

# THE VOCABULARY AND SYNTAX OF ICONOGRAPHY IN SASANIAN IRAN\*

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to establish that Sasanian functionaries had to develop a sophisticated iconographical language to propagate a political propaganda aimed at a mostly illiterate population. This iconographical language not only complements the written word, but stands on its own merits in shedding some light on information not easily understood in texts. It also provides a testing ground for the interpretation of complex slogans and philological guessing.

**Keywords :** finger signs, Tishtrya, *afš*, *čīhr*, Arrān, *gao-čīθra*

## INTRODUCTION

There seems to be among historians and art-historians alike, the tendency to accept the written word as solid evidence, and to treat images as decorative elements devoid of documentary value. And if one tries to derive a meaning out of the latter, the usual question is: where is the text to support it? Yet, if one looks back to the Sasanian period, one can readily understand that the political propagandists of that era faced a real dilemma: how could they propagate political slogans if the population was mostly illiterate? The only effective mean to convey their propaganda was to develop an iconography that would

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\* I am indebted to Ryka Gyselen and Philippe Gignoux who have kindly sent me copies of their publications. Their painstaking efforts in deciphering inscriptions provided me with a basis that I could have never reached on my own. But once confronted with their initial reading, my familiarity with later Persian texts, and scribal practices, prompted me to seek a better understanding for some of them.

be easy to understand, and almost intuitive. Even though illiterate in its majority, the Iranian population was nevertheless endowed with an oral tradition, rich in poetic and heroic imagery. A well-developed sign language could tap into this rich imagery and evoke the beliefs embedded in them.

As I shall try to demonstrate in this paper, Sasanian functionaries developed a full-fledged iconographical language by adopting well-defined conventions, by creating a precise vocabulary, and by introducing expanded rules of syntax. This iconography not only complements the written word, but stands on its own merits in shedding light on information not easily understood in texts. Among these is the graphic demonstration of Sasanian knowledge concerning the etymology of Avestic terms such as *afš-čiθra* and *gao-čiθra*. It is also hoped that my arguments will finally lead to an understanding of the basic architecture of Sasanian coinage, which has remained unexplained despite the multitude of publications on the subject.

#### CONVENTIONS

**Convention 1: The right facing king** - In a sharp departure from Parthian practices, in which the king was represented on coins either full face or left looking (figs. 1, 2), Sasanians portrayed their kings facing rightward (figs. 4, 5). Ardashir I (r. 226-242) instituted this rule after having followed at first the Parthian model (fig. 3). This often-cited simple convention allowed illiterate onlookers to immediately distinguish a Sasanian coin from a Parthian one.

To avoid confusion and facilitate recognition, conventions had to be continuously maintained. Thus, with a few minor exceptions, Sasanian coinage followed the right-facing rule until the very end of their dynasty.

**Convention 2: Special headgear** - To distinguish the coinage of a new ruler from that of his predecessor, a second—also well-known—convention was adopted: the effigy of each ruler had a special crown or headgear (figs. 4, 5). The need to have a distinct headgear for each stemmed out of the time-honored Iranian practice of depicting people in a stylized manner. If the effigy was not a real portrait, a pointer to the king's identity was needed. There was of course the name of the king stamped in small characters on the coin, but since very few could

read it another indicator was necessary: thus the special headgear. The prominence of the iconographical identity pointer, in comparison to the textual one, clearly shows that iconography was more relevant.

**Convention 3: The king is tallest** - Like on their coinage, the inscriptions on Sasanian rock reliefs were minutely written and did not carry much weight next to the grandiloquent rock reliefs. Since the rock reliefs were carved to glorify the king, he had to be recognized at first glance, even from afar. As deities were also crowned (to project majesty), and as distinguishing one crown from another from afar was not an easy task, the Sasanian designers adopted a very simple rule to identify the king: the tallest person on the scene (including headgear) was the king (figs. 10). This simple rule—applied without exception to every Sasanian kingly rock relief—has also the merit to emphasize another aspect of the Persian kingly ideology: unlike the Greek world, deities were only accessories to the glorification of the king. Thus, their size was not of importance. Their presence was symbolic, and a sign of their support and approval of the king.

**Convention 4: The designated position** - What we have seen so far is a clear policy to conventionalize iconography for the sake of clarity and ease of recognition. It stands to reason that in pursuit of the same goal, mortals and deities would be allocated fixed positions on coins (where there is very little room to identify them with multiple indices). Switching the position of mortals with those of deities would have indeed been confusing, and counterproductive for the political message that one hoped to convey. This rule applies, for instance, to the reverse of the Sasanian coinage where two crowned figures flank a fire altar. I shall argue that on account of both continuity and iconographical evidence, the figure on the left is the king, and the one on the right is a deity.

The reverse of Sasanian coinage is clearly a modified version of the composition of Persis coins such as the one from Autophradates I (3rd century BC), in which the figure standing next to the fire altar has not only the exact same features as the king on the obverse (fig. 7), but also holds a bow, which was a sign of sovereignty going back to Darius I (522-485 BC) in Bisotun. Continuity in design, therefore, vouches for the figure on the left of the Sasanian fire altar to be a king as well. On Sasanian coins, the latter has either a generic crown (which I shall explain in Appendix I), or when it wears a specific crown it is the exact

crown of the king on the obverse (see for instance figs. 5, 9, 13). The left position is therefore clearly one reserved for the king.

Same is true for the figure on the right: when it is not wearing a generic crown, it represents a deity. On the coinage of Bahrām II (276-93) for instance, the figure on the left is a female deity, presumably Anāhitā, because she is brandishing a beribboned ring of investiture to the king standing on the opposite side;<sup>1</sup> also, as Michael Alram has pointed out, the figure on the right of the fire altar of Ohrmazd I (272-73) is Mithra since he wears a crown with pointed solar rays, and is brandishing the beribboned ring of investiture as well.<sup>2</sup> The right position is thus for deities.

A second application of this rule concerns the coinage that bears on the obverse a small bust opposite the king. Regrettably, four years after I had demonstrated that the bust represented not a prince but a deity, numismatic experts still advance various hypotheses why it embodies a beardless boy prince or a “throne successor.”<sup>3</sup> Yet the mere analysis of coins through the lens of iconographical conventions negates such a possibility. First, we are clearly dealing with deities when the bust is handing the king a beribboned ring of investiture. Such is the case of Zāmāsb (r. 497-99) for which the bust has been recognized as Ahuramazdā (fig. 8),<sup>4</sup> and such is the case of Bahrām II where the bust has been acknowledged as Anāhitā (fig. 13).<sup>5</sup> To switch the identity of the bust from deity to boy, would simply be in contravention of the spirit of conventionalized representation that is the staple of Sasanian iconography. Second, in many cases the “boy” is clearly a woman: in fig. 12 the bust on the obverse has fully developed breasts, and in fig. 13 it has the exact same features as those of Anāhitā on the reverse. In fig. 16 the bust is handing out a special diadem or headband similar to those given by a *woman* (Anāhitā) to a king in a composition engraved on a silver dish (figs. 17).<sup>6</sup> Third, the comparison of the coinage of Ardashir I with Bahrām II (r. 276-93) shows how incongruent the “boy-

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<sup>1</sup> Soudavar 2003, p.68-70, Alram 2008, p. 25

<sup>2</sup> Alram 2008, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Alram 2007, pp. 236-38 (I am indebted to Michael Alram for giving me an offprint of his article); Gyselen 2004, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(1), 328 and pl. 27, no. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Choksy 1989, pp. 117-35,

<sup>6</sup> For more on this dish see Soudavar 2003, p. 36

shows how incongruent the “boy-prince” theory can be:<sup>7</sup> (a) the busts in figures 14 and 15 are both beardless and wear the same type of tiara with earflaps, which would then entail the impossible notion that Ardashir I and Bahrām II had the same crown prince (or favorite prince); and (b), in comparing figures 12, 13 and 15 we would have to surmise that Bahrām II not only often changed his favorite prince, but also switched his choice from a prince to a princess. More importantly, this “boy” theory begs a question: why would kings, who were otherwise hailed and supported by deities, suddenly accept to *downgrade* their stature by having a mere mortal in front of them? The fact is that every Sasanian iconographical composition was devised to enhance the glory of the king. To think that the effigy of a prince would convey added prestige for the king, or symbolize a co-ruler, is to confound the Iranian situation with Byzantine practices. The simple solution to all the above explained problems is that the bust represents a deity: mostly Anāhitā, and occasionally, Ahuramazdā.

#### POLITICAL SLOGAN AND CONTINUITY

Considering the effectiveness of iconographical representation in a mostly illiterate society, it is almost *impossible* for the Sasanians not to have devised a symbolic imagery for the ubiquitous political slogan “*ki čīhr az yazdān*” that characterized the king. As suggested elsewhere, this slogan should be translated: “who reflects the gods (in power and glory)”; and it finds its iconographical expression in the reflective positioning of the king with deities (which includes the two above mentioned cases of king and deities on the obverse and reverse of Sasanian coins).<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, two reevaluations of the meaning of the word *čīhr*, one by Anotonio Panaino and the other by Prods Oktor Skjaervo, have once again brought confusion to the issue.<sup>9</sup> I shall deal with them at length in Appendix I by showing that the primary meaning of *čīhr* in this context is “brilliance/radiance,” while “image” only offers a secondary or derivative meaning, and by arguing that *čīhr* was in essence the manifestation of the king’s *farr* through radiance. But at this juncture, suffice it to say that the translation proposed by

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<sup>7</sup> Alram 2002, p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 48-49.

<sup>9</sup> Panaino 2004, pp. 555-85; Alram, Blet-Lemarquand, Skjaervo 2007, pp. 30-47.

this juncture, suffice it to say that the translation proposed by Panaino and accepted by Skjaervo —“whose image is from the Gods”—has one major iconographical inconvenience: it can no longer serve to explain the juxtaposition of kings with deities, because when the deity is Anāhitā, the king can obviously not be in the “image” of a woman.

Skjaervo also suggests oblivion, and lack of understanding for past formulas, when Sasanians adopted their new slogan. A careful comparison with the Persis coins, however, shows that the Sasanian slogan was not radically different from those of their predecessors, but simply presented it in a new garb. The analogy becomes perceptible if some misconceptions are set aside. Joseph Wiesehöfer, for instance, qualifies the “Achaemenid winged man” on top of the fire altars of Persis coins (fig. 7) as “the embodiment of the *Xvarnah* of a famous royal precursor.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, the most rudimentary iconographical reading of this symbol argues against such interpretation, because the abstract notion of *xvarnah* is not intuitively compatible with a human figure interacting by a gesture of the hand with a king standing below and responding with the same gesture. As I had demonstrated elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> this “Achaemenid winged man” was the symbol of Ahuramazdā who, like most other deities of the Avesta, was a valid interlocutor of man. Ahuramazdā, as the interlocutor of man, is therefore represented in human forms, and the wings give him a supernatural look in order to portray him as a deity. By contrast, a king never converses with the *xvarnah* in the Avesta or any other text.

