

# **THE AURA OF KINGS**

Legitimacy and Divine Sanction  
in Iranian Kingship

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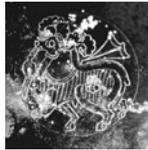
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# THE AURA OF KINGS

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in Iranian Kingship

*Abolala Soudavar*



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*In memory of my father*

*Samad Soudavar*



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

The publication of Mr. Abolala Soudavar's *The Aura of Kings: Legitimacy and Divine Sanctions in Iranian Kingship*, marks the tenth volume in the Intellectual Traditions Series. One of the aims of this series is to publish innovative studies regardless of, and to some degree because of, their controversial nature. Soudavar's work is certainly innovative, proposing as it does novel interpretations of the ancient iconography of Iranian kingship; it may also be considered controversial by the measures and methods of past scholarship on the subject. It is hoped that these attributes will invite fresh and critical review and open new windows into an old, though never tired, debate.

Soudavar has spent a lifetime studying Iranian archaeological and historical iconography from the ancient to the medieval periods. By examining imagery relative to textual traditions, Soudavar has been able to uncover hidden dimensions and significances in an important body of Iranian literary and artistic works. In his Preface to the present book, Soudavar points to a challenge in interpreting the main icons of Iranian mythos by noting that "the written word is scarce and, even when available, is metaphoric and evasive." To circumvent this difficulty, he lets iconography inform and help decipher text. This approach was first used in a study of three manuscripts in his *Art of the Persian Courts* (1992), where he suggested that each of their miniature paintings

reflected not only the literary episode it purported to illustrate, but also a historical event. He then applied the same approach to effectively decipher the historical referents of the “Demotte” or the “Great Il-Khānid *Shāhnāmeḥ*.” This is a major *tour de force* where Soudavar combines calligraphic, pictorial, and textual analysis to reveal the hidden story behind each illustration. By synthesizing these findings he then unravels the manuscript’s underlying intent, which he characterizes as an attempt to enhance the legitimacy of Mongol rule in Iran by infusing Ilkhānid history into the iconography of the Iranian national epic, the *Shāhnāmeḥ* of Ferdowsi.

The Mongol study provided a platform for tackling the question of divine sanction and legitimacy in Iranian kingship as embodied in the concept of the *farr*, or Divine Glory. In the present study, Soudavar traces the symbolism of the *farr* to its early origins and demonstrates its continuity across Iranian history. This important and very readable study sheds new light on the formulation and development of the symbolism of kingship in Iran and her geo-cultural neighbors, and contributes toward a better understanding of the Iranian worldview in general.

In conclusion, I wish to extend my gratitude to the Iran Heritage Foundation for their support toward the publication of the present volume.

Hossein Ziai

## PREFACE\*

The Divine Glory or *farr-e izadi* (Old Persian: *khvarnah*) is an everlasting principle of Iranian political ideology usually invoked to project legitimacy of rule and divine sanction. Persian literature abounds with references to the ruler's Divine Glory, and scholarly studies often emphasize the centrality of this theme to the topic of authority and power. Yet, little attention has been devoted to the visual symbolism of *farr* and its potential for shedding more light on our perception of ancient Iranian history. In a culture where the written word is scarce and, even when available, is metaphoric and evasive, the pictorial document can be as valuable as text, and iconography can be developed into an essential tool of historiography.

A study of Mongol history, through both text and image, had previously shown me how the concept of the *farr-e izadi* was revived under the Il-Khānids to project legitimacy of rule in the post-Caliphate period. Among the official attributes of authority in that period, the idiom *ruz-afzun* had captured my attention, and when a few years ago, at the Second Biennial Conference of Persian Studies, I listened to Touraj Daryae's paper on the coinage of the Sasanian

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\* Parts I and II of this study were presented at the Third and Fourth Biennial Conferences on Iranian Studies, in Bethesda, Maryland, on May 26, 2000, and May 25, 2002, respectively.

Khosrow II and the appearance therein of the legend *farreh-afzun* in conjunction with increased numbers of dotted rings, I saw a linkage between the two idioms and the possibility of a study straddling both the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods of Iranian history.

From the latter perspective, though, some of the accepted theories of pre-Islamic studies seemed problematic. The notion that Sasanian rulers claimed to be of divine origin, for instance, could not be reconciled with any aspect of Islamic Iranian culture, be it text or various imagery. When I first raised the issue with a specialist, I was told that it was cast in concrete, or more precisely carved in stone, and that I should not attempt to refute it. Thus, in an initial essay, I had timidly objected to the pharaoh-like treatment of Sasanian kings in a footnote. But, emboldened by the discovery of supportive arguments for my thesis, I transferred the footnote to the main text, and from then on, I could strongly argue that Sasanian art was not meant to produce family portraiture and that the figures, set in a posture reflecting the king, represented deities and not mere mortals.

However, preconceived ideas are not easy to dislodge. When a first essay was submitted to the British Institute for Persian Studies, its anonymous reviewer refused to accept the connection of the scepter-like handkerchief, *dastārcheh*, to ancient Iranian symbolism, because he seemed to favor the Roman *mappa* as its antecedent. And, because I had accepted the Tāq-e Bostān relief of Shāpur II as an investiture scene representing the king and Ahura-Mazdā, and not as an interaction between mortals, my forays into pre-Islamic domains were labeled as “unreliable.”

A second—and slightly more substantial—version of my essay was then submitted to *Studia Iranica*. Two anonymous experts, who reviewed it for that journal, praised its novel themes but objected to my reliance on the idea of “esoteric” Mithrāism advanced by A.D. Bivar. The latter’s theories had drawn such a strong criticism in the journal that, according to one of the reviewers, to publish my article as such would have meant a negation of all their past criticism of Bivar. They graciously proposed publication provided the article was stripped of its Bivarian content. But even though I myself had serious objections to some of Bivar’s hastily formulated arguments, I fully subscribed to the idea of a latent trend of popular pre-Zoroaster Mithrāic beliefs in Iranian culture and society.

Furthermore, the very idea of a lasting undercurrent of Mithrāic beliefs had given direction to my study and provided a common thread for its various components. Without that common thread, the backtracking of the evolution of *farr* symbolism to its early origins did not seem possible. Moreover, since last submitted, new sections had been added to my paper, requiring a larger number of illustrations that far exceeded the eight-plate limit (i.e., 8 full pages) *Studia Iranica* had generously offered. By then, the study had become too voluminous for journal publication, and, on the suggestion of Dr. Hossein Ziai, I began to envisage it as a monograph.

Meanwhile, the Achaemenid concept of *farr* had remained elusive, and the Sasanian iconography did not reveal any stepping stone for the extrapolation of *farr* symbolism into earlier periods. It was thus most fortuitous—and perhaps because of an auspicious *farr*—that I was finally

able to discover the Mithrāic legacy that linked Sasanian iconography to Achaemenid and Median symbols of *farr*, and to show how it affected, in a remarkably consistent pattern, the paradigm of power and authority in the Iranian world.

Throughout this study, I benefited from the advice and insights of a number of scholars, including Mahasti Afshar, Hening Bauer, James Russell, Shaul Shaked, and Rahim Shayegan, whose comments I have duly reported in footnotes. I am thankful for their wise suggestions.

I am forever indebted to Kambiz Eslami and Farhad Hakimzadeh for their unwavering support in regards to finding references and obtaining excerpts. In addition, I wish to thank the following institutions for providing photographic material: the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington; the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin; the John Work Garrett Library of Johns Hopkins University; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Ja'far Mehr-Kian of the Iran-Bāstān Museum, Tehran; and especially the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, for the prints that they supplied and for their authorization to use images from their superb website.

Last but not least, I acknowledge *Encyclopaedia Iranica* for its comprehensive entries, and the Altes Museum, Berlin; the Archeological Museum, Istanbul; the British Museum, London; the Musée du Louvre, Paris; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, for their wonderful installations of antiquities. This study would have not been possible without the massive amount of information these institutions so generously provide.

## INTRODUCTION

In a 1984 article,<sup>1</sup> Pierre Lecoq faults Shapur Shahbazi—among others—for proposing a reinterpretation of the Achaemenid winged-disk, not as a symbol representing Ahura-Mazdā but as a symbol of the *khvarnah* (also called *kharra*, *farreh*, *farr*, “Divine Glory”).<sup>2</sup> Shahbazi had considered two distinct types of *khvarnah* representations: one as a plain winged-disk supposedly symbolizing the Aryan (Avestic: *Airyānem*, i.e., Iranian) *khvarnah* for the Iranian people, and the other with a bearded figure evoking Kayānid (Avestic: *Kavaem*) *khvarnah* for royalty. Lecoq produced counterexamples, in which the plain winged-disk appeared in royal scenes and the bearded figure appeared in nonroyal ones. For the latter, Lecoq relied on a published sketch of a coin issued by the satrap Datames. But in reality, the winged-disk of the Datames coin is without a bearded figure (fig.1),<sup>3</sup> and instead, it has a duplicate tail on top,

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<sup>1</sup> P. Lecoq, “Ahura Mazda ou Xvarnah?” in *Orientalia J. Duchesne-Guillemain emerito oblata (Acta Iranica 23)*, Leiden, 1984), 301-26.

<sup>2</sup> For more on *khvarnah*, see G. Gnoli, “Farr” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, IX:315.

<sup>3</sup> For a color reproduction see P. Briant, *Darius, les perses et l’empire* (Paris, 1992), 55. The drawing produced by Shahbazi did not display a bearded figure, and he did not claim so either; see S. Shahbazi, “An Achaemenid Symbol. II. Farnah ‘(God Given) Fortune’ Symbolised” in *Archeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, band 13 (Berlin, 1980), 142.

similar to the one displayed on an eighth century BC Neo-Hittite basalt stele (fig. 91).

As a rebellious satrap, Datames had probably placed a winged-disk above his own effigy to claim the authority that his Achaemenid overlord, Artaxerxes II (r. 405-359 BC), also invoked,<sup>4</sup> much in the way that—some twenty centuries later—the rebellious son of Teymur (r. 1370-1405), Mirānshāh, who wished to establish an independent rule in Tabriz, appropriated for himself the authority claimed by his father. He deleted the name of his father and issued *farmāns* in the name of the very Changizid puppet *khān* whom Teymur had elevated to the throne (fig. 2).<sup>5</sup>

In the Avestan hymn of Zāmyād Yasht, Ahura-Mazdā informs Zoroaster that mortals must seek *khvarnah* in order to obtain advantages and success.<sup>6</sup> In other words, every man

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<sup>4</sup> Datames led a satrapal revolt that for a time threatened the breakaway of the entire western part of the Achaemenid Empire. He was assassinated c. 360 BC; R. Schmitt, "Datames" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, VII:116. He is depicted on this coin as seated on a throne and holding the traditional bow and arrow, symbol of regal power and therefore, a proclamation of independence. Datames' choice of winged-disk for his coinage, i.e., one slightly different from the official Achaemenid symbol but with a local (Neo-Hittite) tradition, was probably a further affirmation of his independence. For 3<sup>rd</sup> century Palmyrene rulers adopting Persian or Roman regal titles when in rebellion against their overlords, see A. Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian, and Pagan Polities* (London, 1997), 9.

<sup>5</sup> His *farmāns* would thus begin with the sentences: *Soltān Mahmud Khān yarlighindin, Mirānshāh Gurkān suzumiz* (Soltān Mahmud Khān has ordered, and Mirānshāh Gurkān is relaying it); L. Fekete, *Einführung in die Persische Paleographie* (Budapest, 1977), pl. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Gnoli, quoting *Yasht* 19:53-54, sees it as the duty of "every mortal," Gnoli, "Farr," IX:315. Malandra's interpretation is slightly different: it is not the duty of "every mortal" to seek the *khvarnah* but of an unspecified

can have the *khvarnah*, albeit in varying degrees. Even though a non-Achaemenid, Datames could therefore claim the authority of *khvarnah* after a significant victory.<sup>7</sup> In the same vein, the winged-disk over a scene where Persians are vanquishing their foes in combat (fig. 3), which Shahbazi qualifies as the Aryan *khvarnah*, may simply symbolize a *khvarnah* acquired through victory, which enhanced the glory of individual combatants or the Persian army as a whole.

Based on the above examples, simple intuitive logic suggests—and our analysis shall confirm—that the plain winged-disk represented good fortune and increased authority through military success and victory, i.e., the usually accepted attributes of the *khvarnah*.

Similarly, common sense dictates that the incorporation of the Achaemenid bearded man, who is brandishing a ring of investiture, alters the nature of the abstract winged-disk motif,<sup>8</sup> and its parallelism with Sasanian reliefs suggests that

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few; see W. Malandra, *An Introduction to Ancient Iranian Religion: Readings From the Avesta and Achaemenid Inscriptions* (Minneapolis, 1983), 93. Nevertheless, the “unspecified few” stipulation is enough to actually open the door for everybody. This peculiar aspect of the *khvarnah*, i.e., being a source of authority that can be tapped by commoners as well as foreigners, has greatly influenced the general behavior of Persians toward the acceptance of foreign conquerors as legitimate rulers of Iran; see A. Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts* (New York, 1992), 411.

<sup>7</sup> Fighting Achaemenid troops, Datames obtained a first victory against Autophradates, which led to a temporary reconciliation with Artaxerxes II, and a second victory in 362-611 BC against Artabazus; Schmitt, “Datames,” VII:116.

<sup>8</sup> The alteration is to such a degree that in many cases the discus disappears and the bearded man actually emerges from a ring (see, for instance, figs. 85 and 89 herein).

this anthropomorphic symbol represents a deity, most probably Ahura-Mazdā.

Viewed in the context of authority and legitimacy, the question of whether a motif is the symbol of Ahura-Mazdā or *khvarnah* may seem inconsequential. However, as we shall argue, each of our two motifs emanated from a different ideology: one essentially Achaemenid and the other pre-Achaemenid.

Lecoq believes that, in the absence of contemporary textual reference to the winged-disk symbolism, one should not speculate on this issue and bring down the fragile edifice of an acquired knowledge based on the understanding of the winged-disk as a symbol of Ahura-Mazdā.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the paucity of textual documentation is a hallmark of Iranian studies from one end to the other, and reliance on texts alone can seriously limit research options. The absence of texts, though, can be partially compensated by the recurring imagery that has preserved fundamental Iranian beliefs throughout the course of history.<sup>10</sup> Whether transferred by a Jungian collective unconscious or through a process of oral transmission, basic symbols of authority reemerge with remarkable consistency in Iranian imagery and poetry.

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<sup>9</sup> Lecoq, "Ahura Mazda ou Xvarnah?," 302

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, P.O. Skjaervo, "Thematic and Linguistic Parallels in the Achaemenian and Sassanian Inscriptions" in *Papers in Honour of Prof. Mary Boyce (Acta Iranica 25, Leiden, 1985)*, 593-603; and R. Shayegan, *Epos and History in Sasanid Iran* (Paris, September 1999, paper presented to the 4<sup>ème</sup> Conférence européenne d'études iraniennes), in which the thematic similarities of the inscriptions of Darius I at Bisotun are juxtaposed with those of Narseh at Paikuli and with certain *Shāhnāme* episodes. For a brief discussion of continuity in artistic expression, see Soudavar, *Persian Courts*, 14.

This study traces back *khvarnah* symbolism from the Mughal era which gives us textual references on the subject of kingly *khvarnah* and its representation, to the Il-Khānid era in which legitimacy symbols of pre-Islamic Iran were revived; to the Sasanian era when multiple ways of *khvarnah* representations were created; back to the Achaemenid era, when universal symbols of authority were devised to address the beliefs of the conquered people of the empire as well as the ancient beliefs of Iranians themselves.



## PART I – KHVARNAH SYMBOLISM

### The Mughal *shamseh*

As a Turco-Mongol Muslim ruler of the Indian subcontinent, the emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) encountered the same problem that his forefather, the conqueror Teymur had faced—namely a legitimate right to rule that was acceptable to numerous constituencies. After an unsuccessful attempt to formulate a theory based on Islamic principles of legitimacy, Akbar leaned toward a more universal one that would encompass all of his subjects, Muslims as well as Indians. The result was the *Din-e Elāhi* (Divine Religion) and *Solh-e koll* (Universal Peace) formulated by Akbar's vizier, confidant, and chief-ideologue, Abol-Fazl-e `Allāmi who justified kingly authority in the following terms:

Kingship is a light emanating from God, and a ray from the sun, the illuminator of the universe; it is the argument of the book of perfection, the receptacle of all virtues. Modern language calls this light *Farr-e Izadi* [Divine Glory] and the tongue of antiquity called it *Kayān Kharra* [Kayānid Glory]. It is communicated by God to kings without the intermediate assistance of anyone, and men in the presence of it bend the forehead of praise toward the ground of submission.<sup>11</sup>

Abol-Fazl derived the above passage from the works of Shehāb-od-din Yahyā-ye Sohrawardī (1154-91), who in turn

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<sup>11</sup> Abol-Fazl-e `Allāmi, *Ā'in-i Akbari*, ed. H. Blochmann (Osnabrück, 1985), I:2-3.

had based his Philosophy of Illumination on the light symbolism of the *khvarnah*.<sup>12</sup> Like the *khvarnah*, Sohrevardi's light rays were not restricted to a privileged few but allowed learned men, such as Abol-Fazl himself, to acquire a glory that would enhance and complement the Divine Glory of the ruler.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the essence of the *khvarnah*, whether Aryan or Kayānid, popular or kingly, was the same. Its intensity, though, could vary and could be dealt with through a judicious choice of symbols and size.

Abol-Fazl, who was often accused of harboring Zoroastrian beliefs by his opponents, must have had close contact with the Parsis of India and acquired a deep knowledge of ancient Iranian cultural ethos, because he based the Akbarian *Elāhi* calendar on the Sasanian calendar and adopted an archaistic prose style that even today puts to shame the champions of a "pure" Persian language devoid of Arabic words. Thus, the visual symbol of the *khvarnah* he chose for kingly representation was a sunburst (*shamseh*), which undoubtedly reflects his understanding of Sohrevardian concepts as well as ancient Iranian imagery. In describing the adornments of the throne, Abol-Fazl wrote: "The *shamseh* [that adorns] the canopied throne of rulership (*chahār tāq-e farmānravāi*) is the Divine Glory itself,"

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<sup>12</sup> For the similarity of Abol-Fazl's writings with Sohrevardi's, compare pages 410 and 415 in Soudavar, *Persian Courts*.

<sup>13</sup> In the introduction to his Philosophy of Illumination, Sohrevardi says: "In every seeking soul there is a portion, be it little or great, of the light of God"; H. Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination* (Atlanta, 1990), 173. He also states: "Scholarly Men (*mohaqqeqān*) and Men of Science (*ʿolamā*) can be more knowledgeable than prophets" and that "the philosopher who shall persist in the recognition of the Light of Lights" shall rule the world; Shehāb-od-din Yahyā Sohrevardi, *Majmu'a-ye mosanaffāt-e Shaykh-e Eshraq*, ed. H. Nasr (Tehran, 1977), III:76.

inferring that no *shamseh* was needed to adorn the royal throne since there was already one radiating from the ruler himself.<sup>14</sup> It is a metaphor that parallels the *Shāhnāme*'s description of Kayumars, whose *farr* was likened to the full moon shining from behind a cypress tree:<sup>15</sup>

همی تافت زو فر- شاهنشهی      چو ماه دو هفته ز سرو سهی  
 Kingly *farr* shone from him, as the two-week moon from  
 behind a cypress tree

Subsequently, the sunburst behind the ruler's head became a constant iconographic feature of Mughal royal portraiture and an important element in projecting legitimacy of rule (figs. 104 and 118).

A notable composition in this respect is a painting where Jahāngir (r.1605-27) and his father Akbar are both depicted with a sunburst (fig. 4).<sup>16</sup> As expected, both sunbursts are similar in design, but that of Akbar whose numerous victories shaped the Mughal empire, is larger than his son's. Jahāngir's legitimacy is further emphasized through the transfer of the dynastic Mughal *sarpech* (turban aigrette) from his father to him.

### The II-Khānid *dastārcheh*

Not surprisingly, we see the exact same iconography as that encountered in the previous Mughal painting nearly three

<sup>14</sup> `Allāmi, *Ā'in-i Akbari*, I:45.

<sup>15</sup> Abol-qāsem-e Ferdowsi, *The Shāhnāme*, ed. Dj. Khāleghi-Motlaq (New York, 1988), I:22. The radiance of the kingly *farr* from the royal throne is a recurring theme of the *Shāhnāme*, as in the story of Jamshid (*ibid.*, I:41):

فروزان شده تخت شاهی بدوی (the kingly throne shone by his presence)

<sup>16</sup> For a complete illustration, see Soudavar, *Persian Courts*, 312.

centuries earlier, in an illustration of the *Abu-Sa`id Shāhnāmeḥ* conceived under Uljāyṭu (r. 1304-17) and completed under Abu-Sa`id (r. 1317-35).<sup>17</sup> As argued elsewhere, every illustration of this manuscript was supposed to represent both a story of the *Shāhnāmeḥ* and an episode of Mongol history.<sup>18</sup> In this context, figure 5 represents, on the one hand, the Sasanian Bahrām-e Gur talking to his brother Narseh, viceroy of Khorāsān, and on the other, Ghāzān (r. 1295-1304) talking to his brother Uljāyṭu (also viceroy of Khorāsān), each depicted with a solar disk as symbol of his *farr*.<sup>19</sup> The illustration was meant to bolster a false claim by the vizier Rashid-od-din Fazlollāh (d. 1319) that Ghāzān had appointed his brother as his successor five years before his death. To this end, Uljāyṭu's right of succession was highlighted through the transfer of a special handkerchief from Ghāzān to him. This special handkerchief, referred to as *dastārcheh-ye khās* by the 14<sup>th</sup> century chronicler Vassāf-e Shirāzi, appears as a scepter-like symbol of kingship in various kingly representations.<sup>20</sup> It first appears in the hands of the mythological king Fereydun in the Edinburgh al-Biruni manuscript of 1307,<sup>21</sup> followed by the *Abu-Sa`id Shāhnāmeḥ* in which most seated rulers hold one in their

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<sup>17</sup> The *Abu-Sa`id Shāhnāmeḥ* is also referred to in scholarly literature as the Demotte or the Great Mongol *Shāhnāmeḥ*.

<sup>18</sup> A. Soudavar, "The Saga of Abu-Sa`id Bahādor Khān: The Abu-Sa`id-nāmeḥ" in *The Court of the Il-Khāns, 1290-1340, The Cultural and Intellectual Milieu*, eds. J. Raby and T. Fitzgerald (Oxford, 1996), 95-218.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-30.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 130; Fazlollāh b. `Abdollāh-e Shirāzi, *Tārikh-e vassāf-ol-hazrat* (Tehran, 1338/1959), 617.

<sup>21</sup> Abu-Rayhān-e Biruni, *Al-āthār al-bāqiyya*, ms. Arab 161, Edinburgh University Library.

hands. It is then continuously represented in the hands of Turco-Mongol rulers of Islamic lands: in Mamluk enthronement scenes, such as the enthroned ruler in a 734/1334 *Maqāmāt* manuscript,<sup>22</sup> in the portrait of the Shervānshāh in a 1468 manuscript,<sup>23</sup> in a circa 1480 portrait of Teymur in the Garrett *Zafarnāmeḥ* (fig. 8),<sup>24</sup> in a 1653 Mughal dynastic portrait of Teymur by Hāshem,<sup>25</sup> in the portrait of Soltān Ya`qub in the Topkapu Saray Museum,<sup>26</sup> in Ottoman imperial portraits, especially that of Mohammad the Conqueror,<sup>27</sup> and in a circa 1527 portrait of the Safavid Shāh Tahmāsb (see fig. 6),<sup>28</sup> to name a few.

A poem by Khāqāni (d. 1199) suggests that the *dastārcheh* occasionally hung from a lance or standard as in figure 9:

ماه زرین زیر رایت و دستارچه زیر

The golden crescent at the top of the standard and the *dastārcheh* under (it).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Nationalbibliothek, Vienna (AF9, fol. 1r); see R. Ettinghausen, *Peintures persanes* (Geneva, 1962), 148.

<sup>23</sup> British Museum (Add. 16561); see I. Stchoukine, *Les peintures des manuscrits timurides* (Paris, 1954), pl. XLV.

<sup>24</sup> John Hopkins University Library. For a complete illustration see, for instance, T. Lentz, and G. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision* (Los Angeles, 1989), 265.

<sup>25</sup> Reproduced in T. Falk (ed.), *Treasures of Islam* (Geneva, 1985), 172.

<sup>26</sup> For a reproduction see Ruzbahān-e Khonji, *Tārikh-i `ālam-ārā-ye amini*, ed. J. Woods (London, 1992), pl. 1; B. Robinson, "The Turkman School to 1503," in *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia*, ed. B. Gray (London, 1979), pl. 147.

<sup>27</sup> Topkapu Saray, H2153, fol. 10r; see, for instance, Z. Zygulsky Jr., *Ottoman Art in the Service of the Empire* (New York, 1993); M. Ipsiroglu, *Chefs-d'oeuvres du Topkapi* (Fribourg, 1980), 128.

<sup>28</sup> Soudavar, *Persian Courts*, 160.

