

## ARTAXIAS III AND A NUMISMATIC ENIGMA

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PLATE 4

In AD 18 Germanicus, on behalf of the emperor Tiberius, crowned Zeno as King Artaxias of Armenia (Tacitus *Ann.* 2. 56). Lucius Antonius “Zeno” was a son of Polemo I, king of Pontus (ca. 37-8 BC) and Queen Pythodoris, who succeeded her husband (ca. 8 BC–AD 23/4) (Thonemann 2004, 146). An enthusiastic Armenophile with natural appeal to the Armenian people, Zeno-Artaxias enjoyed an apparently unchallenged reign until his death in AD 35.

The only numismatic evidence to this point for Artaxias’s reign has been a pair of silver coins from Caesarea in Cappadocia bearing the portrait of Germanicus on the obverse, and on the reverse Germanicus crowning Artaxias (didrachm, *RPC* 1, 3629, and drachm, 3630). These coins may have been either issued contemporaneously or as later commemoratives during the reign of Claudius (AD 41–54) (*RPC* 1, p. 554). In any case, they are not considered issues of the Kingdom of Armenia, leaving numismatists to speculate that Artaxias issued no coins of his own (*RPC* 1, 571; Nercessian 1995, 88). The following new coins correct the numismatic record.

### Coins of Artaxias III

1. AE tetrachalkon. Average wt. (1 ex.) 10.74 g; die axis 10:00.<sup>1</sup>  
Obv.: Armenian tiara with five peaks l., star on r., Δ below on l. (legend from 11:00 ~) ΘΕΟΙCCEΒACTOIC KAICAPI KAI IOYΛIA. [beaded] border.  
Rev.: Horse prancing r. (legend from 12:00~) [BAC]APTAΞIOY TOY EK BΠOΛE KAI ΠYΘ[OΔΩPI]. beaded border.  
KV coll. (**pl. 4,1**).
2. AE tetrachalkon. Average wt. (3 ex.) 9.63 g; die axis: 7:30.  
Obv.: Armenian tiara with five peaks l., star on r., Δ below. (legend from 11:00 ~): ΘΕΟΙCCEΒACTOIC KAICAPI KAI IOYΛ.Α. [beaded] border.  
Rev.: Horse prancing l. (legend from 11:00 ~) B[AC APTAΞIOY] ΠOYEB\*B ΠOΛE KAI ΠYΘOΔΩPI. beaded border.  
\*B an engraving error for K, an anticipatory dittography.  
a) KV coll. (ex Gorny 212, 5 Mar 2013, lot 2264): 12.97 g (**pl. 4,2a**); b) FK coll.: 7.20 g, 7:30 (**pl. 4,2b**) c) FK coll.: 8.73 g, 7:30.

The reverse legend B[ΑΣ](ιλεως) APTAΞIOY TOY EK B(ασιλεως) ΠOΛE(μωνος) KAI ΠYΘOΔΩPI(δος), “Of King Artaxias son of <sup>2</sup> King Polemo and Pythodoris,” clearly identifies the issuing authority as Artaxias III.<sup>3</sup>

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Note: Partially preserved Greek letters are underlined.

<sup>1</sup> The die axis given is for the horse shown prancing. If the horse was intended to be rearing the die axes for nos. 1 and 2 could be 12:00 and 6:00 respectively. This die alignment seems more logical in the context of Roman provincial coins.

<sup>2</sup> According to Peter Thonemann (personal communication): “The use of ὁ ἐκ/ἡ ἐκ in the sense of υἱός/θυγάτηρ is widely paralleled in the official titulature of Near Eastern monarchs around the turn of the era” citing Queen Dynamis of the Bosporan kingdom (CIRB 31; cf. CIRB 979), her son Aspourgos

The obverse inscription “To the Divine Augusti Caesar and Julia” pays homage to the divine Tiberius and Livia.<sup>4</sup> The type, an Armenian tiara, symbolizes kingship as bestowed by the authority of Rome. The star, normally in the center panel of the Armenian tiara, is placed behind it as a separate symbol, perhaps to emphasize kingship and country as distinct concepts. The Δ in the field most likely represents the denomination “four” (chalkoi). The designs warrant a few comments. The Armenian tiara as a main type is unusual, but has precedent on a tetrachalkon of Erato’s sole reign (ca. AD 13-15) where the tiara is superimposed over a crossed bow and arrow.<sup>5</sup> (pl. 4,A) Earlier variations of this type are found on the coins of Roman conquerors, such as Mark Antony in 36 BC (Crawford 539/1), or on the 20 BC issue of Augustus, celebrating Tiberius’s victory (*RIC* 1,515-517). As a reverse type the Armenian tiara appears on an unidentified Julio-Claudian bronze of probable Armenian origin.<sup>6</sup> (pl. 4,B).

