

THE FORMATION OF ACHAEMENID IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE AVESTA

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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.’ By the title of my paper, it seems that I had heeded his advice even before hearing it. In reality though, my initial goal had been different: I had only wanted to explore the formation of the Achaemenid imperial ideology. Its impact on Zoroastrianism came to me by 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 Zoroastrianism.

2. Some preliminary methodological considerations

It is generally perceived that the deciphering of iconography is less precise than 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 got ‘crystallised’ in the post Achaemenid period, was perhaps gathered and organized into different chapters in Parthian or early Sasanian times, was written down not before the reign of Khosrow I (r. 531-79), of which a small fraction 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 date to the fourteenth century!¹ To say the least, it is hazardous to solely rely for conclusions on such a text.

By contrast, Achaemenid iconography is not a copy but 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 to sweep them under the rug. 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 new ones himself? It inevitably leads to the question of the maturity of Zoroastrianism and the birth date of Zoroaster, an issue which is fiercely debated among two schools of thought. The first relies on the *Avesta*, and places Zoroaster in between 1800 BC and 800 BC. The second argues for a birth date of 618 BC by relying on a data transmitted by 10th 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 putting it into perspective. Conversely, the observations presented for my thesis will ultimately reinforce the rectitude 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.² The fact though is that the dating of the *Rig-Veda* itself is hypothetic, and while philologists such as Kellens argue about the archaic nature of Avestan language and a linguistic hiatus between what they term as ‘Old’ and ‘Young’ *Avesta*,³ none of them could ever propose a reliable methodology for measuring the age of the Avestan language. Philology is not an exact science and their dates are based on a guess. A guess based on experience may be valuable, provided it is relevant. In this case it is not, because even if true it is not decisive: As Gershevitch has argued, the development speed of languages can vary, and different dialects may evolve differently over time and space.⁴ 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.

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 Jan. 25th, 1983) of 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.⁵

Since the measure of linguistic evolution for the *Avesta* is inconclusive, proponents of the first school sought to buttress their theory with another tack: that the Avestan environment described a pastoral and primitive society.⁶ 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 southwest Iran, up to present day Uzbekistan.⁷ In this stretch of land, most of the rural communities are still pastoral today, and *primitively so*.⁸ 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.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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*.¹¹ Suffice it to say, that Akso Parpola, whose 2001 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 circa 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.¹² The latter theory is obviously just a theory and 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 say the *Lamentations* of the celebrated Sufi, Khājah ‘Abdollah Ansāri (1006-89 AD) of Herāt. As for the later *Avesta*, Y 57.27, Yt 5.13, and Yt 10.125 describe a *quadrigae* (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.¹³ The *quadrigae* 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.¹⁴ 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.’¹⁵

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.

Skjaervo remarks that the Sasanians did not mention the Amesha Spentas either.¹⁶ It’s true, but early Sasanian kings clearly stated that they were ‘Mazdyasna’ believers which word the chief-priest Kerdīr unambiguously qualified as a religion (*dyn*).¹⁷ Had Zoroaster lived circa 1000 BC, one should expect that five centuries later, his religion would have been defined in a more comprehensive way than a mere praise for Ahura Mazdā.

Unable to find a connection to the Zoroastrian creed in royal inscriptions, Skjaervo then relies on clay documents from Darius’ treasury, to insinuate that some of them pertained to sacrificial rations for Zoroastrian divinities, including Spenta-Armaiti (who is one of

the Amesha Spentas).¹⁸ The fact though is that Zoroastrian divinities were not the creation of Zoroaster's mind but had been revered much before him, and only regrouped by him in a new compact pantheon. As Razmjou's article—which is Skjaervo's source in this instance—spells it out, Spenta Armaiti was an Aryan divinity, and possibly a Median one, who had always been revered as the goddess of Earth, and her name appeared in these ration-disbursement tablets not with the other Amesha Spentas, but in company of ancient tribal deities such as gods of mountains and rivers, and Mithra, for all of whom sacrificial ceremonies were held.¹⁹ 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 Skjaervo labels as 'Avestan' deities, did not make a Zoroastrian of Darius.

More generally, Skjaervo's attempt to draw a parallelism between the Achaemenid inscriptions and the *Avesta* confounds form with substance: the parallelism that he sees is not the result of a common religious belief but due to a common form of expression rooted in the same Iranian culture shared by the Achaemenids and the *Avesta*.²⁰

Finally, as Pierre Lecoq has remarked, gods who are referred as *yazatas* in the *Avesta* were still called *bayas* by the Achaemenids, and the Achaemenid calendar bares no trace of Zoroastrianism.²¹ Had the prophet lived some five centuries earlier, a Zoroastrian calendar would have been certainly developed by the time of the Achaemenids, and Darius would have certainly used it in Bisotun where, instead, he dates eighteen events of his reign with non-Zoroastrian months. Moreover, Razmjou has recently argued that the Achaemenid calendar names all pertained to divinities 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, i.e., *baya*. In other words, the god par excellence of the Achaemenid calendar was still Mithra and not Ahura Mazdā.²²

3.2. Assessing the '258' figure

The 258 years mentioned by the texts measures 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 to refer to the year Zoroaster envisioned his new religion, and which the mini-calendar of Zādspram specifies to have occurred at the age of thirty.²³ Hence a birth-date of circa 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.

