

## Arsaces I (c. 247 - 211 B.C.)

### ΑΡΣΑΚΗΣ

Arsaces I was the first king of the Parthians. (See the [early history of Parthia](#).) Arrian reported Arsaces I was descended from Arsaces, son of Phriapites, and that his brother was Tiridates.<sup>1</sup> Confusion exists among historians as to whether Arsaces I or his brother Tiridates ruled until 211 B.C., but it is generally accepted today that Arsaces I was the king and Arrian's references to Tiridates should be attributed to Arsaces. See the [genealogy chart](#).

Arsaces I overthrew Andragoras, the Seleucid governor of Parthia<sup>2</sup> and was crowned in 247 B.C. in [Asaak](#) (Arshaak), the capital city of Astauene.<sup>3</sup> Arsaces I had to deal with attempts by Antiochus III to recapture lost Seleucid territories, but evidently succeeded in consolidating control of Parthia, Hyrcania, Herat and Astauene (and possibly Nisaia). Early in his reign of 36 years he invaded and conquered Hyrcania<sup>4</sup> and then, on the death of the elder King Diodotus in Bactria, formed an alliance with Diodotus II. About 228 B.C., Seleucus II Calinicus (247-226 B.C.) gathered an army in Babylon with which he marched east to reclaim the lost satrapies. Arsaces I retreated before him and eventually sought refuge among the Sakae, but circa 227 B.C. he returned victorious to Parthia when other troubles in Syria diverted Seleucus II. Following his death, Seleucus II was succeeded by his elder son Seleucus III Soter who ruled only three years until his murder, to be succeeded in turn by his younger brother Antiochus III (the Great) in 223 B.C. While Antiochus III was concerned with rebellion by two of his generals, the brothers Molon and Alexander, Arsaces continued to consolidate his position, increase his army, build forts and establish new cities such as Apaortenon, an almost impregnable position.<sup>5</sup>

[Click here](#) to view the inscriptions on this king's coins.

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#### Notes:

1. Arrian, *Frg. Hist.*, 1 (quoted in Photius 58) and 156.
2. Justin, xli, 4.
3. Isidore of Charax, *Stations*, 11.
4. But Justin, xli 4. 8, believed it was Tiridates
5. Justin xli, 5. 1-4. Debevoise (*Political History*, 15, n. 62) cites the classical and modern disagreements on its location and name

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## Coins Attributed to Arsaces I

Click on coin images to enlarge:

Sellwood Type 1



Arsaces I

AR Drachm, 4.02 g, 13 mm, die axis = -15 deg

Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa?](#), undated

Obv/ beardless head right, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated left on backless throne, holding bow in left hand; two-line Greek inscription ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ / ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟΣ; circular border of dots

Photo/ by Chris Hopkins

- Sellwood 1.1



Arsaces I

AR Drachm, 3.99 g, die axis 12h

Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa?](#), undated

Obv/ beardless head right, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated left on backless throne, holding bow in left hand; two-line Greek inscription ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ / ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟΣ; circular border of dots

Additional images/ [[monochrome obv and rev](#)]

Photo/ by permission [Lanz Numismatik](#)

- Sellwood 1.1

- Lanz 102 (May 2001), lot 301 (this coin)



Arsaces I

AR Hemidrachm , 1.98 g

Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa?](#), undated

Obv/ beardless head right, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated left on backless throne, holding bow in left hand; two-line Greek inscription ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ / ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟΣ; circular border of dots

Note/ Unpublished in the standard works and only the second recorded specimen, the first appearing in Busso Peus 323 Nov 1988

Photo/ by permission [Classical Numismatic Group](#)

- Sellwood 1.1 variant (hemidrachm)

- Busso Peus 323 (1-4 Nov 1988), lot 902 (same obverse die)

- Triton V, lot 1556 (this coin)

## Sellwood Type 2



Arsaces I

AR Drachm, 4.22 g

Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa](#)?, undated

Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated left on backless throne, holding bow in left hand; two-line Greek inscription ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟΣ; circular border of dots

Photo/ by permission [Dr. Busso Peus](#)

Additional image/ [[obverse & reverse](#)] by permission [Classical Numismatic Group](#)

Note/ Extremely rare, fewer than 10 recorded specimens

- Sellwood 2.1

- Peus 363, Lot 5092 (this coin)

- Triton V, lot 1555 (this coin)

### Sellwood Type 3

Special attention must be paid to the monogram M variant of type 3. Sigmund Galle ("Une Drachme inconnue d'Arsace Ier et la problème des monogrammes," *Iranica Antiqua*, 1982, vol. 17, p. 175-180) has pointed out a possible discrepancy in Sellwood's interpretation of the monograms as a mintmark of Mithradatkart-Nisa. He notes that archaeological exploration has dated the city's oldest remains to the late third or second century B.C., creating a strong likelihood that it was named for [Mithradates I](#), the only king by that name in that era. If true, he reasons, Mithradatkart could not have functioned as a mint for Arsaces I.