Moreover, since many Persis coins qualify the king as being the “*frataraka* of gods,” i.e., deputy of gods (on earth),<sup>12</sup> we can see that the composition on the reverse of figure 7 is the exact rendering of this idiom: by a mutual gesture of the hand, king and deity acknowledge their interrelated responsibilities, one from up high, and the other, down

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<sup>10</sup> Wiesehöfer 2007, p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 88-106.

<sup>12</sup> Wiesehöfer translates *frataraka* of an Achaemenid satrap of Egypt as “sub-satrap,” and foresees in the case of the Persis coin inscriptions that is written in Aramaic as “*prtrk’ ZY LHY*” may actually mean the *frataraka* of “godlike” kings; Wiesehöfer 2001, p. 43. Notwithstanding the fact that “godlike” is a totally foreign and unacceptable notion in Iranian kingship ideology, the fact is that the notion of a sub-king or sub-god is also unheard of. Therefore, as I had argued in Soudavar 2006 (pp. 163-64) the only possible translation is “deputy of gods (on earth).”

on earth. Furthermore, the use of the term *frataraka* as the dynastic designation of the rulers of Persis by Wiesehöfer has the negative effect of masking the aspirations of their kings. Indeed, he envisages the possibility of “*fratarakas*” being vassals to the Seleucids or the Arsacids.<sup>13</sup> But when a king proclaims to be “the deputy of gods,” he envisions an authority emanating directly from the gods; he does not consider himself a vassal of another king. Similarly, the holding of the bow before the fire altar also projects sovereign rule. Thus, in choosing a political slogan that incorporated the word *čih*r, the same that Darius had previously used in his inscriptions (see Appendix I), the Sasanians were still claiming to be earthly kings whose power emanated from the gods.<sup>14</sup> The only iconographical adjustment that was necessary to reflect their modified political slogan was to bring down the symbol of god, from atop, and place it opposite the king, next to the fire altar.

#### VOCABULARY

In addition to conventions, Sasanian functionaries developed a precise vocabulary for their sign language, three sets of which I shall discuss here below:

**Set 1: The number vocabulary** – Since ancient times, it existed in Iran a sign language that conveyed numbers through the configuration of fingers. The Sasanian functionaries naturally incorporated these signs into their iconography, as a vocabulary subset. I had signaled elsewhere that the *Farhang-e Jahāngiri* gave a full description of these finger signs,<sup>15</sup> but since various art history catalogs still describe them as devotional or arcane gestures, I have decided to present a full English translation of its text in Appendix II. Samples of number signs are illustrated in figs. 19 a, b, c.

This sign language was probably developed to facilitate trade among merchants, along the Silk Road. A practice sheet by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) indicates that illustrated manuals existed even in

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<sup>13</sup> Wiesehöfer 2001, pp. 41-43. The term *frataraka* is a misnomer, for it is awkward to call a dynasty that of “Deputies.” Timurids, for instance, could not (and never did) call themselves Gurkānids (i.e., “son-in-laws”), even though Timur had married a Changizid princess and was entitled *gurkān*.

<sup>14</sup> Soudavar 2006, p. 176; Soudavar (forthcoming).

<sup>15</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 59-60, based on Zokā 1998, Inju-ye Shirāzi 1980, I:61-65.

Europe, because the three hand gestures that he has drawn illustrate three such numbers.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, we have two types of representation for the number 20: as a closed fist on the drawing of fig. 20, and as a greeting sign exchanged between kings, gods, and Sasanian grandees on rock reliefs (fig. 19d). Both, however, conform to the description of the *Farhang-e Jahāngiri* because its only requirement is to have the thumb of the right hand put under the proximal phalange of the index finger; the position of the remaining fingers does not matter (see Appendix II). I had previously suggested that this twenty sign, represented the sum total of the fingers of the hands and feet, and was perhaps a sign of total submission.<sup>17</sup> However, a recent article about the function of some “Kermān” stone plaques may provide a better explanation, one akin to the notion of excellence associated today with grading systems based on the number twenty (good eyesight is for instance graded 20/20). Ann-Elisabeth Dun-Vaturi and Ulrich Schädler have plausibly argued that the 20 holes on these plaques represented the stations of an ancient game, the goal of which was to advance to the twentieth hole through a roll of dice (fig. 21).<sup>18</sup> One can then imagine that reaching 20 became synonymous with victory and excellence. As such, it made sense for both deity and kings to greet each other with the sign of victory and excellence.

**Set 2: The *farr* vocabulary** – Since the notion of *farr* (OP *xvarnah*) was essential to authority and kingship, a vast array of symbols were created, each emphasizing a certain aspect of it. In two different studies, I have identified a number of *farr* symbols, a synopsis of which is presented in the table below. For some, such as the ram or headband, direct reference was provided. Others were identified by logical inference based on text and iconography. A more complex reasoning however involved the case of the windblown headband (flying ribbon, *dastār*), which I argued to be not a symbol of the regular *xvarnah* but of the Aryan *xvarnah*. This reasoning was based on the

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<sup>16</sup> I have flipped horizontally the Dürer drawing to get configurations for the right hand, which project the numbers 10000, 20 and 3 (from top left clockwise); the original drawing represents on the left hand: 10000, 200 and 3000; see Appendix II.

<sup>17</sup> Soudavar 2003, p. 60, note 151.

<sup>18</sup> Dun-Vaturi, A.E., and Schädler, U., 2006, pp. 2-10.



observation of a shift in the iconography of the headband (i.e., the addition of the ripples), in conjunction with the victory of Shāpur I (r. 242-272) over the Romans and the adoption of the title of King of Erān and an-Erān, which found its explanation in Yt 18, and that I shall further discuss here below.











Image	Description	References and justification
	Ram	<i>Kār-nāmag</i> , <i>Shāhnāmah</i> . <sup>19</sup>
	Headband/ ribbon	Officially called <i>dastār</i> but referred to as <i>x<sup>w</sup>arreh</i> by Mas`udi. <sup>20</sup>
	Windblown headband	Ripples indicate the presence of the Strong Wind as companion to the Aryan <i>xvarnah</i> (Yt 18). <sup>21</sup>
	Shining disk	<i>Shāhnāmah</i> , Tāq-e Bostān hunt scene. <sup>22</sup>
	Radiating rings	As complement to the word <i>afzun</i> , to achieve <i>farreh-afzun</i> . <sup>23</sup>
	Pair of wings	<i>Shāhnāmah</i> , possessors and givers of <i>farr</i> (Yt 14, Yt 19), sign of <i>farr</i> residing with the king, also used in the Armenian cross. <sup>24</sup>
	Pomegranate	Iconographical evidence. <sup>25</sup>
	Sunflower	Symbol of Mithra ( <i>Bundahišn</i> ), and <i>farr</i> radiance. <sup>26</sup>
	Lotus	Symbol of water deities ( <i>Bundahišn</i> ), and emergence of <i>farr</i> from its underwater stage. <sup>26</sup>
	Pearl	Symbol of encapsulated <i>farr</i> underwater (Yt 19). <sup>26</sup>

Table 1- Symbols of *farr*

<sup>19</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 20-21, 31-37.

<sup>20</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 19-25, Soudavar 2006, pp. 173-74.

<sup>21</sup> Soudavar 2006, pp. 174-75.

<sup>22</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 8-9, 19, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 16-19.

<sup>24</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 19-25.

<sup>25</sup> Soudavar 2003, p. 58.

<sup>26</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 52-56, 100-101

**Set 3: Graphic signs** – Like the road signs of today, Sasanian functionaries produced easily recognizable caricatures or graphic signs to identify celestial entities. I shall discuss three such signs: the child sign as a symbol of Apam-Napāt, the cow sign as symbol of the Moon, and the three-dot sign as the symbol of Tishtrya (Sirius). All three are night time entities, and as I shall argue, their signs reflect their name or attributes in the Avesta. It entails that while the targeted people of these signs may have been illiterate, *they were fully aware of the significance* of Avestic names and attributes. All three entities were purveyors of *farr*, and therefore their presence on coins was to insinuate that the king's *farr* was going to be further increased under their aegis.<sup>27</sup>

**The child sign** – References to Apam-Napāt in Sasanian iconography may look at first as an anomaly. Because, from the time Darius raised Ahura Mazdā to supremacy, Apam-Napāt's fortunes in Iranian kingly ideology had been on a declining path. Where there was a need for an aquatic deity, Anāhitā better fulfilled that role.<sup>28</sup> At the popular level though, memories of Apam-Napāt must have lingered on, since we see a resurrection of this deity in the Hellenistic period. Indeed, Iranians saw in the image of Eros a perfect representation for Apam-Napāt, whose very name meant Grandson of Waters. Added wings were synonymous with supernatural qualities in Iranian iconography, and the image of a winged young boy was, therefore, a perfect fit for Apam-Napāt. A Bactrian gold ornament (fig. 30) even shows him on a dolphin to emphasize his aquatic affiliation; and his central position on a silver bowl, overshadowing surrounding deities such as Hercules (fig. 27), accentuates his acquired importance in the Iranian environment. Apam-Napāt got a further boost under Shāpur I, in conjunction with his consecutive victories over three Roman emperors. When the time came to celebrate his victories on a rock relief (fig. 11), he chose Apam-Napāt in lieu of Anāhitā. Indeed, a deity was needed to convey the Aryan *xvarnah*, symbolizing victory over the an-Erān. According to the *Zāmyad Yasht*, the *xvarnah* that Jamshid lost was actually the Aryan *xvarnah*, which was then guarded

<sup>27</sup> Apam-Napāt becomes the guardian of *farr* (Yt 8:34, Yt 19:51-53), the *Bundahišn* qualifies the Moon as purveyor of *farr* (Dādaghi 1990, p. 110), and in Yt 8:1 Tishtrya (along with Moon) bestows *farr* to men.

<sup>28</sup> Soudavar 2009 (forthcoming).

underwater by Apam-Napāt (Yt 19:51-57). It is therefore he who delivers the *xvarnah* ribbon (*dastār*) to Shāpur in Bishāpur (fig. 11).

Coin designers, who had to maximize the projection of *farr* for the king, had a hard time fitting full-sized deities into their compositions. A caricaturized symbol could be just as effective. In the case of Apam-Napāt, a two-legged *ankh* sign easily mimicked the little Eros. It could even be fitted on Shāpur's eagle-headed conical hat (fig. 28). The latter cannot be, as others have suggested,<sup>29</sup> a specific heraldic sign of Shāpur, because it also appears on Ardashir's horse in the battle scene of Firuzābād (fig. 31),<sup>30</sup> as well as on the crown of Bahrām II (fig. 9). As a recurring kingly sign, it can only be an auspicious symbol, projecting abundant and/or a strong *farr*. A graphic sign of the Grandson of Waters, clearly accomplishes that. Apam-Napāt was the Lord of the night, and nighttime stellar objects such as Tishtrya derived their brightness from him (see below). His hierarchical importance is even emphasized in Firuzābād where, in trying to endow each of the princes with an auspicious emblem, the designer allocated the more prestigious child sign of Apam-Napāt to Ardashir, and the cow sign to his son Shāpur.