- 1) Why a 'rapidly evolving civilisation' (presumably the Achaemenids) *accepted* the message of a 'near contemporary' with 'ideas rooted in the Stone Age'?
- 2) If Zoroastrians had a system of recording all events in respect to 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?

- 3) 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 6000 years earlier)? ‘If the Greeks were misled in this vital point, what validity can we claim for the rest of their evidence?’²⁴

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

- (1) 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 ‘stone age’ than Zoroastrianism.
- (2) Quoting Zoroastrian priests, Biruni produced a number of lists tabulating the reign of Iranian kings. One cannot conclude from these tables however, 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 enmeshed with the ruling power, they usually display 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 reconstructs from that period.²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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 in time. 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 black pest, are commonly used by people to situate events, even within Moslem or Christian communities who have a well defined—religion based—calendar.
- (3) 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,²⁷ 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 questioning.²⁸ 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 data generally depends on three criteria: a) that the data is transmitted by the paramount, or relevant, tradition, b) that it is correlated by multiple sources, c) and the sources are old and close to the date events took place. The 258 figure has all of these characteristics. Indeed:

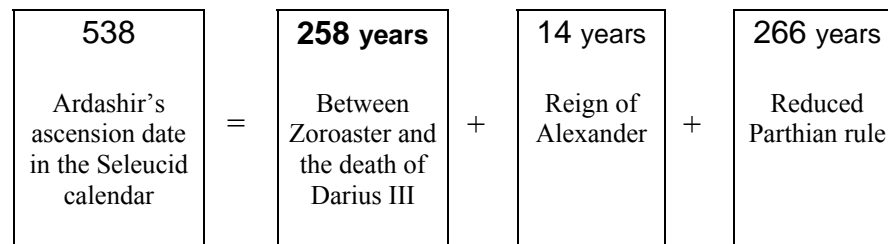
(a) It was transmitted through Irano-Zoroastrian channels and not a foreign one, and through the same oral traditions—so dear to Boyce—that present-day Zoroastrians have inherited, with the difference that this oral information was frozen in the tenth/eleventh century, and set into writing, when the likes of 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.²⁹
- 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.³⁰
- Most importantly, it can be derived from the fact that it provides an explanation to a very odd historical question:

Why in 224 AD, when the Sasanian Ardashir I ascended to the throne, he changed the calendar, not in the way that the last Shah of Iran did by moving the starting point in time, 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.³¹ Only faith and dogma can trump



common sense in such a fashion.

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

3.5. Avestan text in support of 258

Upholders of the first school though, 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 (*iḍa apqm*)...
From now on (*iḍa 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 revolt.³²

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 in time 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).

Now, the only Iranian empire prior to the Achaemenids was of course that of the Medes.³³ 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 circa 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; a direction dictated by a dogmatic belief in a prehistoric and pastoral Zoroaster. Skjaervo 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.³⁴

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.³⁵ Skjaervo's translation based on a non rectified text thus brakes 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 that unequivocally relates to inhabited political entities such as countries or nations, and not pastoral ones.

Despite the logical implications of Yts 13:94 and 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 guess 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 13:95.³⁶ The natural course to pursue afterwards was to find when these two emblems were first combined in the Iranian context. The iconographic evidence visibly suggested that this happened 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 horde 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.³⁷ Based on the epigraphic peculiarities of a rhyton inscription—of a type which is found on many other silver vessels from the Kalmākareh horde—Vallat has suggested a dating between 589 and 539 BC.³⁸ Similarly, the complex iconography of the Bukan bricks, which is an amalgam of Assyrian and Urartu motifs mixed with indigenous Lorestān type elements, is rendered in a style that precedes the Achaemenid stylistic standardisation. 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.³⁹ But the facts speak for themselves:

- 1) Cyrus never mentions Ahura Mazdā in his inscriptions.
- 2) A colossal sunflower-lotus combination (49cm wide) is carved on his tomb, which as indicated before, is the symbol of the dual Median deities, Mithra and Apam Napāt.⁴⁰

- 3) Horse-sacrifice rituals of Mithraic nature were conducted at Cyrus' tomb by his successors.⁴¹
- 4) As I have elsewhere suggested, Darius avows in his letter to Gadatas that Mithra was worshipped by his predecessors.⁴²
- 5) 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).⁴³

Abstract a proof to the contrary, it is safe to assume that Cyrus, and probably Cambyses,⁴⁴ 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 its prophet's lifetime and the advent of Darius in the year 522 BC. Darius may or may not have known of Zoroaster and his teachings. The fact though 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 demoniac beings.