The horse, a normal and expected type, is a reference to the country’s most important industry as well as to its mounted military.

The two newly identified coins of Artaxias now allow us to understand a number of hitherto unidentifiable coins with enigmatic legends<sup>7</sup> which are degenerated imitations of no. 1.

### Imitations of Artaxias III

#### Early Imitation

3. AE tetrachalkon. Imitation of no. 1 above. Average wt. (1 ex) 8.43 g.  
 O1. Obv.: Armenian tiara with five peaks l., star on r., large Δ below on l. (legend ∩ 12:00): ΛΝΟΙΙΑΚΙΡΑΑΙΑΤΚΙΟ[Τ]ΒΑ[Ι]Ο[Ι]Ο[Ι]Ο[Ι]Ο[Ι]Ο[Ι] ∩. [beaded] border.  
 R1. Rev.: Horse prancing r. (legend from 12:00 ∩):  
 ΒΑΛΙΝΟΟΛΣΚΟΠΛΟΚΛΙΠΝΟΟΔΥΙΡΙ. beaded border.  
 a) FK (pl. 4, 3a); 12:00. b) private coll. (pl. 4,3b).

The early imitation is close artistically to nos. 1 and 2: the tiara retains the five short peaks of the original and the star retains the size and eight rays; the horse has a relatively

(CIRB 40), the Cappadocian king Ariobarzanes II (OGIS 354-5, with Michels 2009, 141-3), and Antiochos I of Commagene (IGLS I 1, with Facella 2005). Thonemann notes further: “The coinages of Kamnaskires IV and V of Elymais carry (with variants) the title βασιλέως Καμνασκίρου τοῦ ΕΓ βασιλέως Καμνασκίρου (Alram 1986: nos. 458-66); the letters ΕΓ are usually understood as representing the Greek word ἐγ(γόνου) (thus e.g. Callataÿ and Lorber 2011), but this abbreviation would be completely unparalleled, and it is surely preferable to understand this simply as τοῦ ἐγ βασιλέως Καμνασκίρου, ‘son of King Kamnaskires’, with the *kappa* nasalised to *gamma* before the *beta* of βασιλέως (extremely common in inscriptions of this period).”

<sup>3</sup> Tacitus *Ann.* 2.56 points out that the throne name was based on Artaxata as the city of coronation.

<sup>4</sup> For the cult of Tiberius and Livia in the east see Burnett 2007, 211.

<sup>5</sup> Unpublished tetrachalkon of year 3. Bust of Erato r., BA – EP / tiara over crossed bow and arrow, E – Γ. 19.5 mm; 7.68g; 6:00. FK coll.

<sup>6</sup> *RPC* S2-1-5488.1 (ex Righetti, now in FK coll., since conserved). Jugate busts r., no legend apparent / tiara r., ΚΑΙ ΤΙΒΕΡΙΟΣ Κ.[...]; *RPC* 1,3860 and 3862. Two specimens in private collections were reportedly found in Armenia.

<sup>7</sup> The first example known was acquired in 1984, followed in 1988 by GHirsch 163, lot 509 (not Münzen und Medaillen). See Saryan 1991, 112.

naturalistic appearance. The obverse legend is little changed from the original, apart from being written retrograde, CEB is now CIB, the K of KAICAPI has become Γ, and the last two letters of IOYΛIA are dropped. The following table shows the complete thirty letter legend of the Artaxias issues no. 1 compared to the twenty-eight letter legend of the earliest imitation no. 3.

Table 1. Obverse legends of no. 1 and earliest imitation no. 3, retrograde sequence reversed for comparison.

no. 1	Θ	Ε	Ο	Ι	ϸ	ϸ	Β	Α	ϸ	Τ	Ο	Ι	ϸ	Κ	Α	Ι	ϸ	Α	Π	Ι	Κ	Α	Ι	Ι	Ο	Υ	Λ	Ι	Α
no. 3	Ο	ϸ	Ο	Ι	ϸ	ϸ	Β	Λ	ϸ	.	Ο	Ι	ϸ	Γ	Α	Ι	ϸ	Α	ϸ	Ι	Κ	Λ	Ι	Ι	Ο	Υ	Λ	-	-

The reverse legend is considerably different, with “Artaxias” replaced by VOOΛ, though the names of his father and mother remain, perhaps no longer recognized for what they were. See below for further discussion.