**The cow sign** – In the Avesta the Moon is qualified with the epithet *gao-čiθra*. I have argued elsewhere that the traditional translation of this term (“which carries the seed of the bull”) stems out of a wrong interpretation of the *Bundahišn*, and that the *čiθra* of this epithet denotes brilliance and appearance.<sup>31</sup> But

<sup>29</sup> Overlaert 1993, p. 91. Gyselen (2004, p.53) suggests this sign to represent the *frawahr* without giving any reason for it.

<sup>30</sup> Rather than focusing on Ardashir's valor in the final combat with the Parthians, the Firuzābād relief is emphasizing the support and participation of Shāpur, along with a beardless prince that may be the latter's son, Ohrmazd. More importantly, it is Shāpur who is depicted at the center of the composition, and it is his combat that occupies most of the space. In Naqsh-e Rostam, Ardashir presented his victory over Artabān as the triumph of Ahuramazdā over Ahriman. The Firuzābād battle relief, however, by presenting it as a battle of mortals without the involvement of deities, undermines Ardashir's propaganda based on a religious theme. On the other hand, I see a clear benefit for Shāpur, presenting the battle as a family effort, with him occupying center stage. One must therefore consider the possibility that it was ordered by Shāpur, rather than his father.

<sup>31</sup> Soudavar 2006, pp. 166-67.

irrespective of the meaning of *čiθra* in this composition, it seems that Sasanian functionaries seized upon this epithet to create a caricature of the cow (*gao*) by combining three phases of the Moon. Indeed, expanding on the Moon description of the Avesta (Yt 7.2), the *Bundahišn* describes how in a first phase called *andar-māh* it grows from a state of nothingness into a thin crescent shape, to subsequently reach a state of fullness called *por-māh*, and to ultimately follow a reverse path in the second half of the month.<sup>32</sup> In the course of its monthly evolution, the Moon will therefore have three distinct shapes: nothingness symbolized by a short line, thinness by a crescent, and the full moon by a circle. The visual combination of these three symbols in the cow sign, however, does not follow the regular evolution of the Moon, but a line-circle-crescent order to obtain a cow-head caricature.

**The three-dot sign** – In the same way that *farr* had multiple representations, and the Moon was generally represented by a crescent or a cow head, Tishtrya also had multiple symbols. One such symbol is a single star within a crescent. As the brightest star at night, and a companion to the Aryan *xvarnah* (Yt 18.5-7), it would certainly be invoked before any other star.<sup>33</sup> A second is the winged horse, because in one of his avatars, Tishtrya comes to earth in the form of a flying horse to disperse the waters (Yt 8:18). Interestingly, the winged horse often has a star sign incorporated in its design to emphasize its affiliation to Tishtrya (fig. 33).<sup>34</sup>

A third is the three-dot sign that appear on the reverse of Sasanian coins (figs. 9, 13) or on crowns (fig 5). The latter certainly depicts a celestial body, because in the crown of the Sogdian goddess Nana, it sits inside the crescent in lieu of the more common single star (fig. 32). More importantly, in a coin (*Jital*) of the governor of Kabul under the Saffārid Ya`qub Layth (840-879), which combines an Arabic inscription with a Sanskrit one (fig. 35), we see on its obverse a warrior mounted on a horse marked by the three dots, and on the obverse, a combination of the above mentioned three symbols: a cow, a child sign,

<sup>32</sup> Dādaghi 1990, p. 115.

<sup>33</sup> Soudavar 2006, p. 175.

<sup>34</sup> For a horse carrying wings and a star on a Benaki Museum Textile see Camparetti 2006, p. 98.

and a single star.<sup>35</sup> Two centuries after the Arab conquests, coin designers on the edge of Iranian lands still understood the auspicious nature of these symbols and the close association with each other. The reverse symbols refer of course to the exact three nighttime entities that we have enumerated here: Apam-Napāt, the Moon, and Tishtrya; and the three-dot cluster on the horse reinforces its tie to Tishtrya: instead of the star on the horse of the Sasanian textile (fig. 33), we have three dots here. But in the same way that the Avestic epithet of the Moon was used to create the cow-head symbol, it is the epithet *afš-čiθra* of Tishtrya that provides the key to the understanding of the three-dot sign.

Taking my cue from the NP verb *afšāndan* (spraying, scattering), I had suggested that *afš* meant water droplets, and *afš-čiθra* meant scintillating like rain drops.<sup>36</sup> Martin Schwartz was the first to point out that present etymological studies on the verb negate any connection with the Avestic *afš*.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, a recently published dictionary of Iranian verbs decomposes *afšāndan* into the suffix *\*apa* and the verb *\*shān* (to shake).<sup>38</sup> While my initial assumption may have been fortuitously derived,, good old Rudaki (859-941) provided the proof I needed. He had used the word *afšak* with the meaning “dew”:

باغ ملک آمد طری از رشحه کلك وزیر      زان که افشک می کند مر باغ و بستان را طری  
The garden of kingdom became verdant by the sprinkles of the vizier's pen  
Because **dew** makes garden and orchard verdant<sup>39</sup>

Since *afšak* (with the diminutive suffix “ak”) is dew, *afš* would be slightly bigger, i.e., a drop of water. The celebrated poet Sa'di (1194-1292) uses the plural *afšān* for rain, and another poet uses the word *afšanak* with the same meaning of dew:<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> For more on these *Jitals* see Tye 1995, p. 36.

<sup>36</sup> Soudavar 2006, pp. 166-67. In the Dehkhodā dictionary, half of the applications of this verb relate to liquids.

<sup>37</sup> Oral communication at the ECIS6 conference in Vienna.

<sup>38</sup> Cheung 2007, p. 371; I am indebted to Samra Azarnouche for giving me this reference.

<sup>39</sup> Rudaki 1994, p. 150.

<sup>40</sup> Dehkhodā 1993, 2:2636

نظاره چمن اردیبهشت خوش باشد      بر درخت زند باد نوبهار افشان  
There is much pleasure in looking at the green grass of Spring

As the Spring Wind hits the tree with **rain**

شد عرق ریزان پریرو زیر زلفش از حجاب      بر گل رعنا مگر که افشنگ افتاده است  
Sweat dripped down from the hair locks of the beautiful maiden under veil  
As if **dew** had fallen on a colorful flower

Whit this array of *afš* derivatives all pointing to a meaning of dew and droplet, we can begin to understand why the three dots on the coins, looking very much like a cluster of dew, may symbolize Tishtrya's epithet of *afš-čīθra*. The question though is: why three droplets? It's because the association of the number three with Tishtrya stems not only from his three avatars in ten days intervals (Yt 8:13 - 18), but from the fact that its very name meant "the three-starred one" (like the English name Tristar), or "belonging to the group of three stars."<sup>41</sup> The adoption of the three-dot sign was probably due to an iconographic concern as well. Because, the single dot that exists on many coins (figs. 9, 36, 37) could well symbolize a droplet, but not unequivocally; a cluster of three, however, produced an unequivocal representation Tishtrya based on its etymology. On the other hand, since the epithet *afš-čīθra* was not exclusive to Tishtrya, but was applied to stars in general (Yt 12:39), a single dot could be used for the generic representation of stars. Thus, in a post-Sasanian coin of `Abdollah b. Zubayr (624-92), at a time when coins were designed with surreptitious auspicious symbols, we can see the single dot appearing, in additions to the three-dot cluster, next to the star and crescent (fig. 34).<sup>42</sup> Moreover, because of the aquatic nature of the three-dot sign, it could also be visualized as three pearls; and that is why it frequently adorns Anāhitā's dress, as in Bandyān (figs. 38).

The coins of Persis (figs. 36, 37) provide additional information. Since their rulers have a crescent and dot on their tiara, instead of the more common crescent and star, one may conclude that the visualization of *afš-čīθra* as a dot was already practiced by the

<sup>41</sup> Panaino 1995, pp. 9-10.

<sup>42</sup> The three-dot sign must have remained as an auspicious in Central Asia, for, it was picked by Timur as his personal *tamghā* sign; see Bernardini 1995, p. 23.

predecessors of Ardashir in Persis. Moreover, figure 36 displays next to the Persis king, at a place where usually appears a crescent or a star (see for instance fig. 2), a triskeles sign. It is not beyond the realm of possible, that they were already referring to Tishtrya, not as “the three-starred one,” but as a star that had an alignment with three stars (δ, ε, ζ Orionis) on the belt of the constellation of Orion.<sup>43</sup>

One should also note that the juxtaposition of the child sign and the three-dot sign next to the fire altar in figure 13, reflects the content of Yt 8:4 in which Tishtrya is said to derive its brilliance from Apam-Napāt.<sup>44</sup> As Lord of the night, Apam-Napāt is in fact the driving force behind all night elements, including the Moon. Two silver plates (one at the Hermitage and one recently offered for sale, fig. 26),<sup>45</sup> in which the cows of the Moon’s chariot are being pulled by an Eros-type Apam-Napāt, reemphasize the nocturnal powers of this deity.

We can therefore see that iconography and etymology go hand in hand to confirm my initial assumption that *afš* meant droplet in Avestic, and not water in general.

As for the NP *afšāndan*, the discovery of the words *afšak*, *afšanak* and *afšān* perhaps paves the way for a new philological construct of this verb.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Panaino 1995, pp. 10-16.

<sup>44</sup> Soudavar 2006, p.164, 167.

<sup>45</sup> For a similar composition on a plate of the Hermitage, see *Splendeur* 1993, p. 163.

<sup>46</sup> Nicholas Sims-Williams and Xavier Tremblay have both suggested that I need not invoke *afšāndan* to make my point on *afš* being a droplet. Nevertheless, the etymology of *afšāndan* merits further investigation. I proposed the following possibility to Sims-Williams: *afš* (droplet) => *afšāndan* (putting water into a state of droplets, i.e., pulverizing, spraying) as *čarx* (wheel) => *čarxāndan* (to make something turn like a wheel). His comments: “If *xwābāndan* (beside *xwābānīdan*) and *čarkhāndan* are really attested, that implies that NP does sometimes form denominative verbs with suffix -āndan (beside -ānīdan), which would certainly remove one possible objection to your derivation of *afšāndan* from \**afš*. But *afšān-/afšāndan* “to spread, scatter, sow” is already well-attested in Pahlavi, where the suffix forming denominative verbs is -ēn/-ēnīdan rather than -ān/-ānīdan as in NP (see MacKenzie, *Concise Pahlavi Dictionary*, p. 30). That means that *afšān-/afšāndan* as a denominative from \**afš* would be at least a very unusual formation in Pahlavi” (private communication). The polemic seems to subsist. But the fact is that Sasanian coinage clearly shows that *afš* was understood as droplets.