<sup>29</sup> A. Dehkhodā, *Loghatnāmeḥ* (Tehran, 1373/1994), VII:9518; Gardizi mentions that Soltān Mahmud gave Qadar Khān the gift of a uniquely

The Safavids referred to the *dastārcheh* by its Turkish name, *sāruq*, and included it in the kingly paraphernalia sent to their vassals.<sup>30</sup> The *dastārcheh* thus appears as a widely used symbol of authority. The question is: what are the origins of such a symbol?

A clue to the answer is provided by a circa 1481 painting of a royal Turkaman manuscript depicting *Bahrām-e Gur in the Sandalwood Pavilion* (fig. 10) with two winged angels flying toward him holding a ribbon-like handkerchief in their hands. Its iconography recalls the two angels carved on each side of the vault of Tāq-e Bostān (fig. 11)—an edifice that was under Turkaman control in the 15<sup>th</sup> century—and leads us to seek the etymology of *dastārcheh*, or perhaps its antecedent *dastār*—without the suffix *cheh*—in the Sasanian era.<sup>31</sup>

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expensive gem together with a *dastārcheh*; Abu-sa`id Abdol-Hayy b. Zahhāk b. Mahmud-e Gardizi, *Tārikh-e Gardizi*, ed. A. Habibi (Tehran, 1363), 406.

<sup>30</sup> At the death of the Kurdish warlord Sharaf Khān in 940/1533, Tahmāsb sent to his son, Shams-od-din, “a drum, a standard-finial (*alam*), a Safavid headgear (*tāj*), a *sāruq*, and the edict of governorship of Sharaf Khān’s fiefdom, the province of Bitlis, also bestowing him with the title *khān*.” `Abdi Beyk-e Shirāzi, *Takamalat-ol-akhbār*, ms. 3980 Malek Public Library, Tehran. It is to be noted that the published version of this manuscript (ed. A. Navāi (Tehran, 1369/1990), 75) misspells *sāruq* as *sārchoq*.

The Turkish word *sāruq* and its equivalent Persian term, *dastārcheh*, both mean “handkerchief” as well as “towels,” thereby implying that the scepter-like handkerchief was longer than regular ones. Perhaps this is why all such handkerchiefs were folded with a loop protruding from one side of the ruler’s hand, while regular handkerchiefs, carried for instance by court ladies, were usually smaller and unfolded.

<sup>31</sup> The Roman/Byzantine handkerchief *mappa*, which the reviewer of *IRAN* favored as the antecedent of the *dastārcheh*, had already been suggested to me in 1995 by Robert Hillenbrand at the *Art of the Mongols*

### The Sasanian *dastār*

In the Tāq-e Bostān composition, the angels are carrying a ribbon attached to a bejeweled ring or headband, but in multiple other representations, most particularly in the rock-relief of Shāpur I (r. 241-272) in Bishāpur (fig. 12), they carry only a ribbon.<sup>32</sup> The latter rock-relief is not a scene of investiture. It celebrates Shāpur's victory over his Roman adversaries and is devoid of any deity or ring of investiture.<sup>33</sup> Instead, at its focal point we see an angel offering a flying ribbon to Shāpur who is depicted with one already floating behind his head. Like modern-day school children, he is getting an added ribbon for each victory!

At this point, we should recall that one of the meanings of *dast* is "victory."<sup>34</sup> The combination *dast-ār* (i.e., "purveyor of *dast*") may then be understood as "an agent for conveying victory," which is the very essence of the *khvarnah*

conference in Edinburgh. At that time, though, the Arab handkerchief (*mandil*), seemed a more promising alternative. Unfortunately, upon further investigation, no evidence could be found, neither iconographically nor etymologically, for the linkage of either of them to the Persian *dastārcheh*.

<sup>32</sup> See, for instance, the British Museum silver plate (Inv. 124093) in *Splendeur des Sassanides* (Bruxelles, 1993), 208; A.U. Pope, and Ph. Ackerman, *A Survey of Persian Art* (Tokyo, 1967 reprint), VII:239, pl. b.

<sup>33</sup> The relief depicts the Roman emperors Gordian III (r. 238-44), Philip the Arab (r. 244-49) and Valerian (r. 253-60), who were successively defeated by Shāpur I.

<sup>34</sup> See Dehkhodā, *Loghatnāmeḥ*, VII:9506, where several examples are quoted from the *Tārikh-e Bayhaqi*; see also Mir Jamāl-od-din Hosayn Inju-ye Shirāzi, *Farhang-e Jahāngiri*, ed. R. Rahimi (Tehran, 1359), I:1290, quoting Mowlavi:

شاد شد جانش که بر شیران نر یافت آسان نصرت و دست و ظفر  
He rejoiced as he easily obtained success, *dast*, and victory  
over male lions.

concept.<sup>35</sup> Unlike the later concept of Sāheb-Qerān, which augured predestined and everlasting success for its fortunate possessor,<sup>36</sup> the possession of *khvarnah* could not be perceived as permanent. For the *khvarnah* could be increased in victory, decreased in defeat, or ultimately lost, as in the story of Yimā/Jamshid.<sup>37</sup> The angel carrying a flying ribbon was therefore added to the Bishāpur rock-relief to confirm Shāpur's increased *khvarnah*.

Through diagonal symmetry as well as punning association, the hand (*dast*) of the angel and its emblem of victory (*dastār*) find a counterpart in the hand of Shāpur squeezing the wrist of the captive Roman emperor ("captivity" and "submission" are termed as *dastgir* in Middle and New Persian).<sup>38</sup> The relief composition thus seems to emphasize in more than one way the centrality of *dast* in its projection of victory and glory and, consequently, the appropriateness of the name *dastār* for the flying ribbons.

This interpretation also offers a solution to a hitherto unresolved enigma: why would the turbans of the Arabs be primarily referred in Persian literature by the name *dastār*

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<sup>35</sup> I am indebted to Hening Bauer for his insights into the etymological structure of *dastār*.

<sup>36</sup> The concept of Sāheb Qerān was based on a projection of everlasting good fortune due to an auspicious birth, when two auspicious stars had gathered in one constellation, an event that was referred to as *qerān-osa' dayn*.

<sup>37</sup> *Yasht* 19:34-38, Malandra, *Introduction*, 91. See also infra page 23, and T. Daryaee, "The Use of Religio-Political Propaganda on the Coinage of Xusro II" in *American Journal of Numismatics* (New York, 1997), IX:52, where a passage from the Paikuli inscriptions is quoted to the effect that Narseh may lose his ancestral glory if he becomes an evildoer against gods and men.

<sup>38</sup> I am indebted to Rahim Shayegan for pointing out the symmetry between the hand of the angel and that of Shāpur.

rather than an Arabic word, such as *`emāma* or *taylosān*? In miniature paintings—unlike the turbans of the Iranians or Turco-Mongols—the Arab turbans were always depicted with hanging loose ends (see, for instance, fig. 7),<sup>39</sup> because the Arab Bedouins deliberately left their turban ends hanging in order to cover their faces when caught in a sandstorm. After the Arab conquest, the loose ends of their turbans were probably equated with the Sasanian flying ribbons, and thus named *dastār*. In the eyes of the Iranians, the victorious Arabs were surely perceived to possess the *khvarnah* and to merit the *dastār*. A poem by Suzani-ye Samarqandi (d. 1174) further demonstrates the association between the turban-*dastār* and the *khvarnah*:

آفتاب خسروان را سایه دستار او

چتر فیروزیت فتح و نصرت اندر پیش و پس

The shadow of his turban (*dastār*) is to kingly sunshine, a parasol of victory, while [its] front and back herald victory and triumph.<sup>40</sup>

The allegorical meaning of this poem cannot be deciphered without any reference to Sasanian iconography. The “front and back” mentioned in it clearly point to the position of the hanging turban tail-ends (as in fig. 7), which, like flying ribbons, were perceived as agents of victory and the symbol of “kingly sunshine” (i.e., *khvarnah*).

Thus, we have textual evidence that after the Arab conquest, their turbans were perceived as symbols of *khvarnah* and as such, were referred to as *dastārs*. It then

<sup>39</sup> For a complete illustration see Soudavar, *Persian Courts*, 107.

<sup>40</sup> Dehkhodā, *Loghatnāmeḥ*, VII:9517. The similarity of terms with verses quoted in footnote 34 supra is quite remarkable.

naturally follows that once the term *dastār* was adopted for the long-length Arab turban in the Islamic era, a new but slightly different term had to be devised for the special handkerchief (or small ribbon) that was going to be adopted as a sign of kingly authority. Hence, the name *dastārcheh* (“smaller *dastār*”) for the handheld sign of authority.

### ***Farreh-afzun***

In addition to the illustrations of the *Abu-Sa`id Shāhnāmeḥ*, a solar disk or sunburst appears on the coinage of Ghāzān and Uljāyṭu.<sup>41</sup> As in Mughal times, the adoption of this solar iconography derived from the quest to formulate a new theory of legitimacy for the Il-Khānid rulers of Iran and was based on the Philosophy of Illumination of Sohrawardi.<sup>42</sup> But here again, the Sohrawardian philosophy was complemented with ancient Iranian concepts of authority, such as the previously mentioned symbolism of the *dastārcheh*.

Another such concept was the use of the epithet *ruz-afzun* in conjunction with *dowlāt* (fortune) to convey Il-Khānid power and authority. It appears as early as 1292 on a *farmān* issued by the Il-Khān Gaykhātu (r. 1291-95). In conformity with Il-Khānid chancery practices, the important words are pulled out of the text and are written in the margin, leaving a blank in the original place with a “v” sign marking the beginning of the blank space. In figure 14 we can distinctly see how, through this artifice, the term *dowlāt-e ruz-afzun* has been split, and how the more important part (i.e., *ruz-*

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<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, M. Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins and Their Values: The World of Islam* (London, 1977), 252-53.

<sup>42</sup> Soudavar, “The Saga,” 184-86.

*afzun*, appears in the right margin.<sup>43</sup> The Dehkhodā dictionary explains *ruz-afzun* as “a wish for longevity.” However, only a couple of verses—out of 21—mentioned in support of this explanation actually offer such meaning. The rest convey the meaning of “shining light” or “good fortune,” i.e., the very attributes of the *khvarnah*.<sup>44</sup>

*Ruz-afzun* has a counterpart on the coinage of Khosrow II (r. 590-628). This coinage incorporates noticeable changes in comparison with previous Sasanian issues. The usual alterations to the crown configuration notwithstanding, the most visible changes are in the number of rings around the royal bust on the obverse (fig 17), as well as in those circling the fire altar on the reverse (fig 16), which are increased to two and three respectively. Most importantly, a new legend, *farreh-afzun* (“increased glory”), was added on the obverse. These changes have been recognized to reflect the struggles of Khosrow with the usurper Bahrām Chubin, which resulted in the latter’s defeat in 591.<sup>45</sup> As we shall argue further, rings on coinage, solar disks, sunbursts, and pearl roundels are all equivalent and interchangeable symbols of *khvarnah* radiance. The multiplicity of rings on Khosrow’s coinage therefore constitutes the visual equivalent of the legend *farreh-afzun*, projecting added authority through increased

<sup>43</sup> For the complete *farmān* see Soudavar, *Persian Courts*, 34-35.

<sup>44</sup> Dehkhodā, *Lughatnāmeḥ*, VIII:10880 :

محلی چو مهر روزافزون، دولت تو روزافزون، مظفر پیروزبخت روزافزون  
ای آفتاب روزافزون،

O *ruz-afzun* sunshine; a stature that is *ruz-afzun* as the sunshine (*mehr*); may your fortune be *ruz-afzun*; the fortunate, the victorious and the *ruz-afzun*.

<sup>45</sup> Daryaee, “Religio-Political Propaganda,” IX:43-45.

glory in the same way that Shāpur's glory was meant to increase through the conveyance of a new flying ribbon.

Ousted by his rebellious general, Bahrām Chubin, Khosrow had to take refuge with the Byzantine emperor Maurice (r. 582-602), who provided him the means to regain his throne. Similarly, Kavād I (r. 488-97; 499-531) lost his throne but recaptured it two years later with the help of the Hephtalites. As in the case of Khosrow, Kavād's loss of prestige had to be compensated with increased propagandistic symbolism. Consequently, the word *afzun* (or *afzut*) was inscribed—for the first time in the Sasanian era—on Kavād's coinage after his return to power.<sup>46</sup> An extra ring was also added on the reverse (fig. 18).<sup>47</sup> The later legends *farreh-afzun* and *ruz-afzun* clearly suggest that the solitary word *afzun* on Kavād's coinage was meant to convey the same auspiciousness. Even though the word *farreh* (usually written as the ideogram GDE) is absent, its multiple symbols, such as rings and flying ribbons that appear on the coin complement the word *afzun* by providing a “half-image half-word” version of *farreh-afzun*.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> The first such coin seems to date from Kavād's twelfth regnal year, *Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge, 1986 reprint), III(1):330.

<sup>47</sup> See also M. Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins and their Values: The Ancient and Classical World* (London, 1978), 170-71.

<sup>48</sup> The use of this “half-image half-word” artifice was not unique to the Sasanian era and continued well into the Islamic era. For instance, in the *Munes-ol-ahrār* manuscript (Kuwait, Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya, LNS 9 MS), which Mohammad b. Badr-e Jājarmi wrote and illustrated in 1341, the first verse from the couplets of certain poems is written as text while the second is produced as an image; see M.L. Swietochowski, S. Carboni, and S. Morton, *Illustrated Poetry and Epic Images: Persian Painting of the 1330s and 1340s* (New York, 1994), 26-37. A second example is the representation of Qoranic verses at the mausoleum of Pir-e Bakrān, near Esfāhān, in which four verses of Sura 48 appear as bold

Finally, because the hunting of ferocious beasts was usually equated with the combat of good against evil, we can expect the symbolism of *farreh-afzun* to appear in hunt scenes as well. Indeed, in the Sasanian hunt scene of Tāq-e Bostān, as the narrative imagery moves from left to right (fig. 13), a solar disk is added to the ruler's head as a sign of increased glory after the killing of wild boars.

Constantly invoked as a well-wishing formula, in both Sasanian imagery and Middle Persian texts,<sup>49</sup> the *farreh-afzun* concept thus reflected the variable nature of the *khvarnah* and was a reminder of the constant effort required to maintain and to increase it.

#### A pair of wings and rams

The pair of wings that often appears on Sasanian crowns has been described as standing for Verethragna/Bahrām because in one of his avatars, he takes the form of a falcon.<sup>50</sup> The study of its iconography in various contexts however, reveals a direct association with the *khvarnah*, and strong ties to Mithrā rather than Verethragna.

A stucco wall element from Ctesiphon (fig. 20) incorporates a pair of wings in conjunction with a monogram that

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calligraphy on the wall and the fifth as illustration below the calligraphy, see B. O'Kane, "The Bihbahani Anthology and Its Antecedents" in *Oriental Art* XLV/4 (1999/2000), 13-14.

<sup>49</sup> For a well-wishing textual example see, for instance, the 9<sup>th</sup> century Pahlavi text of Āzarfarnbagh Farrokhzātān, *Mātikān-e gojastak abālish*, tr. E. Nāzer (Tehran, 1375), 44-45:

“varj u *farreh afzāyāt* ohrmazd i xvatāy rāy”

(may the greatness and glory of the God Orhrmazd be increased).

<sup>50</sup> *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(1):325; Daryaee, “Religio-Political Propaganda,” IX:43.

has been read by Jean de Menasce as *afzun*.<sup>51</sup> Once again, we are in presence of a half-image half-word emblem in which the word *afzun* is complemented by a pair of wings in order to project the auspicious glory of *farreh-afzun*. The emblem in turn is placed at the focal point of a pearl roundel, which also represents *khvarnah* radiance (see pp. 58-59), to enhance the projection of good fortune. In another instance, and in keeping with the Iranian taste for symmetrical compositions—very much in evidence in Islamic calligraphy (as in fig. 23)—we can see the *afzun* monogram transformed into a symmetrically balanced composition, in which each letter is doubled with a mirror image, and placed on top of a pair of wings (fig. 22).<sup>52</sup>

A second stucco element from the same region reinforces the correlation between wings and *khvarnah*. The stucco element depicts a ram's head with a flying ribbon attached around its neck, surrounded by a pair of wings, while another flying ribbon is knotted on the base of the wings and holds them together. There is no apparent aesthetic reason to combine a ram's head with a pair of wings. In the well-known episode of the *Kārnāmag-i Ardashir-i Pāpakān*, when the last of the Parthians, Ardavān, inquires about the ram that was following Ardashir, the *dastur* (*dastvar*) replies

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<sup>51</sup> J. de Menasce, *Études Iranienes -Studia Iranica*, cahier 3 (1985), 159. Another reading, *ayrān* (i.e., Iran), has also been suggested, but based on the surrounding iconography and the longestablished tradition of well-wishing formulae in the Iranian world, we subscribe to the *afzun* reading.

<sup>52</sup> All letters are distinctly doubled, except for the crescent “z,” whose mirror image lies upon itself. For other examples see P. Gignoux and R. Gyselen, *Bulles et sceaux sassanides de divers collections - Studia Iranica*, cahier 4 (1987), pl. XVI.70.3. For a pair of mirror-image *kufic* inscriptions on Teymurid doors, where each has its own meaning (*bārek-Allāh, mobārak bād*), see, for instance, Soudavar, *Persian Courts*, 100.

that it represents Kingly Glory.<sup>53</sup> The wings are thus depicted in company of elements that all symbolize the *khvarnah*; the same must be true of the wings themselves. The winged-ram and knotted ribbon combination also appears on a mosaic (fig. 25) from a site near Antioch and reconfirms the tight correlation between the two elements.<sup>54</sup>

Another support for our contention comes through the repercussions of the *khvarnah* symbolism among neighboring people. The Armenians depict their Holy Cross with a pair of stylized wings underneath (fig. 24) and refer to it as *P`ark` Khāch`* (“Glorious Cross”). Because *p`ark`* is the Armenian equivalent of the Persian *farr* and derives from a common root, we can conclude only that the wings were added to the cross as a substitute for the word *Glorious*.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, as in the case of the flying ribbons, Persian poetry offers a verbal equivalence among the wings, ram, and *khvarnah*. In addressing the Simorgh in the *Shāhnāmeḥ*, Zāl says: “Your two wings (or feathers) constitute the *farr* of my hat.”<sup>56</sup> And the *dastur*’s reply to Ardavān, in the *Shāhnāmeḥ* version of the previously mentioned *Kārnāmag* story about the ram that is following Ardashir, is that “it represents his *farr*, and his *wings* of kingship and good fortune.”<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge, 1929), I:143; also *Kārnāmeḥ-ye Ardashir-e Bābakān*, ed. M. Mashkur (Tehran, 1369), 184 where the ram is translated as lamb (*bareh*).

<sup>54</sup> For another Antioch mosaic, see Ma 3442, 5<sup>th</sup> century, Musée du Louvre, in *L’Islam dans les collections nationales* (Paris, 1977), 52.

<sup>55</sup> I am indebted to Prof. James Russell for pointing out this Armenian expression to me.

<sup>56</sup> دو پر تو فر کلاه من است , Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāmeḥ*, I:171.

<sup>57</sup> چنين پاسخ داد كه اين فر اوست , شاهي و نيك اختري پر اوست B. Servatian, *Barresi-ye farr dar shāhnāmeḥ-ye Ferdowsi* (Tehran, 1350/1971), 26.

The wings that in the Sasanian era represent the *khvarnah* are smaller and curlier than the horizontally stretched wings of eagles in Egyptian and near-eastern iconography. They seem to be those of a falcon. A single falcon appears on the *korymbos* of Shāpur III (r. 383-88) at Tāq-e Bostān (fig. 15)<sup>58</sup> and as a pair, appears in an Elymaic bas-relief, in which one falcon carries a ring of investiture to a standing ruler and another takes a beribboned ring to a mounted king (fig. 19).<sup>59</sup> Two falcons are also mentioned as carrying the *khvarnah* in a *Shāhnāmeḥ* dream.<sup>60</sup> These sources all tend to confirm the association of falcons—rather than eagles—with the *khvarnah*.

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<sup>58</sup> The falcon on Shāpur III's headgear ties in well with his description in the *Mojmal-ot-tavārikh val-qesas* (facsimile edition of the Berlin manuscript, copied in 751/1350, introd. by I. Afshār and M. Omidsālār, (Tehran, 1379/2001), folio 13b), according to which he held a scepter with a bird finial (*qazibi āhani, surat-e morghi bar sarash*).

The description of Sasanian kings in the *Mojmal* was based on color portraits in what its author refers to as the “Book of Illustrations” (*Ketāb-os-sovar*), which was probably an equivalent copy of the illustrated Chronicle of the Kings of Iran dated (113/731) that Mas`udi had seen in Estakhr (Abol-Hasan `Ali-ye Mas`udi, *At-tanbih val-eshrāf*, tr. A. Pāyandeh (Tehran, 1365), 99). The latter manuscript had been translated from Pahlavi into Arabic for Heshām b. `Abdol-malek from “documents of the royal Iranian treasury.” The few explicit descriptions related by Mas`udi tightly fit those of the *Mojmal*.

<sup>59</sup> I am indebted to Jafār Mehr-Kian, who has supplied me with a detailed photo of this rock-relief at Khong-e Azhdar (also known as Khong-e Nowruzi). For a full picture and further discussion see, for instance, M.A.R. Colledge, *Parthian Art* (New York, 1977), 92, pl. 17.

<sup>60</sup> O. Davidson, *Comparative Literature and Classical Persian Poetics*, (Costa Mesa, CA, 2000), 88. Even though the quoted verses are considered as unauthentic by Khāleghi-Motlaq (Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*, I:340), for the purpose of our discussions here, they still demonstrate that in the mind of the poet, whether Ferdowsi or a later imitator, falcons were perceived to be associated with the *khvarnah*.

In the Avesta, there are two *khvarnah*-related mentions of falcons, which provide possible interpretations for the presence of wings in Sasanian compositions. The first is in the previously mentioned story of Jamshid. He drifts toward falsehood and loses his *khvarnah*, which turns into a falcon (*vareгна*) and goes to Mithrā and, subsequently, to two other deities. Thus, in all probability, the wings that appear on a sovereign's crown are to signal that the Divine Glory is still there and hasn't departed. They represent the basic "existence" level of the *farreh-afzun* spectrum of glory.

The second mention is in a passage from the Bahrām Yasht, where Ahura-Mazdā asks Zoroaster to seek the feather of a "falcon with spread-out feathers"—also qualified as the "bird of birds"—whose feathers possess much *khvarnah* and bring respect and support for their possessor.<sup>61</sup> In accordance with our previous emphasis on the universality of the Divine Glory concept (see *supra* pages, 2-3 and 7), this passage again confirms that *khvarnah* is not exclusive to kings, but that ordinary mortals can acquire it, hence the appearance of wings in nonroyal contexts.<sup>62</sup> The passage may also explain why wings and feathers are mostly chosen as a symbol of *khvarnah* rather than a complete falcon.

As we can see, multiple images projected the *khvarnah* and, depending on the circumstances, the most effective was chosen. Shāpur II (r. 309-79), for example, wore in battle "a golden image of a ram's head set with precious stones."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Yasht* 14:34-35, see Malandra, *Introduction*, 85.

<sup>62</sup> Gignoux and Gyselen, *Bulles et sceaux sassanides*, pl. VI.

<sup>63</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *History* (19.1.3), ed. J. Henderson (Cambridge, MA, 1986 reprint), I:471; E. Peck, "Crown II: From the Seleucids to Islamic Conquest" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, VI:414.

And, over the centuries, each symbol acquired a life of its own. Thus, the ram with auspicious flying ribbons reappears as a decorative element on a 7-8<sup>th</sup>-century high-tin bronze plate (fig. 26), or as a live mascot in the milieu of Esfahāni wrestlers and street-brotherhoods (*lutis*), whose rituals echoed in many ways ancient esoteric traditions (fig. 27).<sup>64</sup> On the latter ram, however, the traditional flying ribbons are tied around its horns as a turban, which once again indicates a perception of equivalence between the flying ribbons and what became known as *dastār* in Islamic times, i.e., the Arab turban.

The universal nature of *khvarnah* symbolism perhaps also clarifies why Sasanian-type coins were used in the early Islamic era. The symbolism on their coinage was impersonal and could suit any Moslem ruler, such as `Obeydollāh b. Ziyād (Governor of Basra 674-83), who chose a Khosrow II type model—the most loaded of Sasanian coinage with *khvarnah* symbolism—for his issues (fig. 17). He had a *Bismallāh* added in *kufic* script on the rim and his own name inscribed as Aubitala Ziātān in Pahlavi inside the ring. In

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<sup>64</sup> This was painted by Reza `Abbāsi who frequented the milieus of wrestlers and other Sufi-type guilds (see, for instance, Soudavar, *Persian Courts*, 272). The *lutis* in particular kept a ram in their houses and greeted each other by wishing long life for their respective rams: ! سر قوچ شما سلامت باد , M. Mo`in, *Farhang-e Fārsi* (Tehran, 1353/1974), II:2742. Also, among the Yazidi Kurds, there is a custom that on the occasion of the Barān-bardān festivities in mid-fall, girls will tie their scarves or ribbons to the head of the strongest ram; G. Asāturīān, “Arusi-ye gusfandān” in *Iranshenasi*, XII/4, Winter 2001, 861. For the continuing influence of Mithrāism on Persian brotherhoods, wrestlers, and sufi organizations see, for instance, H. Pirouzdjou, *Mithraïsme et emancipation, anthropologie sociale et culturelle des mouvements populaires en Iran: au VIIIe, IXe et du XIe au début du XVIe siècle*, (Paris, 1997), 57-60 and 215-34.

bringing these additions, he could have very well scratched any unacceptable symbol; but he did not. The nonidol, non-portrait nature of the effigies on Sasanian coinage and its well-wishing formulae, including the legend *farreh-afzun* on the left side, were acceptable symbols to a nascent Islamic state not yet affected by orthodoxy.

### Mithrā versus Verethragna

Among the Zoroastrian deities, Verethragna is often associated with *khvarnah*, for in the Avesta he boasts to be “most in possession of *khvarnah*.”<sup>65</sup> It should be noted, however, that Verethragna is only in possession of the *khvarnah*, while Mithrā not only bestows *khvarnah* and power but also can take it away.<sup>66</sup> As a recipient of the *khvarnah*, Verethragna is in a subordinate position vis-à-vis Mithrā. This subordination is also emphasized in the Mehr Yasht, in which Verethragna runs in front of Mithrā, opening a path and striking at opponents.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, even though in his avatars Verethragna takes the form of the wind, the ram, and the falcon, all associated one way or another with the *khvarnah*, he cannot claim solar radiance that is the main attribute of *khvarnah* and the quintessential symbol of Mithrā. Nor can he claim association with scorpions and serpents that, as we shall see, are associated with *khvarnah* symbolism. As Mithrā’s subordinate, Verethragna seems to have inherited only some of his *khvarnah*-related attributes. It is then self-evident that, in kingly representations, symbols of the one who bestowed power and fortune took precedence

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<sup>65</sup> *Yasht* 14, sec. 3, Malandra, *Introduction*, 82.

<sup>66</sup> *Yasht* 10, secs. 16, 27, Malandra, *Introduction*, 60, 62.

<sup>67</sup> *Yasht* 10, sec. 70, Malandra, *Introduction*, 67.

over a subordinate recipient, and that Mithrā would be invoked in preference to Verethragna.

### Mithrāic symbolism

A recent article by Franz Grenet produced two seals with lion masks and ram-horns underlined by a pair of wings (fig. 30). For Grenet, the lion-mask represents the sun in a Mithrāic context, and the association of the ram-horns with the sun-mask comes from an astrological tradition marking the entrance of the sun into the Constellation of the Ram at the beginning of spring, an event that led to festivities, which continued even in Islamic times.<sup>68</sup> Overlooked in his arguments was the pair of wings that we have associated with the *khvarnah* and its correlation with the ram in that context. Following the patterns observed in the case of the stucco elements, previously examined, we may envision that all three (i.e., ram-horns, sun-mask, and wings) represent the *khvarnah* and are associated with Mithrāic symbolism.

Another article by Grenet reinforces this conclusion. Discussing the iconography of a Bāmiyān fresco, he argues that the composition is almost entirely borrowed from

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<sup>68</sup> F. Grenet, “Mithrā et les planètes dans l’Hindukush central: essai d’interprétation de la peinture de Dokhtar-i Nōshirvān” in *Res Orientales*, VII (Leuven, 1995), 117. Considering that the birth of Mithrā was celebrated at the winter solstice, when the sun enters the sign of Capricorn—represented by a goat—one may wonder if the horns alluded to the goat as well, although ram’s horns invariably curl down and forward while the goat/ibex horns go up and slightly curl back. A Sogdian jug of circa 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, depicting a goat with a ribbon tied around his neck, may exemplify the interchangeability of the goat and ram in this context; see Pope, *Survey*, VII:219, pl. B, and 222, pl. A; or *L’asie des steppes; d’Alexandre le grand à Genghis Khān* exhibition catalog (Paris, 2001), 72.

Mithrāic representations (fig. 31).<sup>69</sup> Buddha, standing in lieu of Mithrā at the center of this fresco, is depicted with a nimbus behind his head and a radiant disk around him. Based on another seal produced by Grenet, which depicts Mithrā as a sun god rising from Mount Hara (fig. 29), the radiant disk in the Bāmiyān scene is described as the solar radiance associated with Mithrā.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, we recognize in the hands of the angels at the top corners of the fresco as well as flowing behind Buddha's head, a previously discussed symbol, namely the *dastār*. It too becomes Mithrā-related.

But in solving the etymology of *dastār* and its application to Arab turbans, we are exposed to a new dilemma: If the *dastār* was a commonly understood symbol of *khvarnah*, why doesn't this word appear in pre-Islamic texts? The answer may lie in a doubly problematic legacy that affects this Sasanian symbol of authority: one is religious and related to an *omerta* theory that A.D. Bivar has proposed in respect to Mithrāic cults, and the other is political and related to the demise of the Parthians.

Trying to explain the bizarre reaction of the *Shāhnāme* hero, Bahrām-e Gur, to his consort Āzādeh, who likened his skills to those of Ahriman and was trampled to death, Bivar suggested that, in the context of esoteric Mithrāism, i.e., the portion of Mithrāic cults banned by Zoroaster and which ended up being associated with *daevas* (Old Persian, *daiwas*, New Persian, *divs*, "demonic creatures") and Ahriman, the

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<sup>69</sup> F. Grenet, "Bāmiyān and the Mehr Yasht," in *Bulletin of Asia Institute* VII (1993), 87-92.

<sup>70</sup> The earliest image with a radiant disk seems to date back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, S. Shahbazi, "Iranian Notes 1-6" in *Papers in Honour of Prof. Mary Boyce (Acta Iranica 25, Leiden, 1985)*, 503-05. For another representation, see Grenet, "Mithrā et les planètes," 117.

utterance of the Mithrā/Ahriman name automatically resulted in death.<sup>71</sup> In other words, there was an *omerta* to be observed in esoteric Mithrāism, the same that perhaps led to a secretive organizational structure for Western Mithrāism.<sup>72</sup>

Even though the more simple explanation for the cause of the trampling would be to consider Āzādeh's words as an insult that attracted the kingly wrath, Bivar's proposition has the merit to focus our attention toward factors that may have affected the use of the word *dastār* and the lack of popularity of this term in the Sasanian era.

The ban on the utterance of names, for instance, is not a far-fetched idea because it was also observed amongst the Turco-Mongol tribes, who descended from the Central Asian steppes into Iran. After the death of a Turco-Mongol ruler, his name could not be mentioned and all references to him were through a posthumous pseudonym. Persian chroniclers adopted a similar naming convention and usually omitted the name of the deceased rulers. They referred to them in terms such as *navvāb-e sekandar sha`n* or *navvāb-e jahānbāni* and extended the same to the living ones, a convention that

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<sup>71</sup> A.D. Bivar, "The Royal Hunter and the Hunter God: Esoteric Mithraism Under the Sasanians?" in *Res Orientales*, VII (Leuven, 1995), 33. Bivar expounds his theory in relation to the Yazidis, whose cult is believed to be a descendant of Mithrāism. Our reference to the Yazidis concerning the tying of scarves and ribbons to rams (footnote 64 supra), and the common veneration of the scorpion (see footnote 76 infra), are perhaps added indications of that cultic affiliation.

<sup>72</sup> Western Mithrāism refers to the religion that spread through the Roman Empire and was the most serious rival of Christianity at the time that Constantine the Great adopted the latter as the state religion; for a comprehensive study of its relationship with its Iranian origins, see R. Turcan, *Mithra et le mithriacisme* (Paris, 2000).

usually leads to much confusion as to which pseudonym applies to whom.

More importantly, the idea of a continued undercurrent of banned aspects of Mithrāism finds concrete proof in the form of a scorpion on top of a pair of wings carved on a Sasanian seal (fig. 39). Indeed, the appearance of the scorpion—an Ahrimanic species that orthodox Zoroastrianism abhorred—in conjunction with a glorified pair of wings, symbol of the *farr*, can gain meaning only in the context of unreformed Mithrāism, remnants of which are to be found in Western Mithrāic scenes, in which the scorpion and the serpent accompany Mithrā in his attack on the bull (see fig. 109).<sup>73</sup> Another seal with a scorpion and the name Mehrag inscribed on its contour further attests to the scorpion's close association with Mithrā (Mehr).<sup>74</sup> The scorpion also appears in combination with the doubled *afzun* monogram, on a seal from the British Museum as yet another half-image half-word manifestation of the *farreh-afzun* concept (fig. 40).<sup>75</sup> We can then surmise that the scorpion, which for more than a millennium was perceived as an auspicious—or even

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<sup>73</sup> For additional taurochtony scenes see *Etudes mithriaques* (*Acta Iranica* 17, Leiden, 1978), pls. XXII, XXXI; Turcan, *Mithra et le mithriacisme*, pls. 1-5. For a similar attack of the scorpion and serpent and a possible Elamite connection, see page 120 and fig. 120 *infra*.

<sup>74</sup> Seal no. NCBS 914, Yale University; see Gignoux and Gyselen, *Bulles et sceaux sassanides*, 214, pl. XIII. See also *ibid.*, pl. X, 30.110, for a seal with a combined snake and scorpion motif, i.e., the usual companions of Mithrā.

<sup>75</sup> See seal no. E28803 in A. D. Bivar, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum; Stamp Seals: II - The Sassanian Dynasty* (London, 1969), 114 and pl. 28-NG9.

revered<sup>76</sup>—creature before being categorized as a *khrafstar* (“noxious creature”) in Zoroastrianism,<sup>77</sup> was a Mithrāic symbol that, in combination with a pair of falcon wings or the *afzun* monogram, still projected *khvarnah* for a certain portion of the Iranian population under Sasanian rule.

Gherardo Gnoli, taking his cue from Ilya Gershevitch, noted that Mithrā and the goddess Anāhitā “besides being two *yazatas* for the authors of the Avestan Yashts and two *bagas* for Artaxerxes II, were also two *daevas* for the disciples of a religion that was repudiated by the Zoroastrians.”<sup>78</sup> In other words, after Zoroaster’s reforms, Mithrā was still worshipped as god by the people who had not accepted those reforms and who were qualified in the Avesta as *daeva*-worshippers (demon/falsehood-worshippers). The Mithrā of these people had certainly attributes and symbols no longer acceptable to the Zoroastrians. A perfect example of these banned attributes was the scorpion, which orthodox Zoroastrianism reviled but popular beliefs kept alive as a Mithrāic *khvarnah* symbol.

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<sup>76</sup> The Yazidis, who also revere the scorpion, have a designated *pir*, Pir Gerwa, as the holy protector of the Scorpion. However, the scorpion—along with the serpent—appears as an auspicious animal on 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC vessels, known as the “Kermān stones”; see, for instance, P. Kohl, “Carved Chlorite Vessels: A Trade in Finished Commodities in the Mid-Third Millennium” in *Expedition* 19 (1), Fall 1975, 24 and 29; P. Kohl, “The Balance of Trade in Southwestern Asia in the Third Millennium BC” in *Current Anthropology* 19 (3), Sept. 1978, 465; see also footnote 295 infra.

<sup>77</sup> Farnbagh Dādagi, *Bondaresh*, ed. M. Bahār (Tehran, 1369), 98.

<sup>78</sup> G. Gnoli, *Zoroaster in History* (New York, 2000), 32. Gnoli also refers to Gershevitch’s analysis of *Yasht* 5:94, and *Yasht* 10:108, showing that those qualified as *daeva*-worshippers offered libations and sacrifices to Mithrā and Anāhitā; see also footnote 249 infra. For Anāhitā gradually replacing Mithrā’s counterpart, Apam-Napāt, see pages 55-56 infra.

### The *dayhim*

If an association with the banned aspects of the cult of Mithrā was partially responsible for a lack of direct reference to *dastār*, we must then be able to find for it an antecedent related to unreformed Mithrāism. The most suitable candidate is the string-like Parthian headgear usually referred to as *dahem/dedem* (New Persian: *dayhim*) or its Greek equivalent, diadem.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the appearance of a winged-angel carrying the *dayhim*, on the reverse of certain Parthian coins, establishes an exact parallel with the Sasanian winged angel carrying the flying ribbons as symbols of *farr* (fig. 37).<sup>80</sup> More importantly, the same motif appears on the obverse of certain coinage behind the head of the ruler (fig. 38); it confirms that the looped strings carried by the angel constituted the *dayhim* and was meant to be tied to the ruler's head.<sup>81</sup>

A passage from the Mehr Yasht explains that Mithrā had a “thousand well-made bowstrings” in his chariot, which “fly

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<sup>79</sup> According to a fashion probably borrowed from the Assyrians, Darius wore a regal headband or diadem too (for instance, at Bisotun). The tradition goes back to the Pharaoh Amenophis III (r. 1390-1352 BC), who is “already represented as wearing a diadem, which constituted an abstract index of royalty irrespective of its ‘original’ association with solar cults, an association which was not always lost in the mists of time,” Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 12.

<sup>80</sup> See also Mitchiner, *The Ancient and Classical World*, 116 (no. 600), and 119 (no. 642); or *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(1), pl. 2 (Parthian coins) nos. 3-4.

<sup>81</sup> Also, on a seal of Tigranes II of Armenia (95-56 BCE), an angel, who according to the Hellenistic and Roman traditions is generally referred to as Nike (Victory) or Tyche (Fortuna), is carrying above his head a duplicate of the spiked tiara that Tigranes wears; see Christie's, *Catalog of Antiquities* (New York, June 8, 2001), lot 245. This confirms that such angels carried the main headgear of authority, be it crown, string, or tiara.

from the supernatural realm” and fall “onto the heads of the *daevas*.”<sup>82</sup> Even though the sections following the previous passage in the Mehr Yasht talk about maces thrown out of Mithrā’s chariot that smash the heads of the *daevas*, it is almost impossible to find a rational explanation for the harm that a falling bowstring could inflict on the head of a *daeva*.<sup>83</sup> One suspects that this passage had a positive connotation before deities were turned into *daevas* through Zoroaster’s reforms, and perhaps the Parthian string-like *dayhim* invoked the previously auspicious bowstrings.<sup>84</sup> Since the bow was the Parthians’ weapon of choice, and figured prominently as an emblem of power on the reverse of most of their coinage, such a supposition is not wholly unreasonable.

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<sup>82</sup> *Yasht* 10:128, Malandra, *Introduction*, 74.

<sup>83</sup> *Yasht* 10:133, Malandra, *Introduction*, 74; another translation (“Avesta: Khorda Avesta,” from *Sacred Books of the East*, tr. J. Darmesteter, American Edition, 1898) mentions “bows well-made, with a string of cowgut” rather than bowstrings hitting the skulls of the *daevas*. The latter translation does not make sense either, for bows are not made to be thrown, but to shoot arrows with.

<sup>84</sup> It is interesting to compare this passage of the Mehr Yasht with the Paikuli inscriptions of Narseh where it says that a certain Vahnām, with the help of “Ahriman and the devils” *banded* (tied) the *dayhim* to the head of Varahrān (Bahrām), the king of the Sakas; Shayegan, *Epos*, 4; H. Humbach, and P.O. Skjaervo, *The Sasanian Inscription of Paikuli*. I-III (Wiesbaden, 1983), part 3.1 29. It seems that in this official Sasanian inscription, there is an implied association between *dayhim* and Ahriman. The appearance of the same expression (i.e., tying the *dayhim*) in a non-official context, such as the Manichaean text *Shāpuragān* (tr. N. `Omranī (Tehran, 1379), 57, where it is read as “*didem benneh?*”), may not necessarily negate our assumption that in the official Sasanian secretariat the *dayhim* was associated with the Parthians (thus, Ahrimanic), especially in view of the fact that Māni himself was reputedly of Parthian origin; see Abol-Faraj Ebn al-Nadīm, *Māni be ravāyat-e Ebn al-Nadīm*, tr. M. Abol-ghāsemi (Tehran, 1379), 15.

Be that as it may, the investiture relief of Ardashir I at Naqsh-e Rostam puts the previous observations into perspective (fig. 36). Ahura-Mazdā mounted on a horse offers a ring of investiture with attached flying ribbons to Ardashir, who is depicted as a near-perfect mirror image of the deity. What is uniquely interesting is the simultaneous depiction of the vanquished Ardavān under the hoofs of Ardashir's horse and Ahriman under Ahura-Mazdā's mount.<sup>85</sup> Its message is clear: Parthian rule was Ahrimanic and illegitimate, and when the last of the Parthians was vanquished, so was Ahriman.

Such a drastic political statement surely necessitated a break with Parthian iconography and symbols of legitimacy. The Parthian tiara with a radiant star, worn with a string-like *dayhim* that Ardashir had at first adopted for his coinage, was soon abandoned for a new Sasanian composition.<sup>86</sup> Although the previous symbols of authority had to be modified, the basic Mithrāic affiliation of the *khvarnah* was nevertheless preserved.

The Parthians, coming from eastern Iran, were perhaps prone to use—unreformed—Mithrāic symbols such as the string-like *dayhim*, recalling Mithrā's bowstrings. The Sasanians, on the other hand, emphasized Zoroastrian orthodoxy and probably sought to replace old symbols with more acceptable ones, i.e., symbols of Mithrā not banned or

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<sup>85</sup> Because of a serpent laced around the head of the man under Ahura-Mazdā's horse, he is generally recognized as Ahriman; M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London, 1979), 107; *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 76.

<sup>86</sup> For a sample of Ardashir I's early coinage, see, for instance, *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(1), pl. 25 no. 2; Mitchiner, *The Ancient and Classical World*, 149.

denigrated by the Avesta. And so, instead of the string-like *dayhim*, an amplified version, the flying ribbons, appeared beneath the Sasanian crown on bas-reliefs as well as coinage. It is not clear what the flying ribbon was exactly supposed to represent. Perhaps it was used as an indicator of the wind generated by Mithrā's daily journey through the sky. It was a universally recognized symbol of wind, as valid then as it was three thousand years ago<sup>87</sup> or even today. Whatever it was meant to represent, it was in lieu of the hanging part of the Parthian string-like *dayhim* and was combined with a thicker headband that had to be *tied* to the head as well. Perhaps, a new name such as *dastār* was selected, either for the ribbons alone or in combination with the headband.<sup>88</sup> But—like for so many other officially enforced changes—people continued to address the combination as *dayhim*, a word no longer officially correct because of its association with banned aspects of Mithrāism and the Parthian regime.<sup>89</sup> The new word, *dastār*, might have gained currency only toward the end of the Sasanian rule; hence its passage into the Islamic era and the lack of Sasanian written reference to it.

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<sup>87</sup> See fig. 92 and its explanation pages 81-82.

<sup>88</sup> Prof. Shaul Shaked, who was the discussant of our panel at the Biennial Conference, communicated to me later on that even though *dastār* was not found in Pahlavi, it was used in Aramaic and meant “handkerchief” or “towel.” Therefore, as a loanword from Pahlavi, *dastār* must have existed in Sasanian times as well.

<sup>89</sup> A point in case is the Calendar reform imposed by Ardashir I, which was not well received. People ignored it and continued to celebrate Nowruz and other festivities according to the old Calendar; Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 104-105. Another controversial measure was the ban on the use of image worship that according to Boyce, “must have caused great distress and stirred up stubborn resistance”; *ibid.*, 107.

The Sasanians seem to have used the combination of headband and flying ribbons as a new emblem of investiture. The depiction of ring-shaped headbands must have been prompted by a desire to emulate the ring of investiture handed over by the winged symbol of Ahura-Mazdā in Achaemenid bas-reliefs, which in turn was derived from Mesopotamian iconography. These rings of investitures were all shaped like a solid torque. By contrast, the Sasanian headband, which was to be tied around the head, must have been supple in appearance. Hence, the less than perfect roundness of the emblem in certain scenes of investiture (see, for instance, fig. 36).

Four silver plates may shed further light on the forms and functions of Sasanian replacements of the Parthian *dayhim*. In the first plate (fig. 34), an angel is carrying an ornate *dastār* to a mounted ruler, who has killed a lion and is in the process of slaying a boar with a lance while confronting an elephant ridden by an Indian *mahout*.<sup>90</sup> In form and purpose, there is a striking similarity between the angel-carried *dastār* of the Bishāpur relief and the one on this plate. However, the more elaborate depiction of the latter clearly shows that its central part—which was to be tied to the head—was woven with a thicker pattern into the *dastār* and became an integral part of it.

Next is a 7-8<sup>th</sup> century Sogdian plate from the Hermitage Museum, representing a royal feast in which an angel is carrying a headband with a crescent toward a seated king (fig. 52). The supple headband with tying hooks at its two ends is equivalent to the central part of the previous *dastār*

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<sup>90</sup> For a complete illustration, see *Sasanian Silver: Late Antique and Early Medieval Arts of Luxury From Iran* (Michigan, 1967), 94.

and clearly projects the same symbolism as the flying ribbons and strings of figs. 12, 33, and 34, all of which are carried by similar flying angels.

The third plate (Walters Art Gallery, 57.709) depicts an enthroned couple and has wrongly been interpreted as a king offering a present to his consort (fig. 32).<sup>91</sup> The action flows in fact in the opposite direction: from a female deity, Anāhitā, to the enthroned ruler. Like most royal Sasanian settings, the deity is depicted in a mirror-image posture. Wearing a ram-horned head piece, Anāhitā is portrayed as the purveyor of *farr* handing the king a headband consisting of a thick central part ending with two rosettes and two strings for tying it to the head. The king had previously received three such headbands (all tossed on the ground) that certainly correspond to the three boar heads depicted under the throne. The hand gesture of Anāhitā signaling the number three confirms her approval of the three feats.<sup>92</sup> Like the Tāq-e Bostān hunting scene (fig. 13), the boar hunts brought added glory to the king and earned him a headband for each boar.

A fourth plate (see fig. 33) illustrates the similar conveyance of a supple headband to a king, probably for the killing of the ram or mouflon depicted under his throne. The ram-head under the throne symbolizes the king's *farr* and emphasizes his increased glory.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 211; Pope, *Survey*, VII:230, pl. A; P.O. Harper, *The Royal Hunter* (New York, 1978), 148.

<sup>92</sup> See also footnote 151 *infra*. The appearance of a fourth headband in the hands of the king is probably to relay the notion that the previous ones were also handed out by Anāhitā.

<sup>93</sup> Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, no. S1987.113. For another ram-head under a throne, see a seal imprint reproduced in *Cambridge History of Iran*,

Viewed in conjunction with our previously discussed symbols, these four silver plates establish an equivalent *farr*-symbolism among the *dayhim*, headbands, flying ribbons, ram-heads, and solar disks pictured there.

Interestingly, the prototype of the reclining and cross-legged ruler of the last three plates goes back to Parthian times, as depicted, for instance, on the Tang-e Sarvak rock-relief (fig. 35).<sup>94</sup> Since all three are of Sogdian origin and datable to the late or post-Sasanian period, and in all three, only a headband is exchanged and not the full *dastār*, one may speculate that on the periphery of the Sasanian empire and close to the Parthian homeland, there was perhaps a tendency to look at the Sasanian-imposed *dastār* as a simple ornament and to revive in its stead a headband devoid of flying ribbons as the primary symbol of *farr*.

### Mithrāic radiance

As Abol-fazl-e `Allāmi pointed out, the projection of solar radiance signaled a king's possession of *farr*. In order to adapt solar radiance to different media and situations, various circular and radiating motifs had been devised, including teardrop-shaped rays emanating from Mithrā's nimbus (see fig. 29). The teardrop rays provide in fact an iconographical bridge between the sunburst and the dotted contour lines.

The dotted contour seems to have first been used as an aesthetic device defining the squared surface limits of early

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III(2): pl.106(d) and Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, 148, in which Anāhitā hands out a crescent-shaped bowl.

<sup>94</sup> All the reclining rulers lean over a stack of four cushions that in later Islamic literature became known as *chahār bālesh-e shahriyāri* ("the cushion-quartet of rulership").

Greek coins<sup>95</sup> and then extended to the circular contour of the Datames type coins (fig. 1). It is quite possible, though, that in conjunction with the winged-disk, which we recognize here as a symbol of Divine Glory, the dotted circular line on the Datames coin had already been perceived as *khvarnah* radiance in Achaemenid times.<sup>96</sup> But even if not recognized as such then, by the time of the Sasanians, the rings on their coinage must have symbolized the *khvarnah*. For if they were added for the sole purpose of better defining the coin surface, one or more of the rings would have logically been placed near the rim rather than midway to the contour (figs. 16, 17, 18).

The most convincing argument for the equivalence of the dotted ring with *khvarnah* radiance however, rests on the iconography of certain Sasanian silver plates, such as the one depicting Yazdegerd I (r. 391-422) hunting (see fig. 28).<sup>97</sup> To convey extra radiance, the nimbus was usually depicted as surrounded by straight-line rays (see, for instance, figs. 4, 46, 104, 118), but in this type of silver-plate, the king's nimbus is surrounded by a dotted ring. Such combinations clearly show that the dotted ring is of the same nature as the nimbus and that this symbol was interchangeably used with

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<sup>95</sup> See, for instance, coins of circa 500-440 BC from Xanthos and its vicinity in the auction catalog of *Dr. Busso Peus Nachf. Münzhandlung*, no. 368, of 25-28 April 2001, nos. 212-217.

