Who was Arsaces, First King of the Parthians?
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The year is 248 BCE. The event: the Aparni tribe from the north along the Oxus River invaded the region of northern Parthia under the leadership of a man by the name of Arsaces. The result of the invasion was the establishment of the Arsacid Dynasty which would be known in our history books as the Parthian Empire. This was the first time Arsaces was mentioned. But who was this man named Arsaces and where did he come from?

What we know about Arsaces is limited and obscure, and we have as little to work with in terms of gaining a panoramic view of the man. However, we are not at a complete loss, for some key historians do provide us with some detail as to who Arsaces was and where he came from. It is said Arsaces was a Scythian chief of the Aparni tribe, who were kin to the Dahae tribe. Arsaces father and ancestry is unknown, or at least to say, uncertain by most historians. However, many historians do agree Arsaces was a Scythian which is not disputed. But unfortunately, many historians have failed to recognize the meaning and linguistics of his name, and if they had they would soon discover that Parthia’s founding father was an Israelite.

The name Arsaces is Greek and was a rendering of his Old Persian name Arshak, which can also be rendered as Arsak, Asaak, or Asaak. The name Arsaces/Arshak suggests that he was of Saka/Scythian origin. This is due to the “Sac” or “Shak” found in his name. The name Sac or Shak is a rendering and form of the Hebrew name Isaac due to the constants S-K or S-C that are present in his name. In addition, the Ar in Arshak is considered to be Scythian and means Aryan, and in the Pahlavi dialect the language of the Parthian’s the word “Aryan” is rendered “Eran”. The “Er” in Pahlavi is said to mean “noble” or “warrior”, and the suffix “an” attached to “Er” represents the relation. Thus, the name Eran can mean “The noble race” or “the warrior race” along those lines. What becomes fascinating is that name Eran (Aryan) is also found in the Bible. The name Eran is also Hebrew and is pronounced as “Ay-rawn”. Eran was the head of the Eranite clan and was also the grandson of Ephraim (Numbers 26:35-36). In addition, the name Eran in Hebrew means, “watcher” or “watchful”. This is a totally different meaning when compared to the Pahlavi meaning of the name Eran. However, the Pahlavi meaning of the name Eran does represent the tribe of Ephraim. Take for instance that the name Eran in Pahlavi as mentioned before means “noble” or “warrior”. Both these descriptions are similar to the Biblical representation of the tribe of Ephraim. For the tribe of Ephraim supported the monarchy of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In addition, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel which was called Samaria was in the lands of Ephraim, and Ephraim was also the leading tribe of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Also, before we lest forget, the alternative meaning of Eran in Pahlavi is “warrior”, and this meaning also describes the tribe of Ephraim as well. For if we turn to the book of Micah ch.5, the whole chapter shows us that the tribe of Ephraim was a great warrior tribe, but we should not forget that this is backed up by the fact that Ephraim was the leading tribe in Israel. Thus, the word Eran in Pahlavi is a great description of Ephraim’s characteristics of being a “noble warrior”. Nevertheless, there is another possibility that the “Ar” in Arshak is the Hebrew name Er pronounced as “Ayr”, and Er according to the Bible was the oldest son of Judah and grandson of Jacob (Geneses 38:3). Er, like the name Eran, are connected and roughly have the same meaning. Thus, it becomes possible, that the man named Arsaces/Arshak was indeed an Israelite and quite possibly from the tribe of Ephraim through the clan of Eran, and we can roughly say that his name when translated could be rendered along the lines as “Eran/Er of the house of Isaac.”

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i Lerner, The Impact of Seleucid Decline on the Eastern Iranian Plateau, p. 29
ii Strabo, Geography, 11.9.2
iii Garthwaite, The Persians, p. 75
iv Isidore, Wilfred Harvey Schoff, Parthian Stations, p. 31
v Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p. 211
vi Holt, Thundering Zeues, p. 183
vii Collins, Israel’s Lost Empires, p. 197
ix Strong, Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Eran (#6197), Er (#6147).
x Strong, Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, **Eran** (#6197), **Er** (#6147).
xi Davidiy, Joseph, P. 104-105
xii Davidiy, Ephraim, p. 24/King James Bible
xiii Strong, Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, **Eran** (#6197), **Er** (#6147).