Darius' zeal in promoting Ahura Mazdā is akin to the zeal with which, the Safavid Shāh Esmā'il I (r. 1501-24 AD) exalted the Imam 'Ali and promoted Shiism as the new religion of Iran in 1512 AD, 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 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 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 how well-established was the monotheistic ideology that Darius wished to promote.

Through a series of examples, I shall argue that, similar to Shah Esma'il's Shiism, it was ill defined, was more antagonistic toward other Iranian religions than foreign ones, and

that 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.⁴⁵ 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 that is what Darius tried to do. After being confronted with the popularity of solar deities among his various subjects,⁴⁶ Darius decided to empower his Ahura Mazdā with solar attributes, and thus added a *solar* emblem on his hat in Bisotun (figs. 1 and 5). This emblem is a later addition, for there is a noticeable gap line 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 emphasised 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. 2) 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 too reintroduce it in his ideological program.

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 away some of that early zeal by allowing a vague reference to 'all the gods' after invoking Ahura Mazdā in his DPd inscription.⁴⁷

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 hadn't lost it. For his palaces therefore, Darius chose a winged-sphere as the symbol of the *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. 3).⁴⁸

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*.⁴⁹ The shape of the winged-sphere though, was not suitable for a repetitive pattern, while symbols previously adopted by the Medes, namely the sunflower 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. 4). 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 square shaped wings of the Bisotun-prototype (fig. 6) to more rounded ones in Persepolis (fig. 7) 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 standardised icons—can only be explained by a desire to establish a visual linkage between the new emblem of *khvarnah* and that of Ahura Mazdā.⁵⁰ 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 figs. 3 & 4, 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. 5). It was clearly meant to reemphasise 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 around. First among these is the fact that each time the *khvarnah* is mentioned it is almost systematically preceded by a 'Mazdā-created' label. Such an overemphasis is generally an indication to the contrary.⁵¹ 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 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.

The most blatant contradiction though appears in the Farvardin Yasht where Ahura Mazdā is in need of the *khvarnah* of the *fravashis* 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 avows that if it weren't for the help of the *fravashis*—presumably through their *khvarnah*—he would not

have been able to protect the good people and beneficial animals.⁵² 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. 8). The whole panel is then surrounded by a border of triangles that emphasises 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 a transfer agent for this auspicious fortune. It is thus that on another glazed brick from Persepolis (fig. 9) we can see the *veraghna* with two encapsulated *khvarnah* spheres in its claws, and surrounded by a similar border of radiating triangles.⁵³

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).⁵⁴ Perhaps, 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 have ultimately 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 for 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 by them.⁵⁵ 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 Mazdā; 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 Mazdā stemmed from an ideology that must have been popular among a small group of Iranians. Chances are that some of Darius' fellow conspirators, if not all, belonged to that group.⁵⁶ Indeed, both Herodotus and Bisotun agree that the usurper magus, Gaumata, was in control of the army and harshly suppressed any opposition.⁵⁷ 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. 10). 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.⁵⁸

Otanes mentions of course Ahura Mazdā. But more important for our discussion is the sentence (in italic) 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 wasn't one, say Mithra, not enough? As Mary Boyce has explained, Iranians saw day and night as two different realms: the day came under the protection of Mithra and the night under that of Apam Napāt.⁵⁹ This division was obviously incompatible with a monotheistic conception of the world, and had to be modified. That is what Otanes tried to achieve.

The plaque also reflects Darius' early preoccupations, and his emphasis in the Bisotun inscriptions that his orders were carried 'by day and by night.'⁶⁰ As deputy of Ahura Mazdā on earth, Darius had to abolish the division of time into two realms, and contend that he effectively ruled on 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 program.

I had suggested in a previous study that in this icon, the lion represented the sun and the bull symbolised the moon, and the whole reflected the day and night revolutions (fig. 11).⁶¹ The subsequent discovery of a seal from Sardis, with the sun and moon depicted over an intermingling lion and bull (fig. 12), validates my interpretation.⁶² 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. 7), 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. 11). While similar icons exist in other cultures, they generally depict a lion devouring a helpless prey. The innovative approach 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 backward, and ready to reengage the lion. The artifice was meant to convey perpetuity in time.