<sup>96</sup> The emphasis on solar-radiance for the pre-Achaemenid plates discussed on pages 85-86 favors such supposition.

<sup>97</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, (1970.6). See also Pope, *Survey*, VII, 209 and 213 for two other Sasanian plates (depicting Shāpur II and Khosrow I, respectively) with the same type of dotted contour for the nimbus; or *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(1), pl. 18.

the rays surrounding the solar disk.<sup>98</sup> In the following paragraphs, we note how the dotted contour's transformation into a pearl roundel, added yet another layer of *farr* symbolism to its original projection of solar radiance.



Bronze plaque. Ziviyeh, Iran, 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Ghirshman, *Perse*, 307)

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<sup>98</sup> For another variety of a radiant contour, made from sunflower petals see figs. 57a,b,c.



## PART II – REINTERPRETING SASANIAN RELIEFS

Sasanian iconography, whether on silver plates, coins, or reliefs, is propagandistic in nature, and like most other Iranian art-forms, its composition is governed by conventional symbolism. Although some of these conventions followed older traditions, such as the reclining position of the ruler from the Tang-e Sarvak, others expressed newly created formulas dictated by Sasanian slogans. The correct deciphering of the slogans that often appear as legends and idioms in various inscriptions is therefore essential to the understanding of Sasanian imagery.

### The king as image of the gods

A problematic descriptive refrain “*ke chihz az yazadān*” that follows the king’s name in most Sasanian regal inscriptions, has often been translated as “whose seed is from the gods,” mainly on the basis of accompanying Greek translations on the investiture reliefs of Ardashir I at Naqsh-e Rostam and of Shāpur I at Naqsh-e Rājab: ΕΚ ΓΕΝΟΥΣ ΟΕΩΝ (“from the family of gods”).<sup>99</sup> In Middle Persian, though, *chihz* (New Persian, *chehr*) has two sets of meanings: (1) face and appearance, (2) seed and origin.<sup>100</sup> It is the Greek translation

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<sup>99</sup> See, for instance, D. MacKenzie, “The Inscription” in “The Sasanian Rock Reliefs at Bishapur: Part 2,” in *Iranische Denkmäler* (Berlin, 1981), L10 RII, 17.

<sup>100</sup> D. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (London, 1971), 22.

that has caused the adoption of the second meaning rather than the first. Such a choice assumes that the Greek translation was accurate and that “family” is closer to “origin/seed” than to “face/appearance.” This translation has led to the perception that Sasanian kings boasted a divine origin; which perception was perhaps reinforced by yet another translation, the letter of Shāpur II to the Roman emperor Constantius, in which the Iranian king claims to be the “brother of the Sun and the Moon.”<sup>101</sup> But as Lecoq demonstrates, translations can be treacherous.<sup>102</sup> One can very well imagine the Greek translator bending the meaning of the word *chihr* to what was more familiar, and perhaps more potent, in the Greek context.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Marcellinus, *History* (at 17.5.3), I:333.

<sup>102</sup> In his article, “Un Aspect de la politique religieuse de Gaumata,” in *Res Orientales*, VII (Leuven, 1995), 183-86, Lecoq argues that the word *āyadanā*, which in reality means “religious practices,” has been translated as “temple” in the Babylonian and Elamite versions of the Bisotun inscriptions because in the Mesopotamian context, the destruction or reconstruction of temples was a normal consequence of religious changes.

<sup>103</sup> James Russell, who is a fervent defender of the “the seeds of the gods” translation for the idiom “*ke chihr az yazatan*,” qualifies as a “mistranslation” the part of the letter that Movses Khorenac’i reproduces as addressed to the Parthian Arsaces, in which the latter is qualified as “king of the earth and sea, whose person and image—as it truly is—are of gods...”; J. Russell, “The Scepter of Tiridates” in *Le Muséon*, tome 114 – fasc. 1-2 (Louvain, 2001), 190. And yet, the letter is composed (as acknowledged by Russell himself) in the Sasanian secretarial style and unambiguously uses the word *patker* (image) in respect to the relation of the king with gods.

The Armenian translation of Khosrow II’s letter to Heraclius offers yet another interpretation of the “*chihr*” legend. It reads “Chosrov, chéri des dieux, maître et roi de toute la terre, fils du grand Ahrmazd, à notre serviteur, imbécile et infâme, Héraclius” (G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, tr. J. Hussey (New Brunswick NJ, 1999), 102, quoting

Reliance on translations, without proper consideration for the original context, may thus be misguided. In the case of the Shāpur I inscriptions, for instance, the resulting English translation:

“I am the Mazdean Lord Shāpur,... whose seeds is from the gods, son of the Mazdean Lord Ardashir, ..., whose seeds is from the gods,” ...,<sup>104</sup>

incorporates an unnecessary redundancy. If Ardashir were truly from the seeds of gods, his son would have been as well. There would be no need to emphasize it twice.

Furthermore, in English, “from the seeds of gods” conveys a permanent trait, whereas the most fundamental tenet of Iranian kingship, as related by the story of Jamshid and the later “mirror for princes” literature, is that this trait is temporary and can be lost when kings stray from the path of righteousness.<sup>105</sup> Except for translations, there has never

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Sebeos as translated by Macler). In the latter translation, “*chéri des dieux*” surely stands for “*ke chihz az yazadān*,” which is markedly different from the Greek translation of the same legend (for an English translation, see <http://rbedrosian.com/seb8.htm>).

<sup>104</sup> P.O. Skjaervo, “Thematic and Linguistic Parallels in the Achaemenian and Sassanian Inscriptions,” in *Papers in Honour of Prof. Mary Boyce (Acta Iranica 25, Leiden, 1985)*, 594.

<sup>105</sup> Choksy, who, quoting the Denkart, affirms that “all corporeal kings are men and not gods,” nevertheless accepts the “seeds from the gods” translation but then adds that this “divine determinant” was not intended “by the monarchs as a claim that they were gods or even demi-gods, but meant that the “ruler and his relatives were the chosen of gods”; J. Choksy, “Sacral Kingship in Sasanian Iran,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 2 (1988), 37 and 48. Unfortunately, this is an explanation negated by the impact of the word “seeds.” Before trying to forcibly give “seeds” a meaning that it cannot support, it seems a lot more logical to verify if the translation was correct in the first place.

been the slightest indication of a ruler pretending to be divine in Iranian kingly ideology.<sup>106</sup>

Moreover, large-sized rock-reliefs were meant to convey a message from afar, whereas the inscriptions, originals as well as translations, could be deciphered only at close range. The pictorial vocabulary of the *image* therefore took precedence over that of the *inscription*. The pictorial vocabulary emphasized the fact that the investiture conferring deity is consistently represented on equal footing and as mirror image of the Sasanian ruler: the two almost equal in size (but the king slightly taller), with similar exaggerated flying ribbons, and with both either standing or mounted (as in figure 32).

The Manichaean text, *Shāpuragān*, provides a vivid representation of what *chihr* was really meant to convey. It states that in the final phase of the world and on the Day of Judgment, the Great Fire ascends to the heavens in the *chihr* (i.e., shape) of Ohrmazd-bagh (the Primordial Man).<sup>107</sup> Visualizing fire as a deity or a sacred person was not confined to Manichaean texts alone, for it also finds a

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<sup>106</sup> One should recall Darius' comment about his earthliness in his Susa inscription (*DSf* 8-22): "Such was Ahuramazdā's pleasure that of the entire earth he chose me, a *man*. He made me king over the entire earth"; Malandra, *Introduction*, 50. It is also interesting to note that at least in one version of the *Shāhnāme*, Jamshid's loss of *farr* is attributed to his claim of divine powers, and his demand to be addressed as *jahān-āfarin* (world-creator); Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāme*, I:45, note 9. As for inscriptions such as ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ (of divine descent) included on the reverse of some of the Parthian coins, one must bear in mind that there again the Parthian coin legends are all in Greek and for a Hellenistic audience, and as such, they also bear the legend *philhellene* ("one who loves Greek culture"), which was obviously not destined to impress the Iranian audience; *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(1):182-98.

<sup>107</sup> "ud pad chihr-i ohrmezdbag yzad bawād," *Shāpuragān*, 40.

figurative expression in the Zoroastrian context, namely, in the coinage of Khosrow II. On certain of his gold issues, in lieu of the traditional fire altar that invariably appears on the reverse of Sasanian coinage, Fire (Ātash) is personified in the form of a flaming head (see fig. 41).<sup>108</sup> Thus, the expression “in the *chihr* of gods,” whether used in conjunction with royalty or fire, was likely to mean “in the image of gods.”

This interpretation finds corroborating evidence in the translation of a letter from Khosrow I (r. 531-72) to Justinian (r. 537-65), in which the appearance of the legend “who bears the image of the gods,” in the string of Khosrow’s epithets, can only be the translation of the ubiquitous “*ke chihr az yazadān*” legend.<sup>109</sup>

As in previous cases, the echoes of this regal idiom in post-Sasanian Persian literature reveal both a lasting conceptual continuity and the means to verify our assumptions. One such echo is found in the second part of the *Nasihāt-ol-moluk*, which is a later addition to the original work of Abu-

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<sup>108</sup> It has been suggested that the image on the reverse is that of Anāhitā; *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(1):331. However, this cannot be since the flame-surrounded head is that of a man, without the two rounded breasts that are the most prominent characteristics of this goddess; see *infra* pages 57-58 and 69.

<sup>109</sup> The letter is reported by Menander Protector (6<sup>th</sup> century) and quoted in Choksy, *Sacral Kingship*, 42. The beginning of the letter reads: “Khosrow, the divine, the good, the father of peace, the ancient, king of kings, fortunate, pious, the doer of good, to whom the gods have given great good fortune and a mighty empire, giant of giants, *who bears the image of the gods*, to Justinian Caesar, our Brother”; *idem*. It is not clear what “divine” was meant to translate, but one clearly sees that such an epithet, or adjective, is wholly misplaced in a string where the rest of the elements strictly talk about an earthly being and not a divine personality.

Hāmed Mohammad-e Ghazzali (d. 1111) but nonetheless datable to the 12<sup>th</sup> century:<sup>110</sup>

در اخبار میشنوی که السلطان ظل الله فی الارض، سلطان سایه  
هیبت خدایست بر روی زمین، یعنی که بزرگ و برگماشته  
خدایست بر خلق خویش

You hear from past accounts that: “The Soltān is the shadow of God on earth (in Arabic),” [that is] the Soltān is the shadow of God’s glory (*heybat*) on earth, meaning that he is God’s appointed leader over mankind.<sup>111</sup>

The title for this part of the *Nasihāt-ol-moluk*, “On the justice and statecraft and traditions of rulers, and the story of past kings and the dates of each,” clearly shows that its content was derived from the ancient kingly narratives of Iran. In the Islamic context, where images of God were forbidden, the “shadow of God’s glory on earth” was a clever substitute for the representation of the king as the recipient of *farr* from his mirror-image deity.<sup>112</sup> And the next

<sup>110</sup> For a discussion of the wrong authorship of the second part of the *Nasihāt-ol-moluk*, see, for instance, A. Soudavar, “The Concepts of *al-aqdāmo asāhh* and *yaqīn-e sābeq* and the Problem of Semi-fakes,” *Studia Iranica* 28 (2), 255-69, 266.

<sup>111</sup> *Nasihāt-ol-moluk*, ed. J. Homāi (Tehran, 1367/1988), 81.

<sup>112</sup> The substitution of the word *ruz*, for *farr* in *ruz-afzun*, was also done in the same spirit: it invoked the same concept without direct reference to *farr* which had clear Zoroastrian connotations. *Ruz* provided a double meaning (both *farr* and longevity) to deflect any criticism of non-Islamic conformity. Likewise, the adoption of the “Shadow of God on Earth” formula was probably a clever ploy to use pre-Islamic idioms in a new garb. “Shadow” projected reflection without allusion to light, which could be associated with Zoroastrianism.

The metaphor of “Shadow of God” was used by the Assyrians as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC (Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 17). It is not out of

explanation, that the *soltān* represented God's choice to lead mankind, indicated what the rock-relief imagery of Sasanian times truly projected: the king as a reflective image of gods in both appearance and responsibility.

Other echoes are found in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeḥ*:

به بالای سرو و به چهر کیان

with a stature like a cypress and a Kayānid *chehr* (i.e., Kayānid *farr*)<sup>113</sup>

ترا داد ایزد چنین فر- و چهر که افزودت بر هر یکی داد مهر  
Izad (i.e., Ahura-Mazdā) gave you such a *farr* and *chehr*, that is in excess of what Mehr (i.e., Mithrā) ever gave of each.<sup>114</sup>

The above verses provide conclusive evidence that *farr* and *chehr* were related and somehow equivalent in auspiciousness, and that they emanated from both Ahura-Mazdā and Mithrā. Finally, another *Shāhnāmeḥ* verse underlines the reflective meaning of *chehr*:

ترا بر تن خویش بر مهر نیست وگر هست مهر ترا چهر نیست  
Your body does not have Mithrāic glory, and if it has, it does not reflect it.<sup>115</sup>

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the realm of the possible to think that the Sasanian idiom "*ke chihr as yazadān*" was itself a transmutation of an Assyrian metaphor that ultimately reverted back to its original state in Islamic times.

<sup>113</sup> Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāmeḥ*, I:79.

<sup>114</sup> Dehkhodā, *Loghatnāmeḥ*, III:7352.

<sup>115</sup> Idem. Other indicators for the meaning of *chehr* are found in the combination *mehr-chehr* (i.e., radiant face), or a in poem from the *Habib-os-siyar* (idem.):

خسرو جم قدر منوچهر چهر چهره بخاک در او سوده مهر

The king with the majesty of Jamshid and *chehr* (i.e., *farr*) of Manuचेhr, at whose threshold Mithrā rubs his face (*chehreh*).

In consideration of the preceding analysis, a more appropriate translation for the expression “*ke chihr az yazadān*” may be: “who reflects the gods (in power and glory).” As such, the expression provides a useful indicator for the deciphering of Sasanian imagery: the figures whom a king reflects are probably deities.

### The reflection of gods in early Sasanian coinage

The iconography of the early Sasanian coinage is most revealing in respect to the institution of the reflective king/god imagery. Indeed, Ardashir I’s coinage introduced two novel features: a fire altar, on the reverse (fig. 42), and a new legend in Pahlavi, on the obverse. The latter begins with the titles of the king at the top left, turns anticlockwise and ends with the idiom “*ke chihr az yazadān*” on the right contour opposite the ruler’s portrait (figs. 65, 66).<sup>116</sup>

To give visual expression to this idiom, at first the bust of a deity facing Ardashir was added (fig. 43). It probably represented the patron saint of the house of Sāsān, i.e., Anāhitā.<sup>117</sup> But perhaps, judging that it was redundant to

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in which the two words *chehr* and *chehreh* are juxtaposed, clearly with different meanings, and where *chehr* needs to be similar in meaning to “radiant glory.”

<sup>116</sup> The complete legend translates as: “The Mazdean Majesty Ardashir, King of Kings of Iran, who reflects the gods (*ke chihr az yazadān*).”

<sup>117</sup> This small bust has been generally recognized as representing the heir apparent Shāpur as co-ruler to Ardashir. However, iconographically, a coruler should be positioned along the same side and not opposite the main ruler. Our discussion of the coinage of Bahrām II (see page 69) further justifies our present assumption. The Sasanians who were the hereditary guardians of the temple of Anāhitā at Estakhr (present-day province of Fārs), much revered that deity; Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 101; Mohammad b. Jarir-e Tabari, *Tārikh-e Tabari*, “*Tārikh-or-rosol val-moluk*,” tr. A. Pāyandeh, 16 vols. (Tehran, 1375), III:580.

have the facing bust and the idiom on the same side as the king's effigy, it was soon abandoned in favor of a new formula. The latter was instituted on the coinage of Shāpur I by adding the king and his mirror-image deity on each side of the fire altar on the reverse side of the coin (fig. 44). Concurrently, the two flying ribbons, hanging from each side of the lone fire-altar of Ardashir's coinage (fig. 42), were transferred to the newly added king/god pair. And, in conformity to Shāpur I's description in the *Mojmal-ot-tavārikh val-qesas*, the latter is portrayed standing with a lance in his hand.<sup>118</sup>

As a novel formula for the consumption of the masses (or at least for all those who handled coins), the visual message of the reflective imagery had to be as clear as possible.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, the king-god pairs were strictly identical on the early issues. But later on, variations in headgear were readmitted and, as in rock-reliefs, a female deity (i.e., Anāhitā) was posted on the right side of the altar as the goddess whose reflection brought added *farr* to the king (fig. 45).<sup>120</sup>

### The investiture of Shāpur II

The controversial *Investiture of Shāpur II* at Tāq-e Bostān (fig. 46) offers yet another example of king/god imagery,

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<sup>118</sup> *Mojmal-ot-tavārikh val-qesas* (folio 13a). Only one other king, Yazdegerd I, is also described standing with a lance in his hands. Other Sasanian kings who hold a lance are either seated or hold another emblem of power in the other hand, be it shield, bow, sword, or mace; *ibid.*, folios 12b-15a.

<sup>119</sup> After all, the visibility and exposure of rock-reliefs were more limited than coins, and perhaps destined for a more sophisticated audience.

<sup>120</sup> See also Pope, *Survey*, VII: pls. 254 b and d.

albeit more complex than the previous one.<sup>121</sup> Various studies on the subject agree only on the identity of the figure that lies horizontally at the bottom of the relief: Based on numismatic evidence, he is recognized as the Roman emperor, Julian (r. 361-63),<sup>122</sup> who died in battle against Shāpur II. The central figure had previously been identified as Ardashir II (r. 379-383), and the one on the right, as Ahura-Mazdā but more recently as Shāpur II endowing his brother, the future Ardashir II, with a ring of investiture in celebration of a presumed joint effort to vanquish the Roman emperor.<sup>123</sup>

We concur in identifying the figure on the right as Shāpur II. His broad shoulders and his headgear, which stands taller than everybody else's, conform to those of the kingly prototype common in other Sasanian scenes of investiture. It also seems more logical to see the victor as the person standing on the head of the Roman emperor rather than the one standing over his legs. As for his headgear, it is similar to the one depicted on the coinage of Shāpur II, which clearly shows curled and looped hair protruding from his crown.<sup>124</sup> But here we part ways with those who interpret the central figure as Ardashir II or any other mortal.<sup>125</sup> Since

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<sup>121</sup> For a synopsis of the controversies, see S. Shahbazi, "Studies in Sasanian Prosopography; II - The relief of Ardašer II at Tāq-I Bustān," in *Archeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 18 (1985), 181-85.

<sup>122</sup> Because of his polytheist beliefs and reverence for Sol Invictus (alias Mithrā), this Roman emperor is often referred to as Julian the Apostate.

<sup>123</sup> Shahbazi, "Studies in Sasanian Prosopography," 184-85.

<sup>124</sup> Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins*, 157 no. 873, 159 no. 889.

<sup>125</sup> There are a number of inherently contradictory aspects to Shahbazi's proposition that the relief served to commemorate a pact between Shāpur II and his brother, nominating him as heir apparent. Even if one accepts the *Shāhnāme*-inferred supposition that Ardashir was instrumental in

time immemorial, investiture has juxtaposed kings with deities. To think of investiture as an interaction between two mortals is to misunderstand its purpose and the concept of divine sanction imbedded in it.<sup>126</sup>

Also, a closer look at Ardashir II's coinage reveals that his headgear is in the form of a draped and forward-leaning *korymbos*, which dissimulates his hair.<sup>127</sup> The middle person, though, has a knotted pompon that precludes us from identifying him with Ardashir II.<sup>128</sup> His pompon is the same

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the victory against the Byzantines, the creation of such a relief does not make sense. The Romans didn't threaten the Sasanian throne, and victory against them was not so crucial as to require the king to share his glory with somebody else. And if this was the case, Ardashir II would have been prominently depicted on Shāpur II's Bishāpur relief as well. Also, if the relief was carved in Shāpur's time, the question would be: Why did Shāpur II forgo his own glory and did not have another investiture scene for himself alone? On the other hand, if it was conceived during Ardashir's reign, he would have certainly evoked divine favor for himself rather than mere appointment by his brother. See also footnote 182 infra.

<sup>126</sup> As observed by Al-Azmeh: "Running metaphors of terrestrial power in terms of the sacred, and of the sacred in terms of terrestrial power can be observed in all complex societies. They betoken a primitive equivalence, expressed in a play of images, in a traffic of projections and analogies, and in the displacement of propositions and imperatives concerning the one and the other," Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 4.

<sup>127</sup> See also Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins*, 161.

<sup>128</sup> Shahbazi's contention that Ardashir II deliberately adopted the headgear of his namesake Ardashir I (Shahbazi, "Studies in Sasanian Prosopography," 184) is unfounded and unprecedented. But supposing that this was Ardashir II's wish, he would have certainly adopted a better-known crown, for instance, one that his ancestor wore in investiture scenes and not one from a limited coin issue. Also, his contention (*ibid.*, 183) that this headgear was worn by Ardashir I on his triumph relief of Firuzābād is simply not true. On that relief, Ardashir I is wearing a flag-type headgear stretching backward with the wind (for a close-up, see R. Ghirshman, *Parthes et sassanides* (Paris 1962), 126; *The*

as the one worn by the figure generally identified as Ahura-Mazdā in the adjacent investiture scene of Khosrow II at Tāq-e Bostān (fig. 62).<sup>129</sup> He must therefore be identified as Ahura-Mazdā, seconded by the lesser *ahura* Mithrā, as the purveyor of *farr*.

### Apam-Napāt/Anāhitā

According to the Farvardin Yasht, right after Zoroaster “was born” and the good Mazdean religion had spread around the world, Mithrā and Apam-Napāt were both entrusted with the *exact same task*: to “promote all supreme authorities of the countries” and “pacify all those in revolt.”<sup>130</sup> In other words, they were the deities who upheld authority and vanquished rebellion.

Apam-Napāt is also the deity who finally took possession of the *khvarnah* that Jamshid had lost, and in order to protect it, hid it under the sea. In the Zāmyād Yasht, he is qualified as the lofty *ahura*, “imperial,” “regal,” and as an aquatic god, whose name meant “Son of Waters.”<sup>131</sup> Mary Boyce indicates that the equality in stature of Mithrā and Apam-Napāt—as spelled out in the Farvardin Yasht—goes back to pre-Zoroastrian times, when in the divisions of the day, the morning was set under the “protection Mithrā and the afternoon under that of Apam-Napāt.”<sup>132</sup> Their equality in

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*Arts of Persia*, ed. R.W. Ferrier (New Haven, 1989), 65, for a sketch, see *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 89).

<sup>129</sup> Anāhitā also wears it at both Tāq-e Bostān (in the *Investiture of Khosrow II*) and at Tang-e Qandil.

<sup>130</sup> *Yasht* 13:94-95, Malandra, *Introduction*.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, *Yasht* 19:51-52. Mallory conjures that Apam-Napāt should translate as “grandson/nephew of waters”; J.P. Mallory, *Indo-Europeans, Language, Archeology and Myth* (London, 1999 reprint), 129.

<sup>132</sup> M. Boyce, “Apam Napāt” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, II:148.

stature and responsibility, as well as the ancient Iranian and Vedic belief that the setting sun sunk into the sea,<sup>133</sup> rendered these two deities interchangeable in respect to the *khvarnah*: Mithrā was the sun god who projected *khvarnah* in daytime, and Apam-Napāt was the aquatic god who protected it at nighttime. In other words, they were the two sides of the same coin, or more precisely the representatives of the two halves of the same cycle: the rise of the sun to the skies followed by its dive into the sea.

But with the advent of Zoroastrianism, Ahura-Mazdā rose to prominence, while Mithrā and Apam-Napāt were demoted to a secondary position. Nevertheless, the latter two are the only deities to be qualified as *ahura* (lord) alongside Ahura-Mazdā in the Avesta.<sup>134</sup>

As the protector of the *khvarnah* and a deity of equal standing with Mithrā, one should expect that Apam-Napāt's authority is also invoked in kingly representations. The investiture scene of Shāpur II at Tāq-e Bostān offers one such example (fig. 46). Mithrā is represented standing on a fully blossomed lotus flower. The lotus is of course the blossom of the water lily that in Persian is named *nilufar*. The “*far*” component in the name of this blossom—which springs from the water—seems to have phonetically evoked that it was endowed with the *farr* that Apam-Napāt kept under water. It is interesting that its French name, *nénuphar* (Latin: *nuphar*), phonetically maintains the “*far*”

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<sup>133</sup> Boyce, “Apam Napāt,” II:148.; M. Boyce, “Mithra Khsathrapati and his Brother Ahura” in *Bulletin of Asia Institute* 4 (1990), 5

<sup>134</sup> Boyce, “Apam Napāt,” II:148; Boyce, “Mithra Khsathrapati,” 7.

component,<sup>135</sup> and a larger variety of water lily that mainly grows in India is called *Victoria Regia*, a name that incidentally incorporates the attributes of both the *farr* (as agent of victory) and of Apam-Napāt (the “regal”). It is said that the latter species can grow so large as to support a young child standing on it.<sup>136</sup> The investiture scene of Tāq-e Bostān thus invokes the full power of the *ahura* triumvirate: Ahura-Mazdā, handing the ring of investiture, and Mithrā standing on the *Victoria Regia* lotus, bestowing the *khvarnah* that Apam-Napāt had protected and nurtured.