# PĀRSĀ/PĀRSIG

It is rather puzzling that all of the extra signage on the reverse of the above mentioned Sasanian coins concerns nighttime entities. I had previously given a tentative explanation: that the solar rings on the obverse reflected the solar radiance of *farr*, and the signage on the reverse pertained to nighttime *farr* purveyors.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps. But one still wonders about the strong emphasis on nighttime at the expense of the more natural, and more universal, solar and daytime entities. The word *pārsig*, which appears on two different seal imprints of a certain Weh-Shāpur, seemed to offer a further clue to the solving of this enigma. But before I explore this possibility, I would like to present a new reading for the *spāhbed* seal of Weh-Shāpur, which may then be applied to all other seals of the same type published by Ryka Gyselen.<sup>48</sup>



	<p><u>Gyselen:</u> [wydšhpw]ly ZY 'sppty ZY p'lsky wēh-šābuhr ī aspbed ī pārsig Wēh-Shāpur, Persian aspbed</p>
	<p><u>Gyselen:</u> wydšhpwly ZY 'sppty ZY p'lsyk {k} (štlr)pty W hwytk hwslwdy LBAY 'yl'n kwsty ZY nymwlc sp'hpty wēh-šābuhr ī aspbed ī pārsig ud šahr(?)...bed ud hujadag Khusrō wuzurg erān kust ī nēmroz spāhbed Wēh-Shāpur, Persian aspbed, chief of ... of the empire, (?) and "well-omened Khusrō", grandee, spāhbed of the Aryans, side of the south</p>

Table 2 – Two Seals of Wēh-Shāpur

I see two problems in the final translation of the second seal: (a) as an epithet, the formula "well-omened Khusro" is unattested and highly improbable, (b) there is a contradiction in calling somebody the general

<sup>47</sup> Soudavar 2006, p. 175.

<sup>48</sup> Gyselen 2001, pp. 39, 46; Gyselen 2007, pp. 270, 284.



of a whole nation (whether Erān or the Aryans), and then restrict his command to a smaller area. I suggest that the primary reason for the presence of the ideogram LBAy was not to obtain *wuzurg*, but to inject the notion of “quarter,” as the Arabic *rob`* (one quarter) or *rab`* (quarters). Since the number four was written by the ideogram ALBA (MP *chahār*, Arabic: *arba`*), it made sense to write 1/4 in the same vein. The purpose of this exercise was to emphasize that the *kust* called *nēmroz* was one of the four divisions created by Khosro. The reading that I propose is therefore the following:

wyđšhpwly ZY `sppty ZY p`lsyk W (štłr)pty W hwytk hwsłw ky<sup>49</sup>  
 LBAy `yl`n kwsty ZY nymłwc sp`hpty  
*wēh-šābuhr ī aspbed ī pārsig ud šahr(?)...bed ud hujadag Khusrō*  
*ki 1/4 (kard)*<sup>50</sup> *erān kust ī nēmroz spāhbed*  
 Wēh-Shāpur, the *pārsig aspbed*, and chief of ... of the empire, (?)  
 and General of the *kust* of Nēmroz (created by) the blessed Khosro  
 who quartered Erān



In this formula, we have the name of the king followed by *ki* (who), and an unwritten verb (*kard*) implying the division of Erān into four.<sup>51</sup> In another seal however, we not only have Ohrmazd in lieu of Khosro, but under LBAy (1/4) appears what I believe is a shorthand version of the verb *kard*.<sup>52</sup> The relevant section of the inscription (in dark) would then read as: “*Ohrmazd 1/4 kard Erān.*”

<sup>49</sup> The usual spelling of the article *ki* is through the ideogramme MNW. It seems, however, that in order to economize precious space on a seal, the engraver has opted for a direct transcription k-y. This article pronounced nowadays as *ke*, was written as *ki* in the first few centuries after the birth of New Persian. See also note 69.

<sup>50</sup> I am not sure how 1/4 was pronounced; perhaps *ek tasum*

<sup>51</sup> The absence of the verb here recalls the lack of the verb *dārad* (has) in the political slogan *ki čīhr az yazdān*.

<sup>52</sup> Gyselen reads the word under LBAy as an undefined “*āt*”; Gyselen 2001, p. 38. One should note that the same word appears after Erān in another *spāhbed* seal, Gyselen 2001, p. 37. The mobility of this word, i.e., the fact that it can be put after either Erān or 1/4, seems to confirm it as a verb.

One must then assume that the divisions of Erān may have changed from one king to another, and the name of each king defined a different geographical expanse for these divisions. As Gyselen has suggested, the Khosro on these seals may refer to Khosro I (r. 531-79), who is credited by the sources, to have instituted the four-partite division of Erān. By the latter seal though, it seems that Ohrmazd IV (579-90) modified that division. One can then assume that Khosro II (r. 590-628) modified it as well, especially after his initial inroads into Byzantium. These seals may therefore pertain to Khosro II's generals.

Coming back to the problem of nighttime symbols, I had noticed that among all the generals studied by Gyselen, the seals of Wēh-Shāpur had the highest number of such signs: a moon crescent, winged horses, and the cow-head sign (Table 2). On the other hand, a recently published article by Fatemeh Jahānpur about a high altitude lake called Chashmeh Sau or Chashmeh Sabz near Tus in Khorāsān, provided an interesting remark about priestly nighttime activities.<sup>53</sup> Similar to Takht-e Solaymān, there had been a fire temple next to the Chashmeh Sau, where according to Hamdollāh-e Mostowfi (1281-1349):

پارسایان در شب بر کنار چشمه احیا داشته اند

The *pārsās* held nighttime ceremonies next to the lake<sup>54</sup>

The NP word *pārsā* generally means a pious man, but Mostowfi is clearly using it to designate non-Islamic priests, in lieu of the usual term *mowbad*. One is then led to believe that he is referring to a special category of Iranian priests who held nighttime ceremonies. The NP *pārsā* is similar to the term that Darius had used in his inscriptions to qualify his genealogy as “*pārsā* son of *pārsā*,” which I had argued to designate not a permanent quality but a transient one.<sup>55</sup> Subsequently, I suggested that *pārsā* had priestly connotations.<sup>56</sup> The comment of Mostowfi, and the *pārsig* seals also tend to reinforce the notion that the province of Fārs (*Pārsā*) was perhaps where priests valued most water-

<sup>53</sup> <http://web3.ehost-services.com/hemranib/articles.htm>. For the mention of this lake in the *Bundahišn*, see Cereti 2007, p. 56.

<sup>54</sup> Mostowfi 1983, pp. 148-49.

<sup>55</sup> Soudavar 2006, pp. 170-72.

<sup>56</sup> Soudavar 2009 (forthcoming).

related deities and night ceremonies.<sup>57</sup> Whereas Zarathustra attacked and banned sacrificial ceremonies held in nighttime,<sup>58</sup> one wonders if the *pārsā* ceremonies were not to replace those banned ceremonies.<sup>59</sup> Still, all this does not provide us with a clear answer for our enigma. It therefore remains unresolved pending further evidence. If I have evoked it is to draw attention to a possible connection between the overemphasis on nighttime entities and the word *pārsā*.

#### RULES OF SYNTAX

In their quest to project greater glory, which is often expressed as *farreh-afzun* (may glory be increased), Sasanian functionaries also devised rules of syntax, three of which I shall explain hereafter:

**Rule 1: The number-symbol syntax** – A simple way to project the *farreh-afzun* was the use of a multiplying factor: the combination of a number sign with a symbol of *farr* obviously projected an abundance of *farr*. Thus, grandees of the realm, holding a lotus between the thumb and index of their right hand, conveyed a wish of 10000 *farrs* for Shāpur I in Dārāb (fig. 22).<sup>60</sup> Same is true for the seal image of an isolated hand pressing a lotus between two fingers (fig. 24).

**Rule 2: Associative syntax** – Clearly, multiple symbols of *farr* had the associative effect to increase the *farr* (i.e., to project the *farreh-afzun*). A corollary to this rule would be that the presence of symbols such as a scorpion along the *farr* symbols listed above must be auspicious as well. In other words, the Zoroastrianism that we know today, and which considers the scorpion to be a noxious animal (*xrafstar*), was not all prevailing in Sasanian times. But more importantly, since the notion of *farr* was tribal in essence and only appropriated for gods in order to elevate their stature,<sup>61</sup> it was not

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<sup>57</sup> Tishtrya, by its epithet *afš-čīθra*, and by its role in the distribution of waters (Yt 8:34), is water related. Also, because of the rise of the seas at nighttime, water is described in the *Bundahišn* to be “associated with the Moon”; Dādaghi, p.110.

<sup>58</sup> Dustkhāh 2002, p. 25; Panaino 2004b, p. 47.

<sup>59</sup> One should also note that the only rock-relief in which Mithra and Apam-Napāt appear in tandem, at the expense of Anāhitā, is in Tāq-e Bostān, outside the stronghold of Sasanian conservatism of Fārs; Soudavar 2003, pp. 52-56.

<sup>60</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 59-62.

<sup>61</sup> Soudavar 2009 (forthcoming)

Zoroastrian specific. As an ancient cultural symbol it simply projected auspiciousness. Thus, Armenians saw no problem in integrating a pair of wings with their cross called *P`ark` Khāch`* (“Glorious Cross”), because *p`ark`* was the Armenian equivalent of the Persian *farr*.<sup>62</sup> And on a recently published Christian seal (fig. 25),<sup>63</sup> we can observe a multitude of signs: hand sign of 10000, *dastār*, scorpion and cross, all signaling auspiciousness through an associative syntax. The appearance of a triskeles on figure 24, in conjunction with a 10000 *farr* symbol, confirms it as an auspicious symbol.

**Rule 3: The Word-Symbol Syntax** – A solitary word *afzun* (or *afzut*), meaning “increase” or “increased,” often appears on seals, coins, and vessels. Catalogs describing the composition of these items often transcribe and translate this word without explaining its purpose. Yet, the fact is that by itself, this word is meaningless. To gain a meaning it needs an object. Something needs to be increased, and that is the *farr*, the presence of which is not only necessary for the perception of authority, but for the well being of man in general (see Appendix I). Thus, the presence of this word portends the auspicious wish of *farreh-afzun*. If the *farr* precedes it in full letters, its meaning is quite clear, if not, one must seek a complement for it in the form of symbols. We would then have a hybrid syntax, half word, half image. Such an artifice is by no means an attribute of Sasanian times, but continued in the Islamic period as well.<sup>64</sup> A seal imprint, for instance, illustrates this word-symbol syntax in its most basic form (fig. 23):<sup>65</sup> on it, the solitary word *afzun* is only accompanied by the image of the beribboned ram that Mas`udi had qualified as a symbol of *farr*. It thus unequivocally conveys the notion of *farreh-afzun*. I had previously produced two other examples of this application in Sasanian times: on coins, and on a stucco element (fig. 18).<sup>66</sup> In both of these applications the solitary word *afzun*, is complemented by a multiplicity of *farr* symbols to project a wish of abundant of *farr*. On the coins we have multiple radiating rings, and on the stucco element, a pair of wings and a

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<sup>62</sup> Soudavar 2003, p. 21.