**Later Imitations**

- 4. AE tetrachalkon; later imitations derived from no. 3. Average wt. (32 ex.) 10.97g; die axis varies.

Obv.: Armenian tiara with four peaks l., star on r., large Δ below on l. Legends below.

Rev.: Horse prancing r. beaded border. Legends below, from about 1:00.

The legends of no. 4, O2–4 and R2–6, are presented in tables. A - indicates no letter; a dot (.) indicates a missing or uncertain letter.

Table 2. No. 4 obverse legends.

⤵	Ο	Υ	Λ*	⤵	Ι	Λ	ϸ	Ι	Υ	ϸ	Λ	Τ	Ι	Ο	Τ	Λ	Ι	Υ	ϸ	Ι	Ο	Τ	12:00	↷	O2
Λ	Ο	Υ	Λ	⤵	Ι	Λ	ϸ	Ι	Υ	ϸ	Λ	Τ	Ι	Ο	Τ	Λ	Ι	Υ	ϸ	Ι	Ο	Τ	12:00	↷	O3

\*the Λ tilts into the \ (diagonal l) resulting in a combined letter, further obscured by a die break.

O4 11:00	↷	Τ	Ο	Ι	ϸ	Ρ	Ι	Λ	Τ	Ο	Ι	Τ	Λ	ϸ	Υ	Ι	ϸ	Λ	Ι	Υ	ϸ	Υ	Ο	Κ
O5 11:30	↷	Τ	Ο	Ι	ϸ	Ρ	Ι	Λ	Τ	Ο	Ι	Τ	Λ	.	.	.	.	Λ	Ι	-	-	Υ	Ο	Κ
O6 2:00	↷	Τ	Ο	Ι	ϸ	Ρ	Ι	Λ	Τ	Ο	Ι	Τ	Λ	ϸ	Υ	Ι	ϸ	Λ	Ι	-	-	Υ	Ο	Κ

Table 3. No. 4 reverse legends.

R2	Β	Λ	ϸ	Υ	Ο	Ο	Λ	ϸ	Κ	-	Ο	Π	Λ	Ο	Κ	Λ	Ι	Π	Υ	Ο	Ο	Δ	Υ	Π	Ι
R3	Β	Λ	ϸ	Υ	Ο	Ο	Λ	ϸ	Κ	-	Ο	Π	Λ	Ο	Κ	Ι	Υ	Π	Υ	Ο	Ο	Δ	Υ	Π	Ι
R4	Β	Λ	ϸ	Υ	Ο	Ο	Λ	ϸ	Κ	-	Ο	Π	Λ	Ο	Κ	-	Υ	Π	Υ	Ο	Ο	Δ	Υ	Π	Ι

**No. 4 Exemplars**

O2	R2	13.52	CNG e-sale 92, lot 39.
		12.66	F&S MBS 8, lot 259.
		12.43	GHirsch 159, lot 453.
		12.33	YTN coll., Nercessian 2008, 319.
		12.21	CNG e-sale 294, lot 205.
		11.73	CNG Ebay 1 Jan 2001.
		11.69	Gorny 134, lot 1572.
		11.67	private coll. (pl. 4,4a)



### Who Struck the Imitations?

Regarding who caused these imitations to be struck, one should consider that they were based on designs still in circulation, but employed substantially altered legends which no longer conveyed the original message. The possibilities seem to be that they are either 1) an official but degraded continuation of Artaxias’s own coinage; 2) struck by Armenian officials after Artaxias’s reign; or 3) struck by one of Artaxias’s successors in the chaotic period from AD 35 to 53.

The first proposition seems most unlikely, given the debased legends and the apparently intentional removal of Artaxias’s name. Therefore, the likely milieu for this imitative coinage is the chaotic seven year period immediately following the death of Artaxias in AD 35. During this period of Parthian civil war and Roman incursion no fewer than five foreign kings wore the crown of Armenia. Candidates of Rome and Parthia came and went in alternating attempts to control this strategically important territory.

