բանալի բառեր՝** *Արշակունիներ, Պարթևստան, Վրկան, դահեր, պարներ, քսանթիներ, պիզոններ, Պահլավ, Սուրեն, Կարեն, սինեդրիոն, Սպրաբոն:*

Մ.թ.ա. III դ. երկրորդ կեսին Վրկանի ու Պարթևստանի տարածքում սեփական պետության ստեղծման և քոչվորական կացութաձևից նստակեցության անցնելու հանգամանքները արմատական փոփոխություններ առաջացրին դահական հասարակության ավանդական սոցիալ-քաղաքական հարաբերությունների մեջ: Պետության ստեղծման նախաձեռնողը պարների (ապարների) առաջնորդ Արշակն էր, որի ցեղապետական տոհմն էլ յուրացրեց արքայական իշխանությունը: Սակայն դահերի միության մյուս երկու ցեղերը՝ քսանթիներն ու պիսուրները, շնորհիվ այդ գործընթացին իրենց մասնակցության, նորահաստատ պետության մեջ կարողացան պահպանել իրենց ավանդական իրավահավասարությունը: Սրանց ցեղապետական տոհմերը Արշակունիների նվիրապետական



համակարգում կազմեցին հատուկ, ըստ էության, ներփակ սոցիալական շերտ, որի ներկայացուցիչներին դասական հունա-հռոմեական աղբյուրները հատկանշել են «megistanes» (հուն. μεγιστανες), «ordo probulorum», իսկ հայ և արաբ հեղինակները՝ «պահլավ» (պարթև) և «ֆահլավ» մակդիրներով: Պարթևական հասարակության մեջ պահլավների սոցիալական խավի ներկայացուցիչները կոչվել են «արքայի ազգականներ»: Այն ոչ թե ուղղակի ազգակցականություն էր ենթադրում, այլ աքեմենյան և հելլենիստական արքունիքներում տարածված պատվատիտղոս էր, որը տրվում էր արքային առանձնապես մոտ կանգնած, նրա հետ դաստիարակված անձանց: Ամենայն հավանականությամբ Սելևկյաններից յուրացված այս տիտղոսի սոցիալական իմաստի ընդունումը, ինքնին, նեղացնում է «ազգականների» սոցիալական շրջանակը և հանգում է ազնվակա-նության «*ծագմամբ հավասար*»-ների մի փակ խմբի, որը Արշակունիների պետության մեջ կարող էր նույնական լինել միայն դահերի ցեղային ավագանու խավին:

Արշակունիների պետական համակարգում պահլավների սոցիալական շերտը կազմել է առանձին պետական հաստատություն՝ խորհուրդ: Ըստ երևոյթին, այն նման է եղել Աքեմենյան դարաշրջանի «առաջին պարսիկների» «արքայական խորհրդին», բայց ունեցել է անհամեմատ կայուն քաղաքական կշիռ և ինստիտուցիոնալ բնույթ: Պարթևական պահլավներից բաղկացած «*ազգականների խորհուրդը*» իր առանձին գոյությունից զատ, «մոզերի և իմաստունների» խորհրդի հետ մտել է պարթևական բարձրագույն ներկայացուցչական մարմնի՝ «Պարթևական սենատի» մեջ, որը, դատելով աղբյուրների վկայություններից, եղել և մինչև վերջ մնացել է Պարթևական պետության բարձրագույն կրողը: Եվ թեպետ Պարթևական պետության գոյության ողջ ընթացքում պահլավները երբևէ չվիճարկեցին Արշակունիների արքայատոհմի գահակալական իրավունքները, այնուամենայնիվ, շնորհիվ պարթևական արքունիքում և հասարակության մեջ ունեցած բարձր հեղինակության, նրանք ի զորու եղան պահպանել իրենց ազդեցությունը Արշակունիների ներքին ու արտաքին քաղաքականության վրա: