

# THE WORLD OF ACHAEMENID PERSIA

HISTORY, ART AND SOCIETY IN IRAN AND  
THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Edited by  
John Curtis and St John Simpson

Proceedings of a conference at the British Museum  
29th September–1st October 2005



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## Editors' Introduction

This volume publishes the papers delivered at the conference “The World of Achaemenid Persia” that took place in the Clore Education Centre at the British Museum on 29th September–1st October 2005. From many points of view this was a landmark conference. With a few notable exceptions, it brought together from around the world all those people most active in Achaemenid studies. It has often been remarked recently that Achaemenid studies have undergone a revolution in the last 30 years, coinciding perhaps with a period when large-scale foreign excavations in Iran have not been possible and scholars have had the opportunity to undertake a radical review of the whole subject. The result has been a reappraisal of the sources that have traditionally been used to construct Persian history. It is now accepted that Greek sources such as Herodotus, Ctesias and Xenophon should be used with great caution, and that far more weight should be given to native Persian sources, particularly the Old Persian royal inscriptions and the Persepolis tablets. There is also inscribed material from surrounding areas, particularly Babylonia with its wealth of cuneiform documents dating from the Achaemenid period. All this is

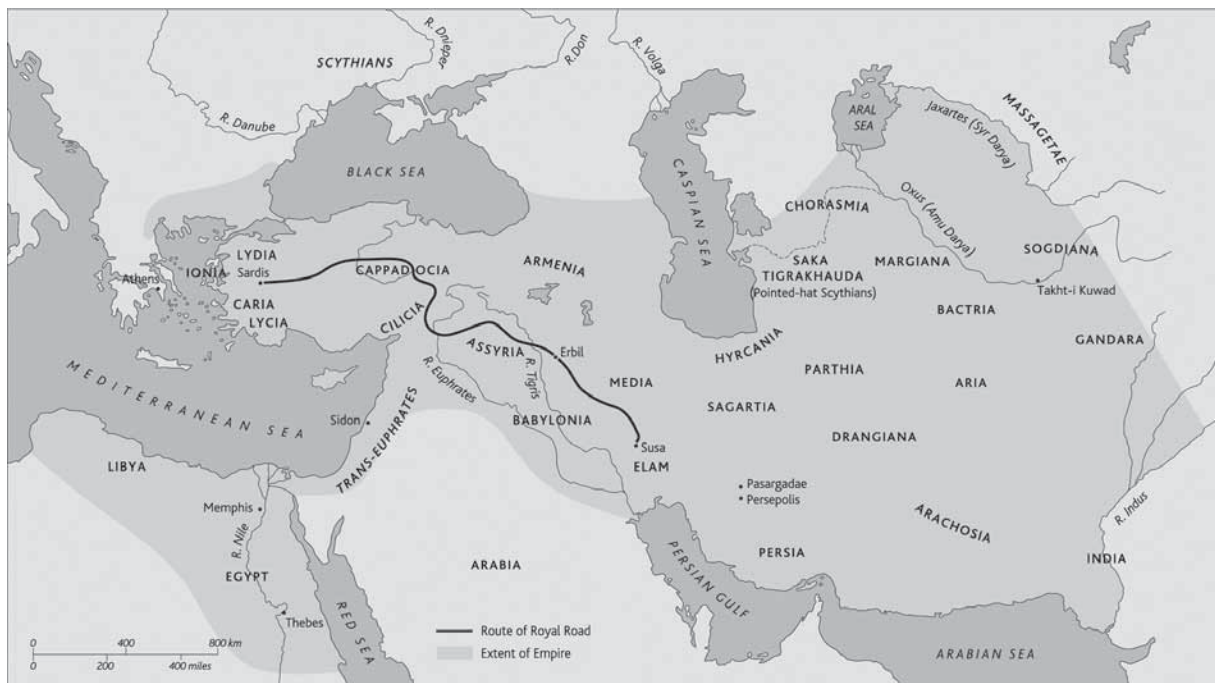
very much to be welcomed, but the process of reappraisal has not yet gone far enough. There is still a tendency to overlook or misinterpret the archaeological evidence from Iran and surrounding regions, and until this rich vein of evidence is properly assessed and incorporated we will still not have a rounded picture of the Achaemenid Empire. There is also a reluctance on the part of western scholars to take into account the views of Iranian archaeologists or the results of their work. It is hoped that this conference, like the exhibition which it accompanied, went a little way towards redressing the balance, although there remains far to go. In fact, nine Iranian scholars gave or shared in presentations at the conference, and two more submitted abstracts. Six of these papers are published in full, and one can only wish that it could have been more.

The conference was organized to coincide with the exhibition “Forgotten Empire: the World of Ancient Persia” that was on display at the British Museum from 9th September 2005 to 8th January 2006. This was a remarkable success and attracted more visitors—154,200—than any paying exhibition at the British Museum since “Tutankhamun” in 1972.

There was, in addition, unprecedented media interest in the exhibition, which extended its impact and influence far beyond the British Museum. There was a consequent surge of interest in Ancient Persia that is still visible today. The exhibition drew together material from four great collections, the National Museum in Tehran, the Persepolis Museum, the Musée du Louvre, and the British Museum itself. Because of the logistical difficulties in assembling such an exhibition, it was not intended that it should travel widely, and in fact it was only possible to show the exhibition in its entirety at one more venue. This was at La Caixa Forum in Barcelona, 8th March–11th June 2006, where it was seen by 127,000 visitors. The accompanying catalogue was translated into both Spanish (*El imperio olvidado: El mundo de la antigua Persia*) and Catalan (*L'imperi oblidat: El món de l'antigua Persia*). Following this, a small number of the

British Museum objects were lent to an exhibition in Speyer in Germany, where they joined objects from various museums in Germany, Belgium and Switzerland. This exhibition, entitled “Pracht und Punk der Grosskönige: Das persische Weltreich” (herausgegeben vom Historischen Museum der Pfalz Speyer) was held 9th July–29th October 2006. The catalogue accompanying the exhibition and with the same name includes some interesting essays and makes a useful contribution to Achaemenid studies.

The conference was organized by the British Museum and the Iran Heritage Foundation in association with the Persian Cultural Foundation and with additional support provided by the Soudavar Memorial Foundation. The conference committee consisted of John Curtis, Farhad Hakimzadeh, Sam Moorhead, St John Simpson and Nigel Tallis. At the conference 49 papers on a wide



Map of the Achaemenid Empire

range of topics were delivered, and it is pleasing that 45 of those papers are published in full in the present volume. Those four papers for which, for one reason or another, we do not have the full texts, are represented by abstracts (Adjerloo, Daryaie, Ebbinghaus, Yadollahi). There are, in addition, two abstracts that were submitted by authors who were not able to attend the conference. The first of these is the abstract of a paper on the Oxus Treasure by Dr Shapur Shahbazi. He was intending to come to the conference but was unfortunately too ill to do so and passed away on 16th June 2006 before having a chance to write out his paper in full. There is no doubt this would have been a valuable contribution to Achaemenid studies, in keeping with his many other articles and books, and it is gratifying that we are at least able to include here the abstract. The death of Dr Shahbazi is indeed a great loss to Achaemenid studies, and it is a mark of the esteem in which he was held by his colleagues that a telegram expressing best wishes was sent to him on behalf of all the participants in the conference. The second of these abstracts was from Ehsan Yaghmaee, formerly of the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization, who was unable to come for personal reasons. He was intending to deliver a paper on the important Achaemenid palaces at Bardak-i Siyah and Sang-i Siyah near Borazjan in Bushir province. There have been no further excavations at these sites since 2005.

During the conference, the film directed by Goetz Balonier, *Persepolis—A Reconstruction* was shown, and Kourosh Afhami, Wolfgang Gambke and Sheda Vasseghi of Persepolis 3D.com presented their virtual reconstruction of Persepolis. A seven-minute video from this film is now on show in the new Rahim Irvani Gallery of Ancient Iran at the British Museum.

The 45 papers and 6 abstracts have been arranged in eight parts that demonstrate the breadth and diversity of the conference. The sections are as follows: History and Historiography; Religion; Gender Studies; Art and Architecture; Archaeology; Seals and Coins; Gold, Silver, Glass and Faience; and Regional Studies. These divisions to some extent, but not entirely, are a compacted version of the 15 sessions at the conference. Those sessions were chaired by Andrew Burnett, Dominique Collon, John Curtis, Irving Finkel, Robert Knox, Andrew Meadows, Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis, St John Simpson, Nigel Tallis, Christopher Walker (all British Museum), David Bivar, Georgina Herrmann, Nicholas Simms-Williams (University of London), Sir John Boardman (University of Oxford), and Farhad Hakimzadeh (Iran Heritage Foundation). Welcome speeches were given by John Curtis and Farhad Hakimzadeh, and closing remarks were delivered by Neil MacGregor (Director of the British Museum) and John Curtis.

Since the conference was held, there have been a number of important archaeological discoveries, testifying to the dynamic nature of Achaemenid research. Foremost amongst these new findings is the discovery of a number of Achaemenid-style palaces. Thus, two Achaemenid palaces have been found in Ramhormoz in Khuzestan province (CAIS News, 30th March 2009), and the joint ICAR (Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research) and University of Sydney expedition is investigating an Achaemenid portico with column bases at Qaleh Kali in the Mamasani district of Fars province in Iran (see Potts *et al.* 2007, and Potts *et al.* 2009). There has also been work at the two major Achaemenid sites of Persepolis and Pasargadae. At Persepolis, a joint Italian–Iranian archaeological team

led by Professor Pierfrancesco Callieri of the University of Bologna has carried out limited excavations and geophysical survey work in areas beyond the platform, starting in September 2008. They have established that the city of Persepolis was much larger than previously thought. The same team also conducted limited excavations on the Tall-e Takht at Pasargadae in 2006 and 2007, and found evidence of a post-Achaemenid destruction level (CAIS News, 27th November 2007). Also in connection with Pasargadae, at the 10th International Congress on Iranian Archaeology in Bandar Abbas in December 2008, Remy Boucharlat and Kourosh Mohamad Khani reported on magnetic surveys at the site. There have also been discoveries of Achaemenid significance in the Bolaghi Valley, a rescue project occasioned by the building of the Sivand Dam, particularly at sites excavated by Callieri and Boucharlat with Iranian collaborators.

In terms of publications, the most significant work to have appeared in the last five years is Amélie Kuhrt's *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period*, two vols (London and New York, 2007), a pair of magnificent volumes that according to the fly leaf "contains the most complete collection of raw material for reconstructing the history of the Achaemenid Persian empire in existence". Students of Achaemenid religion will welcome the new book by Wouter Henkelman based on the Persepolis Fortification Texts entitled *The Other Gods Who Are?* (Achaemenid History 14, Leiden, 2008). A new and important resource for linguists is Jan Tavernier's *Iranica in the Achaemenid Period: Lexicon of Old Iranian Proper Names and Loanwords Attested in Non-Iranian Texts* (Leuven, 2007). With regard to regional studies, two works deserve special mention. The first is a comprehensive survey

(in English) of the Achaemenid period in the Caucasus, with mention of the various Achaemenid palaces, by Dr Florian Knauss in *Iranica Antiqua* 41 (2006), pp. 79–118. This article is an expanded version of the Lukonin Memorial Lecture that Dr Knauss gave at the British Museum on 13th July 2004. Some of the splendid finds from one of these Caucasian sites, Vani in Georgia, were recently shown in a touring exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge entitled "From the Land of the Golden Fleece: Tomb Treasures of Ancient Georgia" (2nd October 2008–4th January 2009). Secondly, for Palestine, the collected articles of Michael Heltzer have now been published in a volume entitled *The Province Judah and the Jews in Persian Times* (Tel Aviv, 2008).

In the same period, there have been a number of important conferences or publications of conferences. They include three significant conferences held in 2006. The first was a colloquium in Paris on the Persepolis Fortification Archive. The papers have now been published in *L'archive des Fortifications de Persepolis: Etat des questions et perspectives de recherches* (Paris, 2008), edited by Pierre Briant, Wouter Henkelman and Matthew Stolper. Secondly, the controversial question of relations between Iran and Greece was revisited in a conference in Athens, which has now been published as *Ancient Greece and Ancient Iran: Cross-Cultural Encounters* (Athens, 2009), edited by Seyed Mohammad Reza Darbandi and Antigoni Zurnatzi. Thirdly, a conference in Georgia has been published as *Achaemenid Culture and Local Traditions in Anatolia, Southern Caucasus and Iran* (Leiden, 2007), edited by Askold Ivantchik and Vakhtang Licheli and appropriately dedicated to a towering figure in Caucasian archaeology, Otar Lordkipanidze. A conference that was held at Rennes in 2004, and so before our own conference, has now

been published as *Persian Responses: Political and Cultural Interaction with(in) the Persian Empire* (Swansea, 2007), edited by Christopher Tuplin, and has been very favourably reviewed by Stanley Burstein in the *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (2008.07.44).