The conclusions of Cindy Nimchuk (see her paper in this publication) for the foundation plaques of the Apadana in Persepolis, brings 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 silver and the other in gold) 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. 13). It puts the lion and bull on equal footing and confirms their role as iconic symbols for day and night, and not one as prey for the other.⁶³ 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 \ before the first word (see top left of fig. 10), which vouches for an early date of circa 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 have been initially 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, i.e., before and after. But Achaemenid scribes must have realised very quickly that the first stroke was superfluous and hence they dropped it. To this date no other inscription but 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 vied 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 tri-lingual 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 an article to appear in *Iranica Antiqua*, I have argued that the Old Persian word *chiça*, its Avestic counterpart *chiθra*, as well as their progenies, all derive from a common root ‘*chit*’ that means brilliance and appearance, but to which philologists have unfortunately added unwarranted meanings such as seed, nature and origin that can lead to a nonsense, as in the underlined sentence here: Aryan, means exactly of ‘Aryan origin’, there was no need to repeat it.⁶⁴ 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 symbolise 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 it.⁶⁵ 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,’⁶⁶ 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 des nations (*dahyu*) that I conquered beyond Persia:

... the Mede, the Elamite, the Parthian, the Arien, the Arachosian, the Sattgydien, the Gandharian, the Indian, the Amyrgian Scythian, the Tigrakhoda Scythians, the Babylonian, Assyria, 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

One must note that in Bisotun, Darius also gives a list of nations which, although less extensive than this one, includes nonetheless 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.⁶⁷ 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, hadn’t 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 Scythians From Beyond the Seas. 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 emphasises 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*,⁶⁸ but the imperial Achaemenid functionaries who seized upon it to build a solar imagery that kingship so 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,⁶⁹ and reappeared as *chihr* in the ubiquitous Sasanian imperial slogan ‘*ke chihr az yazatan*,’ a slogan that was meant to portray the king reflecting the gods in their radiance and power.⁷⁰

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 forever)—and to the holy Zoroaster’⁷¹

In this passage, Zoroaster is said to possess the Aryan *khvarnah*,⁷² an auspicious power that only emanates from the Aryan nations. The problem though is that Jamshid’s myth precedes Zoroaster because he himself alludes to it in his *Gāthās* (Y 32.8).⁷³ 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* therein, to attribute the strongest form of *khvarnah* to their prophet, the same that 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 expressed: '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.'⁷⁴ It now seems that the latter is true, and 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:

- 1) We have 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 *invocatio*s.⁷⁵
- 2) In the Gāthās, Zoroaster uses the word *khvarnah* only once, and with 'auspiciousness' as its meaning.⁷⁶ Had this word been originally associated with Mithra, it is doubtful that Zoroaster would have used it.
- 3) 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.
- 4) 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.
- 5) One may add that Lubotsky and Parpola's recent suggestions for the etymology of *khvarnah*, as being derived from Scythian *farnah* corresponding to Sanskrit *parna* (meaning feather), ties it more to a mythical bird than to a deity.⁷⁷

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,⁷⁸ Artaxerxes II did what Iranian kings whose legitimacy was contested had to do: to claim the support of Ahura Mazdā, and the gods that 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 buttress a legitimacy that had been eroded by the challenges mounted by his brother, Cyrus the younger.⁷⁹

But irrespective of when the Avestan hymns were composed, what is certain is that the attribution of the perpetual Aryan *khvarnah* to Zoroaster would have robbed the Achaemenid kings from claiming the same, and would have not survived through 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, same could have happened earlier on, i.e., 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 parallelism 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 though 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 rendered 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 avows the Aryan *khvarnah* to belong to Zoroaster.⁸⁰ In 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 under water 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.⁸¹

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.⁸² The question though is why was there a need to supplant him at all? In a monotheistic conception of the world, wasn't it easier to just 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 better conform 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 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. This Anāhitā was thus the perfect choice for Artaxerxes to invoke along side 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 supra), 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' therein: 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.⁸³ 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 (perhaps location-related as the paper of Sima Yadollahi may suggest), 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, and to which belonged Darius and his co-conspirators. '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 but affiliation with the term that Darius had used. Secondly, one should note that in referring to Mazdean priests who practiced 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*.⁸⁴ Thirdly, in the coinage of Persis, we have 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. 14). The combination seems to be the visual rendering of the 'Pārsā son of Pārsā' expression of Darius which must have remained in use in the stronghold of the Achaemenids, i.e., present day Fārs (which

was named after the Pārsās). The Persis dynasty of rulers there, were in fact 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. Same may be true for the early Achaemenids.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, I have tried to demonstrate that Darius began his reign with a strong monotheistic fervour but had to gradually 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 enmeshed 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,⁸⁵ 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 which in turn will end up espousing many of the concepts and beliefs of its initial foes.

As Skjaervo has noted, there was indeed much parallelism between the *Avesta* and Achaemenid ideology. But rather than proceed with his a priori stance that ‘[e]ither the Achaemenids had always been Zoroastrians or at some time for some reason the early Achaemenid became Zoroastrian,’⁸⁶ and restrict the scope of possibilities, I have allowed text and iconography to guide me to 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 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, i.e., 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 a 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 circa 1000 BC or earlier. Their theory is in reality a house of card built on quick sand.

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 bad, as the foil against which good must be measured.⁸⁷

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.⁸⁸ But more important than the authors are the main ideologues of the *Avesta*, i.e., those whose idea shaped up this holy book of Zoroastrianism. If Zoroaster was the first such an 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*.

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Captions

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¹ Kellens 2002: 242-43; Skjaervo 2005: 80-81.

² Boyce 1979: 18.

³ In 1985-87 Kellens estimated the hiatus between the older and younger *Avesta* to be four centuries; Kellens 1987: 135-39. Four years later, he seems to have revised it to two centuries; Kellens 1991: 14.

⁴ Gershevitch 1995: 2-3.

⁵ According to Kellens, the younger *Avesta* emulated the older one, at times without proper understanding of the latter's underlying structure; Kellens 1987: 139. It implicitly admits the attachment of later priests to an archaistic language.

⁶ Boyce 1989: 62-66

⁷ Gershevitch (Gershevitch 1995: 4-5) favors Sogdiana as Zoroaster's homeland. Grenet (Grenet 2005: 29-51) projects on maps the views of different authors, all emphasizing this eastern Iranian corridor as the growth place of Zoroastrianism.

⁸ 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 2nd millennium BC; Fussman 2005: 221. Unfortunately, anybody who has witnessed Afghan raids on eastern Iran, and I being one such a 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 Turkmens who lived a few centuries earlier and before the advent of the gun. Such a characterization is therefore not a proof for assigning the Avestan community to the 2nd millennium BC.

⁹ Boyce had been misled by Bailey's erroneous translation of *abgenag* (glass) as 'crystal', which is classified in the *Bundahishn* among metals (presumably because glass is obtained through a melting process as metals are), Malandra 2003: 273.

¹⁰ Parpola 2002: 246-47.

¹¹ Kreyenbroek 2005, Shayegan 1997.

¹² Parpola 2001: 246-47.

¹³ Most mythological chariots as in the *Iliad* (23, 334-348) describe a *bigae* or a two-horse chariot, but Swennen remarks that the *quadrigae* 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.

¹⁴ Frankfort for instance, demonstrates that the supposedly Zoroastrian funerary practice of leaving the dead body in open air was practiced 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; Frankfort 2005: 276-77 and 294-95. See also Kellens 2005: 45-46; Razmjou 2005: 154.

¹⁵ Y12.1, Boyce 1984: 57.

¹⁶ Skjaervo 2005: 52.

¹⁷ '... 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' (Y12.6).

¹⁸ Skjaervo 2005: 53

¹⁹ Razmjou 2001: 9-12.

²⁰ The most blatant example of Skjaervo's misguided approach is his reliance on the linguistic imagery of a grasping hand to convey a notion of vanquishing, capturing, and subduing an enemy (Skjaervo 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.

²¹ Lecoq 1997:159 and 161.

²² Razmjou 2003: 22-24 and 31-32.

²³ Gnoli 2000: 156. The mini-calendar of Zādspram allows a lifespan of 77 years for the prophet (Gignoux and Tafazzoli 1993: 87); it consequently puts his death at circa 541 BC.

²⁴ Keyenbroek 2003: 123.

²⁵ See note 30 *infra*. Kellens' objections as to the unreliability of 258 because of its companionship with fantasmic regnal years (Kellens 2001: 177) becomes also moot according to 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.

²⁶ Taqizadeh 1943-46: 26-30.

²⁷ Aeschylus, *Persians*, at 681.

²⁸ I refer here to the ubiquitous Sasanian political idiom '*ki chihr az yazatan*' and the erroneous Greek translation of the word *chihr* therein as 'family,' rather than a reflective aura, which I have argued to be the proper meaning in Soudavar 2003 (pp. 41-47). Since the latter's publication, Panaino has independently come to the same conclusion, (Panaino 2004: 555-585), and Philippe Gignoux has also rallied to my thesis (personal communication).

²⁹ 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, vol. II: 551: '258 years from Vishtaspa until the advent of Alexander'; Mas'udi 1962, vol I: 202, also states that the father of Vishtaspa, i.e. Lohrāsp, was a contemporary of Nabuchodonosor (r. 605-562 BC).

³⁰ The Coming of the Religion (which supposedly occurred when Zoroaster was 30 years old) was confounded in these reconstructions with the year Zoroaster converted to his cause Kay Goshtāsp (i.e., Vishtaspa) on the 30th 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 to 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

³¹ For a detailed reasoning see Gershevitch 1995: 6-7, and also Taqizadeh 1947: 34-38, where the latter provides full explanation and extensive data on how the Seleucid era was equated with the tenth millennium of the Zoroaster era. See also Henning 1949: 38-39.