The symbolic pairing of Mithrā and Apam-Napāt can be traced back to the Achaemenid period, when the sunflower and the lotus (figs. 47a and b) were combined in such a way

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<sup>135</sup> The Larousse dictionary states that *nénuphar* has an Arabic antecedent. The Arabs though, use both *nénuphar* and *nilufar*. Also, the ancient Egyptian term for the *Nymphaea Caerulea* (blue lotus) may have been *nen-nufer* (the beautiful) in deference to Nefertem, the god worshipped in the form of a lotus blossom and who was closely linked to the sun god; H. Biedermann, *Dictionary of Symbolism: Cultural Icons and the Meanings Behind Them*, tr, J. Hulbert (New York, 1994), 212 (no reference given), see also footnote 206 infra. The Middle Persian *nilufar* falls in between an Egyptian term and the Sanskrit *nilōtpala* = *nila+ut+pala* in which the first term means “blue” (perhaps meaning the blue that came from the land of the Nile), the last term derives from the verbal root *pal* = “to burst open,” and as a whole refers to the blue lotus. Therefore, the *farr* association in *nilufar* may be accidental or fortuitous. (I am indebted to Mahasti Afshar for her insights into the etymological problems of the word *nilufar*). Interestingly, it has been suggested that the association of the Avestan word *khvarnah* (originally meaning brilliance, splendour) with the sun (*khvar*) came through punning and sound associativity as well; J. Elfenbein, “Splendour and Fortune” in *Philologica et Linguistica. Historia, Pluralitas, Universitas, Festschrift für Helmut Humbach zum 80. Geburtstag am 4. Dezember 2001* (Trier, 2001), 492.

<sup>136</sup> Moin, *Farhang-e Farsi*, IV:4904. *Victoria Regia* (perhaps named after Queen Victoria) is now mostly referred to as *Victoria amazonica*.

as if the former emerged from the latter. The sunflower was the quintessential symbol of solar radiance and the lotus, the symbol of the waters. In the *Bondahesh*, each of the Amesha Spentas and *yazatas* is allocated a flower, and in that schema, the *nilufar* specifically represents Ābān (i.e., the Waters) and the sunflower symbolizes Mithrā.<sup>137</sup> Therefore, the combination of the two flowers not only alluded to the ancient Iranian belief that the sun sank into the sea at dusk and rose from it at dawn, but emphasized that the aquatic god Apam-Napāt, as the guardian of the *farr*, and the sun god Mithrā, as the propagator of *farr* radiance, had complementary and back-to-back functions in respect to the *farr*.

The same symbolic duality reappears on a silver cup from the Tiflis Museum, two roundels of which depict Bahrām II (r. 276-93) emerging from lotus petals encircled by sunflower petals (see fig. 57a).<sup>138</sup> The lotus petals conveyed the *farr* of Apam-Napāt and the sunflower ring projected yet another variety of Mithrāic radiance, similar to the previously discussed dotted rings and sunbursts.

Boyce observes that with the advent of Zoroastrianism, Apam-Napāt, whose functions as a creator-god clashed with those of the supreme creator Ahura-Mazdā, was condemned to oblivion. He was gradually superseded by another aquatic

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<sup>137</sup> Farnbagh Dādagi, *Bondahesh*, 88. Mithrā's flower is named as the "hamisheh-beshgofteh" (ever-blooming), also known in modern Persian as the *hamisheh-bahār*, from the family of sunflowers.

<sup>138</sup> For a complete description see P.O. Harper, "Sasanian Medaillon Bowls with Human Busts," in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy, and History; Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, ed. D. Kouymjian (Beirut, 1974), 63.

deity, the “Lady of the Waters,” Anāhitā.<sup>139</sup> The *nilufar* naturally symbolized them both: the Son of the Waters, Apam-Napāt, and the Lady of the Waters, Anāhitā, whose *yasht* in the Avesta was referred to as Ābān Yasht. Thus, Anāhitā, who carries a jug of Primordial Waters in her left hand in the *Investiture of Khosrow II* at Tāq-e Bostān (fig. 62), is also depicted on a gilt silver ewer of the Metropolitan Museum of Art with the same jug in her right hand and a lotus in her left hand (fig. 54).

As the successor of Apam-Napāt, Anāhitā assumed his powers in respect to the *farr*. Therefore, a lotus flower placed in the hand of a standing woman, as in seals from the British Museum (figs. 51 and 73), was meant not only to identify her as Anāhitā but also to depict her as a purveyor of *farr*.<sup>140</sup>

#### **The lotus flower and other aquatic signs of *farr***

Like all other symbols of *farr*, the lotus flower was used to depict authority and good fortune. As such, it appears for instance on a stucco plaque from an excavated palace in Kish (fig. 55). It is supported by a pair of wings, held together by flying ribbons similar in form and purpose to fig. 21, which incorporates at its center a ram instead of a flower.

It also appears in the hand of the seated ruler at the center of the previously discussed Sogdian silver plate (fig. 52).

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<sup>139</sup> Boyce, *Apām Napāt*, II:149-50.

<sup>140</sup> British Museum seals nos. 119358 and 119366. See also Bivar, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals*, pl. 7, CA5, CB1, CC3, CC5-13; and Gignoux and Gyselen, *Bulles et sceaux sassanides*, pl. IV, 10.1. The tradition of representing Anāhitā holding a lotus flower seems to go back to the Achaemenid era; for samples see B. Goldman, “Women’s Robes: The Achaemenid Era,” in *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 5 (1992), 95-96.

The atmosphere surrounding the ruler indicates that the festivities are conducted under the auspices of Anāhitā, the patron of feasts and the deity whom later Persian literature calls *motrebeh-ye falak* (the celestial musician).<sup>141</sup> A poem by Suzani-ye Samarqandi, a native of the province that was once referred to as Sogdiana, further explains the iconography of this subject:

ناهید رودساز به امید بزم تو دارد بدست جام عصیر در آسمان  
 The *rud*-playing Nāhid (i.e., Anāhitā) in wait of your feast  
 Holds in her hand a cup of wine in the sky<sup>142</sup>

Thus, the lotus flower and the cup of wine in the hands of the seated ruler reflect the image of Anāhitā and project on the ruler the sanction of her authority.

As patron of feasts and a goddess whose main symbol was a ewer (see fig. 62), Anāhitā was bound to be depicted on wine jugs. Indeed a number of Sasanian silver ewers (e.g., figs. 53, 54, 71, and 72), depict her in various poses.<sup>143</sup> The pompon headgear, flowing *dastārs* and the aura behind her head are all pointers to her identity. As to her voluptuous appearance on this type of ewer, one should less view it as a continuation of the Dionysiac traditions of the Seleucid and Parthian eras,<sup>144</sup> than as a characteristic dictated by her description in the Avesta:

<sup>141</sup> Dehkhodā, *Loghatnāmeḥ*, XIII:19703.

<sup>142</sup> Idem. The *rud* is a musical instrument from the family of the lute.

<sup>143</sup> For other details of these jugs, see A. Gunter and P. Jett, *Ancient Iranian Metalwork in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of Art and the Freer Gallery of Art* (Washington, DC, 1992), 198-201; also Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, 60-61.

<sup>144</sup> Gunter and Jett, *Ancient Iranian Metalwork*, 200, quoting R. Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World*

She laces herself around the waist both so that [her]  
 breast [may be] well formed and so that they swell  
 out<sup>145</sup>

With the rise of her stature, the depiction of Anāhitā inevitably acquired more attributes and symbols. In addition to the lotus flower and jug, she generally held four to six more symbols in her hands when shown on silver ewers. One such symbol is the pomegranate.<sup>146</sup> As a fruit with hundreds of seeds, each enclosed in a water-filled capsule, the pomegranate was perceived as the quintessential symbol of abundant water and fertility on the desolated Iranian plateau. In figure 37, it appears as a whole fruit in between the horns of Anāhitā's headgear and also as a pile of seeds before the reclining king.<sup>147</sup> More important is the pomegranate depicted as a *farr* symbol in the heart of a beribboned lotus flower on stucco plaque modules from the Kish palace (see fig. 56).<sup>148</sup>

At Tāq-e Bostān, the presence of a female deity in the investiture scene of Khosrow II and the water pond in front of it, place the imagery under the blessing of Anāhitā. The double ring of pearls in the hands of the right-side angel

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(Leiden, 1972), 1-8. One should note that on the ewer of fig. 54, the string of grape motifs that Ettinghausen recognized as an essential Dionysiac element, is replaced by bands of sunflowers as symbol of *farr*.

<sup>145</sup> Abān Yasht (*Yasht* 5:127), Malandra, *Introduction*, 130-31.

<sup>146</sup> Another attribute is the pyxis, which appears on silver ewers, and also in the left hand of the king in our fig. 32.

<sup>147</sup> It's interesting to see how images of Anāhitā affected the Buddhist iconography of the Eastern Iranian world. Hariti for instance, was often represented with the attributes and symbols of Anāhitā (i.e., prominent breasts, lotus flower and pomegranates); see, for instance, S. Czuma, *Kushan Sculpture: Images From Early India* (Cleveland, 1986), 157.

<sup>148</sup> The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago (no. 228832).

above the portal (fig. 11)<sup>149</sup> can thus be interpreted as yet another aquatic sign of *farr*. For the pearl—this precious gem that is incubated at the bottom of the sea—can readily be equated with the *farr* that Apam-Napāt guarded under water and that Anāhitā must have inherited. Because the pearl roundel symbolized both Mithrāic radiance and the essence of underwater *farr*, it must have been perceived as a doubly auspicious symbol. Hence, its widespread iconographical use in textile design and stucco panels and in ornamental necklaces for both men and women.

#### Wishing ten-thousand *farrs*

The lotus flower also appears as a well-wishing emblem in the hands of two of the grandees of the realm standing behind Shāpur I in the rock-relief of Dārāb (fig. 61).<sup>150</sup> To fully explain the symbolism of the lotus flower in this setting, one must take into account the hand gesture of the two grandees.

Attempts to decipher the meaning of hand gestures in Sasanian rock-reliefs have been hitherto inconclusive. A recent article by the late Iranian scholar Yahyā Zokā, however, provides the key to their deciphering. Zokā discussed four numbering systems based on various positions of fingers for silent communication or as means to conclude transactions.<sup>151</sup> The fourth system, which he believed was

<sup>149</sup> The ring in the hand of the left-side angel is different and appears as a bejeweled solid torque.

<sup>150</sup> For a complete illustration see L. Trümpelmann, “Das Sasanianische Felsrelief von Dārāb” in *Iranische Denkmäler* (Berlin, 1975), 6/II.

<sup>151</sup> Y. Zokā, “Ahamiyyat-e naqsh-e angoshtān-e dast dar shomāresh va no’i `amal-e zarb-e a`dād bā angosht dar Tabriz” in *Arjnāmeḥ-ye Iraj*, ed. M. Bāgherzādeh (Tehran, 1377), 359-78. The number three, for instance,

the most ancient and one that Plutarch had alluded to, is an elaborate signaling system fully described in the *Farhang-e Jahāngiri*, the wonderful dictionary of ancient Persian words and customs compiled for the Mughal emperor Akbar and completed in the reign of Jahāngir.<sup>152</sup> Once again, it is Mughal India that provides us with a textual reference to an ancient Iranian custom.

Zokā also produced two seal imprints with hand gestures that he interprets as the numbers 30 and 10,000 (figs. 58, 59).<sup>153</sup> As described by the *Farhang-e Jahāngiri*, the former number is composed through applying the tip of the thumb against the tip of the forefinger while the other three fingers remain extended and the latter number, through modifying the previous gesture by pushing the thumb and forefinger forward in order to have the two fingertips in parallel. What Zokā neglected to see was the connection between the number expressed by the hand signal and the ribbons under it. In line with the concept of *farreh-afzun*, the hand and the ribbons were combined into a well-wishing formula to project 30 and 10,000 *farrs* respectively.

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was projected with the thumb and forefinger extended and the other three bent (see fig. 32 here). In light of Zokā's article, the gestures alluded to by Jamsheed Choksy (in "Gesture in Ancient Iran and Central Asia II: Proskynesis and Bent Forefinger," in *Bulletin of Asia Institute* 4 (1990), 201-08), and by Carol Bromberg ("An Iranian Gesture in Miran," in *Bulletin of Asia Institute* 5 (1992), 45-58) need to be reinterpreted. The gestures alluded to in both articles may be the same but viewed from different angles. It seems to represent the number 20, equivalent to the total number of fingers on both hands and feet, and perhaps is a well-wishing sign projecting full use of all limbs, i.e., full possession of one's powers.

<sup>152</sup> Inju-ye Shirāzi, *Farhang-e Jahāngiri*, I:61-65.

<sup>153</sup> Zokā, "Ahamiyyat-e naqsh-e angoshtān," 371.

We can thus see that in holding the stem of the lotus flower, the fingers of the two grandees form the number 10,000.<sup>154</sup> In Persian literature, *bivar*, or 10,000, is generally used to show abundance.<sup>155</sup> The flower-holding gesture of the two grandees, therefore, was a well-wishing formula that augured abundant *farr* for Shāpur I. One may then presume that a similar gesture of Anāhitā on the seals of figures 51 and 73 represented an adaptation of the same well-wishing formula for the seal-owner.

A pair of celestial symbols, the crescent and the sunburst, frequently appears on Sasanian coinage as well as on silver plates. An almost natural interpretation of the pair would be to consider them as “sun and moon” symbolizing the radiance of the *farr* in day and night. Tha`ālabi for instance relates a dream of Pāpak in which he had seen “the sun and moon shining from the forehead of Sāsān.”<sup>156</sup> And yet, there are arguments to consider the pair as “star and moon” rather than “sun and moon.” Some Mesopotamian *kudurrus* (ancient boundary markers), for instance, have three astrological signs: a crescent, a sunburst, and a sunburst enclosed in a circle.<sup>157</sup> They seem to indicate that as an

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<sup>154</sup> One should also note that the delicate holding of the lotus flower by these two corpulent grandees is in sharp contrast with the firm grip displayed on the Hermitage Sogdian plate of fig. 52 and on the Achaemenid reliefs of Persepolis (see also *infra* footnote 206).

<sup>155</sup> As in the name Bivarasp, i.e., the one with plenty of horses.

<sup>156</sup> ‘Abdol-malek b. Mohammad b. Esmā`il Tha`ālabi-ye Neyshāburi, *Ghorar-e akhbār-e moluk-el-fors va siyarehem*, tr. M. Fazāeli (Tehran, 1368), 299.

<sup>157</sup> See, for instance, P. Harper, J. Aruz, and F. Tallon (eds.) *The Royal City of Susa: Ancient Near Eastern Treasures in Louvre* (New York, 1992), 178. Occasionally, the moon is represented as a crescent surmounted by a full disk in order to project its full spectrum of forms;

iconographical convention, the sunburst enclosed in a circle represented the sun, and the plain sunburst represented a star (most probably the North Star). Moreover, in Safavid chronicles, the Ottoman standards with a crescent and sunburst are called *akhtar-māh* (star-moon) and not *mehr-māh* (sun-moon).<sup>158</sup>

Whatever is the origin of the symbolism of these two signs, the fact of the matter is that they appear in the same capacity as the *farr* symbols so far deciphered: in the silver-plate of figure 52, for instance, a crescent hangs from a *dayhim* carried by an angel, and in a Sasanian seal, which depicts a hand signaling the number 10,000, a star appears next to it, once again projecting the *farreh-afzun* well-wishing formula (fig. 60).<sup>159</sup>

#### **Anāhitā and the rock-reliefs of Narseh**

As the patron saint of the House of Sāsān, Anāhitā became the most prominent deity of the Sasanian era and a constant feature of Sasanian iconography. On rock-reliefs for instance, she was either depicted in person or her presence was symbolically underlined by positioning the reliefs near a

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see, for instance, the one behind the head of the moon god Aglibol, standing next to Baalshamin, and the sun god Malekbol, in a Palmyran stone relief at the Musée du Louvre (AO19801), in J. Dentzer-Feydy and J. Teixidor, *Les antiquités de Palmyre au musée du Louvre* (Paris, 1993), 145; *Le monde de la bible, archéologie-art-histoire*, no. 106 (1992), 85. In Mughal times, a crescent was added under the sunburst and the combination was referred to as the *nayyerayn* (the two shiny ones); see, for instance, M. Beach, *The Imperial Image: Paintings from the Mughal Court* (Washington, DC, 1981), 74 and 79.

<sup>158</sup> See, for instance, `Abdi Beyk-e Shirāzi, *Takamalat-ol-akhbār*, 82 and 196.

<sup>159</sup> Gignoux and Gyselen, *Bulles et sceaux sassanides*, pl. V, no. 10.19.

pond or waterway, or both. Her rise in stature was such that once she even usurped the traditional role of Ahura-Mazdā in the *Investiture of Narseh* at Naqsh-e Rostam (see figure 50 and explanations).<sup>160</sup>

Two Sasanian rock-reliefs, one at Tang-e Qandil (fig. 49) and the other at Barm-e Delak, emphasize her role as purveyor of the *khvarnah*.<sup>161</sup> These two are similar in size, and both include a man and a woman exchanging a flower. These problematic reliefs have been the subject of many controversies as well.<sup>162</sup> Except for one study that identifies the woman as a priestess, all others see her as a queen, even though they note, on the one hand, the difference in robe and headdress from those of the queen depicted in Sar-Mashhad and, on the other, their similarities with those of Anāhitā in the *Investiture of Narseh*.<sup>163</sup> The consensus seems to have been that unlike all other Sasanian reliefs, these are not scenes of investiture or regal propaganda but a “family” or “private” scene, in which husband and wife are romantically exchanging a flower.<sup>164</sup> And yet, despite certain odd features, such as the non-crown headpiece for the main figure,<sup>165</sup> the elements of these two rock-reliefs appear to be generic and

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<sup>160</sup> For a color reproduction of the *Investiture of Narseh*, see, for instance, *Splendeurs des sassanides*, 76.

<sup>161</sup> For details see R. Frye, “The Sasanian Relief at Tang-i Qandil” *IRAN* 12 (1974), Pls. II-VII; G. Herrmann, “The Sasanian Rock Reliefs at Bishapur: Part 3,” in *Iranische Denkmäler* (Berlin, 1983), pls. 33-40.

<sup>162</sup> For a recap of these studies see Herrmann, “Bishapur: Part 3,” 33, where she reproduces a table compiled by L. Vanden Berghe from *Acta Iranica* 15 (Leiden, 1980), 271.

<sup>163</sup> *Splendeurs des sassanides*, 77; Herrmann, “Bishapur: Part 3,” 35.

<sup>164</sup> *Splendeurs des sassanides*, 80; Herrmann, “Bishapur: Part 3,” 35; Frye, “Tang-i Qandil,” 189.

<sup>165</sup> The word *crown* generally refers to a stepped or mural headgear.

conventional rather than personal and private. The standing woman with a lotus, for instance, is very similar to the one depicted on the aforementioned British Museum seals (figs. 51, 73).

At Tang-e Qandil, the presence of a ring of investiture, even if not handed to the central figure, certainly qualifies the scene as one loaded with a political message rather than as a family souvenir relief. Further, the carving of the two reliefs near a waterway strongly suggests a connection with Anāhitā. And because, in the first scene, the woman is holding a lotus flower, a symbol that we have associated with *farr* and Anāhitā, one must conclude that she represents said divinity. The conclusion for the second scene should be the same with the difference, however, that she is no longer holding the lotus flower and has already handed it to her counterpart.

The following interpretation of the Tang-e Qandil composition might further explain the reasons for Anāhitā's presence therein. We begin with the observation that the man who holds the ring is portrayed in the exact same posture as that of the central figure, with similar clothing down to the last detail. Reflecting the "*ke chihr az yazadān*" idiom, this similarity in posture and paraphernalia usually appears in between the king and Ahura-Mazdā in Sasanian scenes of investitures, albeit as a mirror image.

Composition-wise, the threesome grouping is similar to the investiture scene of Khosrow II at Tāq-e Bostān (fig. 62). Moreover, the abundance of *farr* symbolism in Sasanian regal art attests to the fact that the legitimacy of a prince or ruler not only necessitated the sanction of the supreme *ahura*, Ahura-Mazdā, but also one of the two lesser *ahuras*

as purveyors of the *farr*. This three-figure composition, therefore, was one that immediately projected for the Sasanian viewer the image of a ruler with its double sources of legitimacy. The fact that the central figure is not wearing a crown does not alter the essence of this projection. It may simply cast this as a preinvestiture scene depicting a prince about to be consecrated as a king (perhaps this is why he is neither grabbing the ring of investiture nor the *farr* symbol held by Anāhitā and why none of the three is depicted with flying ribbons). Also, as we shall mention, the crownless bonnet was a kingly headgear that in no way diminished the solemnity of an investiture-type scene and was appropriate for a relief with a specific political message. Be that as it may, for the king to better reflect the image of gods, the mural crowns of the two accompanying deities were eliminated.

Seen under this light, the only odd feature of the scene is the fact that the prince turns his back to Ahura-Mazdā and seeks the support of Anāhitā. And that in fact is the clue to the identity of the prince. For the only king who “turned his back,” so to speak, to Ahura-Mazdā and received his investiture from Anāhitā, and not from him (see fig. 50), was Narseh (r. 293-303). The question then is: Why did he do it and what did it entail?

Narseh was the son of Shāpur I, and before he finally ascended to the throne in 293, he had to endure the successive ascent of his brothers, Hormizd I (r. 272-73) and Bahrām I (r. 273-76), as well as the latter’s son, Bahrām II, and grandson, Bahrām III (r. 293). Narseh’s inscriptions at Paikuli indicate that his accession to the throne came after the defeat of Bahrām, King of the Sakas, who is generally

identified as Bahrām III.<sup>166</sup> Given the unprecedented position of influence that the high-priest Kerdir had achieved under Bahrām II, Bahrām III's candidacy for the throne must have enjoyed his full support. On the other hand, Bahrām III's short reign of four months and the Paikuli tale of how Sasanian nobles rallied to the cause of Narseh indicate that the reign of Kerdir's candidate was contested from the start. We may then surmise that Narseh's quest for kingship not only pitted him against the official king, Bahrām III, but also against Kerdir and his religious bigotry. In the ensuing power struggle, religious factionalism must have played an important role, so much so that Narseh's Tang-e Qandil and Naqsh-e Rostam reliefs must have been conceived as the negation of Kerdir's brand of Zoroastrianism. Even though Kerdir switched sides when his candidate was doomed, and was among those who first greeted Narseh at Paikuli,<sup>167</sup> his official position as "High-priest of Ohrmazd/Ahurā-Mazdā" and the resentment that his previous seizure of the fire-temples of Anāhitā-Ardashir and The Lady Anāhitā at Estakhr must have caused among their clergy, were perhaps the very reasons to promote Anāhitā at the expense of Ahura-Mazdā.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> R. Frye, "Iran Under the Sasanians," *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(1):129, see also footnote 84 supra. In the *Mojmal-ot-tavārikh val-qesas* (folio 13a), Bahrām III's title is mentioned as Sakān-shāh. In Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāme*, though, Bahrām III bears the title Kermān-shāh rather than Sakān-shāh, perhaps because of the proximity of Kermān and Sakestān (present day Sistān) or perhaps the author confounds his title with that of Bahām IV, who was entitled Kermān-shāh as crown-prince.

<sup>167</sup> Humbach and Skjaervo, *Paikuli*, 42.

<sup>168</sup> Kerdir's inscriptions clearly show that under the reign of Bahrām, he was finally able to bring the Anāhitā clergy under his control and to monopolize religious authority: "And he (Bahrām II) made me director

Narseh's "turning his back to Ahura-Mazdā," though, only meant a reemphasis of dynastic legitimacy through increased reverence for its patron saint Anāhitā and not the complete abandonment of the supreme *ahura*. Nevertheless, this was an unorthodox expression bordering on heresy; and like every instance of radical shift of religion, a backlash was to be expected. Therefore, the appearance, later on, of both Mithrā and the Victoria Regia, as symbol of Apam-Napāt, in the investiture of Shāpur II in Tāq-e Bostān (fig. 46), must not only be viewed as an emphasis on the conveyance of *farr*, but also as an attempt to squeeze out the super-glorified Anāhitā of the previous generation. Hence, the adoption of a lotus symbol that was radically different from the little flower that Anāhitā usually held.