At the time of the conference the remarkable DVD and companion book by Farzin Rezaeian entitled "Persepolis Recreated" was already available, and since then Rezaeian has produced another DVD and companion book entitled "Iran: Seven Faces of Civilization" (2007). The latter set has a long section on the Achaemenid Empire. Both these enterprises have done much to raise awareness of the Achaemenid period and to promote popular interest in this seminal period of world history. Another electronic resource that deserves special mention is more for the benefit of scholars. This is the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project, directed by Professor Matthew Stolper, which aims to digitize the large collection of cuneiform tablets from Persepolis now in the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. After excavation in the 1930s these tablets were loaned to Chicago for study and publication, and remain the property of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. They are now the subject of a legal dispute that threatens to result in the tablets being sold on the open market. This would be an unmitigated disaster on a number of counts, not least the damage that would be caused to Achaemenid studies. In order to limit the potential damage in case the worst comes to the worst and the tablets are sold, a great effort is being made to record the information in them. In this way, some good is coming out of a potentially very ugly situation.

With the exception of the incident just described, the prospects for Achaemenid

studies are bright, and rapid progress is being made on a number of fronts. We are confident that the papers in the present volume will contribute to the advancement of the discipline, and the only regret is that it was not possible to make the papers available at an earlier date. Last, but by no means least, it should be pointed out that the responsibility for views expressed in this volume, including the choice of illustrations, rests of course with individual contributors and not with the editors. Efforts have been made to standardize spellings within individual chapters, but not necessarily throughout the book. Again, the editors do not take responsibility for how names are spelled, taking the view that contributors must be allowed some discretion in this matter.

For help with the preparation of this volume, the editors are indebted to Angela Smith, Nigel Tallis, Shahrokh Razmjou and Bridget Houlton. Helen Knox has undertaken the copy-editing with her usual speed and efficiency. Helen Peter compiled the index. The volume has been seen through the press by Elizabeth Stone, to whom we are most grateful. Above all, we would like to thank the Iran Heritage Foundation, who not only sponsored and helped with the organization of the conference in the first place, but also provided a generous subvention towards the cost of printing this volume and has done us the honour of making this book the first in their new series of academic monographs.

Every effort has been made to ascertain the copyright holder for images used in this book. Any missing acknowledgements will be updated for future editions.

JOHN CURTIS AND ST JOHN SIMPSON





# 12

## The Formation of Achaemenid Imperial Ideology and Its Impact on the *Avesta*

Abolala Soudavar

### 1. Introduction

At the end of his conference presentation, Albert De Jong succinctly suggested, “Ask not what Zoroastrianism did for the king, but ask what the king did for Zoroastrianism.” From the title of my paper, it seems that I heeded his advice even before hearing it. In reality, however, my initial goal was different: I had only wanted to explore the formation of the Achaemenid imperial ideology. Its impact on Zoroastrianism came to me from what I saw and what I read. The more I delved into it, the more I was convinced that it was Darius’ kingly ideology that affected the *Avesta*, and not vice versa.

Even though my study rests on a number of controversial issues, it is my hope that the sum of my conclusions will project a coherent and acceptable scenario as to how Darius’ kingly ideology unfolded, and how it impacted on Zoroastrianism.

### 2. Some preliminary methodological considerations

It is generally perceived that the deciphering of iconography is less precise than the deciphering of text. But the reading of an ancient and

cryptic text such as the *Avesta* can be speculative and imprecise as well. It is now recognized that the *Avesta* was an orally transmitted text, which was “crystallized” in the post-Achaemenid period, perhaps gathered and organized into different chapters in Parthian or early Sasanian times, and written down not before the reign of Khosrow I (r. 531–579). A small fraction of it has been preserved as passages inserted within liturgies that were recited without necessarily being understood, the earliest copies of which were discovered in the eighteenth century and may even date to the fourteenth century (Kellens 2002: 242–43; Skjaervø 2005: 80–81). It is, to say the least, hazardous to rely solely on the conclusions made on such a text.

By contrast, Achaemenid iconography is not a copy but the original, and can be dated accurately. It is also very precise, because it is based on a vocabulary designed to enhance the projection of royal authority and legitimacy. This vocabulary was most probably developed by the same functionaries or scribes who devised the inscriptions, and goes hand in hand with their vocabulary and complements it. It is therefore wrong to treat Achaemenid iconography as mere decorative compositions. There is considerable information imbedded in it, and

one must try to decipher it. In this quest, oddities play an important role. When confronted with them, one has the duty to address them and not sweep them under the carpet. One must propose a plausible explanation, and that explanation shall remain valid until disproved or unseated by a more plausible one.

### 3. The birth date of Zoroaster

A key question for the understanding of Darius' kingly ideology is the degree of Darius' familiarity with Zoroastrianism, or in other words, whether he was acting according to a set ideology or formulating a new one himself. It inevitably leads to the question of the maturity of Zoroastrianism and the birth date of Zoroaster, an issue that is fiercely debated between two schools of thought. The first relies on the *Avesta*, and places Zoroaster in between 1800 and 800 BC. The second argues for a birth date of 618 BC by relying on data transmitted by tenth-century documents, which specify that 258 years elapsed between the coming of Zoroaster and that of Alexander.

I subscribe to the latter because I see much confusion in the theories advanced by the proponents of the first school, and at the same time an increasing wealth of evidence in support of the second. Even though this date is not essential to my main thesis, it does help to put it into perspective. Conversely, the observations presented for my thesis will ultimately reinforce the proposition of a late date for Zoroaster.

#### 3.1. Inconsistencies of the first school

The wide range of dates proposed by the proponents of the first school is proof enough

that their methodology is inconclusive. Mary Boyce, for instance, at first proposed a date range of 1700–1500 BC based on a perceived similarity of the Avestan language with that of the Indian *Rig-Veda*, but then reduced it to 1200 BC as philologists began to gravitate around an arbitrary round figure of 1000 BC (Boyce 1984c: 18). The fact is, however, that the dating of the *Rig-Veda* itself is hypothetical, and while philologists such as Kellens argue about the archaic nature of the Avestan language and a linguistic hiatus between what they term as “Old” and “Young” *Avesta*,<sup>1</sup> none of them were ever able to propose a reliable methodology for measuring the age of the Avestan language. Philology is not an exact science and their dates are based on guesswork. A guess based on experience may be valuable, provided it is relevant. In this case it is not, because even if it is true it is not decisive. As Gershevitch has argued, the speed of language development can vary, and different dialects may evolve differently over time and space (Gershevitch 1995: 2–3). English for instance, which is an offshoot of Germanic languages, has evolved more than present-day German, and Tehrani Persian has advanced more than Afghani Persian.

Moreover, out of respect for tradition and/or to impress their followers, men of religion have always favoured an archaistic language. Thus, if one stumbles on a copy of *Divinus Perfectionis Magister* (dated 25th January 1983) by the late Pope John Paul II, one cannot declare it to be a very old document on the basis that no one spoke Latin in twentieth-century Italy. The priestly style of the *Avesta* is archaistic but not necessarily archaic or ancient.<sup>2</sup>

Since the measure of linguistic evolution for the *Avesta* is inconclusive, proponents of the first school sought to buttress their theory with another proposition: that the Avestan

environment described a pastoral and primitive society (Boyce 1989: 62–66). But the general consensus for Zoroaster and/or the Avestan native land is somewhere in the eastern Iranian world, in a corridor that stretches from Sistān in south-west Iran, up to present-day Uzbekistan.<sup>3</sup> In this stretch of land, most of the rural communities are still pastoral today, and primitively so.<sup>4</sup> Any poet-priest from the high plateaus of this corridor will naturally derive his imagery from what he can see in his small world: a pastoral environment by day and a star-studded vivid sky by night. As for Boyce's technical twist that the Avestan people were "stone-age people with only a confused notion of the distinction between stone and metal objects", Malandra has recently demonstrated that it was without merit and based on false assumptions.<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime, anthropologists have discovered that the proto-Indo-Aryans, on their route to India, had settled down in the second millennium in an area that is situated between present-day Uzbekistan and northern Afghanistan, known as the "Bactria Margiana Archaeological Complex" or BMAC (Parpola 2002: 246–247). In the emblematic BMAC, the believers of the first school claim to have found the missing link that justifies their theory, even though there is absolutely no tangible link between any of the BMAC characteristics and those of the *Avesta* (Kreyenbroek 2005; Shayegan 1997). Suffice it to say that Asko Parpola, whose 2002 article in *Iranica Antiqua* represents the seminal study on proto-Indo-Iranian migrations and settlements, could not find any linkage between BMAC and the Avestan community, but instead, proposes a c.800 BC date for Zoroaster based on a theory that the prophet's monotheistic vision of the world must have been inspired from an Assyrian model

(Parpola 2002: 246–247). The latter theory is as yet unsupported by any other evidence.

In tone and imagery, the Gāthās (i.e. the part of the *Avesta* generally attributed to Zoroaster himself) are very similar to the Gnostic lamentations of the Sufis of the eastern Iranian world, and are certainly no more "BMAC" than, for example, the *Lamentations* of the celebrated Sufi Khājeh `Abdollah Ansāri (AD 1006–1089) of Herāt. As for the later *Avesta*, Y 57.27, Yt 5.13 and Yt 10.125 describe a *quadriga* (i.e. a four-horsed chariot) for Sraosha, Anāhitā and Mithra. The construction of such a vehicle not only necessitates a certain sophistication for tying up the four horses and maintaining manoeuvrability, but also presupposes the existence of a fast road or a racing circuit—such as the Circus Maximus of Rome—that warranted the use of a fast chariot.<sup>6</sup> The *quadriga* is neither a stone-age vehicle nor a BMAC cart.

An early date for Zoroaster implies that Zoroastrianism left an impact somewhere, at least by the advent of the Achaemenids. To evaluate this impact one must concentrate on the important particularities of Zoroastrianism and not on secondary issues such as funerary rites that are tied to ancient tribal customs and are not Zoroastrian proper.<sup>7</sup> What distinguishes the Zoroastrian creed from previous Iranian religions is the concept of the Amesha Spenta group of divinities who assist Ahura Mazdā in his various tasks, and the profession of faith in Y 12.1 (the Zoroastrianism Creed) by which the believer must declare:

I profess myself a Mazdā-worshipper, a follower of Zarathushtra, opposing the Daevas, accepting the Ahuric doctrine, one who praises the Amesha Spentas, who worships the Amesha Spentas. (Y12.1, Boyce 1984a: 57)

And yet, despite Darius' 72 mentions of the name of Ahura Mazdā in Bisotun alone, no mention of the Amesha Spentas or Zoroaster ever appears in his inscriptions.

Skjaervø remarks that the Sasanians did not mention the Amesha Spentas either (2005: 52). This is true, but early Sasanian kings clearly stated that they were "Mazdyasna" believers, a word the chief priest Kerdir unambiguously qualified as a religion (*dyn*).<sup>8</sup> Had Zoroaster lived c.1000 BC, one would expect that five centuries later his religion would have been defined in a more comprehensive way than mere praise for Ahura Mazdā.

Unable to find a connection to the Zoroastrian creed in royal inscriptions, Skjaervø then relies on clay documents from Darius' treasury, in order to suggest that some of them pertained to sacrificial rations for Zoroastrian divinities, including Spenta-Armaiti (who is one of the Amesha Spentas) (2005: 53). The fact is, however, that Zoroastrian divinities were not the creation of Zoroaster's mind but had been revered a long time before him, and were only regrouped by him in a new compact pantheon. As Razmjou's article—which is Skjaervø's source in this instance—explains, Spenta-Armaiti was an Aryan divinity, and possibly a Median one, that had always been revered as the goddess of Earth; her name appeared in these ration-disbursement tablets not with the other Amesha Spentas, but in the company of ancient tribal deities such as gods of mountains and rivers and Mithra, for all of whom sacrificial ceremonies were held (Razmjou 2001: 9–12). Darius' support for the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem—out of his own treasury (Ezra 6: 8)—did not make a Jew of him, nor did his support for Egyptian temples make an Amon-worshipper of him. By the same token, the support of sacrificial rites for Aryan deities, whom Skjaervø

labels as "Avestan" deities, did not make a Zoroastrian of Darius.