<sup>63</sup> From the ex-Foroughi collection, Gyselen 2006, p. 57.

<sup>64</sup> Soudavar 2003, p. 18, note 48.

<sup>65</sup> Gyselen 2007, p.349, VA/1 (1).

<sup>66</sup> Soudavar 2003, p. 18-20.

multitude of pearls. Abundant *farr* is thus conveyed through associative multiplicity and through hybrid syntax.

The relevance of this syntax becomes even more apparent in conjunction with three seal imprints recently published by Ryka Gyselen. For, as I shall argue, their text becomes much more meaningful if adjacent symbols of *farr* (pearl roundels) are integrated in their texts.

#### ĀMĀRGAR SEALS

In her valiant attempt to establish an administrative map of Sasanian Iran, Gyselen has tabulated, among others, seal imprints of *āmārgars* (lit. accountants) or provincial tax officials. Typically, they bear the imprint of the word *āmārgar* (i.e. the function of the official), plus the name(s) of administrative domains. Unfortunately, the rendering of the geographical names from two of these imprints suffers from a series of misconceptions. Firstly, Gyselen perceives unnecessary extra letters in names, which she ascribes to scribal inadvertence or engraver mistake. Yet, even if the latter two were only semi-literate, one has to assume that the *āmārgar* himself was a fully literate person who would have not tolerated the use—on a daily basis—of an erroneous personal seal. As for the scribe, who had to fit a long inscription in a tiny space, and the engraver, who had to toil on a hard stone, neither had an incentive to add letters that required extra space and carving. To the contrary, their tendency, as evidenced by the scribal practices of the Islamic era as well as Sasanian times, was to adopt shorthand conventions (at the very least, for commonly used or obvious words). Second, Gyselen does not take into consideration the Iranian practice of wrapping names with convoluted sentences; a practice very much in use in the Islamic era, and probably inherited from earlier times.<sup>67</sup> Thus, by cutting such a sentence into fictitious parts, she creates geographical names that never existed. Third, the name-sentences of these two seal-imprints start with the word *afzut* that becomes meaningful only if complemented by the *farr* evoked through

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<sup>67</sup> For instance the artist `Ali-ashraf would sign his name with the idiom “*ze ba`d-e Mohammad `Ali ashraf ast*,” which can be read in two ways: (a) after the Prophet Mohammad, (his cousin) Ali is the most noble, (b) after Mohammad (i.e., the celebrated painter Mohammad-Zamān) comes `Ali-ashraf; Ivanov 1996, p. 24.

the representation of pearl roundels. These multiple roundels had a double function: the wish of abundant *farr* for its owner, and the completion of the written text through a word-symbol syntax. Table 3 provides Gyselen’s readings as well as my own interpretations. The darker letters are those considered as “extra” by Gyselen, but read differently by me.<sup>68</sup>



 <p style="text-align: center;">Seal 1</p>	<p><u>Gyselen (two cities):</u>  `pzwt hwsll<b>ky</b> štl wyn&lt;n&gt;`lt yzdklty  <i>Abzud-Khusrō, Shahr-winnārd-Yazdgird</i></p> <p><u>Soudavar (one city):</u>  ⊙ `pzwt hwsly <b>ky</b><sup>69</sup> štlwyn`lt yzdklty  <i>Farreh afzud Khosro ki shahrvinārd Yazdgird</i>  Khosro’s <i>farr</i> was increased when he rebuilt the city/citadel of Yazdgird</p>
 <p style="text-align: center;">Seal 2</p>	<p><u>Gyselen ( 4 cities):</u>  `yl`n `pzndt hwsll<b>dy</b> W nwsy` (?) W `lw`ystn W `lcn  Ērān-abzud-Khusrō, (?) nsyn` (?) , Arwāyestan, Arzōn</p> <p><u>Soudavar (2 cities + one erased):</u>  ⊙ `yl`n `pznit<sup>70</sup> hwsllw <b>ky</b> nwsynyt [ ? ] W `lw`ystn W `lcn  <i>Farreh Erān afzonid Khosro ki niwisenid<sup>71</sup> [ ? ] ud Aruastān ud Arzon</i>  Khosro (caused) the Iranian <i>farr</i> to increase when he proclaimed (victory) over [ ? ] and Aruastan and Arzon</p>

Table 3 – Seals of *āmārgars*

<sup>68</sup> Gyselen 2002, p. 40; Gyselen 2007, p. 130, 134

<sup>69</sup> See note 49 supra.

<sup>70</sup> Another possible reading is *afzon k[r]d*.

<sup>71</sup> According to MacKenzie 1971 (p. 60), the verb “to proclaim” is spelled both *nwykyn-ytn* = *niweynidan* and *nwstn* = *niwistan*. It seems that here, it’s a combination of both. The last letter (t) which was close to the scratched city name, seems to have suffered as well.

As a first observation, a feature such as the connected “l-w” in “štlwyn`lt” (*shahrvinārd*) vouches for the precision of the script, because it signals that a composite verb like NP *shahrsāzi* (city rebuilding) should be considered as one word. Second, one has to assume that the name of a king such as Khosro had a standard spelling (*hwsłwy*) observed by all of the bureaucracy. On seal 1, it is spelled in full, *hwsłwy*,<sup>72</sup> and on seal 2 it is spelled without its superfluous ending (y). A scribe would never change this standardized name into *hwsłkdy* or *hwsłwdy*. It is a sacrosanct chancery practice, whether in hieroglyphic or Classical Persian, to use a standardized name for kings. Finally, in both of these seals the names of the administrative districts have been embellished by a sentence that serves as a eulogy to the king.

The reading of these seals must be done in light of the tumultuous political environment of Khosro II’s reign. Khosro was ousted from his throne, regained it with Byzantine help but had to fight the propaganda of his rival Bahrām-e Chobin (r. 590-91), who claimed a higher legitimacy through Parthian descent. A loss of throne was equivalent to a loss of *farr*; and the recapture of throne meant the recovery of *farr*, but a weakened one. Thereafter, Khosro strove to buttress the perception of his *farr* through visual propaganda,<sup>73</sup> and through war with his neighbors. Victories in war always translated in enhanced Glory. Thus, the early successes in his wars with the Byzantines, not only allowed him to claim a strengthened *farr*, but also allowed Sasanian functionaries to eulogize him in their customary exaggerated ways. The above seals offer prime examples of such eulogies. Together with a third one that I shall discuss here below, they all pertain to north-west territories which changed hands several times between the Persians and the Byzantines.

I believe that the first seal pertains to Qal`e-ye Yazdgird (near Sar-e Pol-e Zahāb, in northwest Iran). Khosro must have recaptured it and rebuilt its citadel, the vestiges of which are still visible today. The *āmārgar* is claiming that as a result of this, Khosro’s *farr* was increased. What is interesting though, is that the *āmārgar* of the second seal uses a different formula for Khosro’s victories over Arzon,

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<sup>72</sup> The ending w and y are crammed together.

<sup>73</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 17-19; Daryaei 1997, pp. 43-45.

Aruastan and a third city that has been scratched out, leaving a big gap in the otherwise tightly written inscription.<sup>74</sup> Arzon refers to present day Erzerum that Persian and Arab historians referred to as ارزنة الروم (the Roman Arzen). Together with Aruastan, it was part of the territory captured by Khosro I, but given back by Kosro II to Maurice (r. 582-602) according to Sebeos.<sup>75</sup> They again changed hands during the wars with Heraclius (r. 610-41). Because these cities were essentially Byzantine ones, therefore part of an-Erān, their capture was due to the Aryan *xvarnah* (Yt 18). At the same time, the latter benefitted from these victories and grew stronger. Thus, the inscription credits Khosro<sup>76</sup> for causing these effects. In contrast to the first seal in which the *farr* of the king is increased for the capture of an Iranian city, here, the mother of all *farrs*, the Aryan *xvarnah*, has been increased by the efforts of Khosro to capture an-Erān territory. It is probably for this reason that the verb used is not the usual *afzut*, but *afzonid* (or *afzon kard*), which would mean “caused to increase” rather than “increased.” As for the missing city name, it may have referred to another citadel of the region (such as Dara) which was destroyed or changed hand after the initial carving of the seal.

A third seal imprint produced by Gyselen is that of the *āmārgar* of a district referred to as Erān-āsān-kar-Kawād, for which city she has also produced the seal of its *ostāndār* (governor).<sup>77</sup> The latter though, displays two added features compared to the former: it has a prominent “Erān” written at its center, and a pearl roundel on the rim (at 3 o’clock). It is to be noted that in the *āmārgar* seal, the three first letters of the second line (in black) are grouped together, and the last two of these are connected, suggesting that they are all part of the same word. This word can only be *kard*, otherwise the preceding word (*āsān*) is not meaningful. A primary reading therefore gives:

*Erān āsān kard wāt* = The wind pacified (*āsān kard*) Erān.

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<sup>74</sup> Gyselen has shown how the seal of the same general, was modified from one impression to the other, by the addition of the word Mihrān; Gyselen 2007, pp. 254-57. By the same token, one can very well imagine that a word was scratched when the political situation changed.

<sup>75</sup> <http://rbedrosian.com/seb1.htm>

<sup>76</sup> It may actually refer to Khosro I.

<sup>77</sup> Gyselen, pp. 92-93, 138-39.





	
<u>Gyselen:</u> 'yl'n 's'n klk(w')ty 'm'lkly <i>Amārgār</i> of Erān-āsān-kar-Kawād	<u>Gyselen:</u> ☉ 'yl'n 'yl'n 's'n klk(w')ty 'wst'nd'l Erān, <i>ostāndār</i> of Erān-āsān-kar-Kawād

Table 4 – Seal imprints of two functionaries of the same district

Once again we are dealing with a sentence that is evoking a district in an oblique way. I suggest that this district is the one that was referred to as Arrān in Islamic times for the following reasons. First, while Persian names seldom have a *tashdid*, the spelling 'yr'n (*ayrān*), easily justifies the double “r” in Arrān, which according to Yāqut is a Persian name (*a`jami*).<sup>78</sup> Second, Arrān is known to be wind ridden. The very name of the city of Baku derives from *bād-kubeh* (i.e., wind-pounded), and the local population of this region considers this constant wind to be a blessing, for otherwise their earth would be infested by serpents.<sup>79</sup> Third, the third letter of *kard* is deliberately written in a way that it could be simultaneously read as d and k, thus suggesting a second reading: *Erān āsān kard Kawād* (Kawād pacified Iran), which ties in well with Ebn-e Athir's information that Kawād repelled the Khazar invaders from that region, and built many cities there.<sup>80</sup> This second reading, which was easier to understand, must have finally prevailed, because the *Sharestānīhā ī Erānshahr* spells this sentence/name with both letters **d** and **k**: *Erān āsān kard Kawād*.<sup>81</sup> Fourth, this interpretation then provides a justification for the presence of the additional *Erān* and the pearl roundel on the *ostāndār* seal. Together they signify *xwarreh Erān* (Aryan *xvarnah*) that according to Yt 18 is accompanied by the Strong Wind. By adding this hybrid syntax to his seal, the *ostāndār* was also pretending that his district, the wind-ridden

<sup>78</sup> Dehkhodā 1993, I:1369.