The first such, Arsakes, son of the Parthian king Artabanus II (ca. AD 10–38), was placed on the throne immediately in AD 35, but assassinated shortly after by supporters of the Iberian Mithradates, with the backing of the emperor Tiberius. In AD 36 Artabanus responded by installing his second son, Orodes, as king of Armenia. Mithradates the Iberian displaced Orodes in short order, and held the throne until AD 38. At this point Mithradates was replaced by the Parthian satrap Demonax, who held Armenia until AD 42, at which time another Mithradates, perhaps the son of Mithradates the Iberian, replaced him. (Dio 58.26.1–4). The imitative coins with their garbled legends seem particularly suited to this period of political turmoil. Certainly day-to-day commerce continued, and required coins for orderly transactions. If these were these municipal coins, were their legends purposely blundered to avoid offending whichever king was temporarily in power? Or were they the product of a foreign authority whose grasp of Greek was inadequate? In support of the latter suggestion one need only to consider the Parthian silver drachms of Artabanus II (Sell. 63.6ff ) and the other kings of this period, Vardanes I (Sell. 64.31ff) and Gotarzes II (Sell. 65.33ff), to appreciate how degraded the Greek legends, even on official Parthian coinage, had become.

Comparison of the original reverse legend (nos. 1 and 2) with the earliest imitative coin, no. 3, suggests that it may have been in the time of Vologases I that the imitations were produced.

### Reverse Legends

Table 5. Nos. 1, 2, and 3 reverse legends.

no. 1-2	Β	.	.	ΑΡΤΑΞΙΟΥ	Ε	Κ*	Β	Π	Ο	Λ	Ε	Κ	Α	Ι	Π	Υ	Θ	Ο	Δ	Ω	Ρ	Ι		
				ΤΟΥ																				
no. 3	Β	Λ	Ι	Υ	Ο	Ο	Λ	Κ	-	Ο	Π	Λ	Ο	Κ	Λ	Ι	Π	Υ	Ο	Ο	Δ	Υ	Ρ	Ι

\*no. 2: Β

There are thirty-two letters in the original legend; the imitation R1 reduces it to twenty-four, omitting the king’s name “Artaxias” and ΤΟΥ replacing it with “ΥΟΟΛ”, and omits the Β(asileos) before the name Polemo (transposed letters ΟΠΛΟ). Several letters are simplified (Θ and Ε are rendered Ο)but the correspondence with the original is clear. ΒΑΙ ΥΟΟΛ is - in this context - a plausible writing (with transposed letters) of

“King Volo(gases)” who was king of Parthia from AD 51–78. This would suggest the imitations may have begun in AD 51 and continued into the reign of Vologases’s brother, Tiridates, whose first reign in Armenia lasted from 52/3 to 60. However, at some point Tiridates issued his own coins with intelligible Greek legends (Kovacs 2005/6, 106, no. 1). For the next two dozen years (52/3–ca. 75)—including the brief interruption of the Roman-backed Tigranes VI (60–62)—the monetary status quo is maintained. Thus, the introduction of coinage at some undetermined point in Tiridates’s first reign may provide a terminus for the imitative coinage. It is additionally possible that the imitative tiara/horse coins were revived during the interregnum of 63–66. After his “official” coronation by Nero in Rome Tiridates returned to govern Armenia bringing with him his own Roman-made coins dated to his “official” year 1 (Kovacs 2005/6, 106, no. 2 with corrections 2007, 195).

The two examples of the early imitation no. 3 are said to have been found in Armenia Major, so perhaps they were struck at the mint of Artaxata. The later imitations no. 4 are stylistically different enough from the earliest imitations to suggest a different mint; find spots have been reported from Sophene, near Tigranokerta.<sup>8</sup>

It is clear from both the number of dies, and the surviving examples, that the output of the imitative coinage was substantial. This suggests a longer period of issue than the original coins of Artaxias, or perhaps a period of increased demand for “small change.” Further, the comparative tables above make it clear that the legends of the imitations, originally thought to be randomly degraded are, in fact, remarkably consistent from die to die and reflect the control of some central authority.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The discovery of the tiara/horse coins of Artaxias III has filled a substantial gap in the Armenian numismatic series, and has provided the prototype for the enigmatic tiara/horse imitations. The latter may now be placed in their proper historical context, the chaotic period following the reign of Artaxias III. While it is tempting to regard these imitations as the earliest Arsacid coins of Armenia, questions of their exact authorship remain.