More generally, Skjaervø's attempt to draw a parallel between the Achaemenid inscriptions and the *Avesta* confounds form with substance: the parallel that he sees is not the result of a common religious belief but is due to a common form of expression rooted in the same Iranian culture shared by the Achaemenids and the *Avesta*.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, as Pierre Lecoq has remarked, gods who are referred to as *yazatas* in the *Avesta* were still called *bayas* by the Achaemenids, and the Achaemenid calendar bears no trace of Zoroastrianism (Lecoq 1997: 159, 161). Had the prophet lived some five centuries earlier, a Zoroastrian calendar would certainly have been developed by the time of the Achaemenids, and Darius would certainly have used it in Bisotun where, instead, he dates 18 events of his reign with non-Zoroastrian months. Moreover, Razmjou has recently argued that the Achaemenid calendar names all pertained to entities that were essentially Iranian or Persian, but mostly non-Avestan. While the seventh month of both the Zoroastrian and Achaemenid calendars pertained to Mithra, in the latter calendar, the month-name Bayayadish (god-worship) referred to him by the generic name of gods, that is, *baya*. In other words, the god par excellence of the Achaemenid calendar was still Mithra and not Ahura Mazdā (Razmjou 2003: 22–24, 31–32).

### 3.2. Assessing the "258" figure

The 258 years mentioned by the texts measure the time elapsed between the conquest of Iran by Alexander (i.e. the death of Darius III in 330 BC) and the "Coming of Religion" that Gnoli has convincingly argued refers to the

year Zoroaster envisioned his new religion, and which the mini-calendar of Zādspram specifies to have occurred at the age of 30.<sup>10</sup> Hence a birth date of c.618 BC.

### 3.3. Recent objections

In his critical review of Gnoli's recent book in favour of this date, Kreyenbroek raises three general objections in the form of questions that I believe should be answered.

Why did a "rapidly evolving civilisation" (presumably the Achaemenids) accept the message of a "near contemporary" with "ideas rooted in the Stone Age"?

If Zoroastrians had a system of recording all events in respect of the epoch-year of the "Coming of Religion", then why is it that they did not keep it alive indefinitely, and why did they switch their reference point to the "hated" Alexander's conquest of Iran?

Given that Greeks understood "effortlessly" matters pertaining to Iranian "religion and chronology", how could they confuse Zoroaster's birth date with "the origin of his spiritual being" (i.e. Zoroaster's *fravashi* which Zoroastrians believed to have come to being 6,000 years earlier)? "If the Greeks were misled in this vital point, what validity can we claim for the rest of their evidence?" (Kreyenbroek 2003: 123)

The problem with all of the above questions is that they are based on incorrect assumptions and raise inconsequential objections:

It is far from proven that Achaemenids were Zoroastrians, and even if they were, they were no different than Persians adopting Islam or Romans adopting Christianity, religions that were in no way less rooted in the "Stone Age" than Zoroastrianism.

Quoting Zoroastrian priests, Biruni produced a number of lists tabulating the reign of

Iranian kings. However, one cannot conclude from these tables that Zoroastrians were in the habit of recording regnal years from the first year Zoroaster formulated his religion; neither did Christians start to tabulate regnal years from the day Jesus of Nazareth was born. Unless religious officials get entangled with the ruling power, they usually show no desire to record political events. In the case of Zoroastrians, this only happened after the advent of the Sasanians. The above-mentioned tables are clearly reconstructed from that period.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, it is not always clear what event defines an epoch-year. For instance, as Taqizadeh had demonstrated, three different epoch-years were concurrently used for the Sasanian Ardashir I (r. 224–241), until one eventually prevailed over the others (Taqizadeh 1943–46: 26–30). For religion-related matters, Zoroastrian priests did not only use the year of the "Coming of the Religion" but, as we shall see, also chose other events in their prophet's life as reference points. Moreover, the adoption of Alexander's conquest of Iran as a reference date should be of no surprise to us, since cataclysms such as earthquakes, famine and the plague are commonly used by people to situate events, even within Muslim or Christian communities who have a well-defined—religion-based—calendar.

By far the most unacceptable of Kreyenbroek's assumptions is the reliability of Greek sources and the accuracy of their perceptions concerning Iranians. It is not only Aeschylus (525–456 BC) who, at an early stage of Greek contacts with Iranians, claimed that Persians saw Darius as a god (Aeschylus, *Persians*, 681), but also Greek translators of the Sasanian era who, after centuries of Iranian and Hellenic intermingling, still qualified Iranian kings as gods, a false claim which, unfortunately, most philologists and historians



have accepted without question.<sup>12</sup> The straight answer to Kreyenbroek's last question is: Greek sources can indeed be misleading.

### 3.4. The reliability of the "258" figure

The reliability of a datum generally depends on three criteria: 1) that the datum is transmitted by the paramount, or relevant, tradition; 2) that it is correlated by multiple sources; 3) and that the sources are old and close to the date when events took place. The "258" figure has all of these characteristics:

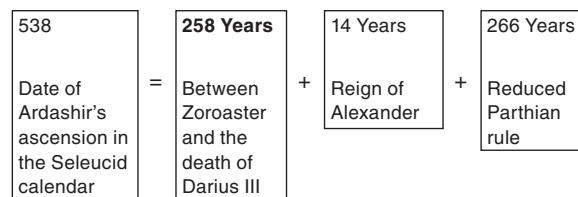
(a) It was transmitted through Irano-Zoroastrian channels and not through a foreign one, and through the same oral traditions—so dear to Boyce—that present-day Zoroastrians have inherited, with the difference that this oral information was frozen in the tenth–eleventh century and set into writing, when writers such as Mas'udi and Biruni collected it from Zoroastrian priests.

(b) It is consistent under a plurality of forms: it appears as a direct quote in works by Mas'udi (d. 957) and Biruni (973–1048), who not only lived a century apart but obtained their information from different regions, the former from southern Iran, and the latter from the eastern Iranian world.<sup>13</sup>

It appears as an immutable time bracket for reconstructing the lost chronology of earlier history: the *Bundahishn*, for instance, fills this time bracket with a different list than Mas'udi's.<sup>14</sup>

Most importantly, it can be derived from the fact that it provides an explanation to a very odd historical question: why in AD 224, when the Sasanian Ardashir I ascended the throne, did he change the calendar, not in the way that the last Shah of Iran had done by moving the starting point, but by compressing

history and cutting out a chunk of 206 years, which reduced the Parthian period to 266 years?



Based on arguments previously advanced by Taqizadeh and Henning, Gershevitch reasoned through a mathematical equation that it was a blind faith in this "258" figure that allowed Ardashir to promote his calendar change.<sup>15</sup> Only faith and dogma can trump common sense in such a way.

(c) The "258" figure was in use long before the tenth century. Indeed, since it had attained a dogmatic status by AD 224, and because dogma does not develop overnight, one could surmise that this figure was relied upon at least one or two centuries earlier, that is, close to the era of Alexander.

### 3.5. Avestan text in support of "258"

Upholders of the first school, however, deride any conclusion not based on the *Avesta*. But if the *Avesta* is the only valid source in this matter, then one should look at it more carefully, especially where it speaks about the birth of Zoroaster, as in stanza 13:94 of the Farvardin Yasht. This stanza celebrates the birth of Zoroaster:

13:94 Let us rejoice, for a priestly man is born, the Spitamid Zarathushtra.

From now on (*ida apqm*) ...

From now on (*ida apqm*) ...

and is followed by 13:95 which reads:

13:95 From now on (*iḍa apqm*), Mithra... will promote all supreme authorities of the countries (*daxiiunqm*) and will pacify those in revolt.

From now on (*iḍa apqm*), strong Apam Napāt will promote all the supreme authorities of the countries and will subjugate all those in rebellion.<sup>16</sup>

Three observations are in order here: first, Yt 13:95 obviously refers to a political event and not a religious one; second, it situates this event shortly after the birth of Zoroaster—which gives added credibility to our assertion that Zoroastrians traditionally situated political events in relation to events in the life of their prophet and not necessarily the date of his conversion; third, the underlined words “countries” and “rebellion” imply a situation in which different nations were subjugated by one central authority, in other words, a situation within an *empire* (which must be an Iranian one as it relates to the Avestan world).

The only Iranian empire prior to the Achaemenids was of course that of the Medes.<sup>17</sup> This ties in perfectly with the historical data, because the Medes sacked Nineveh in 612 BC and subjugated Urartu in 610 BC, that is, within a decade after the supposed birth of Zoroaster c.618 BC. It also seems very logical: the new supremacy of the Medes necessitated a new source of legitimacy and a new kingly ideology; this ideology was then based on the support of two ancient Iranian deities, Mithra and Apam Napāt. Later on, Avestan priests naturally tallied this event with the birth of Zoroaster, the closest religiously significant event that they could think of.

The inescapable conclusion imbedded in these two stanzas of the Farvardin Yasht is one that supports the late date for Zoroaster and,

at the same time, sheds light on the ideology of the Medes. Yet the tendency among philologists nowadays seems to be going in the opposite direction, one dictated by a dogmatic belief in a prehistoric and pastoral Zoroaster. Skjaervø, for instance, has recently translated the first two sentences of Yt 13:95 as:

Here, henceforth, Miθra... shall further all that is foremost of the lands, and he pacifies those that are in commotion.

(*iḍa apqm \* napā sūrō fraḍāt...*) Here the strong Scion of the Waters shall further all that is foremost of the lands, and he shall restrain those that are in commotion. (Skjaervø 2005: 67)

His translation has two major problems. First, despite being an adept of oral theories, he seems to be unaware that a basic tenet of oral narrations is a repetitive intonation, often marked by a string of sentences beginning with the same words. With that simple rule in mind, one immediately sees that the last two sentences of 13:94 and the first two of 13:95 are all punctuated with an “*iḍa apqm*” opening, and that as a consequence, a second “*apqm*” (which constituted the first part of the name of Apam Napāt/*apqm napā*) has been dropped in the above sentence of the Farvardin Yasht (marked by \*). Scribes who are not very literate in what they copy often think that if a word is repeated twice, one of them must be suppressed. It is a common scribal error that needs to be rectified.<sup>18</sup> Skjaervø’s translation based on a non-rectified text thus breaks the symmetry in the missions entrusted to Mithra and Apam Napāt after the birth of Zoroaster, and by starting the last verse with “Here” has given it a geographic rather than a time-based meaning. Second, by using the words “lands” and “commotion” in lieu of “countries” and “rebellion”, his translation projects a pastoral

event rather than a political one. One should note, however, that what he translates as “lands” pertains to the Avestan *daxiiunqm*, the same word that Darius uses in his inscriptions to designate the people under his dominion (see below), and this unequivocally relates to inhabited political entities such as countries or nations, and not to pastoral ones.

Despite the logical implications of Yt 13:94 and Yt 13:95 in tandem, it would be reassuring if the validity of these two stanzas was somehow verified independently and through other considerations. In what follows, we shall see how on more than one occasion, text and iconography concur in upholding our interpretation of a Median kingly ideology based on the dual support of Mithra and Apam Napāt.

### 3.6. Iconographical evidence in support of Yasht 13:95

I first noticed the relevance of this passage when I was studying the symbolism of the lotus flower as an emblem of the aquatic deity Apam Napāt, and the sunflower as the emblem of the solar deity Mithra. My supposition was that the frequent combination of these two flowers in Iranian iconography was due to the identical roles that Mithra and Apam Napāt were given in Yt 13:95 (Soudavar 2003: 53–57). The natural course to pursue was to find out when these two emblems were first combined in the Iranian context. The iconographic evidence suggested that this happened in the late seventh–early sixth century BC.

Indeed, among all Iranian archaeological items, two groups of items bear the earliest combined lotus and sunflower motifs: the silver hoard from the Kalmākareh grotto (in Lorestān) and the glazed bricks from Bukān (in Kordestān), both discovered in the Median

heartland in the 1990s and 1980s respectively (Soudavar 2003: 86–87). Based on the epigraphic peculiarities of a rhyton inscription—of a type that is found on many other silver vessels from the Kalmākareh hoard—Vallat has suggested a dating between 589 and 539 BC (2000: 29). Similarly, the complex iconography of the Bukān bricks, which is an amalgam of Assyrian and Urartian motifs mixed with indigenous Lorestān-type elements, is rendered in a style that precedes the Achaemenid stylistic standardization. Thus, the iconographical evidence shows a combination of these two flower motifs in the vicinity of 618 BC, which is consistent with our interpretation of Yt 13:95.