³² Dustkhāh 2002, vol.1: 425 (see note 35 *infra*)

³³ Since the *Avesta* is about Iranian people we must look for an Iranian empire, and not for instance an Elamite one.

³⁴ Skjaervo 2005: 67

³⁵ Gershevitch and Malandra had both previously reinstated the missing *apqm*; Gershevitch 1959: 27; Malandra 1971:211 (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 others.

³⁶ Soudavar 2003: 53-57.

³⁷ Soudavar 2003: 86-87.

³⁸ Vallat 2000: 29.

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- ³⁹ Briant 1996: 106-108.
- ⁴⁰ Stronach 1971: 155-58; Soudavar 2005: 88
- ⁴¹ Briant 1996: 106 and 108.
- ⁴² Soudavar 2003: 108-111.
- ⁴³ Strabo (XI.8.4, www.perseus.tufts.edu); Soudavar 2003: 107-111; Bivar 1998: 12-13; Razmjou 2005: 150.
- ⁴⁴ If Herodotus (book III, §65; Herodotus 2000, vol. 2: 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).
- ⁴⁵ See Soudavar 2003: 88-92 and 101, for the justification of the term ‘winged-sphere’ in lieu of winged-disk.
- ⁴⁶ For the importance of sun-gods in Anatolian and Mesopotamian cultures, see for instances Beckman 2002: 37-40.
- ⁴⁷ ‘... 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.
- ⁴⁸ Soudavar 2003: 23, 100. For a representation of the same on a gold ornament see Dusinberre 2002: 149.
- ⁴⁹ For the concept of *farreh-afzun* (abundant *khvarnah*), and the multiplicity of its symbols see Soudavar 2003: 16-19, 59-62, and 91.
- ⁵⁰ This modification was only applied when the two emblems were represented together, but not when Ahura Mazdā was represented alone as in Naqsh-e Rostam.
- ⁵¹ 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 to Ahura Mazdā, the creation of entities that 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.
- ⁵² Dustkhāh 2002: 406-07.
- ⁵³ For an embossed gold medallion of *veraghna* surrounded by stacked lotuses and a sunflower type radiance, see Curtis and Tallis 2005: 147 (fig. 185).
- ⁵⁴ Elfenbein 2001: 492.
- ⁵⁵ Soudavar 2003: 103 and figs. 106-08.
- ⁵⁶ The imposition of the extreme type of Shiism after the ascent of Shāh Esmā`il to the throne was also mainly carried by a small group of supporters known as the Qezelbāsh.
- ⁵⁷ DB §13, Lecoq 1997: 191; Herodotus 2000, vol. II:93 (book III, §71).
- ⁵⁸ I shall rely here on the initial text published in a sales catalog (Lecoq 2003: 105), even though Lecoq has had more insights into it since then. The Old Persian word *vashnā* has generally been translated ‘By the Grace of (a divinity)’. And that is why Lecoq expressed some surprise at its use by Darius himself in DPd §2; Lecoq 1997: 227. The use of the same word by Otanes perhaps indicates that ‘support’ is a better translation than grace.
- ⁵⁹ Soudavar 2003: 53; Boyce 1988: 148; Boyce 1990: 5.
- ⁶⁰ 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.
- ⁶¹ Soudavar 2003: 116-20.

⁶² The sun and moon also appear on Sasanian seals, see seals DJ 3 and DJ6 in Bivar 1969: pl. 11.

⁶³ A recent article by Cahill & Kroll attributes the creation these Croeseids to Croesus' time (I am grateful to Cindy Nimchuk for pointing it out to me). Unfortunately I am not convinced by their arguments for the following reasons: a) I can find no justification why Croesus would switch from the powerful symbol of a single lion to a mixed symbolism of two confronting animals, neither winning or loosing, 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 a lot more the 499 event 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 circa 550 BC was found in the debris, rests on a dating of Greek vases that, as they avow themselves, is contested by some scholars. Still, the discovery of a later item is needed to completely upset their theory. 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 in adopting foreign symbols and interpreting in their own way.

⁶⁴ Soudavar 2006: 170-77.

⁶⁵ DNa §2, Lecoq 1997: 219 ; the Elamite version simply repeats the '*Ariya chisa*' without attempting any translation (personal communication of Dr. Chlodowig Werba).

⁶⁶ Dustkhāh 2002, vol. 1: 481.

⁶⁷ DB §6, Lecoq 1997: 188.

⁶⁸ Elfenbein 2001: 492.

⁶⁹ Soudavar 2006: 169-70.

⁷⁰ See note 28 *supra*.

⁷¹ Yt 5:42, Yt 19:57, 60 and 63-64, Dustkhāh 2002, vol. 1: 305, 495-96. Malandra 1993: 93-95.