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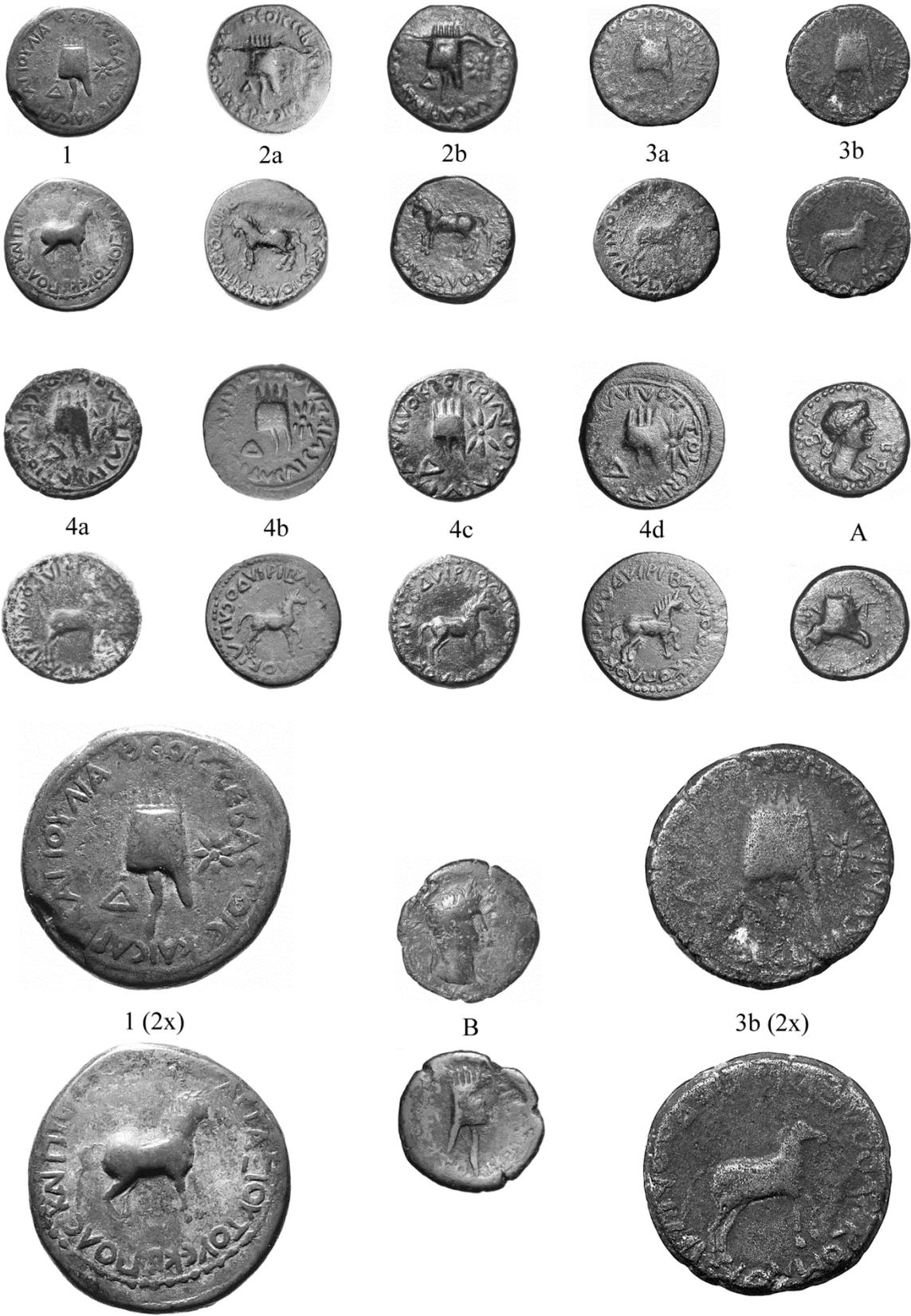
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<sup>8</sup> Saryan 1991, 112 cites a reported find spot in northern Syria.

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### Key to the Plate

1. Artaxias III. AE tetrachalkon. KV coll.
- 2a. Artaxias III. AE tetrachalkon. KV coll.
- 2b. Artaxias III. AE tetrachalkon. FLK coll.
- 3a. Imitation of Artaxias III. AE tetrachalkon. FLK coll.
- 3b. Imitation of Artaxias III. AE tetrachalkon. private coll.
- 4a. Imitation of Artaxias III. AE tetrachalkon, O2-R2. private coll.
- 4b. Imitation of Artaxias III. AE tetrachalkon, O3-R3. CNG esale 217,148.
- 4c. Imitation of Artaxias III. AE tetrachalkon, O4-R4. FLK coll.
- 4d. Imitation of Artaxias III. AE tetrachalkon, O6-R4. FLK coll.
- A. Erato, sole reign. AE tetrachalkon. FLK coll.
- B. Tiberius and Livia(?). AE tetrachalkon. FLK coll.
- C. Tiridates I of Armenia. AE tetrachalkon. FLK coll.
- D. Tiridates I of Armenia. AE, unknown denomination. FLK coll. photo from cast.



Frank L. Kovacs, Artaxias III and a Numismatic Enigma