### 3.7. The prevalence of the Median kingly ideology before Darius

Historians generally shy away from defining Cyrus’ religion (Briant 1996: 106–108), but the facts speak for themselves:

- a) Cyrus never mentions Ahura Mazdā in his inscriptions.
- b) A colossal sunflower–lotus combination (49 cm wide) is carved on his tomb (Stronach 1971: 155–158), which, as indicated before, is the symbol of the dual Median deities, Mithra and Apam Napāt (Soudavar 2005: 88).
- c) Horse-sacrifice rituals of a Mithraic nature were conducted at Cyrus’ tomb by his successors (Briant 1996: 106, 108).
- d) As I have suggested elsewhere, Darius states in his letter to Gadatas that Mithra was worshipped by his predecessors (Soudavar 2003: 108–111).
- e) Cyrus’ generals had erected temples to Mithra and Anāhitā who, as the goddess of



waters, became a substitute for Apam Napāt (also an aquatic deity) (Strabo XI.8.4, [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu)); Soudavar 2003: 107–111; Bivar 1998: 12–13; Razmjou 2005*b*: 150).

In the absence of proof to the contrary, it is safe to assume that Cyrus, and probably Cambyses,<sup>19</sup> adhered to the kingly ideology that the Medes had previously formulated. Therefore, Darius' ideology, based on the supremacy of Ahura Mazdā, must be regarded if not as an outright revolution, at least as a drastic change of direction. As we shall see, it was a distinct monotheistic creed with an antagonistic impetus against the Median beliefs of his predecessors.

#### 4. Darius' kingly ideology

The noteworthy implication of a late date for Zoroaster is that Zoroastrianism as we now know, with its complicated rituals and canonical laws, had not enough time to develop between the lifetime of its prophet and the advent of Darius in the year 522 BC. Darius may or may not have known of Zoroaster and his teachings. The fact is that he does not mention either of them. Darius promoted a monotheistic ideology that exalted the supremacy of Ahura Mazdā, the god that Zoroaster also favoured, and a god that must have been popular among a certain group of Iranians. Moreover, Darius' initial fervour for Ahura Mazdā is accompanied by a total disdain for other deities. Similarly, in contrast to his devotion to Ahura Mazdā and his group of assistant divinities, the Amesha Spentas, other divine beings about whom Zoroaster speaks in the Gāthās are qualified as *daevas* or demonic beings.

Darius' zeal in promoting Ahura Mazdā is akin to the zeal with which the Safavid Shāh

Esmā'il I (r. AD 1501–1524) exalted the Imam 'Alī and promoted Shiism as the new religion of Iran in AD 1512, without really knowing what it entailed, but with a marked antagonism towards the established Sunni community of the land. It took more than a century and a half for Safavid Shiism to take shape, mostly through the intervention of foreign clerics imported from Lebanon. Similarly, Zoroastrianism may have developed through the intervention of eastern priests among a Persian elite that revered Ahura Mazdā without a full understanding of Zoroastrian precepts. And in the same way that a minority of Safavid Shiite zealots converted Iran to Shiism, and ultimately shaped their religion by adopting Sunni concepts as their own, Darius and his supporters may have paved the way for the development of a Zoroastrianism that ended up absorbing many of the existing beliefs of Iranian communities.

The more pertinent issue, however, whether one believes in a late date for Zoroaster or not, and whether he was familiar with Zoroastrianism or not, is how well founded and well established was the monotheistic ideology that Darius wished to promote.

Through a series of examples, I shall argue that, similar to Shāh Esma'il's Shiism, it was ill-defined and more antagonistic toward other Iranian religions than foreign ones, and Darius had to modify his initial stance in order to accommodate the entrenched beliefs of his own constituencies, sometimes successfully and sometimes not.

##### 4.1. The Bisotun solar emblem

My first example is from Bisotun where in his earliest political manifesto, Darius exalted Ahura Mazdā 72 times to the exclusion of any other deity, and attributed all his

achievements and victories to his support. For lack of a suitable model in the Iranian tradition, he chose a Mesopotamian symbol for the personification of Ahura Mazdā: a bearded man within a winged sphere.<sup>20</sup> This choice per se is not indicative of a weak foundation for Darius' brand of Mazdaism, because as the new religion of his empire it needed a universally recognizable symbol, and neighbouring Mesopotamia is where he could find one.

A sudden and tentative change of attribute for Ahura Mazdā, however, does hint at a weak foundation, and this is what Darius tried to do. After being confronted with the popularity of solar deities among his various subjects,<sup>21</sup> Darius decided to empower his Ahura Mazdā with solar attributes, and thus added a *solar* emblem on his hat in Bisotun (Fig 12.5). This emblem is a later addition, for there is a noticeable gap around it which separates it from the original design and which is indicative of an afterthought: a new piece of stone with a solar emblem had to be inset on top of Ahura Mazdā's hat in a previously flattened surface that would otherwise not allow the carving of an additional emblem in relief.

Two points need to be emphasized in this respect: a) this idea must have backfired because this was the first and last time that such an attribute was given to Ahura Mazdā; and b) although the easy choice for a solar emblem was the sunflower, Darius so abhorred any association with Mithra that he preferred the symbol of the Babylonian solar god Shamash with its pointed rays (Fig. 12.1) to that of a similar Iranian deity. But the idea of kingly authority reflecting solar power was too important to be readily discarded, and as we shall see, Darius found a clever way to reintroduce it in his ideological programme.



**Fig. 12.1** The solar emblem of Shamash. (*Das Vorderasiatisches Museum* [Berlin, 1992], p. 189)

## 4.2. A new emblem for the concept of *khvarnah*

My second set of examples is from Persepolis and Susa. By the time Darius decides to erect palaces there, he is in full control of his empire, and like Shāh Esmā'il, he sheds some of that early zeal by allowing a vague reference to "all the gods" after invoking Ahura Mazdā in his DPd inscription.<sup>22</sup>

A more significant compromise, however, was to acknowledge the importance of the *khvarnah*, this auspicious fortune that Iranians have always considered as a necessary attribute of kingship. According to an ancient myth, the legendary king Jamshid (Yima) lost his kingship when he lost the *khvarnah*, and thereafter every Iranian king strove to show that he had become the recipient of the *khvarnah* and had not lost it. For his palaces, therefore, Darius chose a winged sphere as the symbol of the





**Fig. 12.2** Two sphinxes guarding the symbol of *khvarnah*. Brick panel from Darius' palace in Susa. (Musée du Louvre, Sb 3324)

*khvarnah*, and placed a sphinx on each side as its guardians, in order to convey the idea that the *khvarnah* was resident there and had not departed (Fig. 12.2).<sup>23</sup>

There were, however, two problems with this choice: a) in keeping with his preference for foreign elements, Darius had chosen symbols that were not easily understood by his own

constituency; and b) since overstated praise is essential to the Iranian culture, the projection of *khvarnah* could not be limited to a single statement but had to be repetitive in order to project abundant *khvarnah*.<sup>24</sup> However, the shape of the winged sphere was not suitable for a repetitive pattern, while symbols previously adopted by the Medes, namely the sunflower



**Fig. 12.3** The *khvarnah* frieze. Eastern stairway of Apadana, Persepolis. (Courtesy of the Oriental Institute, Chicago. Photograph nos P 15301 and 15302)

and the lotus flower, were more suitable for a multiple showing.

To make the winged sphere symbol more understandable, it was visually associated with the lotus–sunflower combination, which filled the adjacent space (Fig. 12.3). And to render it compatible with the new imperial ideology, the creation of the *khvarnah* had to be attributed to Ahura Mazdā. Indeed, the sudden shift in the symbol of Ahura Mazdā, from the rectangular-shaped wings of the Bisotun prototype (Fig. 12.5) to more rounded ones in Persepolis (Fig. 12.6) cannot be taken lightly, and must have been dictated by an overriding consideration. The modification of such an important symbol in Achaemenid iconography—one that is generally marked by a preference for stylistic continuity and standardized icons—can only be explained by a desire to establish a visual link between the new emblem of *khvarnah* and that of Ahura Mazdā.<sup>25</sup> The latter was thus brought into harmony with the former to convey the idea that the *khvarnah* emanated from Ahura Mazdā. Since the Medes had associated this power with Mithra and Apam Napāt, the supremacy of Ahura Mazdā in Darius’ new imperial ideology necessitated its appropriation for this deity. The easiest solution was to declare that

the *khvarnah* itself was a creation of Ahura Mazdā.

The same approach is taken one step further under Xerxes. In a frieze that, similar to Figures 12.2 and 12.3, was meant to show that the *khvarnah* remained with Xerxes, and in which its winged sphere was also flanked by two guardian sphinxes and the rest of the frieze was sprinkled with lotus–sunflower combinations, we can see Ahura Mazdā standing above the winged sphere and not emerging from it (Fig. 12.4). It was clearly meant to re-emphasize that the *khvarnah* emanated from him.

In the *Avesta*, the concept of *khvarnah* is riddled with inconsistencies and oddities that only make sense if we look at them as borrowed concepts from the Achaemenid ideology rather than the other way round. First among these is the fact that each time the *khvarnah* is mentioned it is almost systematically preceded by a “Mazdā-created” label. Such overemphasis is generally an indication to the contrary.<sup>26</sup> Through the addition of this label, Ahura Mazdā is attributed a political power that is usually not part of religious philosophy.

Moreover, in trying to project an image of an all-powerful god, it is not only necessary to attribute creation to him but also to show





**Fig. 12.4** Ahura Mazdā standing on top of the *khvarnah* symbol. Palace of Xerxes, Persepolis. (Photograph A. Soudavar)

that he can exert continuous control over the created. In the *Avesta* however, Mithra is recognized as the deity who bestows the *khvarnah* and the one who can take it back, while Apam Napāt is the one who guards it under water in its non-active phase. Ahura Mazdā does not and cannot interfere in their functions.

However, the most blatant contradiction appears in the Farvardin Yasht where Ahura Mazdā is in need of the *khvarnah* of the *fravashis* (spiritual beings) of the Righteous to achieve various functions such as protecting Anāhitā (Yt 13.4) or the Earth (which is also qualified as “Mazdā-created”, Yt 13.9). In another instance, in Yt 13.12, he even states that if it were not for the help of the *fravashis*—presumably through their *khvarnah*—he would not have been able to protect the good people and beneficial animals (Dustkhāh 2002: 406–407). Logically, a god cannot be in need of what he can create. While Mazdā-created

labels were added to project the omnipotence of Ahura Mazdā, all contradictions could not be ironed out. Contradictory notions were bound to appear in a manipulated or rectified text that was oral-based and not written.