⁷² In Yt 18, the Aryan Khvarnah is both qualified as *airiianəm x^varenō* (i.e. the Aryan *khvarnah*) and *airiianqm x^varenō* (i.e. the *khvarnah* of the Aryans). The formula here, of a *khvarnah* that is emphasized to forever belong to the Aryan nations, is just a more explicit way of describing the same (I am indebted to Xavier Tremblay for this clarification).

⁷³ Dustkhāh 2002, vol. 1:80. In Vendidad 2.2, Ahura Mazdā tells Zoroaster that Jamshid was the first man to whom he talked, Dustkhāh 2002, vol. 2: 665. The myth of Yima can in fact be traced back to the Indo-European heritage; Malandra 1983: 175.

⁷⁴ Soudavar 2003: 90.

⁷⁵ Soudavar 2006b (forthcoming).

⁷⁶ Y 51.18, Dustkhāh 2002, vol. 1: 80

⁷⁷ Parpola 2002: 309-10.

⁷⁸ Lecoq 1997: 269-70, 274-75.

⁷⁹ Soudavar 2003: 18-19, 73-78, 106-108.

⁸⁰ Yt 19:57, 60 and 63-64, Dustkhāh 2002, vol.1: 495-96

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- ⁸¹ Yt 5:42, Dustkhāh 2002, vol.1: 305
⁸² Boyce, 1987: 149-50.
⁸³ Soudavar 2006: 171-72.
⁸⁴ Mostowfi 1915: 148-49.
⁸⁵ Henning 1951:15.
⁸⁶ Skjaervo 2005: 53
⁸⁷ Gershevitch 1995: 6; Henning 1951: 46-47.
⁸⁸ Kellens and Pirart 1988: 7.

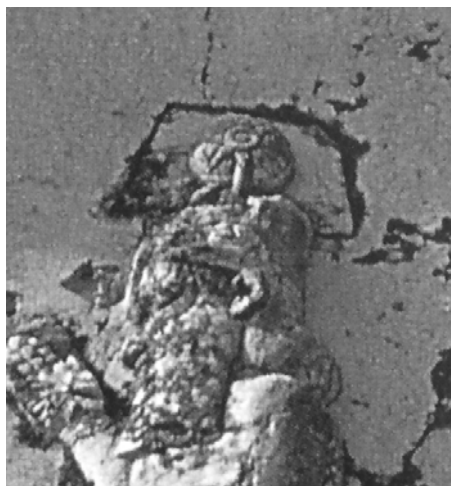


Fig. 1. Ahura Mazdā with an added solar emblem. Bisotun.



Fig. 2. Solar emblem of Shamash (*Das Vorderasiatische Museum*, Berlin, 1992, p. 189)



Fig. 3. Two sphinxes guarding the symbol of *khvarnah*. Brick panel from Darius' palace in Susa (Louvre Museum, Sb 3324).



Fig. 4. *Khvarnah* frieze. Eastern stairway of Apadana, Persepolis, (Courtesy of the Oriental Institute, Chicago. Photo nos. P 15301 and 15302)

Fig. 5. Ahura-Mazdā standing on top of *khvarnah* symbol. Palace of Xerxes, Persepolis,