<sup>79</sup> I have heard this from several people who have worked in the area.

<sup>80</sup> Dehkhodā 1993, I:1369, Ebn-e Athir 1986, p. 83.

<sup>81</sup> See the Pahlavi inscription in Daryae 2002, line 55.

Arrān, was the cradle of the Aryan *xvarnah*. There is otherwise no explanation as to why a second Erān appears on this seal.

#### APPENDIX I – THE ČIHR AZ YAZDĀN IDIOM

Six years ago, in the authoritative *Sylloge Nummorum Sasanidorum*, Prods Oktor Skjaervo translated the ubiquitous Sasanian slogan of *ki čih̄r az yazdān* as: “whose seed is from the gods.”<sup>82</sup> In a more recent article, one that seems to be a response to my 2006 *Iranica Antiqua* article but curiously fails to even mention it, he reconsiders the meaning of *čih̄r* by pointing out two important issues that I only had raised: (a) that it was inexorably linked to Darius’ claim of being “*arya, arya čiča*,” (b) that the whole idiom had the same structure as Yt 8:4, where Tishtrya is said to obtain its *čiθra* from Apam-Napāt. Yet, he favors the Bartholomae meanings of “seed, semen” despite the acknowledgment that in Avestic, male semen is defined by the term “*xšudra*,” and the fact that there is otherwise no evidence of the use of *čiθra* in that capacity. To circumvent this problem he advances a rather strange hypothesis: “It is therefore possible that the Iranian word originally referred to some part of man that was passed on from generation to generation, linking them, and was thus logically thought to be something passed on through semen.”<sup>83</sup> I wonder what “part” of Apam-Napāt was passed through to Tishtrya!

He then addresses Antonio Panaino’s 2004 conclusion in respect to the meaning of *čih̄r* in this Sasanian idiom (“could be actually interpreted as an image”) by raising a very valid objection: in the rock reliefs of Ardashir and Shāpur, the sentence containing this idiom is prefaced by the word *paitkar* (this is the effigy of...), which renders the meaning of “image” redundant and superfluous. Yet, once again, he circumvents his own objection by another strange hypothesis: that the Sasanians who formulated this, had forgotten the original “meanings” of *čih̄r* and used it with the more “concrete” meanings of “form, appearance.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Skjaervo 2002, pp. 53-57.

<sup>83</sup> Alram, Blet-Lemarquand, and Skjaervo 2007, pp. 34-37.

<sup>84</sup> Alram, Blet-Lemarquand, and Skjaervo 2007, p. 37.

What I find baffling in the above, and other examples that I shall cite below, is the attempt to present philological constructs or justifications without any consideration for their context and target audience. If metaphors were used in a political or religious context, they had to be *imaginable* and easy to understand for a wide segment of the population. Their purpose would have been to enhance the effectiveness of the religious message through accessible imagery and not through indecipherable riddles. More alarming is the use of amnesia theory in the Persian context. Since Persian culture is based on an oral tradition, its basic thinking mode and fundamental ideas are passed with remarkable consistency from one generation to another. Names and facts may be suppressed and forgotten, but myths and metaphors remain the same, albeit presented in a new garb.

There are three basic problems with the notion that in claiming to be “*arya, arya čiça*,” Darius meant to have been of Aryan seed, semen or origin:

- 1- If Darius and his son made this claim repetitively, it must have had, if not unique, at least a highly exclusive connotation. But considering that most of the enemies he killed and represented in Bisotun were actually Aryans, none of the above three meanings are of any value. To be of Aryan blood or of Aryan origin was not a distinctive characteristic and brought no glory to Darius.
- 2- Today, one may say that I am French and of French origin, as opposed to a French person of Hungarian descent. This is because to be “French” now means to hold a French passport. But there were no passports in Darius’ time. People’s identity was based on their tribal affiliation. Once Darius claimed to be an Aryan, he said it all. There was no need to emphasize once more that his DNA was also Aryan. Clovis the Frank, would never say that I am a Frank *and* of Frankish origin. Such a redundancy in a lapidary inscription filled with political overtones was simply unacceptable.<sup>85</sup>
- 3- In Susa (DSf 8-22), Darius insists that he is a *man*, chosen by Ahuramazdā. And where he uses the word “*čiça*” he is still using it in a worldly context. If the Sasanians are using the same word (*čihr*) in their political slogan with the meaning of “origin,” then we are faced

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<sup>85</sup> For more on Darius’ inscription see Soudavar 2006, pp.170-77.

with a radical conceptual shift for Iranian kings, from man to deity. If on the other hand, in the Sasanian context, the same word takes the meaning of image, as Skjaervo and Panaino suggest, then we are faced with the problem of a radical shift in the meaning of the same word. To explain the latter, Skjaervo advances the amnesia theory; but as I demonstrated with the three signs of Apam-Napāt, the Moon and Tishtrya, Sasanians had a precise understanding of the etymology and conceptual roles of Avestan entities. Moreover, what would be the meaning of this word on a Sasanian seal that bears the inscription: *čīhr Ohrmazd afzun*?<sup>86</sup> Does it mean it wishes Ohrmazd to have a larger image? More images? Or did the scribe who wrote this come suddenly out of amnesia and wished more seed or semen for Ohrmazd? If there are no valid answers to these questions, it's because all the above assumptions about the meaning of *čiça /čīhr* are wrong.

In what follows, I shall try to emphasize the equivalence of the concept of *farr* with that of *čīhr*, and argue that the latter was, in effect, a manifestation of the former. While I had previously proposed that the only valid meanings for *čīhr* were brilliance and appearance, I shall suggest here that in the political and religious context, the primary meaning was brilliance or radiance, and that image and appearance were occasionally used as a secondary meaning only.

The equivalence of these two concepts is based on the following criteria:

- a- That man and deity can both be endowed with them
- b- That their intensity can increase or decrease
- c- That they are a source of power and action
- d- That they can be appropriated by both good and evil
- e- That the good side of it can be increased through good deeds and the performance of religious duties
- f- Good *farr* manifests itself as brilliance and radiance, thus rendering it akin to *čīhr*.

***Farr/xwarrah/xvarnah*** - It has long been established that *farr* is not the privilege of kings alone, but deities as well as ordinary men can be endowed with it. In the Avesta, for instance, Anāhitā is praised on

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<sup>86</sup> Gignoux and Gyselen 1987, p. 95 (PIT9).

account of her *xvarnah* (Yt 5:9), and Tishtrya is qualified as *xvarnah*-endowed (Yt 8:1). The Denkard (3:269) specifies that all persons are endowed with the *farr*, and in the Avesta (Yt 19:53-54), Ahuramazdā wants every man to seek the *xvarnah*, which, in a vivid proof of lasting concepts in the sphere of Persian culture, is reflected—almost verbatim—in the writings of Sohravardi (1145-91) and Abolfazl-e `Allāmi (1551-1602).<sup>87</sup> What is less understood, however, is the *farr* as a source of energy, and the prescriptions for increasing its power. Philippe Gignoux, for instance, gives the following translation of Denkard (3:356):

*“Dādār dahišn ō kār dād har dahišn xweshkār paydāgēnīd ān kār ī pad dahišn rawāgīh xwarrah ast ī ōy dahišn u-š mādag čand rawāgīh ī kār pad-iš ān ī tan.*

The Creator has created the creatures for action. To each creature he revealed his own action (*xweškār*); that action, which is for the propagation of the creation, is the *xwarrah* of this creature and its substance is equal to the propagation of the action in which (is involved) a single body...”

This passage is in the typical escalating style of later Persian literature in which each sentence becomes a stepping stone for the next. Like so many other religious texts, it emphasizes religious duty through the use of the term *xweškār*, which is unfortunately translated by Gignoux as “own work,” thus rendering his translation very opaque.<sup>88</sup> This passage should read:

The Creator gave the (faculty of) action to the created (i.e., man); to each created he revealed his duties (*xweškār*). What (gives) man worthiness (*rawāgīh*)<sup>89</sup> is the *xwarrah* of that man, the substance of which depends on the worthiness of the actions of that one person...

<sup>87</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 2, 7-8.

<sup>88</sup> Gignoux has opted for the word-by-word translation “own work” while acknowledging that De Menasce translates it as duty; Gignoux 2007, p. 178. McKinsey 1971 (p. 96), translates it as dutiful. *xweškār* means the work that can only be performed by one self, which in the religious context can only refer to religious duty. In fact, Denkard 3:358-359, clearly define this self-work as religious duty.

<sup>89</sup> McKinsey 1971 (p. 71), gives “currency” for *rawāgīh*. Gignoux uses “propagation” for the same, which is one meaning of the word, but applies it wrongly to “creation” rather than to the “created.” According to these, the sentence is emphasizing the action which can give man either his full “currency” or his capacity

In other words, it is preaching that good actions, as defined by religious duties, increases the *farr* of man, and thereby his worthiness and well being. The same is emphasized in another passage of Denkard (3:361),<sup>90</sup> wrongly translated by Gignoux for the same reasons:

*arzīgīh i mardōm čand-iš xwarrah mād[ag]*<sup>91</sup>(1) *u-š xwarrah i mād[ag] čand xweškārih* (2) *u-š xweškārih [nimāyed]*<sup>92</sup> *abar xwarrah mād[ag][xwadih]* (3)

“The value of man is equal to the substance of his *xwarrah* (1) and the substance of his *xwarrah* is equal to his own action (2), and his own action is superior to the substance of *xwarrah* (3)”<sup>93</sup>

There is an illogical aspect to the above translation, because “own action” in 2 is equal to *xwarrah*, while it becomes superior to it in 3. Like in the previous passage, this should also follow an escalating pattern:

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for propagation (i.e., evolution). But I believe the meaning here is more akin to NP *rawā* (MP *rawāg*), for which Moin 1974 (2:1680) gives: لايق، سزاوار (worthy). One should also note that Gignoux’ translation of *čand* as “equal” is wrong and misleading (substance cannot be “equal” to propagation). Its literal translation is “how much” and evaluates the quantity of something or the degree of a phenomenon. Its presence before *rawāgīh* (in the last sentence) shows an intention to quantify this entity. This justifies, once more, the use of “worthiness” for *rawāgīh*, because it can be quantified while the other meanings cannot be.