#### 4.3. The emphasis on the radiance of the *khvarnah*

A brick panel in Persepolis shows the independent conception of the *khvarnah* within a tripartite cycle: encapsulated as a pearl in its dormant and underwater phase, its rise from the water through a stack of lotus flowers and its appearance in the sky as a sunflower (see Fig. 12.7). The whole panel is surrounded by a border of triangles that emphasizes the radiance of the *khvarnah*. But according to an Iranian legend incorporated into the *Avesta*, a falcon-type bird by the name of *veraghna*, whose feathers are full of *khvarnah*, acts as

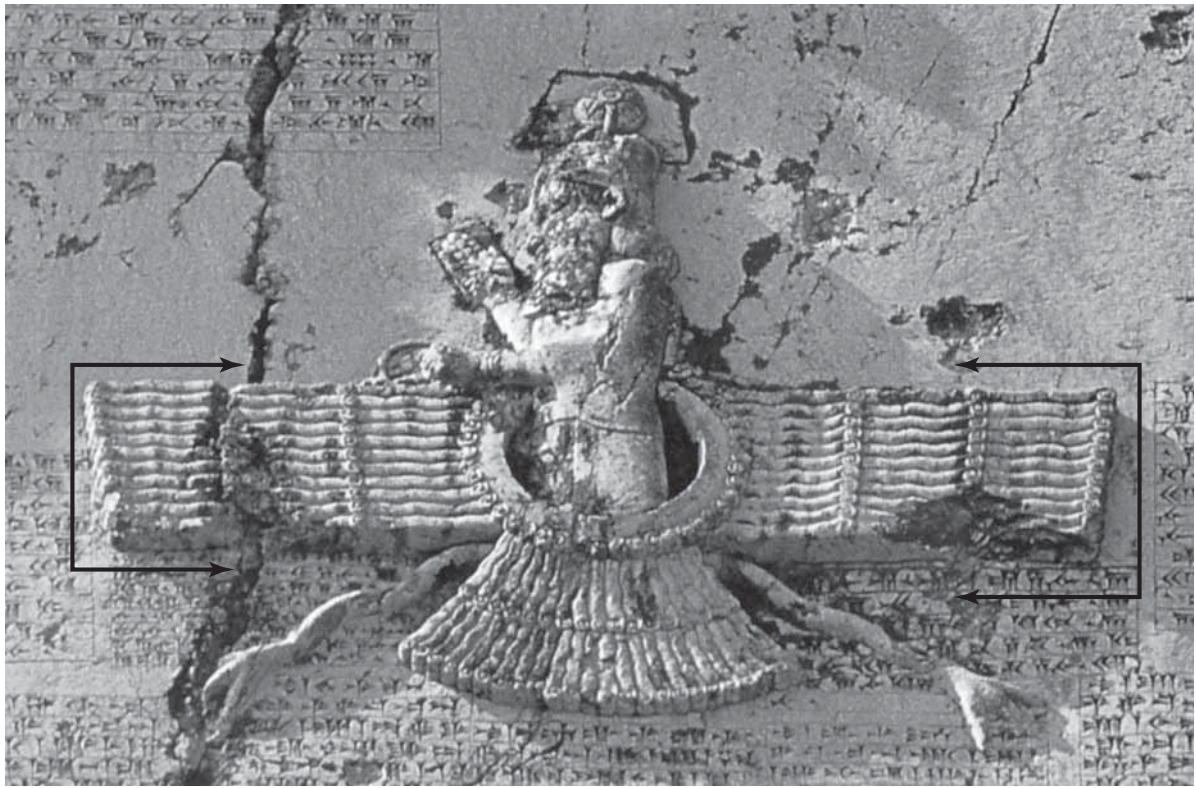


Fig. 12.5 The rectangular-shaped wings of the Ahura Mazdā symbol in Bisotun. (Photograph A. Soudavar)

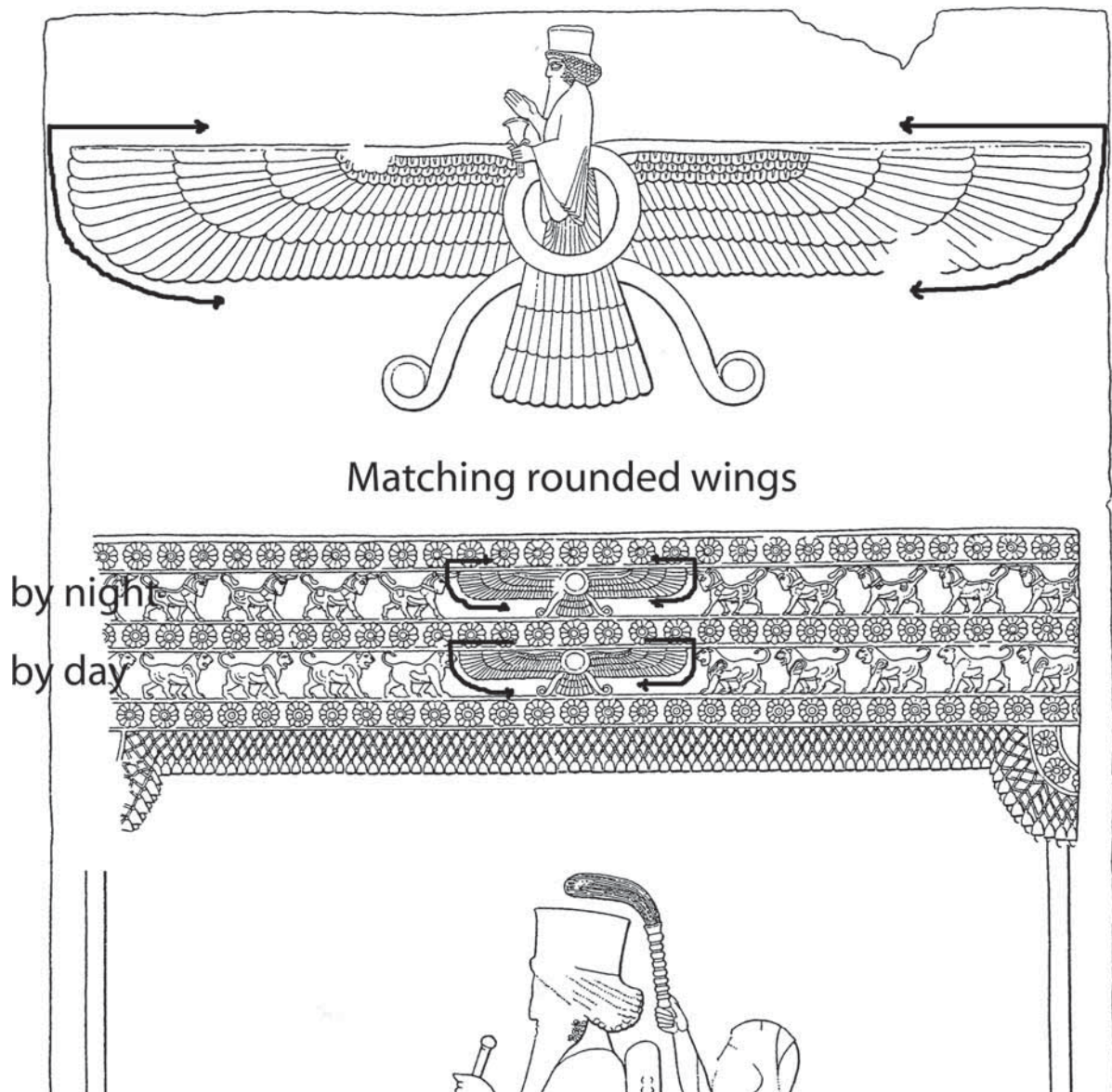
a transfer agent for this auspicious fortune. It is thus that on another glazed brick from Persepolis (Fig. 12.8) we can see the *veraghna* with two encapsulated *khvarnah* spheres in its claws, surrounded by a similar border of radiating triangles.<sup>27</sup>

Elfenbein has suggested that the association of solar radiance with the *khvarnah* came as a result of punning on the phonetic resemblance of the first part of this word with *khvar* (i.e. sun in Old Persian) (Elfenbein 2001: 492). This is a possibility, but punning alone cannot create such a lasting and powerful attribute as the radiance of the *khvarnah*. I suspect that the emphasis that Darius put on the radiance of the *khvarnah* may ultimately have sealed its association with radiance. As we shall see, this emphasis was not only achieved through the

imagery of his palaces but also through the use of a new qualifying word, *chiça*, that embodied the radiance of the *khvarnah*. The abandonment of the solar attributes of Ahura Mazdā was thus compensated by the claim of a *khvarnah* that was endowed with solar radiance.

Ironically, the emphasis on the radiance of the *khvarnah* opened the door for the reintroduction of the *khvarnah* iconography previously devised by the Medes. The problem with opening the door to ancient beliefs, especially if they are popular and colourful, is that they can overwhelm the newer ideology for which they were summoned for support. It is thus that the pearl, lotus and sunflower overwhelmed the winged-sphere symbol, as wall after wall of the Susa and Persepolis palaces was covered in them (Soudavar 2003: 103, figs 106–108).



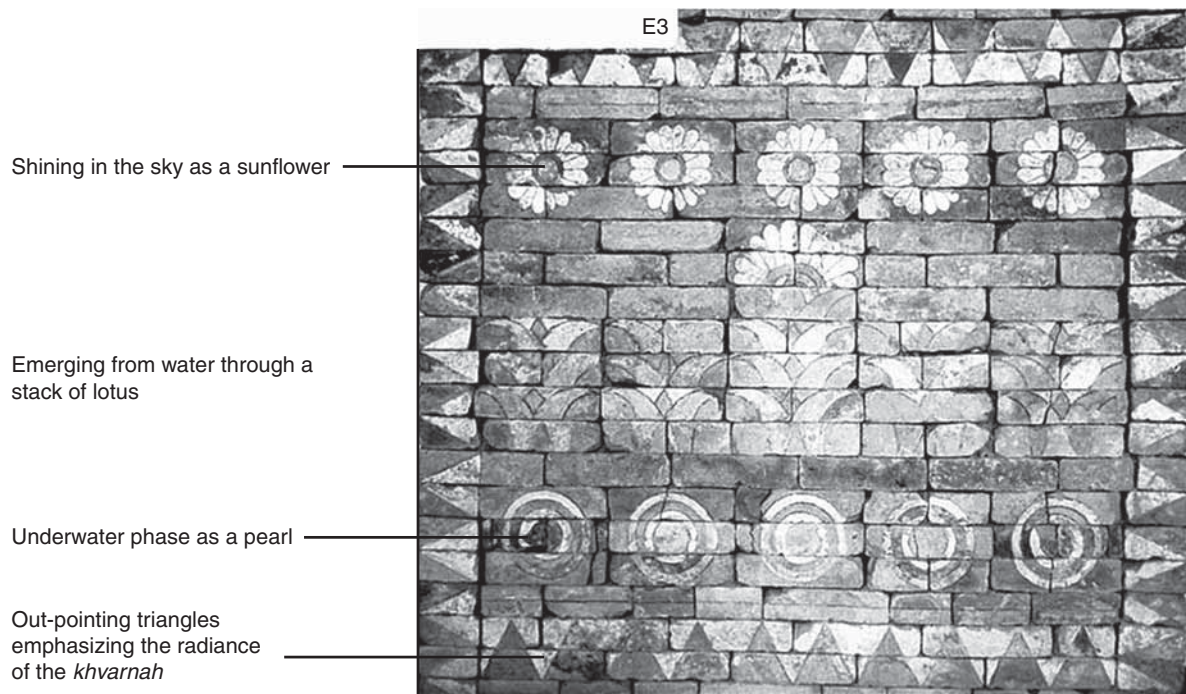


**Fig. 12.6** Matching the shape of the symbol of Ahura Mazda to that of the *khvarnah* in Persepolis. (Curtis & Tallis 2005: 76)

Similarly, there is a noticeable contrast between the Gāthās composed by Zoroaster himself, and the rest of the *Avesta* added by later priests. The Gāthās praise the supremacy of one god only, Ahura Mazda; but subsequently, he is overwhelmed by the more colourful, and seemingly more powerful, deities of the later *Avesta*.

#### 4.4. The support of the conspirators

Earlier on, I had surmised that the monotheistic reverence of Darius and Zoroaster for Ahura Mazda stemmed from an ideology that must have been popular among a small



**Fig. 12.7** Tripartite cycle of the *khvarnah*. Glazed brick panel, Persepolis. (Courtesy of the Oriental Institute, Chicago. Photograph no. P 58470)

group of Iranians, and it is likely that some of Darius' fellow conspirators, if not all, belonged to that group.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, both Herodotus and Bisotun agree that the usurper magus, Gaumata, was in control of the army and harshly suppressed any opposition (DB §13, Lecoq 1997: 191; Herodotus 2000, ii: 93 [Book III, §71]). It therefore seems logical to assume that under the cloud of terror that hung over their heads, the conspirators needed to trust each other. Their trust was probably based on common religious beliefs or affiliation.

My fourth example may reinforce this assumption. It is a silver plaque in the name of Otanes, one of Darius' co-conspirators whom Herodotus portrays as the elderly statesman who initiated the conspiracy (Fig. 12.9). It bears a cuneiform inscription deciphered by Pierre Lecoq:

I am Otanes..., I am (one) of the men in Persia. I...orders of Darius, the Great King. Darius says: *I protect the powerful (who is) just, I punish the liar (who is) a rebel.* By the support (*vashnā*) of Ahura Mazdā and with me, Darius is the Great King.<sup>29</sup>

Of course Otanes mentions Ahura Mazdā. But more important for our discussion is the sentence (in italics) in which Otanes is clearly challenging the Median beliefs expressed in Yt 13:95. The functions of supporting *authority* and suppressing *rebellion* are transferred from Mithra and Apam Napāt to Darius who, in effect, will act as Ahura Mazdā's deputy on earth.

But Yt 13:95 begs a question: why did the Medes need two deities to perform the same task in the first place, and why was one, for example Mithra, not enough? As Mary Boyce has explained, Iranians saw day and night as





**Fig. 12.8** Symbol of *veraghna* surrounded by triangular light rays. Glazed brick, Persepolis. (Curtis & Tallis 2005: 95)

two different realms: the day came under the protection of Mithra and the night under that of Apam Napāt (Soudavar 2003: 53). This division was obviously incompatible with a monotheistic conception of the world, and had to be modified. This is what Otanes tried to achieve.