### Regal headgear

We now come back to the problem of the crownless headpiece of the third figure in the Tang-e Qandil relief that we identified as Ahura-Mazdā. The symbolism of Sasanian kingly headgear is not well defined in our present state of knowledge. However, we may expect that similar to manuscript miniature paintings, in which characters of the *Shāhnāme* were donned with the latest clothing fashions of the day, the prevalent Sasanian regal attire determined the

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and authority over the fire of Anahid-Ardashir and Anahid the Lady [in] Stakhr"; D.N. MacKenzie, "Kerdir's Inscription," in "The Sasanian Rock Reliefs at Bishapur: Part 2," in *Iranische Denkmäler* (Berlin 1981), 58, §10; see also P. Gignoux, "L'inscription de Kerdir a Naqsh-e Rostam," *Studia Iranica* 1(2) (1972), 186. With the promotion of Anāhitā, the power of the clergy of its temples inevitably increased. Therefore, as the prime beneficiaries of Narseh's religious policies, they must have been among his most ardent supporters.

type of headgear to be worn by deities depicted on reliefs. Even though the king was supposed to be in the image of the god, paradoxically, it was the god who was made in the image of a king. But the god's effigy was not to be worshipped. It was merely a symbol emphasizing divine sanction and, as such, the size of the effigy did not matter. It could be small—as the small bust of Ahura-Mazdā within the Achaemenid winged-disk—and still convey the full power of the deity. Furthermore, crownless headgear was not necessarily weaker in stature than those that were crowned, for some of Ardashir I's headgear were crownless too (fig. 65),<sup>169</sup> and Ahura-Mazdā donned a similar crownless headpiece at Tāq-e Bostān for the investiture scenes of both Shāpur II and Khosrow II (figs. 46, 62).

The bonnets of Narseh and Ahura-Mazdā in Tang-e Qandil are similar to the one Shāpur I is wearing on some of his coins, and therefore his is one of high rank (see fig. 66).<sup>170</sup> More importantly, it appears on Bahrām II's coinage (figs. 69, 70), worn both by his consort and by a facing

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<sup>169</sup> Ardashir's pompon headgear may have been a replica of what the Ābān Yasht (*Yasht* 5:128) describes as Anāhitā's headgear and worn by her on different reliefs: "Above (on her head), Aredwi Surā Anāhitā binds a beautiful, well-made, golden diadem (studded) with one hundred stars, (holding) eight buns of hair (?), made like a chariot body, adorned with pennants, having a prominent rim"; Malandra, *Introduction*, 130. The Darmesteter translation is slightly different: "Upon her head Ardvi Sura Anahita bound a golden crown, with a hundred stars, with eight rays, a fine ... a well-made crown, in the shape of a ... with fillets streaming down"; Avesta, tr. J. Darmesteter, [www.avesta.org](http://www.avesta.org).

<sup>170</sup> See also *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(1), 337 and pl. 25 (no. 10). One should note that while this bonnet appears on the obverse of the coin, on the reverse, both Shāpur and the god (whom Shāpur was supposed to reflect) are wearing Shāpur's more familiar stepped crown; see our fig. 44.

figure, which because of its small size has been mistakenly identified as the heir apparent, Bahrām III. Oddly, in another instance that is for the coinage of Zāmāsp (r. 497-99), a similar small-sized bust has been recognized as representing Ahura-Mazdā, only because he is wearing a crown and holding a ring of investiture.<sup>171</sup> But for the coinage of Bahrām II, the idea of a “family portrait” was so attractive that it even forbade noticing that the presumed crown prince had two fully developed breasts (fig. 69), which according to the Avesta is a characteristic of Anāhitā.<sup>172</sup> A closer scrutiny of Bahrām II’s coinage also reveals that in some cases this small bust holds a beribboned ring of investiture as in figure 70 and, in some others, an *ankh*-type sign with two legs that also appears as an auspicious symbol on the obverse of the coinage of this period;<sup>173</sup> and that, in most cases, it is positioned opposite the Queen who is wearing the same type of bonnet.<sup>174</sup> The Queen was thus made in the image of the goddess (i.e., in the *chihr-i yazadān*) and vice versa. The inescapable conclusion is, therefore, that the small bust represents Anāhitā glorifying Bahrām II and his consort.<sup>175</sup>

<sup>171</sup> *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(1), 328 and pl. 27, no. 5.

<sup>172</sup> See footnote 145 supra.

<sup>173</sup> See fig. 45, top left corner. For a more precise rendering of this two-legged *ankh* sign on a Sasanian silver cosmetic box, see Christie’s sale catalog of *Antiquities* (New York, Dec. 6, 2001), lot 732. The sign could be interpreted as figuring a boy, possibly symbolizing Apam-Napāt.

<sup>174</sup> The only difference between the two bonnets is that the Queen’s is topped with a wolf’s head and Anāhitā’s, with a falcon head.

<sup>175</sup> Jamsheed Choksy’s proposition that the small bust on Bahrām II’s coinage is of three types and represents alternatively the crown prince, Anāhitā and Verethragna, (J. Choksy, “A Sasanian Monarch, His Queen, Crown Prince, and Deities: The Coinage of Wahram II,” *American Journal of Numismatics*, second series, 1 (1989), pp 117-35) falters on several points. First, Iranian iconography is strictly conventional and

While we may still not understand the relative significance of the different animal finials adorning these regal bonnets (wolves, falcons, horses etc.), the above analysis demonstrates that such bonnets were commonly used for rulers and deities, and therefore suitable for the representation of Ahura-Mazdā as well.

Finally, one should note that the idea that only a mural crown (i.e., a gold crown with a stepped contour) was the only official regal headgear, and therefore the only one suitable for Ahura-Mazdā, is very much conditioned by our familiarity and reliance on western crowns which, ironically, are themselves derived from Sasanian ones. In fact, a silver naked figurine—therefore a deity—from the Oxus treasure and dateable to the 5-4<sup>th</sup> century BC, which wears a gilt tiara bordered with a row of pearls (fig. 67), points to a long tradition of Iranian deities wearing a non-crown headgear.<sup>176</sup> In shape and function, the Oxus figurine's headgear is very

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therefore the bust, which faces the kingly couple is either deity or human, it cannot be both; and, as we argued, on the coinage the idiom “*ke chihraz yazadān*” vouches for a deity. Second, the “mature, young man” type of bust that Choksy understood as representing Verethragna (ibid., 133) is in fact similar to the one depicted in our fig. 69, which does not hold a ring of investiture and is visibly a female. Third, the “Median” bonnet that he suggests to be the distinctive sign of the crown prince is also worn by deities, such as the Oxus figurine (fig. 67) or Anāhitā on the Tiflis bowl (fig. 57c), especially when they display a pearl border as in Choksy's pl. 10.11. Fourth, it would be odd for a king to switch his god or goddess protector, especially from Anāhitā to Verethragna, whom we argued to be of lower rank in terms of *farr*-bestowing. Finally, while it is very difficult to ascertain the exact nature of the animal on the finials (whether it is a beaver, falcon, or eagle), a close look reveals, in most cases, the female nature of the bust.

<sup>176</sup> For a color illustration see <http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk> .

similar to the regal Parthian tiara and to the headgear of deities facing the bust of the rulers in figures 43 and 57c.

Moreover, in modern Persian, the word for crown is *tāj* (i.e., the Arabicized version of the Pahlavi *tāg*), and the *Mojmal-ot-tavārikh val-qesas*, which gives a detailed description of the various effigies of all the Sasanian kings, refers to their colorful *korymbos* as a “*tāj*” set in gold:

تاج آسمانگون نگاشته اندر زر ...

He (Bahrām I) had a blue *tāj* surrounded by a gold fixture...

تاج او سبز میان دو شرفه زر اندر ساخته

His (Bahrām III's) *tāj* was green and set in between two gold stepped murals<sup>177</sup>

In other words, the important portion of the Sasanian regal headgear was the *korymbos*, the silky tiara that was truly the replacement of the Parthian tiara, and not the gold ornament or “crown” built around it. This ties in well with the Safavid red scarlet baton-headgear that was wrapped in a turban, which was also referred to as a *tāj*, and had no mural crown whatsoever.<sup>178</sup> Thus, the Sasanian animal headed bonnet was likely to have been perceived as a *tāj* and, therefore, of equivalent stature to other Sasanian regal

<sup>177</sup> *Mojmal* (folio 13a).

<sup>178</sup> It is interesting to note that relying on Ruzbahān Khonji's *Tārikh-e ʿālam-ārā-ye amini*, Hassan Pirouzdjou argues that under Esmāʿil's grandfather, Shaykh Jonayd, the Safavid order first adopted a red bonnet, which was reminiscent of the Khoramdinān movement (which Pirouzdjou traces back to the Mithrāic tradition). Under Jonayd's son Haydar, it was changed to the twelve-sided red baton; Pirouzdjou, *Mithraïsme et emancipation*, 131-41. One should also add that the Safavids' most ardent supporters came from Anatolia which had a long tradition of harboring Mithrāic sympathizers (see pages 107-14 infra).

headgear. With this in mind, we can now better analyze the composition of the *Investiture of Narseh* at Naqsh-e Rostam.

### A quest for legitimacy

Narseh had overthrown an enthroned ruler and therefore had to be legitimized in the strongest possible way. Unlike the Achaemenid Darius I, whose ascent to the throne followed a similar pattern,<sup>179</sup> and who attributed his success only to Ahura-Mazdā, in Paikuli, Narseh expresses that he made his bid for kingship “in the name of Ohrmazd and all the gods and Anāhid, the Lady,” and that the gods gave him “glory and rulership” (in other words, *farr* and investiture).<sup>180</sup> We may then expect to find in the *Investiture of Narseh* at least four gods sanctioning his ascent to the throne: Ahura Mazdā, Anāhitā, and two other “gods” (since the latter word appears in plural in the Paikuli inscriptions).

Anāhitā is of course the female deity who presents the ring of investiture to Narseh. To identify the remaining figures, we begin with the most intriguing and uncommon figure of the relief, i.e., the child positioned in between Narseh and Anāhitā (fig. 74). An amplified *dastār* hanging on the right side of his head and the multitude of knotted ribbons designate him as a king or deity. The most important of these knotted ribbons is the one tied around his waist, which recalls the *Shāhnāmeh*’s description of Jamshid:<sup>181</sup>

کمر بسته با فر شاهنشهی جهان گشته سرتا سر اورا رهی  
He tied his waist with the kingly farr, and the world fell under  
his spell.

<sup>179</sup> See footnote 10 supra.

<sup>180</sup> Humbach and Skjaervo, *Paikuli*, 35 and 53.

<sup>181</sup> Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāmā*, I:41.

Rather than seeing this relief as a “family” portrait of a king together with his son,<sup>182</sup> we should look at the young boy depicted therein as a companion of Anāhitā, whose identity was immediately recognizable to the average Zoroastrian of that time. As Boyce pointed out, Apam-Napāt, whose very name signifies “Son of the Waters,” was daily venerated by the Zoroastrians and was called upon in the prayers of the Uzerin Gāh and the Yasna liturgies.<sup>183</sup> Next to the Lady of the Waters, Anāhitā, the image of a child deity undoubtedly symbolized Apam-Napāt, the Son of Waters, for Zoroastrians.

Our above contention is further supported by numerous representations of Anāhitā accompanied by, or holding, a child, as on the aforementioned British Museum seal (fig. 73), and on ewers, such as in figs. 71 and 72.<sup>184</sup> It thus seems

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<sup>182</sup> Shahbazi believes that the woman in this relief is not Anāhitā but Naresh’s consort, Shāpurdokhtag; Shahbazi, “Studies in Sasanian Prosopography,” 184. It necessarily follows—from such a romantic view of the relief—that the child in between is their son, or at least a young prince other than Ardashir II, the mature ruler of Adiabene who supposedly helped Shāpur II in his defeat of the Romans. And that clearly negates one more time his other contention that the chosen successor of Shāpur was Ardashir II, see also footnote 125 supra.

<sup>183</sup> See Boyce, “Apam-Napāt,” II:149, where she quotes:

Yasna 1.5: I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for Uzerin the Asha-sanctified master of Asha, and for Fradat-vira and Dakhyuma, the Asha-sanctified master(s) of Asha, and for that lofty Ahura Napat-apam (the Son of Waters), and for the waters which Ahura Mazda made,

Uzerin Gāh prayers: 2) With propitiation of the lofty Ahura Apam Napat, and the waters made by Mazda, for worship, adoration, propitiation and praise. Yatha Ahu Vairyo, the zaotar should say to me. 8) We worship the lofty Ahura, the radiant Khshathra, Apam Napat, possessing swift horses; and we worship the Ashavan waters, made by Mazda;

<http://www.avesta.org/>.

<sup>184</sup> See also Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, 145, no. 69c.

that in an effort to raise the status of Anāhitā as patron saint of the Sasanians, a play on names allowed her to be portrayed as the mother of Apam-Napāt. Thus, through a process of “reverse inheritance,” she would not only acquire all the attributes of her “son” but also become a purveyor of *farr* in her own right, with her own particular *farr* symbols, such as the pomegranate.

The identification of Apam-Napāt next leads us to the figure standing behind Narseh. We suggest that it represents Ahura-Mazdā, even though, unlike in the Tang-e Qandil relief, he does not hold a ring of investiture. Our suggestion is once again based on the observation that he is dressed similarly to Apam-Napāt and Narseh—with the same rippled trousers and knotted ribbons on his waist and shoes—and has the same posture as they do, with his limbs exactly parallel to theirs and the left hand gripping his sword as they do. In other words, both the child and the third figure are in the *chihr* of Narseh, therefore deities.

His right hand gesture, which is one of approval and recognition, is the same as the gesture Bahrām II on the Tiflis bowl of fig. 57a. If such a gesture befitted a Sasanian king, it also befitted deities that he was supposed to reflect. His gesture is also similar to that of the child-like Apam-Napāt. In a tradition that goes back to the Assyrians, hand gestures of deities always signaled their sanctions.<sup>185</sup> Moreover, a closer look at the Tiflis bowl reveals that its four roundels are organized in a way that each of the effigies

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<sup>185</sup> Quoting Abenda, Root suggests that for Assyrian rulers, the hand gesture meant “the transmission of divine sanctions of rulership given by deities”; M. Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art (Acta Iranica 19, Leiden, 1979)*, 174.

of Bahrām II face a divinity: a female bust holding a quatrefoil lotus, which must represent Anāhitā (fig. 57c), and a male bust wearing a bonnet with a horse-head finial brandishing a ring of investiture, which undoubtedly represents Ahura-Mazdā (fig. 57b) and is very similar to the head of the persona behind Narseh (in his investiture scene at Naqsh-e Rostam). Like the Sasanian reliefs, the bowl was made to enhance the legitimacy of the king through the projection of an investiture transmitted by Ahura-Mazdā and the *farr* bestowed by Anāhitā. Because the design of the bowl required each of the personalities to be encircled in a separate roundel, physical contact between the king and the divinities was not possible. Instead, the hand gestures of Bahrām II signaled his acknowledgment of the divine favors bestowed on him.<sup>186</sup>

Finally, we have seen that a bonnet with an animal head was suitable for deities, and since the unfinished figure to the far left seems to wear similar headgear and is depicted in the exact same posture as the other two male deities, we surmise that he too must have been a deity, most probably, Mithrā. The investiture scene of Ardashir I at Naqsh-e Rostam brings added credibility to this supposition. Indeed, there are two figures to the right and behind Ahura-Mazdā who, because

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<sup>186</sup> The irresistible attraction of seeing the figures on the bowl as a family souvenir overwhelmed as keen an observer as Vladimir Loukonine, who, despite his acknowledgment of strong similarities between the bowl and scenes of investiture, recognizes the figures opposing Bahrām II as his son, the future Bahrām III, and his wife, Shāpurdokhtag; V. Loukonine, et al., *Lost Treasures of Persia* (Washington, DC, 1996), 91-95. Such interpretation casts the hand gesture of Bahrām II in the mold of Hollywood scenes, in which heroes wave goodbye to their beloved from behind the window of a departing train!

of their positioning behind the supreme god, must be considered as deities (fig. 68).<sup>187</sup> One is a female, probably Anāhitā, and the other is a male, wearing a bonnet with a lion finial. The lion is of course a symbol of the sun and the appropriate choice for Mithrā. The Mithrāic symbolism of the bonnet is further strengthened by the inclusion of a sunflower emblem on its back and the fact that its general shape ties in well with the headgear of Mithrā—facing Antiochus—in Nimrud-Dagh,<sup>188</sup> and those in various Western Mithraeums, where the sun god of Iranian origin is invariably shown with the so-called Phrygian bonnet.<sup>189</sup> In the Iranian context, though, it was appropriate to depict Mithrā with an added symbolic motif: if space or medium permitted, shining rays; if not, a sunflower.<sup>190</sup>

To enhance Narseh's legitimacy, the carving of a relief at the sanctified site of Naqsh-e Rostam made sense only if it projected the approbation of the major deities of the Zoroastrian pantheon and not that of courtiers and

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<sup>187</sup> For a full view see *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(1): pl. 15. It is not clear why these two deities are depicted with faces turned away from the investiture scene, and why Anāhitā is making a hand gesture in the opposite way.

<sup>188</sup> Ghirshman, *Parthes et sassanides*, 67; *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(1): pl. 37a.

<sup>189</sup> For the latest arguments concerning the Iranian origins of Western Mithraism, see Turcan, *Mithra et le mithriacisme*, 28-29, 127-34 and pls. 1-5.

<sup>190</sup> A similar sunflower adorns a magnificent “quilted” bronze bonnet of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (1979.41). A Phrygian bonnet sold at Sotheby's further confirms our hypothesis that the sunflower emblem is a symbol of deity, for in its stead the Sotheby bonnet incorporates an appliqué head of Athena; see Sotheby's sale catalog, *The William Herbert Hunt Collection, Highly Important Greek, Roman, and Etruscan Bronzes* (New York, June 19, 1990), lot 35).

dignitaries. At Paikuli, Narseh had clearly indicated what was expected from the gods: they gave kingship and glory (i.e., *farr*). The first allowed ascent to the throne and the second provided the means to maintain it. They were both necessary aspects of legitimacy and invariably present in Sasanian propagandistic reliefs.

The Tang-e Qandil and Naqsh-e Rostam reliefs, however, work in tandem to project an even more complex legitimacy schema. In the former, Ahura-Mazdā's ring-offering gesture behind Narseh was meant to convey the idea that his right to rule had been affirmed by Ahura-Mazdā but not been implemented. In turning toward Anāhitā, he was acknowledging that Anāhitā's intervention gave him (or was about to give him) the victory to claim the rulership that Ahura-Mazdā had acknowledged as his. Because Anāhitā gave him the *farr* to vanquish other contenders, it was ultimately she who had given him kingship. In choosing later to portray her on as the deity who extended to him—under the approving eyes of Ahura-Mazdā—the beribboned ring of investiture in Naqsh-e Rostam, Narseh was reaffirming what he had previously expressed at Tang-e Qandil: the right to rule approved by Ahura-Mazdā, implemented through the intervention of Anāhitā, and supported by Mithrā and Apam-Napāt. He was portrayed in the *chihr* of gods in order to reflect their glory and power.

#### **Inherited versus acquired glory**

The coinage of Bahrām II projected that the Queen, whose portrait shadowed that of the king, was sanctioned with Divine Glory and was to be regarded as a coruler. The legitimacy of Bahrām II was thus reinforced because he was

seconded in his rule by a glorified queen. The Sar-Mashhad relief of Bahrām II also projects the same idea.<sup>191</sup> He kills a lion while holding the hand of his consort (see sketch in fig. 63). In other words, his feat was partially due to the support and strength that he received from his consort, a support that is further emphasized by the fact that Bahrām II's scabbard is actually held by the queen and is not hanging by his waist.<sup>192</sup> The unprecedented emphasis on the support of a queen had undoubtedly strengthened Bahrām II's claim of legitimacy vis-à-vis the supporters of Narseh.

The stature of Bahrām II's consort must have been essential to assure Bahrām II's ascension to the throne. She is named as Shāpurdokhtag (i.e., the daughter of Shāpur),<sup>193</sup> probably the same whom Narseh married later on.<sup>194</sup> Even though Shahbazi, following Lukonin and Hinz, suggested that Shāpurdokhtag was the daughter of Shāpur Meshan Shāh (son of Shāpur I) and hence Bahrām II's cousin,<sup>195</sup> chances are that in reality she was the daughter of Shāpur I and a kingmaker, similar to the princess Pari Khān Khānum, daughter of the Safavid Shāh Tahmāsb (r. 1524-76). Since next-of-kin and incestuous marriage was the order of the day,<sup>196</sup> she may well have engineered the ascent of Bahrām

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<sup>191</sup> See, for instance, *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(1), pl. 16.

<sup>192</sup> One should notice that, in contrast to the gripping of the wrist (*dastgir*) depicted in the *Triumph of Shāpur I* (see footnote 38 supra), a second meaning of *dastgir*, i.e., "helping hand," is at play here.

<sup>193</sup> Choksy quotes Lukonin for a special coinage of Bahrām II and his consort that bears the legend: "Shāpurdokhtag, Queen of Queens"; Choksy, *A Sasanian Monarch*, 122.

<sup>194</sup> *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(2):708.

<sup>195</sup> S. Shahbazi, "Bahrām II" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, III:516.

<sup>196</sup> Shāpur I, for instance, married his own daughter, Ātur-Anāhit; Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 111. The practice of marrying a next of kin (*khvedodah*)

II to the throne first and, after the demise of the latter, switched allegiance to her brother, Narseh, rather than to a grand-nephew.

It has been suggested that at that juncture of Sasanian history, succession legitimacy was oscillating between the “elder of the clan” and the “eldest son” doctrines.<sup>197</sup> According to the former, Narseh should have succeeded his brother Bahrām I; and according to the latter, Bahrām III was the rightful heir to Bahrām II and Narseh, a usurper. It is important to note, however, that clans and dynasties usually adhered to one dominant succession doctrine (such as the Salic laws for the Franks or the Yāsā for the Mongols). Therefore, rather than viewing the above mentioned “elder of the clan” and “eldest son” doctrines as two distinct canonic principles, we must consider them as offshoots of the same ideology: an ideology that based legitimacy on the notion of Divine Glory, or *khvarnah*, and saw the most suitable candidate for the throne as the one with the highest degree of glory.

Glory could be obtained through victory or through inheritance.<sup>198</sup> Short of a sensational victory over the Romans, the inheritance claim from Shāpur I established the

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had the practical effect of maintaining wealth and power in the family, a practice that is still carried on Iran, albeit among cousins only and not first-degree relatives, but for the same reasons.

<sup>197</sup> *Cambridge History of Iran*, III(2):692-93.

<sup>198</sup> Choksy posits that the “doctrine of sacral kingship dictated that the ruling family be of royal blood and descent”; Choksy, *Sacral Kingship*, 41. In that case, Ardashir shouldn’t have replaced Ardavān, nor could Alexander the Macedonian or Changiz the Mongol be accepted as legitimate kings. Blood was only a conduit to inherit the Divine Glory acquired by a predecessor. That, however, could be supplanted by the Glory that a decisive victory bestowed on a new victor.

strongest legitimacy for his descendants. For, so glorified was Shāpur I with his victories over three Roman emperors that none of his successors could rely on a higher claim of legitimacy than descent from him. Thus, by presenting Shāpurdokhtag as a coruler, Bahrām II could project a more powerful linkage to Shāpur I than to his uncle Narseh, and so thwart his bid for power. His son, Bahrām III, however, could not establish such credentials and consequently lost his throne to Narseh.

But in the case of Shāpur II, his victory over Julian amplified his glory to such an extent that his descendants saw it as a new source of legitimacy. Thus, in a grotto adjacent to the *Investiture of Shāpur II* at Tāq-e Bostān, his son, Shāpur III, was content to place his own effigy next to his father's, simply invoking a legitimacy acquired through inheritance without invoking divine sanction (fig. 64).<sup>199</sup> Whether acquired by blood or through victory, or even propaganda, legitimacy necessitated the perception that the ruler embodied the highest degree of Divine Glory.

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<sup>199</sup> The inscriptions next to the statues, refer only to the genealogical descent of the two represented kings in the grotto. Each is qualified as "Mazda-worshipper" but neither Ahura-Mazdā nor any other divinity is represented therein; S. Fukai, et al., *Taq-i Bustan IV –Text* (The Tokyo University Iraq-Iran Archeological Expedition, Report 20), (Tokyo, 1984), Appendix I.

## PART III – SYMBOLS OF AUTHORITY FOR A NASCENT EMPIRE

### Egyptian and Mesopotamian motifs

Of the *khvarnah* motifs so far encountered, many appear with similar symbolic functions in Egyptian art of the second millennium BC. The ram, for instance, symbolized the god Amon, patron of the pharaohs,<sup>200</sup> and the solar disk represented the sun god Re-Harakhty. When the two were fused into one, the ram with a solar disk on its head represented the combined deity, Amon-Re, the most powerful god of the Thebian pantheon.<sup>201</sup> The winged-disk represented the sky-god (fig. 94). The ram-head became almost interchangeable with the solar disk since it was occasionally inserted into the symbol of the sky-god in lieu of the disk.<sup>202</sup> The lotus flower was omnipresent both as a symbol of regeneration and as the heraldic symbol of Upper Egypt. The flying ribbons appeared as visual indicators of the “breath of life” that came with the solar rays of Aton and

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<sup>200</sup> The ram also appears as an auspicious symbol in China. But the symbolism there is derived through sound analogy between: *yang* (ram) and *xiang* (auspiciousness); see, for instance, W. Hung, “Where Are They Going? Where Did They Come From? - Hearse and Soul Carriage in Han Dynasty Tomb Art” in *Orientations* (June 1998), 23.

<sup>201</sup> For a representation of the ram with a solar disk see, for instance, R. Schultz and M. Seidel (eds.) *Egypt: The World of the Pharaohs* (Cologne, 1998 English edition), 212.