<sup>90</sup> The transliteration provided by Gignoux has certain lacunae that were rectified thanks to a careful transcription (based on Dresden 1966), and analysis, provided by Xavier Tremblay, to whom I am most grateful. He also kindly sent me a copy of the translation of the same passages by Jean de Menasce (Menasce 1972, pp. 323-27). The words and letters in [] are those missing in Gignoux’ text.

<sup>91</sup> Upon consulting the facsimile text, Xavier Tremblay has suggested to me that the last letter in what Gignoux reads as *mād* (m’ty) must be a shorthand k rather than the superfluous y, and therefore the word should read *mādag* as in 3:356.

<sup>92</sup> Gignoux has read this word as *mahist*. However, according to Tremblay, the presence of a vertical stroke before the “m,” which is readable as “n,” and the number of loops in the writing of this word favor the reading *nimāyēd*, which is also the one adopted in Menasce 1972, p. 326.

<sup>93</sup> Gignoux 2007, p. 178. Once again the use of “equal” for *čand* throws Gignoux’ translation off track. One should also note that the use of the word *kamih* (paucity) in the next sentence, is in perfect symmetry with a *čand* meaning “how much” and not “equal” in the previous sentence.

The value of man (depends) on the substantiality of his *xwarrah*; and the substance of his *xwarrah* (depends) on how much (religious) duty he performs; and the performance of one's duties shows, through the substance of his *xwarrah*, his real self.

The above is then followed by an explanation of the reverse phenomenon, i.e., how one loses worthiness, which further justifies the corrections that I introduced above:

*Kāstagiḥ ī-š arz az kamīh ī-š xwarrah (1) ud kamīh ī-š xwarrah čandīh a-xweškārih (2) u-š a-xweškārih [nimāyed] abar zad xwarrah [sahman xwadih] (3)*<sup>94</sup>

The diminution of one's value is due to the paucity of his *xwarrah*; and the paucity of his *xwarrah* (depends) on how undutiful one is; and one's disrespect for duty shows, through diminished *xwarrah*,<sup>95</sup> his limited self.

Like most other religious texts, the aim here is to remind each person of his religious duties. To emphasize their importance, they are linked to the deep-rooted notion of *farr*, which was equivalent in Iranian culture with auspiciousness and success. In Denkart 3:409 it is further emphasized that the *xwarrah xweškārih* (the *xwarrah* derived from observing religious duty) is the instrument of all happiness, and as Gignoux points out, such a *xwarrah* becomes luminous and bright.<sup>96</sup> Denkart 3:326 reminds the believer that works of charity increases the *xwarrah*, and 3:283 enumerates certain qualities of the king that will endow him with an increased *xwarrah* that will shine far and wide. This finds an iconographical parallel in the hunt scene of Tāq-e Bostān, where Khosro is not radiant initially but is depicted with a solar disk after a successful hunt of boars.<sup>97</sup> Thus brilliance and radiance is a manifestation of *farr*, which may be acquired through good deeds, performance of religious duties, heroic acts and victory. This radiance is also referred to as *čih*, the functions and qualities of which mirror those of the *farr*:

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<sup>94</sup> Gignoux 2007, pp. 178-79. His translation of this passage suffers from the same problems as before and are hereby rectified.

<sup>95</sup> *zad* literally meaning hit, evokes diminished capacities.

<sup>96</sup> Gignoux 207, p. 180.

<sup>97</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 8-9, 149.

**Čihr, čiθra** – In Book 5 of the Denkard, a passage (24.29) explains what is needed to restore the radiance of an impoverished soul:

And [in the matter of] the body and soul adorned with a radiance (*čihr*) that has lost its luminosity (*nē-rōz*), [said] luminosity can be suitably restored by the sparkle [generated by] goodness, the aura [generated by] being dutiful [in religious tasks] (*xwarrah ī xwēškārih*), and the beneficial good wisdom, and the straightforward learning, and the desire (*xwāstag*) to help more others (*wēš frayādišnig*), and other excellent blessings that are best suited to reside with God-worshippers.<sup>98</sup>

One can readily see from this passage that, like the *farr*, *čihr* resides with man, but can become weak and loose luminosity, which can then be restored by good deeds. Among the latter is mentioned the *xwarrah ī xwēškārih*, which, as we previously saw, was also an important factor for increasing one's *farr*. In Yt 8:23-25, Tishtrya looses strength because Men had not worshipped him with sacrifice; he regains his strength when Ahuramazdā performs the sacrifice in lieu of Men. The episode clearly underlines the essential role of worship and sacrifice rituals as part of religious duties (*xwēškārih*). The purpose of these rituals was to strengthen gods, who would in turn reflect it back upon the worshippers.

In Yt 13:1-16, Ahuramazdā regards the *xvarnah* of the *frawashis* of the Righteous People as a source of power which allows him to regulate the world. The believer must then wish greater power for Ahuramazdā, and that is exactly what the owner of the seal with the *čihr Ohrmazd afzun* inscription is doing: wishing more power for his god. The more *čihr* has the god, the more powerful becomes the expression *ki čihr az yazdān*, for, the king is deriving his *čihr* (as a manifestation of his *xvarnah*) from the god. The *farr* was considered a source of value and worthiness; likewise, the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* considers the *čihr*, as a source of *nērōg* (power).<sup>99</sup> And in the same way that there was a *xvarnah* attached to the *frawashi* of the Righteous people, there was a *čihr* related to man's soul. The wrong translation of *čihr* will of course obscure this notion, as it has in a recent translation of a passage of the Hādoxt Nask by Almut Hintze:

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<sup>98</sup> Soudavar 2006, p. 156.

<sup>99</sup> Soudavar 2006, pp. 158-60.



(Yt 22.39) *dātarə \*kuua.ciθra \*zi hənti irstanqm uruuqnō yā ašaunqm frauuašaiiō*. (Yt 22.40) *paiti šē aoxta ahurō mazdā spəntat haca maniaot zaraθuštra aēšqm ciθrem vahištāat manāḥat*  
 O creator, of what origin then are the souls of the dead, (namely) the choices of the truthful (men and women)?  
 The Wise Lord answered to him: “From the bounteous spirit, O Zarathustra, (is) their origin, and from best thought.”<sup>100</sup>

The problem of tying the “origin” of man’s soul to “best thought” notwithstanding, the above translation suffers from an internal misconception: it allows an origin for a *dead* man’s soul, presumably different from the one he had when alive. A religious discourse, though, must have a purpose, and I see no purpose in it, as translated above. On the other hand, if *ciθra* is taken as brilliance, then the passage becomes meaningful. Like in any other religion, it asks the fundamental question: what should a man do for the salvation of his soul, for his soul to become radiant? And the answer is: he must have good character (*spəntat*) and good thoughts. The *ciθra*, as the manifestation of one’s *xvarnah*, is then essential for gauging one’s potentials.

An example quoted by Skjaervo further emphasizes the lack of a separate *cihr* for the soul:

“*Ruwānān rāy gōwēnd ku and-uš cihr ne padirēnd dā paymōzēnd nasāh ud cihr ī tanwāren*  
 They say about the souls that they will not receive their form until they don the dead matter and the form of a body.”<sup>101</sup>

It is a very confused translation. Souls have no form, almost universally, and one wonders what donning “dead matter” should mean for a soul. Structurally, the sentence is written as today’s Persian would be:

It is said about the souls that they don’t gain their radiance until they ‘wear’ (i.e., embrace) a corpse and its bodily radiance.

<sup>100</sup> On handout distributed by Almut Hintze on the occasion of her talk at ECIS6, Sept. 2007, Vienna.

<sup>101</sup> Alram, Blet-Lemarquand, and Skjaervo, p. 35.

To “wear a corpse and its bodily radiance” is a pejorative way to say that the soul becomes enveloped by them. In other words, on their own, souls do not acquire radiance; they get it once they enter a body, and their radiance is in fact that of the man to whom they get attached. It was important to dissociate *čīhr* from the soul in order to put the responsibility of its salvation back on Man. If the soul had a separate *čīhr* why should Man strive for good deeds?

Philologists have bent backward in order to attach meanings such as origin, semen and seed to *čiθra*, while turning a blind eye on the inherent problems of their translations. The incongruent translation of “who carries the semen of the bull” for the epithet *gao-čiθra* of the Moon, for instance, was due to a superficial and incorrect reading of the *Bundahišn*.<sup>102</sup> Then came the parallel epithet *aš-čiθra* for Tishtrya translated as “which carries the seed of water.” Since semen didn’t fit the latter, and in order to preserve functional parity, “seed” was used for *gao-čiθra* as well, which created a double-problem: no backward villager of antiquity would accept a metaphor purporting that the bull had seeds instead of semen; nor would he accept as imaginable, the idea that water came out of a seed, since, by the laws of nature, a seed needs water to grow!

In the translation of just one stanza of (Yt 8:4), Panaino adopts two different meanings for *čiθra*: the epithet *aš-čiθra* of Tishtrya is translated as “(who is) the origin of the rains,” and where the star is said to obtain his *čiθra* from Apam-Napāt, it is rendered as “visible form.”<sup>103</sup> Both are problematic. If Tishtrya is the “origin of rains” why are other stars qualified as *aš-čiθra*? Are all stars the “origin” of rain? Why? Since the only visible form that is projected for Apam-Napāt is that of a child, must Tishtrya and all other stars have the “visible form” of a child? When dealing with nighttime celestial entities, which are only perceptible because of their luminosity, isn’t brilliance the more

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<sup>102</sup> In the *Bundahišn*, the Moon never keeps the semen of the bull, and therefore cannot “carry” it; Soudavar 2006, pp. 165-66. As a matter of fact, the related passage in the *Zādspram* emphasizes that it is the light (*rōšnih*) of the cow’s semen (and not the semen itself) that is taken for purification to the moon; Gignoux & Tafazzoli 1993, 49-50. It clearly vouches for the luminescence of *gao* as expressed by the *gao-čiθra* epithet of the moon in the Avesta; see also footnote 104 infra.

<sup>103</sup> Panaino 1990, p. 30.

natural attribute to consider?<sup>104</sup> More generally why insist on seed, origin and semen, when brilliance gives consistently a more understandable meaning?

It is undeniable that along with brilliance, appearance was a primordial meaning of *čiθra*, and certain passages of the Avesta, or the Šāpurgān, are better explained with it.<sup>105</sup> As a matter of fact when, in lieu of Anāhitā's bust before the effigy of Ardashir (fig. 14), Shāpur projected the *čihr az yazdān* slogan, by placing a pair of standing king-god on the reverse of his coinage, the initial two figures where the mirror image of each other (fig. 6). The iconography thus made use of both meanings (radiance, appearance) of *čihr* to visualize the newly devised Sasanian slogan.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, "radiance" constituted the core of the slogan, and "appearance" was only an accessory. Already on the coinage of Orhmazd I (fig. 5) the deity standing opposite the king wore a different crown, and in the coinage of Bahrām II, the deity became a woman, namely Anāhitā (fig. 13). Clearly "appearance" was not essential and could be side-stepped.