The plaque also reflects Darius' early pre-occupations, and his emphasis in the Bisotun inscriptions that his orders were carried "by day and by night".<sup>30</sup> As deputy of Ahura Mazdā

on earth, Darius had to abolish the division of time into two realms and contend that he effectively ruled both. The degree of his concern in this respect is measured by the number of lion–bull icons that were incorporated in the Persepolis visual propaganda programme.

I had suggested in a previous study that in this icon, the lion represented the sun and the bull symbolized the moon, and the whole reflected the day and night revolutions (Fig. 12.11) (Soudavar 2003: 116–120). The subsequent discovery of a seal from Sardis, with the sun and moon depicted over an intermingling lion and bull (Fig. 12.10), validates my interpretation.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, we can see that in placing a winged sphere in the middle of two rows, one flanked by bulls and the other by lions (Fig. 12.6), the designer of Darius' canopy was projecting that the *khvarnah* supported the king by day and by night. In so doing, the designer was still conditioned by a Median mindset by which night and day belonged to two different realms. The more clever presentation, however, was the combined lion–bull icon, which somehow blurred the separation between the two realms by presenting them as a perpetual phenomenon (Fig. 12.11). While similar icons exist in other cultures, they generally depict a lion devouring a helpless prey. The innovative approach



**Fig. 12.9** Silver plaque of Otanes. (Private collection)



**Fig. 12.10** The lion and bull design surmounted by sun and moon motifs. Seal from Sardis. (Dusinberre 2002: 278)

here was to depict it as a temporary and non-fatal attack of the lion, since the bull is springing back up with his head turned backwards, ready to re-engage with the lion. The artifice was meant to convey perpetuity in time.

The conclusions of Cindy Nimchuk (this volume) for the foundation plaques of the Apadana in Persepolis, bring an added vista into Darius' preoccupation with the realms of Mithra and Apam Napāt. As she argues, the choice of material for the two plaques (one in gold and the other in silver) was by design, and invoked the sun and the moon. In keeping with our analysis of the Otanes plaque and the Persepolis canopy, it seems that Darius was emphasizing that his authority—as described on the DPh inscriptions of the foundation plaques—was upheld “by day and by night”. Moreover, gold Croeseids (i.e. coins from Lydia or more generally Asia Minor) were also placed in the foundation boxes along with the plaques. Of particular interest are the confronting heads of a lion and a bull on them (Fig. 12.12). It puts the lion and bull on an equal footing and confirms their role as iconic symbols for day and night, and not one as prey

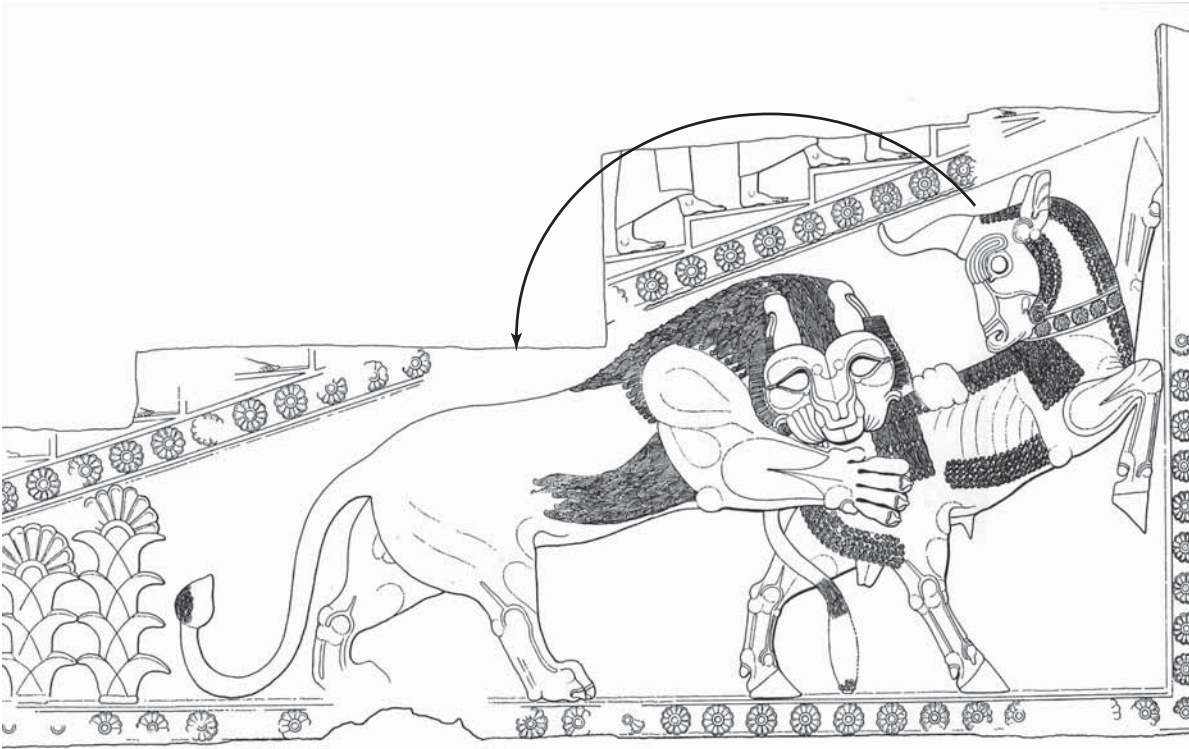
of the other.<sup>32</sup> By burying this coin, Darius was symbolically burying the Median division of the world into two realms.

Finally, the Otanes plaque shares a peculiarity with Bisotun, namely a slanted stroke placed before the first word (see top left of Fig. 12.9), which vouches for an early date of c.519 BC. Indeed, an important characteristic of the Old Persian script is the use of the slanted stroke as a word separator. This sign must initially have been conceived as a device to bracket words rather than to separate them, for we see that in Bisotun, the first word has it on both sides, that is, before and after. But Achaemenid scribes must have realized very quickly that the first stroke was superfluous and hence dropped it. To this date no inscription other than Bisotun has it. Its appearance on this plaque, therefore, attests to a date close to that of Bisotun. This early date corroborates our contention that Darius and his supporters strove from the outset to dismantle the Median ideology based on the dominion of Mithra and Apam Napāt over the realms of day and night.

#### 4.5. *Arya chiça* in lieu of the Aryan *khvarnah*

My last example is from the trilingual Naqsh-e Rostam inscription (DNa §2) where Darius declares to be the “son of Vishtaspa the Achaemenid, Pārsā son of Pārsā, Aryan and Arya chiça”. The latter—underlined—sentence has generally been translated as “Aryan and from Aryan origin”.

In a forthcoming article, I argue that the Old Persian word *chiça*, its Avestic counterpart *chiθra*, as well as their progenies, all derive from a common root *chit*, which means brilliance and appearance, but to which philologists have unfortunately added unwarranted



**Fig. 12.11** The lion and bull icon symbolizing the perpetual night and day revolutions, Persepolis. (Curtis & Tallis 2005: 78)

meanings such as “seed”, “nature” and “origin” that can lead to a nonsense, as in the underlined sentence here: Aryan means precisely “of Aryan origin”, there was no need to repeat it (Soudavar 2006a: 170–177). A Kurd would not say that he is Kurdish *and* of Kurdish origin; Clovis of France (r. 466–511) was never designated as a Frank *and* of Frankish stock. In addition, what benefit was there in claiming to be an Aryan if some of those who rebelled against Darius, such as the Medes and the Scythians, were also Aryans?

What Darius meant here was that he possessed the Aryan *khvarnah*; but because the word *khvarnah* had acquired a Mithraic connotation, he preferred to replace it with an equivalent term, hence *chiça* whose brilliance could also symbolize the radiating power of

the *khvarnah*. In this trilingual inscription, neither the Babylonian scribe nor the Elamite one knew how to translate the purely Iranian idea of Aryan *chiça*, and refrained from doing it.<sup>33</sup> Modern philologists should have done the same.

Why did Darius do this? He did it because Yt 18.2 specifies that it is the Aryan *khvarnah* that “vanquishes the non-Aryan nations” (Dustkhāh 2002, i: 481), and Darius was claiming that he had conquered a series of nations that included non-Aryan ones:

DNa, §3—Darius the King says: By the will of Ahura Mazdā here are the nations (*dahyu*) that I conquered beyond Persia:

...the Mede, the Elamite, the Parthian, the Arian, the Arachosian, the Sattgydian,





Fig. 12.12 Gold 'Croeseids' from the foundation box of the Apadana. (Curtis & Tallis 2005: 58)

the Gandharian, the Indian, the Amyrgian Scythian, the Tigrakhoda Scythians, the Babylonian, the Assyrian, the Arab, the Egyptian, the Armenian, the Cappodocian, the Lydian, the Greek, the Scythians From Beyond The Seas, the Thracian, the Aspidophores Greeks, the Libyans, the Ethiopians, the Macians, the Carians.

It should be noted that in Bisotun Darius also gives a list of nations which, although less extensive than this one, nonetheless includes non-Aryan nations. There is, however, a subtle difference in the way these two lists are introduced. In Bisotun, Darius presents a list of nations that "obeyed" him (DB §6, Lecoq 1997: 188). These were nations conquered by his predecessors, some of which had rebelled but were ultimately vanquished by Darius. Darius had restored order in the empire but as yet had not conquered any non-Aryan nation. By contrast, in the preamble to the DNa list he boasts that these were the nations "conquered" by him, among which there were non-Aryan nations such as the Thracians and

the Ethiopians. The conquest of non-Aryan nations required the possession of the Aryan *khvarnah*.

The choice of *chiça* as a substitute for *khvarnah* ties well with the iconographic evidence by which Darius emphasizes the radiance of the *khvarnah* through triangular rays. By rendering the *khvarnah* luminous, he was able to claim back the solar attribute that he once tried to obtain through Ahura Mazdā. Thus, in retrospect, it was perhaps not the *Avesta* hymn composers of Elfenbein who perceived the phonetic similarity between the sun (*khvar*) and *khvarnah* (Elfenbein 2001: 492), but the imperial Achaemenid functionaries who seized upon it to build a solar imagery that kingship required. The use of the word *chiça* in lieu of *khvarnah* was to reinforce this solar imagery.

Unlike Darius' unsuccessful borrowing of a foreign solar symbol in Bisotun, the substitution of an equivalent Iranian term for the *khvarnah* had a lasting effect. It penetrated the Avestan vocabulary (Soudavar 2006a: 169–170), and reappeared as *chihr* in the ubiquitous Sasanian imperial slogan *ke chihr az yazatan*, one that was meant to portray the king reflecting the gods in their radiance and power.<sup>34</sup>

But the more interesting effect is how it inspired Zoroastrian priests to portray their prophet. We can see it in the *Zāmyād Yasht*: after the *khvarnah* flew away from Jamshid (Yima) and was hidden under water by Apam Napāt, the Turānian Afrāsiyāb (Frangrasyan) tries to recover it, but is repeatedly unsuccessful and utters each time:

I have not been able to conquer the *khvarnah* that belongs to the Aryan nations—to the born and the unborn (i.e. now and for ever)—and to the holy Zoroaster. (Yt 5:42,

Yt 19:57, 60, 63–64, Dustkhāh 2002, i: 305, 495–96; Malandra 1993: 93–95)

In this passage, Zoroaster is said to possess the Aryan *khvarnah*,<sup>35</sup> an auspicious power that only emanates from the Aryan nations. The problem, however, is that Jamshid's myth precedes Zoroaster because he himself alludes to it in his Gāthās (Y 32.8).<sup>36</sup> Therefore, it was impossible for Afrāsiyāb to have known Zoroaster and to attribute the Aryan *khvarnah* to him. The inclusion of the name of the prophet in this myth is obviously a later addition, but for what purpose?

Since time immemorial, priests have tried to increase the importance of their religion's prophet by borrowing kingly attributes and imagery. Shiites for instance used epithets such as *soltān* and *shāh* for their prophet and imams; and Christians have often portrayed Jesus seated on a golden throne, and have given him titles such as Pantocrator, and even Saviour (Greek *soter*), which was after all the epithet of Ptolemy I (r. 305–284 BC). Similarly, Zoroastrian priests seized upon the myth of Jamshid and the mention of the Aryan *khvarnah* in it to attribute the strongest form of *khvarnah* to their prophet, as Darius had also claimed. They probably invented concurrently the term Kiyānid *khvarnah*, in order to distinguish kingly *khvarnah* from the one now appropriated for Zoroaster.