<sup>202</sup> For the ram-head of Khnum replacing the disk of the sky-god, see *ibid.*, 224.

blew past the faces of Akhenaton (r. 1354-34 BC) and his family (fig. 93).<sup>203</sup>

The foregoing is not to suggest that the Mithraic symbols of the *khvarnah* were directly derived from Egyptian mythology—although they may have been affected by it—but that the Achaemenid conquest of Egypt reopened the door to a rich symbolism that could be adopted and/or adapted to Iranian needs.

Prior to that, Egyptian motifs had penetrated Mesopotamian regal iconography. The lotus, for instance, had already been chosen as a scepter-like symbol of authority (fig. 98) by Ashurbanipal (r. 668-631 BC).<sup>204</sup> It was subsequently adopted by the Achaemenids for Persepolis throne scenes (fig. 97).<sup>205</sup>

In tandem with the sunflower, the lotus was used as an auspicious ornamental device for Assyrian, as well as Median, surface decorations (see discussion in next section). The conquest of Egypt, however, offered more elegant versions of the lotus and, at the same time, provided the opportunity to reassess the origins of its symbolism for a better adaptation to the Iranian context.

In Egypt, the lotus was a solar symbol of rebirth. A creation myth described how the newborn sun rose out of a lotus floating on Nun, the personification of ancient waters, and then proceeded to create the world. Nun is often depicted

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<sup>203</sup> Modern science actually acknowledges the existence of a “solar wind” (a breeze of electrically charged particles emitted by the sun)!

<sup>204</sup> For a complete illustration see J.E. Curtis and J.E. Reade (eds.), *Art and Empire: Treasures From Assyria in the British Museum* (London, 1995), 122.

<sup>205</sup> For the complete panel, see *Cambridge History of Iran*, I: pl. 23.

raising the sun-disk toward the skies.<sup>206</sup> This ancient Egyptian symbolism probably provided the Achaemenids with new ideas for combining the lotus and sunflower for a dual representation of the *khvarnah*, which the aquatic deity Apam-Napāt guarded under the sea and the sun god, Mithrā bestowed from the skies. The lotus fields of Persepolis (fig. 47b) confirm this second borrowing from Egypt.<sup>207</sup> Indeed, not only was each individual lotus fashioned after the Egyptian model but also the linear stacking format was borrowed from Egypt (see for instance fig. 100), projecting the rise of the *khvarnah* from the depth of waters to the height of the skies.<sup>208</sup>

### The Median Mithrāic legacy

Some of the previously encountered Mithrāic *khvarnah* symbols appear—in groups—on Iranian objects from the dawn of the first millennium BC and even before. Rams for instance, encircle a sunflower on an ornamental bitumen roundel (fig. 75),<sup>209</sup> and a stylized ram-head protrudes from

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<sup>206</sup> For an illustration see *Egypt: The World of the Pharaohs*, 226.

<sup>207</sup> One should also note that the stack of lotus flowers on fig. 47a has much in common with the palm-tree motif on the column heads depicted on the Ishtar walls from Babylon; see, for instance, *Das Vorderasiatische Museum* (Berlin 1992), 127. It is therefore quite possible that the idea of using stacked lotuses to project the rise of the *khvarnah* from the seas was inspired by Babylonian motifs and subsequently supplanted by Egyptian models.

<sup>208</sup> See, for instance, *Egypt: The World of the Pharaohs*, 432 and 444.

<sup>209</sup> This bitumen roundel (10.6 cm) was sold as lot 697 in Christie's sale of *Antiquities* (New York, Dec. 7, 2000), where it was catalogued as an Elamite object. A similar roundel from the Norbert Schimmel collection with a head in lieu of the sunflower has been wrongly attributed to the Southwest Caspian (bitumen was found near the oilfields of Southwest Iran and not the Southwest Caspian area); see O.W. Muscarella (ed.),

the side of a heavy basalt discus that was possibly used as an altar piece (fig. 77).<sup>210</sup>

It is, however, during the reign of the Medes, whose language actually provided the name Mithrā<sup>211</sup> and who may have worshiped Mithrā as their supreme deity,<sup>212</sup> that we see a substantial development of Mithraic symbolism based on the sunflower motif in combination with the lotus.

The latter two symbols appear on stone-slabs from the Palace of Ashurbanipal (see fig. 99),<sup>213</sup> and one is tempted to think that the concurrent use of similar motifs in the Iranian mainland (for instance, on the glazed bricks of the fabulous, circa-7<sup>th</sup>-century BC, temple-palace that was unearthed in 1979-80 near Bukān in Kordestān; see figs. 78, 80),<sup>214</sup> was a borrowing from Assyria. But, even if such a supposition

*Ancient Art: The Norbert Schimmel Collection*, (Mainz, 1974), pl. 151. For one with its original gold sheet cover; see Boisgirard-Heeckeren sale catalog, *Bronzes et terres cuites du Louristan et de la Caspienne, Collection X... (6<sup>e</sup> vente)* (Paris, Sept. 24, 1981), lot 165.

<sup>210</sup> The association of the ram with the sun on the Iranian plateau was a natural one, since mouflons and mountain goats stand at dawn perched on mountain peaks against the brightening twilight as if to herald the rising of the sun (see illustration, page 39).

<sup>211</sup> P. Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide* (Paris 1997), 47-48; F. Kuiper, "Ahura," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, I:684; A.D. Bivar, *The Personalities of Mithra in Archaeology and Literature* (New York, 1998), 4-5.

<sup>212</sup> Bivar, *The Personalities of Mithra*, 22; M. Dandamaev and V. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Iran* (Cambridge, 1989), 342.

<sup>213</sup> See also *Art and Empire*, 101, for other slab sections from the same palace.

<sup>214</sup> The whole edifice was dismantled by looters, amid the war between the troops of the Islamic Government of Iran and the Kurds.

were true,<sup>215</sup> the scant use of the two motifs in Assyria, in contrast to their enormous popularity in the Median Empire, seems to indicate that the lotus-sunflower combination took a special meaning in the Iranian context. Silver plates from the recently discovered Kalmākareh grotto provide clear pointers as to the nature of this special meaning.

Most of the silver vessels from the Kalmākareh hoard bear a neo-Elamite cuneiform inscription datable to the 7-6<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>216</sup> Some of the plates have a sunflower at the center, surrounded by radiating lobes that became, later on, a staple of the Achaemenid style (fig. 79). In addition, many of the vessels have a lion-head engraved on the rim that emphasizes a Mithrāic affiliation (fig. 84). The grotto vessels now provide us with proof that, on the one hand, the Achaemenid imperial style did not flourish in a cultural

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<sup>215</sup> Bricks with an Assyrian-type sphinx from Bukān (see, for instance, Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts*, 16) may suggest Assyria as the prime source of inspiration for the decorative elements of this palace-temple edifice. The extraordinary array of motifs used on its glazed bricks, though, point towards a distinctive local culture, clearly surpassing Assyria and Urartu in imagination and creativity.

<sup>216</sup> Shortly after the accidental discovery of a silver hoard at the Kalmākareh grotto in Lorestān in the early 1990s, the Iranian government rounded up hundreds of antique dealers and intermediaries and halted the clandestine export of items from that find. But within six months, lured by the high prices that these objects were fetching abroad, Iranian intelligence officers in charge of the case smuggled out a considerable portion of the confiscated items (some officers were subsequently jailed). Dealers in London had many of them tested at the Oxford laboratories, which were able to compile valuable metallurgical data from this group of silver objects. The most common inscription on the vessels, as read by Prof. W.G. Lambert, is: "Ampirish, king of [?] Samaturra, son of Dabara." The same inscription on a silver goblet in the Louvre Museum, Paris (AO 30371), is labeled as "Ampirish, King of Samati, son of Dababa."

desert but owed much to its Median predecessor, and on the other, that the popularity of the Achaemenid lobed plates originally hinged on a Mithraic radiant motif.

The most revealing item in this respect is a group of silver plates that bears the usual Kalmākareh inscriptions and that combines as decorative elements a band of garlanded lotus with a central sunflower motif (fig. 83).<sup>217</sup> It is obvious that the alternatively protruding and sinking bands of *repoussé* elements on these plates were not conducive to ease of use, but were meant to convey the dual *khvarnah* symbolism of the lotus and sunflower, complemented by a row of teardrop lobes projecting added radiance. Like the Aramaic script that the Iranians borrowed and used certain of its letter combinations, as ideograms for Persian words,<sup>218</sup> the adopted elements of imagery from neighboring empires allowed the Medes to reflect their own ideology through iconographical elements borrowed from adjacent cultures.

Such contention is further strengthened by the depiction of falcons, along with stylized lotus-sunflower motifs, on a 6<sup>th</sup> century BC silver vessel (fig. 82) of pre-Achaemenid shape,<sup>219</sup> similar in form to another vessel from the

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<sup>217</sup> See also Christie's sale catalog of *Antiquities* (London, Dec. 11, 1996), lot 90. A similar vessel from the Kalmākareh hoard now in the Louvre Museum (AO 30449) has an incised lion head with an inscription "Untash, son of Hunban ... [affiliated to?] Ampirish."

<sup>218</sup> V. Loukonine, et al., *Lost Treasures of Persia*, 17-18. More generally, Loukonine observed: "Persian art was created from heterogeneous quotations taken out of context, from elements of religious imagery from various eastern civilizations reinterpreted by local artists to illustrate their myths or to depict their deities"; *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>219</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973.82, labeled there as 6-5<sup>th</sup> century BC. The falcon on this vessel is very similar to a glazed tile from Persepolis presently at the Iran Bāstān Museum, Tehran; see, for

Kalmākareh grotto (fig. 81). The presence of the falcon on the former vessel cannot be fortuitous: In conjunction with the sunflower emerging from a lotus, it must symbolize *veragna*, the falcon that according to the Avesta was the carrier of the *khvarnah*.<sup>220</sup> One can only marvel at the consistency of *khvarnah* symbolism over time, and from one millennium to another.

Most interestingly, the appearance of the sunflower-lotus combination coincides with the time that, according to the Farvardin Yasht, Mithrā and Apam-Napāt were entrusted with the task of strengthening “supreme authorities of the countries” and pacifying “all those in revolt.”<sup>221</sup> Indeed, this was purported to have happened right after Zoroaster “was born,” which according to modern scholarship is datable to circa 618 BC (i.e., when Median power was at its apogee).<sup>222</sup> The rise in stature of the Medes—after the capture of the Assyrian capital of Nineveh in 612 and the subjugation of Urartu in 610 BC—necessitated a new source of legitimacy and new symbols of regal power. Mithrā and Apam-Napāt obviously existed and were revered long before that time, but

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instance, Lecoq, “Ahura Mazda ou Xvarnah?,” pl. LI (fig. 52), or N. Pourjavady, et al. (eds), *The Splendour of Iran*, 3 vols. (London, 2001), vol. 1 - *Ancient Times*, 141.

<sup>220</sup> One should note that the sunflower-lotus motif on this vase is of the type encountered on some 7-6<sup>th</sup> century BC Anatolian Greek vases and vessels, which is perhaps indicative of the wide-spread popularity of Mithrā in Asia Minor at a very early stage (see *infra* note 227).

<sup>221</sup> Malandra, *Introduction, Yasht* 13:94-95.

<sup>222</sup> Gnoli, *Zoroaster in History*, 165. Zoroaster’s lifetime is dated therein to circa 618-541 BC. On the dates of Zoroaster, we strongly favor Gnoli’s interpretations (which essentially follows Gershevitch’s lucid exposé on the matter in: I. Gershevitch, “Approaches to Zoroaster’s Gathas,” in *IRAN* 33 (1995), 15) over the second school of thought suggesting a circa 1000 BC date.

the role that they were now entrusted with—as per the Farvardin Yasht—was to uphold the legitimacy of the ruler by supporting authority and crushing revolt. It was essentially a political role and not a religious or social one.

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 nighttime, they were perceived as natural choices to embody the *khvarnah* cycle. Whatever the reason may be, both text and iconography tend to show that Mithrā and Apam-Napāt embodied the ultimate source of Median kingly power in the 7-6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

Finally, the carving of a sizeable (46 cm wide) lotus-sunflower emblem (fig. 76) on the tomb of the founder of the Achaemenid empire,<sup>223</sup> Cyrus II (r. 559-529), testifies to the prominence of the Mithrā/Apam-Napāt deity pair—rather than Ahura-Mazdā—at the dawn of the Achaemenid era.

### **The Achaemenid symbol of Ahura-Mazdā**

The supremacy of Ahura-Mazdā in Iranian kingly ideology came in conjunction with the rise of Darius to power and at the expense of the sun god Mithrā. As Duchesne-Guillemin has pointed out, Cyrus himself most probably maintained the Median tradition of reverence for Mithrā,<sup>224</sup> and after his death, Mithrāic ceremonies for the sacrifice of horses were

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<sup>223</sup> D. Stronach, “A Circular Symbol on the Tomb of Cyrus,” in *IRAN* 9 (1971), 156-7.

<sup>224</sup> Duchesne-Guillemin, J., “Le dieu de Cyrus,” *Acta Iranica* 3 (Liège, 1974), 17. More generally, Cyrus may have used the sunflower-lotus motif in combination with various sun god motifs from the conquered lands (such as the winged deity with a complex headgear on a Pasargadae door-jamb that was derived from a Phoenician sun god, Idem) to facilitate the spread of the Persian hegemony.

regularly held at his tomb-site.<sup>225</sup> But in what has been termed as a “white revolution,”<sup>226</sup> Darius proclaimed Ahura-Mazdā to be the supreme god and thereafter omitted any reference to the popular sun god in his inscriptions, even though in a letter to the Greek satrap of Ionia, he avowed that his ancestors had actually venerated Mithrā.<sup>227</sup>

Whether Darius was a devout Zoroastrian or not is irrelevant to our discussion.<sup>228</sup> The fact of the matter is that neither he nor any of his successors tried to impose their “brand of Zoroastrianism” on the conquered people. Therefore, Darius’ repeated reference to Ahura-Mazdā as a source of legitimacy was probably not out of religious zeal but in consideration of the political necessity to propagate a unifying and quasi-universal concept of authority over a vast empire. The message that the power of the Achaemenids

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<sup>225</sup> Pierre Briant, who, for lack of textual evidence, hesitates to attribute any particular religion to Cyrus, nevertheless concedes, on the basis of the writings of Xenophon and Strabon, that the horse-sacrifice rituals performed at his tomb were Mithrāic in nature; P. Briant, *Histoire de l’empire perse, de Cyrus à Alexandre* (Paris, 1996), 106 and 108.

<sup>226</sup> Duchesne-Guillemin, “Le dieu de Cyrus,” 17; Turcan, *Mithra et le mithriacisme*, 20.

<sup>227</sup> For the text of this letter and the analysis of its content see section entitled “Common roots of the Iranian and the Roman Mithrāism.”

<sup>228</sup> Lecoq argues that the lack of any reference to the Amesha Sepentas (the “Holy Immortals,” or beneficent divinities, introduced by Zoroaster) in the Achaemenid texts is proof enough that they were not Zoroastrian devotees; Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide*, 157. One can also envisage a religious affiliation similar to that of the Safavid Shāh Esmā’il I (r. 1501-24), who proclaimed Shi’ism to be the official religion without having the slightest knowledge about Shi’ite theology. Darius’ Zoroastrianism may have simply been confined to the acknowledgment of the supremacy of Ahura-Mazdā in the same way that Shāh Esmā’il was preoccupied only with the praise of the Caliph `Ali and the condemnation of his three predecessors, and not Shi’ite doctrines.

emanated from one single god, Ahura-Mazdā, was more potent and better understood than if attributed to the whole pantheon of Zoroastrian or Iranian deities, or to Mithrā, whose cult was much intertwined with that of his counterpart, Apam-Napāt.<sup>229</sup>

As the symbol of an omnipotent deity, the Assyrian god Ashur, presented in the form of a kingly bust within a winged-disk (fig. 87), and similar motifs used by Neo-Babylonians (fig. 88), provided the Achaemenids with a model that Mesopotamians could readily understand, that Elamites were well aware of,<sup>230</sup> and one that was already in use in western Iran (see fig. 86).<sup>231</sup>

In the earliest and most important adaptation of this symbol, i.e., the one on Bisotun (fig. 85), the Achaemenids closely followed the Neo-Babylonian model. In itself, this is proof enough that it could not have represented complex

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<sup>229</sup> As we saw in the case of Cyrus, the imposing emblem on his tomb was a combination of lotus and sunflower, and in other personified representations of Mithrā in regal settings, i.e., the investitures of Shāpur II and Narseh (figs. 46, 50), he is accompanied by Apam-Napāt or his lotus symbol. One also wonders if the fish-clad figure that appear in Pasargadae, even though an adaptation from Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian iconography (see fig. 88 here and the stone basin in *Das Vorderasiatische Museum, Berlin*, 175), was not meant to allude to Apam-Napāt.

<sup>230</sup> Dandamaev and Lukonin, *The Culture*, 342.

<sup>231</sup> For a complete illustration of this (8-7<sup>th</sup> century BC) Lorestān bronze quiver incorporating a Neo-Babylonian type of deity within a winged-disk, see *Ancient Art: The Norbert Schimmel Collection*, pl. 139. The Neo-Assyrian model, which usually incorporated the god Ashur within a larger ring, was iconographically one step removed from its Neo-Babylonian, rivals reproduced in Root, *King and Kingship*, 172, pls. 45b, 46a and b; *Art and Empire: Treasures From Assyria*, 188; Sotheby's sale catalog, *The Ada Small Moore Collection of Ancient Near Eastern Seals* (New York, Dec. 12 1991), lot 145.

Iranian concepts, such as the *fravashi* of the king (traditionally favored by the Parsis) or his *khvarnah*, as Shahbazi had suggested and Lecoq had rightly criticized.<sup>232</sup> For, the very reason to carve the imposing Bisotun rock-relief with a tri-lingual inscription overlooking an important east-west crossing was to impress a broad spectrum of the empire's constituencies, and not only those of the Persians and Medes acquainted with Zoroastrianism.

Two other observations further negate the interpretation of the aforementioned emblem as a symbol of *khvarnah*. The first is that such emblems seldom appeared as solitary motifs, but were usually accompanied by other symbols of Divine Glory. The second is that to project increased glory (i.e., *farreh-afzun*), architectural symbols of *khvarnah* such as the stucco plaques of the Sasanian era (e.g., figs. 20, 21, 55, 56)<sup>233</sup> as well as the sunflowers of the Achaemenids, frequently came in multiple repeats. Neither of these two observations apply to the Achaemenid symbol of a bearded man within a winged-disk—always depicted unduplicated and unencumbered by the presence of other motifs in its immediate vicinity—although, as we shall see, both are true for the plain winged-disk.

Representations, such as figure 96, further confirm that the bearded man implanted on the winged-disk was himself of divine nature. Indeed, the upward pair of wings is clearly attached to him, which is distinct from the horizontal pair attached to the disk itself, and thus projected supernatural qualities proper to deities only.

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<sup>232</sup> Lecoq, "Ahura Mazda ou Xvarnah?," 311.

<sup>233</sup> These stucco plaques represented a modular element that covered an entire wall or vault; see, for instance, *Splendeur des Sassanides*, 65.

The repeated references to Ahura-Mazdā in the Bisotun inscriptions (72 times) leave only one choice for the identity of the bearded man in figure 85. He is the deity whose blessing and favors had allowed Darius to vanquish his rivals and become king over a vast empire, and one whose symbol could be easily equated with that of omnipotent Mesopotamian deities, such as Ashur and Marduk.

In Bisotun, Darius said:

By the will of Ahuramazdā, I am king. Ahuramazdā delivered kingship to me.<sup>234</sup>

Accordingly, the emblem of Ahura-Mazdā appears with a ring of investiture in his hand as symbol of the kingship offered to Darius.

Duchesne-Guillemin had once observed:

Darius se dit roi par la volonté d'Ahuramazda; mais si Ahuramazda le protège, c'est parce qu'il est un roi juste: une sorte de pacte lie la politique à la religion.<sup>235</sup>

His observation suggests in essence the same kind of god-king relationship as the Sasanian model that projected the king as image of god. And it is perhaps for the very same reasons that we see on the tombs of Darius and Xerxes (fig. 89), that king and god reflect each other, and make the same gesture with the right hand.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> *DB* I. 11, Malandra, *Introduction*, 48.

<sup>235</sup> J. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Religion et politique, de Cyrus à Xerxès," in *Persica* 3, 1972, 7; quoted by Root, *King and Kingship*, 170.

<sup>236</sup> Root suggests that in the Assyrian context, hand gestures of deities conveyed "divine sanctions of rulership," see note 185 supra. Since the scene here is depicted on a tomb façade, it should probably be interpreted

### The prototypes of the Achaemenid symbol of *khvarnah*

Although the symbol of Ahura-Mazdā could well explain the source of Achaemenid power and legitimacy to the populations of the conquered lands, the concerns of their own constituencies (i.e., the Persians and the Medes) had to be addressed as well.<sup>237</sup> For these constituencies, especially those among them who had not accepted the tenets of Zoroaster's reforms and who clung to their Mithrāic beliefs, the *khvarnah* was the most essential attribute of kingship.

The newly conquered land of Egypt provided a most elegant motif for the *khvarnah* in the shape of a winged sun-disk (fig. 94). The winged-disk as symbol of the sky also existed in Syria (fig. 90), Anatolia (fig. 91), and Mesopotamia (fig. 93) prior to the Achaemenid conquests.<sup>238</sup> Aesthetically, though, the iconography of the Achaemenid winged-disk owed much to the Egyptian one, especially in regard to the shape of the wings. The Mesopotamian winged-disks, like the wings of their deities, were usually stretched out horizontally, with feathers bundled in a rectangular

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as a greeting sign on the Day of Judgment. For a similar scene on the tomb of Darius, see Root, *King and Kingship*, pl. XIII, 13a and b.

<sup>237</sup> The pressure on Darius to invoke the protection of a sun god—from even the conquered constituencies—must have been so great that at one point he added a Shamash type star on the tiara of the winged Ahura-Mazdā at Bisotun. Indeed, a close look at the Bisotun relief (fig. 85) reveals that the star is set in as a separate piece, which usually indicates a later addition (i.e., an afterthought).

<sup>238</sup> A similar design as our fig. 93 with an added star within the disk also appears on an Urartu belt, see Christie's sale catalog, *The Art of Warfare: The Axel Guttman Collection, Part I* (London - South Kensington, Nov. 6, 2002), lot 13.

grouping, but the feathers of the Achaemenid and Egyptian ones rotated around the disk.<sup>239</sup>

But in adapting the Egyptian winged-disk to their needs, the Achaemenids added a Mesopotamian type of tail to it and transformed its two *uraeus* into scrolling strings or flying ribbons. The latter change must have been inspired by a Neo-Assyrian model, such as figure 93.<sup>240</sup> The resulting amalgam had the advantage of being recognized as a symbol of the sky by the conquered people and, at the same time, incorporated enough *farr*-related elements (i.e., wings, disk, and strings) to represent the popular Mithrāic *khvarnah* for the Iranian constituency.

More importantly, the plain winged-disk was a stripped down version of the more complex emblem that incorporated an effigy of Ahura-Mazdā on it. The similarity of the two symbols was necessary to indicate that the *khvarnah* was not only bestowed by the lesser *ahuras*, but also emanated from the Supreme Ahura. It could thus additionally reflect the official Zoroastrian doctrine that presented Ahura-Mazdā as the creator of kingly-*khvarnah*.<sup>241</sup>

The adoption of the Egyptian model of the winged-disk in turn affected the composition of the symbol of Ahura-Mazdā. To project that he was the creator of *khvarnah*, in

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<sup>239</sup> For Neo-Babylonian seals see Sotheby's, *Moore Collection*, lots 66, 68, 74.

<sup>240</sup> The Mesopotamian winged-disks generally lack the tendrils depicted on this particular relief. For different types of string/ribbon representations in Achaemenid winged-disks, see M. Roaf, "Sculptures and Sculptors at Persepolis," in *IRAN* 21 (1983), 135.

<sup>241</sup> *Yasht* 19:9-10, "We worship the strong Mazdā created Kawyan Xwarenah created by Mazdā, ... which belongs to Ahura Mazdā, since it is Ahura Mazdā who is wont to create the creatures numerous and good..." Malandra, *Introduction*, 89.

Persepolis and wherever the two symbols had to be shown in the same environment (fig. 105), the straight-feathered Neo-Babylonian shape of Ahura-Mazdā's winged-disk depicted for instance in Bisotun, was abandoned in favor of the Egyptian model used for the plain winged-disk.

The constant pairing of the word *farr* with *owrang* in the *Shāhnāmeḥ* and the fact that *owrang* stands for both "throne" and "glory" in Modern Persian suggest a strong affinity between *khvarnah* and throne,<sup>242</sup> the same affinity that probably prompted Abol-Fazl-e `Allāmi to assume that the canopied throne was to be adorned with symbols of *khvarnah*.<sup>243</sup> It is therefore no mere coincidence that we see on each side of the canopy of Darius' thrones, winged-disks surrounded by sunflowers. All of them evidently symbolized the *khvarnah*. More importantly, although on some canopies the winged-disk appears in only one row, on the door-jamb

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<sup>242</sup> See I. Gershevitch, "Farr U Aurang" in *Papers in Honour of Prof. Mary Boyce (Acta Iranica 24, Leiden 1985)*, 191-94; also Servatian, *Barresi-ye farr*, 52:

پرستش کنم تاج و تخت ترا      همان فر و اورنگ و بخت ترا

"I shall worship your crown and throne, which truly represent your *farr* and glory (*owrang*) and good fortune."