The Sellwood type 3 drachms have an Aramaic inscription which has not yet been translated satisfactorily. Shown here is a computer enhanced picture of the inscription from the [PDC 10907](#) coin which has a particularly clear version. In *Num Chron* 1971, 7/11, p. 113, Sellwood offered a possible interpretation of *krny* (the karen), building on the suggestion by A. D. H. Bivar that karen was a Greek military rank equivalent to general used in Xenophon's time circa 400 B.C. (*Num Chron* 1961, 123, n. 5). We later find Karen as one name among seven of the most powerful families in Parthia, but their date of rise to power is uncertain. Sellwood offered a variant of this inscription I have not yet seen: 1544



Arsaces I

AR Drachm, 4.00 g

Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa](#)?, undated

Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated left on backless throne, holding bow in left hand; monogram MT below seat; behind archer, single-word Greek inscription [AP]ΣAK[OY] read from outside; below bow, single-line Aramaic inscription (LA3ii) but unreadable on this coin; circular border of dots

Photo/ by permission [Classical Numismatic Group](#)

- Sellwood 3.1

- CNG 36, lot 2 (this coin)

- Shore 2 (this coin)



Arsaces I

AR Drachm, 4.04 g, die axis 11h

Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa?](#), undated

Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated left on backless throne, holding bow in left hand; monogram MT below seat; behind archer, single-word Greek inscription APΣAKOY; below bow, single-line Aramaic inscription (LA3ii); circular border of dots

Photo/ by permission [Lanz Numismatik](#)

- Sellwood 3.1

- Lanz 102 (May 2001), lot 302 (this coin)



Arsaces I

AR Drachm, 4.12 g

Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa?](#), undated

Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated left on backless throne, holding bow in left hand; monogram MT below seat; behind archer, single-word Greek inscription APΣAKOY; below bow, single-line Aramaic inscription (LA3ii); circular border of dots

Additional images/ [[large obv and rev](#)]

Prov/ Bujnurd hoard

Location/ [Fitzwilliam Museum](#), Cambridge CM 395-1968

Photo/ by Chris Hopkins

- Sellwood 3.1

- Shore 2



Arsaces I

AR Drachm, 4.05 g

Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa?](#), undated

Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated left on backless throne, holding bow in left hand; monogram M below seat; behind archer, single-word Greek inscription [A]PΣAKOY; below bow, single-line Aramaic inscription (LA3ii); circular border of dots

Location/ [Cabinet des Médailles](#), Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, Inv. II, 58-368

Photo/ by Chris Hopkins

- Sellwood 3.1 variant (monogram)

- Shore, not listed

- Galle, "Une Drachme inconnue d'Arsace Ier et la problème des monogrammes," *Iranica Antiqua*, 1982, vol. 17, p. 175-180 (this coin)



Arsaces I

AR Drachm, 4.09 g, die axis 12h

Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa?](#), undated

Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated left on backless throne, holding bow in left hand; monogram M below seat; behind archer, single-word Greek inscription [A]PΣAKOY; below bow, single-line Aramaic inscription (LA3ii); circular border of dots

Photo/ by permission [Lanz Numismatik](#)

- Sellwood 3.1 variant (monogram)
- Lanz 102 (May 2001), lot 303 (this coin)
- Shore, not listed



Arsaces I

AR Drachm, 3.83 g

Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa?](#), undated

Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated left on backless throne, holding bow in left hand; monogram MT below seat; behind archer, single-word Greek inscription APΣAKOY read from inside; below bow, single-line Aramaic inscription (LA3ii); circular border of dots

Photo/ by permission [Kirk Davis](#)

- Sellwood 3.1 variant (APΣAKOY read from inside)
- Kirk Davis, catalog 34 (Spring 2001), lot 76 (this coin)
- Shore, not listed