## 5. The origins of the *khvarnah* and chronology issues

Pondering about the *khvarnah* and its relationship to Mithra and Apam Napāt, I had previously said that, "What is not clear, however, is whether these deities were chosen because of an existing association with *khvarnah* or because, as lords of daylight and night time,

they were perceived as natural choices to embody the *khvarnah* cycle" (Soudavar 2003: 90). It now seems that the latter is true, and that the *khvarnah* was a tribal concept, referred to as the Aryan *khvarnah* that pre-existed the Medes. Even though in the *Avesta*, the Aryan *khvarnah* is labelled as "Mazdā-created", it clearly belonged to the Aryan nation and Ahura Mazdā had no further control over it. It was there to be claimed by a strong leader. It provided an authority beyond any bestowed by Ahura Mazdā, and thus had to be invoked separately. Several observations vouch for this assertion: there is a similar clan or tribe-related auspicious power that is invoked by other central Asian tribes, namely the Turcomans and the Mongols, in their edicts. In all of these edicts, the invocation of clan power comes after, and in addition to, a supreme deity that precedes it in their *invocatios* (Soudavar 2006b).

In the Gāthās, Zoroaster uses the word *khvarnah* only once and with "auspiciousness" as its meaning (Y 51.18, Dustkhāh 2002, i: 80). Had this word originally been associated with Mithra, it is doubtful that Zoroaster would have used it.

In the Zāmyād Yasht, Ahura Mazdā derives his creation powers from the *khvarnah* of the spiritual beings (*fravashis*) of the *ashavans*, a term which primarily seems to refer to the past heroes of the Aryan tribes.

In the same Yasht, when the Glory moves away from Jamshid it is simply termed as *khvarnah*, but when Afrāsiyāb wants to recuperate it, it is qualified as the Aryan *khvarnah*. This suggests that originally there was only one type of *khvarnah* and it belonged to the Aryan nations.

One may add that Lubotsky's and Parpola's recent suggestion for the etymology of *khvarnah* as being derived from Scythian *farnah*

corresponding to Sanscrit *parna* (meaning “feather”), ties it more to a mythical bird than to a deity (Parpola 2002: 309–310).

This may then explain why Darius chose to rely on the concept of *khvarnah* to promote his legitimacy. The *khvarnah* was not a Median invention; the Medes had only given it a new veneer. Darius did the same by incorporating it into a monotheistic Mazdean ideology but paradoxically, by rendering it radiant and luminous, he reinforced its connection to the Iranian sun deity, Mithra. As soon as Mithra was reinstated by Artaxerxes II (r. 405–359 BC), the *khvarnah* became once again associated with it, and by extension the Median model of the solar and aquatic pair of deities was reinvigorated. In choosing to invoke Mithra and Anāhitā along with Ahura Mazdā in his inscriptions (Lecoq 1997: 269–270, 274–275), Artaxerxes II did what Iranian kings whose legitimacy was contested had to do: claim the support of Ahura Mazdā and the gods, which popular belief associated with the *khvarnah*. Thus similar to Sasanian kings such as Narseh (r. 293–303) or Khosrow II (r. 590–628), whose legitimacy had to be validated or reinstated, Artaxerxes II invoked Mithra and Anāhitā to bolster a legitimacy that had been eroded by the challenges mounted by his brother, Cyrus the younger (Soudavar 2003: 18–19, 73–78, 106–108).

Irrespective of when the Avestan hymns were composed, what is certain is that the attribution of the perpetual Aryan *khvarnah* to Zoroaster would have prevented the Achaemenid kings from claiming the same and would not have survived that era. Thus, the attribution of the Aryan *khvarnah* to Zoroaster must have happened after the demise of the Achaemenids. The obvious conclusion then is, if in the post-Achaemenid era there were additions to the *Avesta* in an archaistic style,

the same could have happened earlier on, namely, the *Avesta* could have been composed by priests who favoured such a style (in the manner of Roman Catholic priests who still write in Latin). The archaistic style of the text, therefore, loses all validity for dating the time of its composition.

There is an interesting parallel between the Ābān Yasht dedicated to Anāhitā, and the Zāmyād Yasht, in that both include passages about the hidden *khvarnah* in the waters of lake Farākh-Kart (Vorou-Kasha). More interesting, however, is the difference between these two passages. In the Zāmyād Yasht, the story of the *khvarnah*, from its loss by Jamshid to its hiding in the waters of lake Farākh-Kart by Apam Napāt, is given in full detail. Then comes Afrāsiyāb, trying to recover it on his own, without seeking the help of a deity. His unsuccessful attempts lead to the utterance of the above-mentioned sentence in which he states that the Aryan *khvarnah* belongs to Zoroaster (Yt 19:57, 60, 63–64, Dustkhāh 2002, i: 495–496). By contrast, the only part of this story reported in the Ābān Yasht is about Afrāsiyāb’s attempt to recover the *khvarnah* from its dormant and underwater stage. He sacrifices to Anāhitā and asks for her help. Help is denied, and as a result, he is unsuccessful. He then utters the same sentence as above (Yt 5:42, Dustkhāh 2002, i: 305).

According to Mary Boyce, the creation powers of Apam Napāt clashed with those of the supreme creator Ahura Mazdā, and he was gradually supplanted by another aquatic deity, Anāhitā (Boyce 1987: 149–150). The question is, why was there a need to supplant him at all? In a monotheistic conception of the world, was it not easier just to suppress, or ignore, problematic deities, as Darius did in his inscriptions and Zoroaster did in his Gāthās? The only plausible answer is that the need for the

intervention of an aquatic deity was necessary for the *khvarnah* to emerge from its dormant stage under water. Mithra had no control over waters and therefore could not bestow the *khvarnah* unless it was released from the waters, and that was the responsibility of an aquatic deity. By emphasizing the radiance of the *khvarnah*, Darius had caused the consolidation of the position of the solar deity Mithra as the giver of *khvarnah*, and at the same time created the necessity for an aquatic counterpart for him as its keeper. The Avestan priests, who composed the *Zāmyād* and the *Farvardin Yashts*, resuscitated the Median pair of Mithra/Apam Napāt as the giver and guardian of the *khvarnah*. The *Ābān Yasht*, on the other hand, seems to conform better to the kingly ideology founded by Darius and subsequently modified by Artaxerxes II. *Anāhitā* appears in this *Yasht* as a powerful deity who not only controls the *khvarnah* but is also solicited by heroes as well as evil beings, to grant them their wishes. She, of course, accepts the wishes of the former but denies those of the latter. *Anāhitā* was thus the perfect choice for Artaxerxes to invoke alongside Mithra, because by eliminating Apam Napāt, the night and day division that Darius had so persistently fought against was avoided. At the same time, the invocation of this new pair of solar and aquatic deities projected for Artaxerxes the aura of popular legitimacy associated with the *khvarnah*. Nevertheless, Mithra's popularity posed a threat to the supremacy of Ahura Mazdā; it was safer to promote *Anāhitā*. She thus became the choice cultic deity of later Achaemenids and eventually, that of the Sasanians.

The *Ābān Yasht* therefore seems to have been composed in conformity with the directional changes instituted by Artaxerxes II and represented mainstream Achaemenid ideology, while the *Zāmyād* and *Farvardin*

*Yashts* seem to have been composed on the fringe of the empire, or after the demise of the Achaemenids. Both were, however, modified in the post-Achaemenid era, in the passages where Zoroaster is said to possess the Aryan *khvarnah*.

## 6. Pārsā son of Pārsā

In a previous analysis of the genealogical identity that Darius provides in DNa (see 3.5 above), and through a comparison with Turcoman nomenclatures, I had argued that there was a structural difference in the use of the words "Achaemenid" and "Pārsā": one was repeated and the other not. If Darius' father was an Achaemenid, so was he; there was no need to repeat it. On the other hand, if the Pārsā qualification is repeated for father and son, it must point to a non-hereditary and non-permanent qualification (Soudavar 2006a: 171–172). I was, however, unable to suggest a meaning for Pārsā. But in light of my present analysis, I would like to suggest that, whatever the origins of the word, by the time of Darius it had acquired a religious connotation. Pārsā probably designated the group of Iranians who fanatically believed in the supremacy of Ahura Mazdā, to which Darius and his co-conspirators belonged. "Pārsā son of Pārsā" meant that both father and son adhered to the same Mazdā-worshipping group.

Several observations favour such an argument. Firstly, the modern Persian word *pārsā* means religious or pious, and I am at a loss to find any suitable etymological justification for it except as an affiliation with the term that Darius had used. Secondly, one should note that in referring to Mazdean priests who practised nightly ceremonies at the Chashmeh Sabz pond near Tus in Khorasan, Hamdollāh-e Mostowfi (d. 1335) uses the word *parsāyān*,



which vouches for a pre-Islamic origin for the word *pārsā* (Mostowfi 1915: 148–149). Thirdly, in the coinage of Persis, there is for the period leading to the rise of Ardashir I, the odd representation of a ruler on the obverse, and his father on the reverse (e.g. Fig. 12.13). The combination seems to be the visual rendering of Darius’ “Pārsā son of Pārsā” expression, which must have remained in use in the stronghold of the Achaemenids, present-day Fārs (which was named after the Pārsās). The Persis dynasty of rulers there were notoriously religious. The religious standing of Ardashir and his forefathers derived from their hereditary position as keepers of the temple of Anāhitā in Estakhr, and ties well with my previous assumption that the cult of Anāhitā was associated with the mainstream ideology of later Achaemenids. The home of the Pārsās thus remained the bastion of religious zealots who believed in the supremacy of Ahura Mazdā as the creator god, but whose cultic activity gravitated around Anāhitā. The hereditary religious leadership of the early Sasanians justified a “Pārsā son of Pārsā” qualification. The same may be true for the early Achaemenids.

## 7. Conclusion

I have tried to demonstrate that Darius began his reign with a strong monotheistic fervour but gradually had to relax it in view of the popular beliefs of his own constituency. That, in turn, much affected the outcome of Zoroastrianism, which must have had a strong monotheistic undertone at the time of the prophet, but lost it as it became more and more entangled with imperial ideology.

Initially, Darius’ monotheistic fervour left no room for other deities to be invoked. It was a fervour shared by a group of supporters who all believed in the supremacy of Ahura

Mazdā. To explain the activity of this group of zealots, I offered as a model the militancy of the Safavid Shāh Esmā’il and his followers. Although Henning once rebuked Hertzfeld for comparing pre-Islamic Iran with the post-Islamic era (Henning 1951: 15), I believe that the “history repeats itself” cliché is nowhere more fitting than in the Iranian context. If the young Shāh Esmā’il came out of hiding to conquer the Aq-Qoyunlu Empire that his maternal grandfather had founded, it was not to emulate Herodotus in his story of Cyrus II (who also rose to conquer the Median empire of his maternal grandfather), but because similar circumstances usually lead to similar outcomes. At the very least, the Safavid militancy model offers a possible scenario for how a small group of believers can impose their ideology on the rest of the population, an ideology that in turn will end up espousing many of the concepts and beliefs of its initial foes.

As Skjaervø has noted, there are indeed many parallels between the *Avesta* and Achaemenid ideology. But rather than proceed with his a-priori stance that “the Achaemenids had always been Zoroastrians or at some time for some reason the early Achaemenid became Zoroastrian” (Skjaervø 2005: 53), and restrict the scope of possibilities, I have allowed text and iconography to guide me in the opposite direction: the possibility of Achaemenid ideology affecting the composition of the *Avesta* and, by extension, Zoroastrianism.

Darius’ kingly ideology was a forceful ideological revolution that can only be comprehended against the foil of his predecessors’ beliefs. The key to this understanding is Yt 13:95, which not only explains the Median kingly ideology but provides, in conjunction with Yt 13:94, a solid clue for the birth date





**Fig. 12.13** Coin of Shāpur and his father Pāpak, c.AD 210. (*Dr Busso Peus Nachf. Münzhandlung*, catalogue no. 368, lot 364)

of Zoroaster. The importance of this clue is validated by numerous iconographic as well as textual examples that show how persistently Darius tried to suppress the dual night and day realms of Mithra and Apam Napāt, that is, the very foundation of the Median kingly ideology.