It was most probably to emphasize the primary meaning of *čihr* that the word *čihrag* was created with the sole meaning of "image," and not "brilliance/radiance." Otherwise, why use *čihrag* at all? Thus, the literal translation of the *ki čihr az yazdān* idiom should be: "who has obtained his radiance from the gods." But if I have opted for a different translation ("who reflects the gods (in power and glory)"), it is to have a more meaningful one, which would also take into account the evolution of the iconography of Sasanian coinage devised to propagate this very slogan.

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<sup>104</sup> In the case of the Moon, Eric Pirart has suggested that the epithet *gao-čiθra* must pertain to the color and brilliance of the milk (private conversation, along with Jean Kellens). To me, it makes perfect sense to describe the luminosity of a celestial body with a primordial food of ancient tribal societies that was the milk. It also gives the Moon's epithet, the same structure as that of Tishtrya. In such a case, *gao* should be understood as milk rather than cow. Xavier Tremblay confirms that, similar to English where mink refers to the both the animal and its hide, in the Avestic language *gao* refers to both the cow and the milk, as attested in the expression *haomô ya gauua* which means *haoma* mixed with milk (literally cow).

<sup>105</sup> Soudavar 2006, pp. 152, 160, 168; Alram, Blet-Lemarquand, and Skjaervo 2007, p. 36.

<sup>106</sup> Soudavar 2003, pp. 48-49.

While *čiθra/čiça/čih*r and *xvarnah/xwarreh/farr* are in reality the two sides of the same coin, the reason for the adoption of the former by the Sasanians goes back to the emphasis that Darius put on *čiça* at the expense of the *xvarnah*.<sup>107</sup> Even though Sasanian iconography stresses the presence of *farr*, formulaic continuity required the use of *čih*r, in lieu of *farr*, in inscriptions.<sup>108</sup> Whether one accepts this theory or not does not matter. The fact is that the radiance of *čih*r, as a manifestation of *farr*, is a pivotal element in the understanding of both Iranian kingly ideology and religious philosophy. As the Force of the film Star Wars, it is the ultimate source of authority and salvation. And as that Force, it also has a Dark Side, which can be appropriated by evil beings. The basic precepts of the Mazdean religion, as well as Iranian kingly ideology, revolves around the goal of reinforcing the good side of the *čih*r for ones salvation, as well as overcoming evil beings. Unless philologists take note of the centrality of the *farr-čih*r dual concept, their translations will always suffer from the type of incongruities that I have tried to underline in this study. If only the proponents of seed, image and origin, could go and see Star Wars!

## APPENDIX II

The text describing the finger signs comes at the end of the introduction of the *Farhang-e Jahāngiri*, a dictionary that was ordered by the Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-605), but was finished under his son Jahāngir (r. 1605-27), hence the attribute *Jahāngiri*. Translation:

**Describing calculation with fingers** - Among man's inventions, the learned have taken notice of nineteen signs relating to the configurations of fingers in lieu of numbers, for the purpose of calculation. It allows the projection of numbers one up to ten thousand by using: the little, ring and middle fingers of the right hand for numbers one to nine; the thumb and the index for multiples of tens; and

<sup>107</sup> Soudavar 2006, pp. 176-77, 182; Soudavar 2009 (forthcoming).

<sup>108</sup> By Sasanian time, religious orthodoxy dictated that the tribal concept of *farr* could no longer be regarded as an independent source of power, but one controlled by the gods. Thus the *čih*r had to be obtained from gods; Soudavar 2009 (forthcoming).

from the left hand, the thumb and index for multiples of hundred, and the middle, ring and little fingers for multiple of thousand. In this system, the formation one to nine of the right hand shall be similar to those of one to nine thousand on the left hand. For example, as we shall see, placing the tip of the middle finger on the palm of the right hand indicates five, while the same on the left hand would indicate five thousand. Likewise, while the forms of the tens and thousands shall be similar, their position on the left or right hand shall cause the necessary distinction between them. For instance, the shape that indicates ninety on the right hand shall be counted as nine hundred on the left hand. After this preamble, the above mentioned nineteen signs shall be explained in details, God willing.

For the number one, the little finger of the right hand shall be bent inward; and for two, the ring finger shall join the little finger (in its bent position); and for three, the middle finger shall join them as well. These are signs that people customarily use for counting items, one must note, however, that in these three signs the tip of the fingers must come near the finger base. For four, the little finger must be raised and the ring and middle fingers must remain bent; and for five, the ring finger should be raised as well; and for six, the middle finger should be raised with only the ring finger bent, in a way that its tip will hit the middle of the palm; and for seven, the latter should be raised and only the little finger must be bent in a way that it is almost about to rise; and for eight, the same should be done with the ring finger; and for nine, the same shall be done with the middle finger; and in these last three signs, the tip of the fingers must go toward the palm in order not to be confused with the first three signs. For ten, the tip of the nail of the right hand index must be put on the first joint of the thumb in a way that these two fingers form a circular ring; and for twenty, the inner side of the index, which is next to the middle finger, must be placed over the thumb's nail, so that you would think that the distal phalange of the thumb is caught in between the proximal phalanges of the index and the middle finger, but the middle finger plays no role in the sign of twenty, because its shape and position varies for the projection of the numbers one to ten, therefore just placing the nail of the thumb under the inner side of the index is enough to signal twenty. For thirty, the thumb must become straight and the tip of the index must be put against its nail as if they were an arc and chord, but if for reasons of

comfort the thumb gets bent, it is still acceptable. For forty, the middle of the distal phalange of the thumb must be placed on the lower joint of the index in such a way that no space is left in between the side of the palm and the thumb. For fifty, the index must be straight and upward while the thumb must be fully bent and put against the palm and below the index. For sixty, the thumb must be bent and its nail must be put against the middle of the intermediate phalange of the index. For seventy, the thumb must be straight and the first two phalanges of the index must wrap around its nail in a way that all of that nail is visible.<sup>109</sup> For eighty, the thumb must be straight and the side of the distal phalange of the index must be put on the back of the thumb's top joint. For ninety, the tip of the nail of the index must be placed on the base joint of the thumb, contrary to the number ten for which it was put on the top joint.



Sign of fifty <sup>110</sup>

Now that these eighteen signs have been described—nine of which pertain to the little, ring and middle fingers, and nine others to the thumb and index—and as described earlier on, what formation on the right hand projects the numbers one to ten, shall produce on the left hand a figure of thousands, from one to nine; and whatever formation on the right hand projects a multiple of ten, from one to nine, shall project on the left hand the same multiple of hundred, from one hundred to nine hundred. Thus, with the fingers of the two hands, one could project numbers from one to nine thousand nine hundred ninety nine with the above mentioned eighteen signs. For the sign of ten thousand, the side of the distal phalange of the thumb must be placed next to the distal phalange of the index and a portion of its intermediate

<sup>109</sup> The published text is obviously incorrect in here, because it proposes the first “or” the second phalange of the index covers the thumb’s nail. In the former case, it will become similar to thirty, and the latter case is physically impossible.

<sup>110</sup> Neri di Gino Capponi signaling 50. Detail of the frescoes of Benozzo Gozzoli in the chapel of the Medici Palazzo in Florence; Soudavar 2008, pp. 45-46.

phalange, in a way that the tips of the nails of the index and the thumb reach a parallel level.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> He does not specify which hand must produce the 10000 sign; supposedly both, as suggested by figs. 19, 20.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

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- Fig. 2 – Coin of Orodes II (*Dr. Busso Peus Nachf. Münzhandlung*, no. 388, lot 479)
- Fig. 3 – Early coin of Ardashir I (private collection)
- Fig. 4 – Coin of Ardashir I (*Dr. Busso Peus Nachf. Münzhandlung*, no. 368, lot 369)
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Fig. 1 – Coin of Farhad I



Fig. 2 - Coin of Orodes II



Fig. 3 - Coin of  
Ardashir I



Fig. 4 - Coin of Ardashir I



Fig. 5 - Coin of Ohrmazd I



Fig. 6 - Coin of Shāpur I



Fig. 7 – Coin of Autophradates I



Fig. 8 – Coin of Zāmāsb



Fig. 9 – Coin of Bahrām II





Fig. 10 - Khosro II taller than deities



Fig. 11 – Apam-Napāt giving a *dastār*



Fig. 12- Anāhitā with breasts



Fig. 13- Anāhitā offering a ring of investiture



Fig. 14 , 15 - Anāhitā before Bahrām II and Ardashir I



Fig. 16 - Anāhitā giving a diadem to Bahrām II



Fig. 17 - Anāhitā giving a diadem



Fig. 18 - *afzun* inscription with various *farr* signs



Fig. 19 a, b, c, d – Finger numbers projecting 30, 3, 20



Fig. 20 - Practice sheet of Dürer (reversed) (numbers 20, 10000, 3)



Fig. 21 – “Kermān” stone game plaque



Fig. 22 – Grandees wishing 10000 *farrs* to Shāpur I



Fig. 23 – Ram, ribbon with *afzun* inscription



Fig. 24 - Sign of 10000 and triskeles



Fig. 25 – Scorpions with auspicious signs



Fig. 26 – The cows of the Moon chariot pulled by Apam-Napāt



Fig. 27 – Eros/Apam-Napāt surrounded by other deities



Fig. 28 – Coin of Shāpur I



Fig. 29 – Child and cow sign on coin of Bahrām II



Fig. 30 – Eros as Apam-Napāt



Fig. 31 – Shāpur and Ardashir defeating the Parthians in Firuzābād





Fig. 32 – Crescent and three circles on Nana's crown

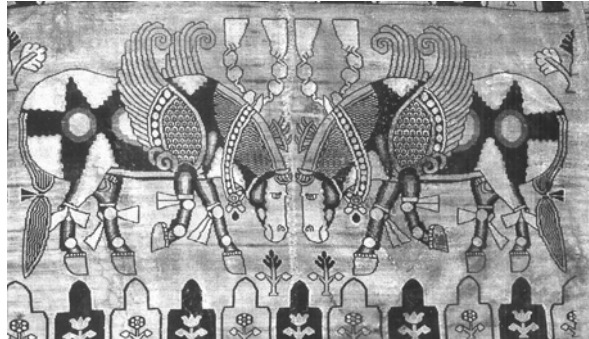


Fig. 33 – Winged horse with star as symbol of Tishtrya on a Sasanian textile



Fig. 34 – Celestial symbols on Arab-Sasanian coin



Fig. 35 – Jital (c.870-75), with cow, star and child sign on the reverse, and three-dot sign on the obverse



Fig. 36 – Triskeles sign next to Minuchir III's tiara



Fig. 37 – Crescent and dot on coin of Shāpur son of Pāpak



Fig. 38 – Clusters of three pearls adorning Anāhitā's dress