Arsaces I

AE Dichalkous, 4.24 g, die axis 12h

Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa?](#), undated

Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ bow in case; single-word Greek inscription APΣAKOY in field right read from outside; circular border of dots

Note/ only three known specimens

Photo/ by permission [Lanz Numismatik](#)

- Sellwood type 3 variant (bronze, bow case reverse)
- Lanz 102 (May 2001), lot 306 (this coin)
- Shore, not listed



Arsaces I

AE Dichalkous, 3.95 g, 18 mm

Mint/ [Rhagae?](#), undated

Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ bow in case; single-word Greek inscription ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ in field right read from outside; circular border of dots

Note/ only three known specimens

Photo/ by permission [Najaf Coins & Collectibles Inc.](#)

- Sellwood 3 type variant (bronze, bow case reverse)

- Shore, not listed



Arsaces I

AE Dichalkous, 3.95 g, 18 mm

Mint/ [Rhagae?](#), undated

Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ bow in case; single-word Greek inscription ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ in field right read from outside; circular border of dots

Note/ only three known specimens

Photo/ by permission [Najaf Coins & Collectibles Inc.](#)

- Sellwood 3 type variant (bronze, bow case reverse)

- Shore, not listed

## Sellwood Type 4



The Sellwood type 4 drachms have an Aramaic inscription which has not yet been translated satisfactorily. Shown here is a computer enhanced picture of the inscription from the [PDC 6190](#) coin in the Paris cabinet. Sellwood did not include this inscription, but did offer an additional type 4

inscription I have not yet seen: 𐤀𐤓𐤕



Arsaces I

AR Drachm

Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa?](#), undated

Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated right on stool, holding bow in left hand; monogram MT below seat; behind archer, single-word Greek inscription [A]ΠΣΑΚΟΥ read from outside, below bow,

Aramaic inscription (LA4ii); circular border of dots  
Location/ private collection  
Photo/ by Chris Hopkins  
- Sellwood 4.1



Arsaces I

AR Drachm, 4.05 g  
Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa?](#), undated  
Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots  
Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated right on stool, holding bow in left hand; monogram MT below seat; behind archer, single-word Greek inscription ΑΡΣΑΚΟ[Y] read from outside, below bow, Aramaic inscription (LA4ii); circular border of dots  
Location/ [Cabinet des Médailles](#), Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, Inv. II, 58-369  
Photo/ by Chris Hopkins  
- Sellwood 4.1



Arsaces I

AR Drachm  
Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa?](#), undated  
Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots  
Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated right on stool, holding bow in left hand; monogram MT below seat; behind archer, single-word Greek inscription [A]ΡΣΑΚΟ[Y] read from outside, below bow, Aramaic inscription (LA4ii); circular border of dots  
Location/ Cabinet des Médailles, [Bibliothèque Nationale de France](#), nc 1  
Photo/ by Chris Hopkins  
- Sellwood 4.1



Arsaces I

AR Drachm, 4.04 g, die axis 12h  
Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa?](#), undated  
Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots  
Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated right on stool, holding bow in left hand; no monogram below seat; behind archer, single-word Greek inscription ΑΡΣΑΚΟY read from outside, below bow, Aramaic inscription (LA4ii); circular border of dots  
Photo/ by permission [Lanz Numismatik](#)  
- Sellwood 4.1 variant (no monogram)  
- Lanz 102 (May 2001), lot 305 (this coin)



Arsaces I /Arsaces II [Mule](#)

AR Drachm, 4.05 g

Mint/ [Mithradatkart-Nisa](#) or [Hecatompylos?](#), undated

Obv/ beardless head left, wearing bashlyk; circular border of dots

Rev/ beardless archer wearing bashlyk and cloak seated right on backless throne, holding bow in left hand; below bow, monogram A; behind archer, single-word Greek inscription APΣAKOY read from outside; circular border of dots

Note/ this is a "mule" bearing a Sellwood type 4.1 obverse and an Arsaces II type 5.1 reverse. There are only three recorded examples of this type: two are in private collections and the third is this example in Paris

Location/ Cabinet des Médailles, [Bibliothèque Nationale de France](#), 1968/499

Photo/ by Chris Hopkins

- Sellwood 4.1 obv/5.1 rev (mule)

source:

<http://www.parthia.com/arsaces1.htm>