Among Darius' innovative approaches was his reformulation of the concept of *khvarnah* by associating it with solar radiance, in conjunction with his emphasis on possessing the Aryan *khvarnah* (which he described as the Radiance of the Aryans). But since the same power was later on attributed to Zoroaster, we have solid proof of the partial composition of the *Avesta* in the post-Achaemenid era. This, in turn, invalidates the very foundation of the believers in an archaic and ancient *Avesta* who insist that the Avestan language was only in use c.1000 BC or earlier. Their theory is in reality a house of cards built on quicksand.

Like every other prophetic religion of the world, Zoroastrianism has been encumbered

over the centuries with additions or aberrations dictated by political developments. Zoroaster's own monotheistic vision emanated from a sharp intellect which first defined "thought", and perceived the conceptual necessity of evil as the foil against which good must be measured (Gershevitch 1995: 6; Henning 1951: 46–47).

In form, his Gāthās have such a Gnostic tone that one wonders if Zoroaster should not be considered as the father of all subsequent Gnostic developments of the east Iranian world. Like all of these Gnostic ideologies, his Gāthās lament the love for the Creator, asking for guidance from him, and ultimately seeking unity with him. It is hard to imagine how such a superior intellect and pure-hearted visionary could be the author of, or inspiration for, a multi-polar *Avesta* riddled with divinities that ultimately undermine Zoroaster's monotheistic and Gnostic outlook.

Based on a stylistic analysis of text, Kellens and Pirart once suggested that the *Avesta* had

more than one author (1988: 7), but more important than the authors are the main ideologues of the *Avesta*, namely, those whose ideas shaped the holy book of Zoroastrianism. If Zoroaster was the first such ideologue, then the second one was undoubtedly Darius, son of Vishtaspa the Achaemenid, Pārsā son of Pārsā, an Aryan and possessor of the Aryan *khvarnah*.

## Notes

1. In 1985–87 Kellens estimated the hiatus between the older and younger *Avesta* to be four centuries (1987: 135–139). Four years later, he seems to have revised it to two centuries (1991: 14).
2. According to Kellens, the younger *Avesta* emulated the older one, at times without a proper understanding of the latter's underlying structure (1987: 139). It implicitly admits the attachment of later priests to an archaistic language.
3. Gershevitch (1995: 4–5) favours Sogdiana as Zoroaster's homeland. Grenet (2005: 29–51) projects the views of different authors on maps, all emphasizing this eastern Iranian corridor as the growth place of Zoroastrianism.
4. Fussman, for instance, characterizes the Avestan community as a “civilization of cattle breeders, marginally agricultural, with a non-lasting habitat that was unsophisticated construction wise, without any trace of urban civilization, using the horse and the cart for warfare and practicing looting raids” in order to conclude that it must have belonged to the second millennium BC (Fussman 2005: 221). Unfortunately, anyone who has witnessed Afghan raids on eastern Iran (I being one such witness) can vouch that except for the use of a gun, Fussman's definition also fits Afghan raiders of the twentieth century. His definition is in fact a perfect fit for the marauding bands of Afghans, Hezaras or Turkmen who lived a few centuries earlier and before the advent of the gun. Such a characterization is therefore not proof for assigning the Avestan community to the second millennium BC.
5. Boyce had been misled by Bailey's erroneous translation of *abgenag* (glass) as “crystal”; glass is classified in the *Bundahishn* as a metal (presumably because it is obtained through a melting process, as metals are) (Malandra 2003: 273).
6. Most mythological chariots, such as those mentioned in the *Iliad* (23, 334–348), are described as a *bigae* or two-horse chariot, but Swennen remarks that the *quadriga* is already mentioned in the *Rigveda* (Swennen 2004: 89). Whatever implication it may have for its dating, the *quadrigae* pertains to a sophisticated society and not a primitive one.
7. Francfort, for instance, demonstrates that the supposedly Zoroastrian funerary practice of leaving the dead body in the open air was practised in non-Iranian Central Asian communities and alongside burial tombs for goats or camels, which further vouches for the non-Zoroastrian nature of those communities (Francfort 2005: 276–277, 294–295; see also Kellens 2005: 45–46; Razmjou 2005b: 154).
8. “and the Mazdean religion (*dyny mzdysn*), as well as the Magians, found respect in our country” (Gignoux 1972: 187). The *Avesta* also refers to its religion in the same way: “the good Mazdean Religion” (Y 6.12, Y 16.6), “Mazdā-worshipper and a Zoroastrian” (Y 12.6).
9. The most blatant example of Skjaervø's misguided approach is his reliance on the linguistic imagery of a grasping hand to convey the notion of vanquishing, capturing and subduing an enemy (Skjaervø 2005: 71–73), which is neither a religious nor a kingly concept but stems from the normal development of a language, similar to what in English would be described as “having the upper hand”. For more on the hand (*dast*) imagery in the Iranian context, see Soudavar 2003: 13–14.
10. Gnoli 2000: 156. The mini-calendar of Zādspram allows a lifespan of 77 years for the prophet (Gignoux & Tafazzoli 1993: 87); it consequently puts his death at c.541 BC.
11. See note 14, below. Kellens's objections as to the unreliability of “258” because of its connection with imaginary regnal years (Kellens 2001: 177) becomes irrelevant as per the scenario in which a religious tradition only kept dates pertaining to its own survival, and upon which regnal years of a forgotten distant past had to be suddenly transplanted in Sasanian times.
12. I refer here to the ubiquitous Sasanian political idiom *ki chihz az yazatan* and the erroneous Greek translation of the word *chihz* as “family”, rather than as a reflective aura, which I have argued to be the proper meaning in Soudavar 2003: 41–47. Since the latter's publication, Panaino has independently come to the same conclusion (2004: 555–585), and Philippe Gignoux has also supported my thesis (personal communication).
13. Biruni 1377: 20: “258 years from the beginning of Zoroaster's prophethood (*zohur*) to the beginning of Alexander's era (*tārikh-e eskandar*)”; Biruni

- 1377: 174 and Mas'udi 1962, ii: 551: "258 years from Vishtaspa until the advent of Alexander"; Mas'udi 1962, i: 202 also states that the father of Vishtaspa, i.e. Lohrāsp, was a contemporary of Nabuchodonosor (r. 605–562 BC).
14. The "Coming of the Religion" (which supposedly occurred when Zoroaster was 30 years old) was confounded in these reconstructions with the year Zoroaster converted Kay Goshtāsp (i.e. Vishtaspa) to his cause in the 13th year of a reign lasting 120 years. Thus, the part of Kay Goshtāsp's reign included in the "258" figure is calculated by the texts as 120 minus 30. The Bundahishn (p.156) gives Kay Goshtāsp as 120–30 = 90 years, Bahman 112, Homāy-e Bahman-dokht 30, Dārā-ye chehr-āzādan ("who is Bahman") 12, Dārā-ye Dārāyān (i.e. Darius III) 14. Mas'udi (At-tanbih val-eshrāf: 85–88) gives: Kay Goshtāsp 120–30 = 90 years, Bahman 112, Khomāni 30, Dārā 12, Dārā-ye Dārāyān 14. Both lists total 258 years. One can readily see from these examples that the compilers of the regnal tables had no clue about earlier history, and reconstructed it by fitting into an orally transmitted time-bracket of 258 years the names of ancient and mythical figures, equally received through an oral tradition.
  15. For a detailed reasoning see Gershevitch 1995: 6–7 and also Taqizadeh 1947: 34–38, where the latter provides a full explanation and extensive data on how the Seleucid era was equated with the tenth millennium of the Zoroaster era.
  16. Dustkhāh 2002, i: 425 (see note 18 below).
  17. Since the *Avesta* is about Iranian people we must look for an Iranian empire, and not, for instance, for an Elamite one.
  18. Gershevitch (1959: 27) and Malandra (1971: 211) had both previously reinstated the missing *apam* (I am indebted to Xavier Tremblay for pointing out these two references to me). It is precisely because of a better rendering of this narrative rhythm that I have relied on the Persian translation of the *Avesta* by Dustkhāh, rather than on others.
  19. If Herodotus (book III, §65; Herodotus 2000, ii: 85) is to be trusted, when Cambyses asks his followers to seek revenge on Gaumata, he does it "in the name of the *gods* of [his] royal house" and not Ahura Mazdā (or Zeus in the Greek context).
  20. See Soudavar 2003: 88–92 and 101 for the justification of the term "winged sphere" in lieu of a winged disc.
  21. For the importance of sun gods in Anatolian and Mesopotamian cultures, see Beckman 2002: 37–40.
  22. "this is what I request from Ahura Mazdā, with all the *gods*; may Ahura Mazdā, with all the *gods*, fulfill my wishes" (Lecoq 1997: 228).
  23. Soudavar 2003: 23, 100. For a representation of the same on a gold ornament see Dusinberre 2003: 149.
  24. For the concept of *farreh-afzun* (abundant *khvar-nah*), and the multiplicity of its symbols, see Soudavar 2003:16–19, 59–62, 91.
  25. This modification was only applied when the two emblems were represented together, not when Ahura Mazdā was represented alone as in Naqsh-e Rostam.
  26. The strong concentration of the "Mazdā-created" label in some of the liturgies such as Y 4 and Y 6 also seems to be an attempt to attribute the creation of entities to Ahura Mazdā, when they may have been previously associated with other deities. In Y 4.10, for instance, where the "Mazdā-created Waters" are praised in the same sentence as the aquatic deity Apam Napāt (lit. Son of Waters), the label was necessary to sever the creation ties of Apam Napāt with the Waters.
  27. For an embossed gold medallion of *veraghna* surrounded by a sunflower-type radiance, see Curtis & Tallis 2005: 147, fig. 185.
  28. The imposition of the extreme type of Shiism after the ascent of Shāh Esmā'il to the throne was also mainly effected by a small group of supporters known as the Qezelbāsh.
  29. I shall rely here on the initial text published in a sales catalogue (Lecoq 2003: 105), even though Lecoq has had more insights into it since then. The Old Persian word *vashnā* has generally been translated as "By the Grace of (a divinity)". This is why Lecoq expressed some surprise at its use by Darius himself in DPd §2 (1997: 227). The use of the same word by Otanes perhaps indicates that "support" is a better translation than "grace".
  30. The "by day and by night" emphasis appears in DB §7 in three languages, and in DB §8 in the Babylonian version only (Lecoq 1997: 189).
  31. The sun and moon also appear on Sasanian seals, see seals DJ3 and DJ6 in Bivar 1969: pl. 11.
  32. A recent article by Cahill and Kroll attributes the creation of these Croeseids to Croesus' time (I am grateful to Cindy Nimchuk for pointing this out to me). Unfortunately I am not convinced by their arguments for the following reasons: a) I can find no justification as to why Croesus would switch from the powerful symbol of a single lion to a mixed symbolism of two confronting animals, neither winning nor losing, which somehow

diminishes the projection of power, and can only be justified with a Median-type theory advanced here (I doubt one could find a similar one in the Greek context); b) the test data is inconclusive and in any case also covers the 499 BC burning of Sardis; c) more importantly, since they emphasize that the coins were found in areas that displayed widespread fire and burning (Cahill & Kroll 2005: 595), the scenario fits the 499 event much better than the conquest by Cyrus. The latter's army may have looted the city, but it would have been uncharacteristic of Cyrus to let his army burn a surrendered city. Their main argument, that no item datable to post-*c.*550 BC was found in the debris, rests on a dating of Greek vases that, as they admit themselves, is contested by some scholars. However, the discovery of a later item is needed to destroy their theory entirely. Be that as it may, even if this type of coin was originally Lydian, for Darius it represented the symbol of day and night.

Persians were notorious for adopting foreign symbols and interpreting them in their own way.

33. DNa §2, Lecoq 1997: 219; the Elamite version simply repeats the *Ariya chiça* without attempting any translation (Dr Chlodowig Werba, personal communication).
34. See note 12 above.
35. In Yt 18, the Aryan Khvarnah is both qualified as *airiianəm x'arenō* (i.e. "the Aryan *khvarnah*") and *airiianəm x'arenō* (i.e. "the *khvarnah* of the Aryans"). The formula here of a *khvarnah* that is emphasized to belong forever to the Aryan nations is just a more explicit way of describing the same thing (I am indebted to Xavier Tremblay for this clarification).
36. Dustkhāh 2002, i: 80. In Vendidad 2.2, Ahura Mazdā tells Zoroaster that Jamshid was the first man to whom he talked (Dustkhāh 2002, ii: 665). The myth of Yima can in fact be traced back to the Indo-European heritage (Malandra 1983: 175).

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