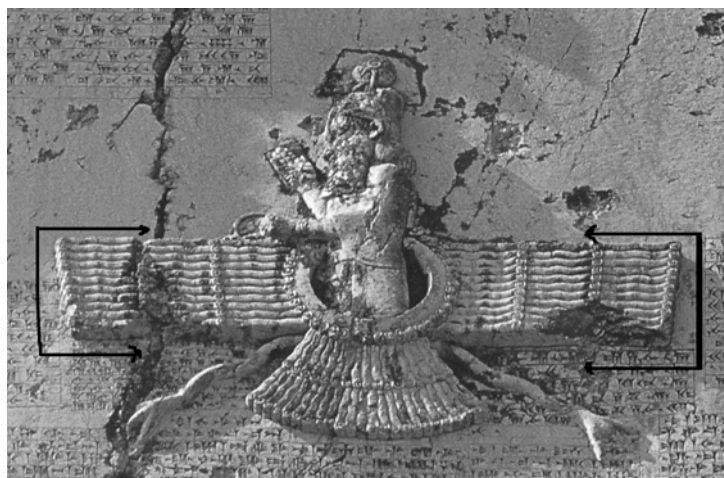


Fig. 6. Rectangular shaped wings of the ahura Mazdā symbol in Bisotun

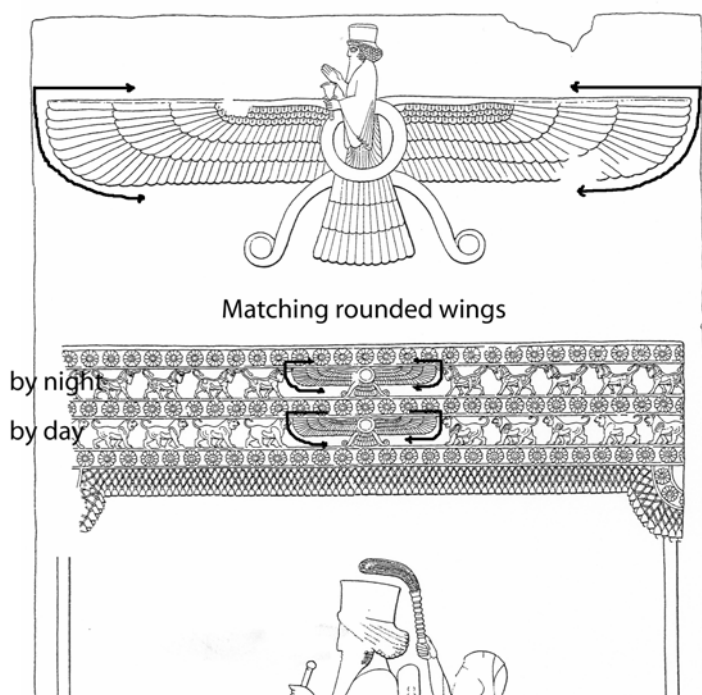


Fig. 7. Matching the shape of the symbol of Ahura Mazdā to that of the *khvarnah* in Persepolis (per Curtis and Tallis 2005: 76)

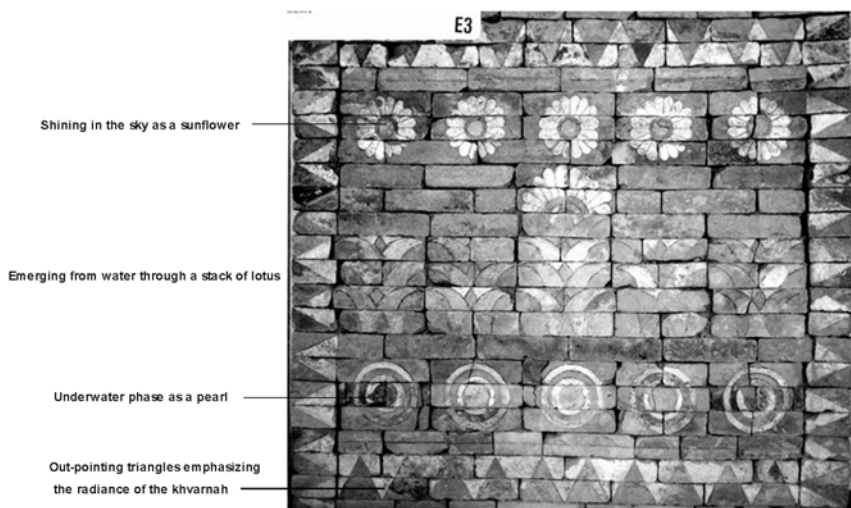


Fig. 8. Tripartite cycle of the *khvarnah*. Glazed brick panel. Persepolis, (Courtesy of the Oriental Institute, Chicago. Photo no. P 58470).



Fig. 9. Symbol of veraghna surrounded by triangular light rays. Glazed brick. Persepolis (Curtis and Tallis 2005: 95)

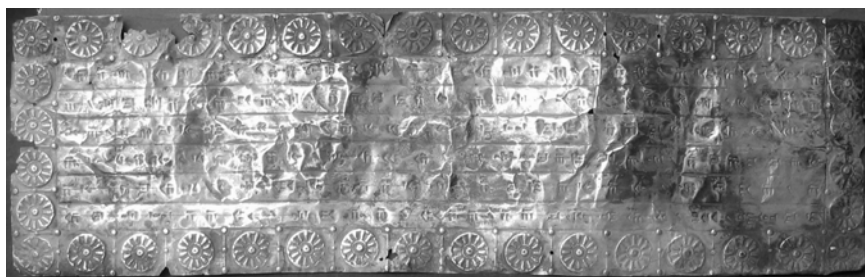


Fig. 10. Silver plaque of Otanes. Private collection.



Fig. 11. The Lion and Bull icon symbolizing the perpetual night and day revolutions. Persepolis. (per Curtis and Tallis 2005: 78)



Fig. 12 Lion and bull design surmounted by sun and moon motifs. Seal from Sardis (Dusinberre 2002: 278)



Fig. 13. Gold 'Croeseids' from the foundation box of the Apadana (Curtis and Tallis 2005: 58).



Fig. 14. Coin of Shāpur and his father Pāpak. Circa 210 AD (*Dr. Busso Peus Nachf. Münzhandlung*, Catalog no. 368, lot 364)