<sup>243</sup> Bayhaqi gives a description of the throne of Soltān Mahmud with a crown hanging from a chain attached to a canopy-top (*āsmān-khāneh*) held by four bronze figurines wrapped around the pillars; A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, "The Iranian Bazm in Early Persian Sources" in *Banquets d'orient, Res Orientales IV* (Leuven, 1992), 112. The process of hanging a crown with a chain from above was also used in the `Umayyad palace of Khirbat al-mafjar; see Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran*, 38-39. The idea of a canopied throne for Sasanians lingered in the memory of European painters to the extent that when, circa 1459, Piero Della Francesca painted *The Battle of Heraclius and Chosroes* at the Church of San Francisco in Arezzo, he depicted Khosrow II's seat under a canopy with four golden columns; see A. Angelini, *Piero Della Francesca* (Milan, 2001 - The Great Masters of Art series), 42, pl. 54.

of the Throne Hall it appears in duplicate on two rows, in between bands of sunflowers (fig. 95). Such multiplicity obviously vouches for a *farreh-afzun* projection and not a representation of Ahura-Mazdā, Darius' unique omnipotent deity and source of legitimacy.

### **The necessity for a dual legitimacy symbolism**

The important question would then be: why was a second symbol necessary at all, and why wouldn't a single symbol of Ahura-Mazdā suffice, in the same way that, for instance, in the investiture scene of the Sasanian Ardashir I (fig. 36), the authority of Ahura-Mazdā alone was invoked to hand out the beribboned ring of investiture? The only viable answer is that a majority of the Persians, whose spears according to Darius had conquered many lands,<sup>244</sup> and the Medes, whom the Achaemenids much emulated, didn't recognize at that time Ahura-Mazdā as the Supreme Ahura endowed with *khvarnah* power. Since Zoroaster's reforms are datable to circa 588 BC, it is hard to imagine that they had gained wide acceptance at the beginning of the Achaemenid era.<sup>245</sup> A sizeable portion of the Achaemenid power base was thus surely still attributing victory and success to the *khvarnah* that Mithrā bestowed, and not to Ahura-Mazdā, whom Zoroaster had placed above him.

A revealing episode is contained in the Persepolis inscriptions of Xerxes (r. 486-65 BC) in which he states:

“And among these countries was [one] where formerly  
the daiwas were worshipped. Then by the will of

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<sup>244</sup> From the inscription of Darius' tomb at Naqsh-e Rostam (*Dnb*); Root, *King and Kingship*, 154.

<sup>245</sup> Gnoli, *Zoroaster in History*, 165.

Ahuramazdā I destroyed the daiwa-temple. And I decreed, "Let the daiwas not be worshipped!" There, where formerly the daiwas were worshipped, I worshipped Ahuramazdā at the baresman [?] in accordance with Truth (?)."<sup>246</sup>

Two important points can be deduced from this episode. First, the deities that Zoroaster had turned into *daevas* or demonic creatures were still worshiped in the empire, and the issue was still very much alive at the time of Xerxes. Second, Xerxes' actions against the *daeva*-worshippers cannot be interpreted as a campaign against heresy, because otherwise it wouldn't have been confined to one country alone but undertaken all over the empire, similar to the way that, for example, Kerdir fought "heresy" under the Sasanians "from place to place and country to country."<sup>247</sup> Xerxes' action was therefore a political one aimed at a constituency that was probably challenging his authority by invoking the power of Iranian deities from the pre-Zoroaster era.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Malandra, *Introduction*, 51.

<sup>247</sup> Gignoux, "L'inscription de Kirdir à Naqsh-i Rostam," 181-201.

<sup>248</sup> In his brilliant analysis of classical texts, Pierre Briant concludes (in reference to Xerxes) that the image of a religion-bashing fanatic, which Babylonian, Egyptian, and Greek sources projected about him, was biased and unjustified, and that he pursued policies very much in line with those of his father. He further concludes that the reference to the "one" country where the *daevas* were worshipped was formulaic and did not refer to a specific event, but was meant to emphasize his duties as a king; Briant, *Histoire de l'empire perse*, 569-70. Although we agree with the latter part of Briant's conclusion, we believe that Xerxes' inscription is too specific to not refer to a real event. The event might have been insignificant but real nonetheless, and blown up to exalt the glory of the king. Since the king was supposed to be the champion of the "truth" (Herodotus, book i, 138, on Persians: "They hold lying to be the foulest of all" and they hold a debtor in contempt because he "must needs (so

Darius' Bisotun inscriptions provide yet another example of nonacceptance of this new kingly ideology. On a later-added fifth column, Darius chastises the Scythians (*Sakas*) who had refused to acknowledge the supremacy of Ahura-Mazdā:

“Darius the King says: Those Scythians were unruly and did not worship Ahuramazdā. I worshipped Ahuramazdā. By the will of Ahuramazdā I dealt with them as I pleased.”<sup>249</sup>

Like the Persians and the Medes, the Scythians were an Iranian tribe who must have persisted in their Mithrāic beliefs and perhaps used them as a rallying cry for their uprising against Darius' centralizing efforts. It was to ward off this kind of political threat and to appease the aspirations of his Iranian constituencies that Darius must have decided to introduce a second imperial emblem, which symbolized

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they say) speak some falsehoods”; Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, tr. A.D. Godley (Cambridge, MA, 1999 reprint), I:177-78), it is hard to imagine that the sentence was completely baseless. If it were simply an allusion to a kingly function then a formula, such as those used in the Islamic era (Enforcer of the Just Religion, Eradicator of Impiety etc.), would have probably been used instead.

<sup>249</sup> *DB* V, 20-36; Malandra, *Introduction*, 49. The first four columns relate the story of Darius' rise to power, and the later-added fifth column deals with the Elamite and Scythian insurrections of his second and third regnal years. In addition, the inhabitants of Parthia and Hyrcania had supported Fravartish, a pretender to the throne of Media against Darius; R. Frye, *The Heritage of Central Asia, From Antiquity to the Turkish* (Princeton, 2001), 86-87, and I.M. Diakonoff, “Media” in *Cambridge History of Iran*, II:123-27. It inevitably brings to mind the *Shāhnāmah* contention that Māzandarān (which was part of, or adjacent to, Hyrcania) was ruled by the *divs*.

the *khvarnah* and linked it to Mithrā and Apam-Napāt within acceptable Avestan parameters.<sup>250</sup>

An impressive winged-disk incorporated in the top frieze of the eastern stairway of the Apadana at Persepolis bears testimony to both the novelty of this symbol and the constituency that it mostly targeted (fig. 102):

1- The winged-disk is within a frieze bordered by sunflowers and, except for two Assyrian-type guardian sphinxes or genies, is surrounded by lotus flowers as well as lotus-sunflower combinations that all symbolize the *khvarnah*. We previously saw that *farr*-symbolism was associative and, therefore, the winged-disk must have represented the *khvarnah* as well.

2- The two sphinxes that stand guard to the winged-disk testify to its presence therein and, in essence, project the same symbolism that the wings of Sasanian crowns were meant to convey (i.e., that the *khvarnah* was residing there and had not departed).

3- The imposing size of the frieze and its prominent position at the center of the staircase were designed to strike the newcomer first, and ahead of the symbol of Ahura-Mazdā on the door-jambs of the Apadana. The winged-disk was thus primarily destined for those who were not admitted to the audience halls, but were nevertheless considered as the pillars of the state (i.e., the very Persian and Mede soldiers

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<sup>250</sup> Even though Lecoq argues that the Avesta (as we know) was only compiled in Parthian times and that the Median and Persian sacerdotal schools had their own texts (Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide*, 157), those texts must have been very close in content to the Avesta. Therefore, it is most probable that in terms of regal power, the acceptable parameters of the Median and Persian canonical texts were similar to those contained in the present day Avesta.

who are depicted standing guard under it). These were the people for whom Ahura-Mazdā did not count but Mithrāic *khvarnah* did.

4- Finally, the most important peculiarity of this frieze is its odd composition. In the context of Achaemenid art, where perfection was the norm, the clumsy placing of an incongruous grouping of lotus flowers under the winged-disk is a blot on the landscape. The winged-disk would have looked much more majestic and in harmony with its side-elements if the space underneath had been left empty and the emblem vertically centered. One is then led to conclude that if, despite the lotus-sunflower clusters on the two sides of the frieze, garlands of lotus buds are crammed under the winged-disk together with a single awkward vertical stack of lotus at the wing tips, they were to provide a clear indication that the winged-disk rose from the waters and carried the seed of the *khvarnah* that Jamshid had lost and Apam-Napāt had guarded.<sup>251</sup>

The need to explain this novel symbol is even more evident from a brick panel of the Apadana (fig. 103). Here, the central stem of stacked lotus flowers is crowned by a half sunflower and is surmounted by a complete sunflower. The combination of the two evokes the rise of the *khvarnah* from the waters and its subsequent journey through the skies as the shining sun. But to complete the cycle, a third motif is placed at the base of the lotus stack. This is in the shape of the round central element of the Achaemenid winged-disk.

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<sup>251</sup> This may even explain why Persepolis is traditionally referred to in Iran as Takht-e Jamshid (Jamshid's throne): It possibly designated the place where his *khvarnah* had previously resided and had now come back to.

This third element must therefore represent the pearl that encapsulates the *khvarnah*, or the sun that sinks into the sea at dusk, or both. The tripartite symmetrical composition thus represents the complete trajectory of the *khvarnah* from the waters to the skies. One cannot find any justification for placing the lotus above a slippery round element other than the urge to provide an explanatory ideogram for a new emblem chosen to symbolize a popular concept.

The same composition more or less appears on the glazed brick walls of Susa now at the Musée du Louvre in Paris. Stacked lotus flowers topped by a sunflower fill one whole wall-panel (fig. 107) next to another one covered by a sea of whirling waves engulfing symbols of the encapsulated *khvarnah* (fig. 108). The motif of the encapsulated *khvarnah* within a whirlpool also appears on the sides of the mural steps of the staircase parapet, next to the lotus and sunflower motifs depicted on its front (fig. 106).

These combinations explain the central element of the winged-disk as the encapsulated *khvarnah* in its underwater stage, with a potential to rise from the waters as the shining sun. The winged-disk (i.e., wing+capsule combination) was thus most probably chosen to symbolize the winged entity *veragna* as carrier of the *khvarnah*.

One should also note that what we have called up to now a “winged-disk” is in fact a misnomer, for the central element of the emblem represents a sphere and not a flat disk.<sup>252</sup> It should really be called winged-sphere or winged-pearl.

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<sup>252</sup> Some of the Egyptian symbols of the sky-god actually depict a spherical central element (fig. 94), and certain Achaemenid reliefs use a deeper carving to convey the same.

### The supremacy of Ahura-Mazdā

An earring from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (1971.256) is quite revealing in respect to the new status of Ahura-Mazdā under the Achaemenids. It has a bearded man on a winged-disk in a central roundel, surrounded by seven smaller roundels, six of which display bearded men riding a crescent and facing the central emblem (see fig. 101).<sup>253</sup> The latter six have been recognized by various scholars as Amesha Spentas, astrological emblems, or as representations of Darius' six allies.<sup>254</sup>

Unfortunately, the uniformity of the six figurines in the roundels argues against the astrological consideration, and one questions the wisdom of representing such highly political figures as Darius' six allies on earrings. For the sake of consistency, if we consider the figure of a bearded man with a raised hand on a winged-disk as a deity, we should likewise accept similar figurines in the contour roundels of this earring as divine beings. In addition, the seventh roundel, positioned beneath Ahura-Mazdā, contains a lotus-sunflower combination—symbol of the Mithrā/Apam-Napāt pair of deities—which indicates that the other six symbolize divine beings as well.

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<sup>253</sup> See also <http://www.mfa.org/artemis/>.

<sup>254</sup> Shahbazi rejects the Amesha Spentas theory based on the supposition that three of them were supposed to be female divinities while all six figurines in the roundels seem to portray male beings. He suggests instead that the six roundels enclose the allies of Darius; Shahbazi, "An Achaemenid Symbol," 124. Lecoq rejects the latter theory by remarking that the seventh circle was then superfluous and that none of them is differentiated from the others as on Darius' tomb. He vehemently objects to the Amesha Spentas theory that could then be used to prove Darius' Zoroastrianism and, along with Amiet, favors the astrological interpretation; Lecoq, "Ahura Mazda ou Xvarnah?," 305.

The aforementioned earring, and a necklace from the Shumei Family collection that displays an array of 16 similar roundels facing a central Ahura-Mazdā,<sup>255</sup> is very much Egyptian in style and technique and was probably manufactured a few generations after Darius, at a time when the story of his rise to power was of no further interest.<sup>256</sup> The roundels may represent deities of the conquered lands or a plurality of deities all praising Ahura-Mazdā with a hand gesture. They were most probably meant to convey the omnipotence of Ahura-Mazdā and the subordination of all other deities to him, including the lesser *ahuras*, Mithrā and Apam-Napāt, whose combined symbol was positioned in a pivotal position under that of Ahura-Mazdā in the Boston earring.

To achieve supremacy, Ahura-Mazdā had to supersede Mithrā and Apam-Napāt by appropriating the *khvarnah* for itself. He was thus promoted to be the creator of the *khvarnah*.<sup>257</sup> And to emphasize this quality we see on a frieze from the Palace of Xerxes, with a similar design as in fig. 102, the bust of the Supreme Ahura is not integrated within the winged-disk but is transplanted over it as a separate entity (fig. 114).<sup>258</sup> It clearly shows that the two symbols were separate entities and how, by placing the

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<sup>255</sup> K. Benzel, et al., *Ancient Art from the Shumei Family Collection* (New York 1996), 48-49.

<sup>256</sup> Stylistically and technically, these two jewelry items are very similar to the necklace in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (65.169), which incorporates a prominent portrait of the Egyptian god Bes at its center and has been dated to the 5-4<sup>th</sup> century BC; *Ancient Near Eastern Art*, (New York, 1984 reprint from *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*), no. 65.

<sup>257</sup> See footnote 241 supra.

<sup>258</sup> Lecoq, "Ahura Mazda ou Xvarnah?," pl. XLIII-fig. 37.

winged-disk under the feet of Ahura-Mazdā, the *khvarnah* had become subordinated to him.

### **Combining official and popular ideology**

In his inscriptions, Darius invoked only Ahura-Mazdā's authority. But in throne scenes such as the relief of the Tripylon gateway at Persepolis (fig. 105), Darius not only invoked Ahura-Mazdā through the symbol of a winged-disk with a bearded man, but he also included the plain winged-disk as a symbol of Mithrāic *khvarnah* to project continued power and success.

The resulting discrepancy between official texts and symbols was by no means an isolated case. When the Saljuqs invaded Iran, for instance, their coinage bore the name of their leader Toghrol (r. 1038-63), in Arabic letters. For the Persian constituency (i.e., the conquered people), Toghrol's name on Saljuq coinage established him as the uncontested emperor, from one end of the empire to the other. For the Saljuq power base (i.e., for the Turkic Ghaz tribesmen), however, tribal emblems were more important than the written name. Thus, in a tacit division of the empire between Toghrol and his brother Chaghri Beyg, the Saljuq coinage from the territories east of Neyshābur bore, despite the written name of Toghrol, the bow and arrow sign (*torghāy*) of Chaghri Beyg, in recognition of his suzerainty on the eastern part of the empire. Thus, the sign symbol reflected the political constraints of the conquerors while the written word did not.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>259</sup>R.W. Bulliet, "Numismatic Evidence for the Relationship between Toghrol Beg and Chaghri Beg, in *Near Eastern Numismatics*,

In using the dual winged-disk symbols (with and without the bearded man) in an era, in which the detailed depiction of deities was not customary, Darius essentially projected the same authority that the Sasanian Shāpur II conveyed later on through the anthropomorphic representation of Ahura-Mazdā, as the deity conferring investiture together with Mithrā and his counterpart, Apam-Napāt, the purveyors of continued success and victory (fig. 46). The former represented royal ideology and the latter popular beliefs that Zoroaster's reforms could not quash.

In remarkable parallelism to the Sasanian era, the imperial tendency to evoke the authority of the omnipotent Ahura-Mazdā had to be tempered because of the popular belief in *khvarnah*.

It was thus only a matter of time for the people to resurrect a belief in the suppressed *ahuras* at the side of Ahura-Mazdā, especially when the authority of the ruler was challenged by a usurper or a new pretender to the throne. Thus, Artaxerxes II, who at the beginning of his reign had to fend off the claims of his popular younger brother, Cyrus, to kingship, naturally invoked in his inscriptions the lesser *ahuras* along with Ahura-Mazdā, as sources of regal authority and continued protection.<sup>260</sup> By this time, of

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*Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, ed. D. Kouymjian (Beirut, 1974), 295.

<sup>260</sup> R. Sharp, *Les Inscriptions cunéiformes en ancien persan des empereurs achéménides* (Tehran, n.d.), 124, 127 and 130; Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide*, 269-70, 274-75:

“Artaxerxes (*A2 Ha*): ...This Audience Hall by the grace of Ahura-Mazdā, Anāhitā and Mithrā, I built. May Ahura-Mazdā, Anāhitā and Mithrā protect me, and whatever I have built, from all evil; (and may it be) that they will not be destroyed by it, and that they will not be damaged by it.

course, Zoroaster's reform had forced the substitution of Apam-Napāt with another aquatic deity, namely Anāhitā.<sup>261</sup>

Whereas the idea of the Achaemenid integration of Median concepts of authority into their own political ideology, followed by a resurrection of the original *khvarnah*-related *ahuras*, came out in this study through iconographical considerations, it is interesting to note that Joseph Elfenbein somehow arrived at similar conclusions through a philological and content analysis of the Avesta:

Taking Gāthic Avestan as representing early Zoroastrianism (Gershevitch's "Zarathushtricism"), which I shall call  $Z_1$ , the unmixed religion, it is perhaps permissible to think that the inherited *farnah* notions were rejected by Zoroaster in  $Z_1$ , but of which a trace remained in the Mazdayasnian worship of the Achaemenian kings, an echo of Ancient Median ideas (but not their language). By the time of the mixed religion of the Yashts (Gershevitch's "Zoroastricism" which I label  $Z_2$ ), the *farnah* notion resurfaced with a vengeance, to such an extent that almost an entire Yasht, Yt 19, was devoted to it.<sup>262</sup>

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Artaxerxes (*A2 Hb*): ... May Mithrā protect me.

Artaxerxes (*A2 Sd*): ... May Ahura-Mazdā, Anāhitā and Mithrā protect me, and whatever I have done, from all evil."

Artaxerxes III, though, dropped Anāhitā and solicited only Mithrā's protection:

"Artaxerxes (*A3 Pa*): ... Artaxerxes the King says: May Ahura-Mazdā, and Mithrā protect me, and this country, and all that I have done."

<sup>261</sup> According to one ancient account, Anāhitā's rise in the Achaemenid pantheon was primarily due to Artaxerxes II's efforts; Briant, *Histoire de l'empire perse*, 695.

<sup>262</sup> Elfenbein, "Splendour and Fortune," 492.

## PART IV - ASPECTS OF *FARR* DUALITY

### Common roots of the Iranian and the Roman Mithrā

According to an oft-quoted passage from Plutarch: in 67 BC a large band of pirates based in Cilicia (a province on the southeastern coast of Asia Minor) was practicing secret Mithrāic rites. As a result, it has been generally assumed that Asia Minor was the starting point for the spread of Western Mithrāism into the Roman Empire.

That Asia Minor became a hub of Mithrāism should come as no surprise to us, given its long tradition of sun god veneration that went back to the Neo-Hittite period.<sup>263</sup> We have seen how the rebellious Datames adopted a Neo-Hittite symbol of the winged-disk in lieu of the Achaemenid model to assert his right to rule. Perhaps, as a sign of further independence, Datames—whose Iranian name was probably Dāta-Mithrā (same as Modern Persian Dādmehr, i.e., Mithrā-given)<sup>264</sup>—wished to emphasize his total reverence for Mithrā rather than the god Ahura-Mazdā, whom the Achaemenids claimed to be their protector. Because the Neo-

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<sup>263</sup> “The history of Mithraism reaches back into the earliest records of the Indo-European language. Documents which belong to the fourteenth century before Christ have been found in the Hittite capital of Boghaz Koy, in which the names of Mitra, Varuna, Indra, and the Heavenly Twins, the Nasatyas, are recorded”; W.R. Halliday, *The Pagan Background of Early Christianity* (London, 1925), 285-86. It refers to a treaty concluded between the Hittites and the Mitannis circa 1370 BC.

<sup>264</sup> See Schmitt, *Datames*, 116, and Schmitt, R., “Dātamithra,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, VII:116.

Hittite model incorporated a sunflower in the middle of its winged sun-disk, it would unequivocally point to the sun god rather than the Supreme Ahura promoted by his former overlords.

This reverence—and preference—for the sun god Mithrā was due not only to the Neo-Hittite heritage but to the propagation of his cult during the initial phase of the Achaemenid conquest of Asia Minor. A most revealing document in this respect is Darius' letter to the Satrap of Ionia, Gadatas, where he reproaches him:

... you have taxed the sacred gardeners of Apollo and compelled them to cultivate a profane land in disrespect of my ancestors' reverence for the deity who spoke to the Persians with words of truth.<sup>265</sup>

Most scholars take the “Apollo” of this letter literally, and many assume that it refers to the sanctuary of Apollo at Magnesia of Meander, to which Cyrus supposedly granted a tax-exempt status.<sup>266</sup> It is hard to believe, though, that Darius would refer to Cyrus as his ancestor; and if the original Persian word was “predecessors” (plural) instead of “ancestors,” and altered through translation, one must conclude that Cambyses (r. 530-22 BC) too had “revered” (i.e., had taken time to honor) this sanctuary, which is unlikely given his preoccupation with Egypt rather than

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<sup>265</sup> *DMM* (preserved in Greek); see Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide*, 277. The text appears on a stele from the Louvre (MA 2934); [www.achemenet.com/pdf/grecs/gadatas.pdf](http://www.achemenet.com/pdf/grecs/gadatas.pdf).

<sup>266</sup> Quoting Sidney Smith that “a favourable oracle was worth more than a battle,” Max Mallowan concluded in the *Cambridge History of Iran*, II:415, that the letter referred to the Apollo sanctuary near Magnesia; also Briant, *Histoire de l'empire perse*, 507-09, although Briant took a different stance later on (see footnote 271 infra).

Ionia. One also wonders why Apollo would speak to Persians at all. Such supposition mostly emanates from a thinking that perceives Persians to have had a high esteem for the Greeks and their gods prior to Alexander's conquests; but as observed by Root, "not a sherd of Attic pottery has been discovered at the entire site" of Persepolis to suggest a Persian admiration for Greeks in the Achaemenid period.<sup>267</sup> Moreover, according to Herodotus, Cyrus' Median general, Mazares, gave Magnesia along with the plain of Meander "to his army to pillage."<sup>268</sup> Such destructive actions negate any Persian reverence for a local Apollo sanctuary, which otherwise would have been able to provide the neighboring population with some protection against the invading army.

The more logical reading would be that the "Apollo" of the Gadatas letter was simply a translation of Mithrā and referred to a temple probably built by Harpagus, who succeeded Mazares and became Satrap of Ionia.<sup>269</sup> Harpagus was, according to Herodotus, the high-ranking Median official whose son was killed by the last of the Median kings, Astyages, and who in revenge switched his allegiance to Cyrus and caused the downfall of the Median dynasty.<sup>270</sup>

If our analysis of Median vessels, in conjunction with the Avestan reference to the recognition of Mithrā and Apam-Napāt as protectors of authority and annihilators of rebellion during the reign of the Medes, is correct, it would then make sense that the Median Harpagus—most certainly with the

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<sup>267</sup> Root, *King and Kingship*, 41-42.

<sup>268</sup> (Book i, 161) Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, I:203.

<sup>269</sup> The temple may have been subsequently transformed into a sanctuary for Apollo.

<sup>270</sup> (Book i, 108-10, 128-29) Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, I:139-41, 167-69.

approval of Cyrus—elevated a temple to the glory of the deity who bestowed victory on the Iranians.<sup>271</sup> As for the last sentence of the letter, the word “truth” therein was probably a translation of *arta* (righteousness) that was meant to convey “authority” or “victory” in its original context, as opposed to the word “*drauga*” (lie), which Darius repeatedly used in reference to rebellion.<sup>272</sup>

The Mithrāic temples, which were built through the agency of Median satraps, most likely adhered to cultic practices unaffected by the reforms of Zoroaster. Indeed, from his analysis of a trilingual 4<sup>th</sup> century BC inscription of Xanthos, a city rebuilt earlier by the aforementioned Harpagus, Bihar concludes that the Mithrāic rites of the

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<sup>271</sup> Briant who—based on epigraphic evidence—accepts a 2<sup>nd</sup> century dating of the stele, now argues against the authenticity of the Gadatas letter; P. Briant, “Histoire et archéologie d’un texte. La lettre de Darius à Gadatas entre perses, grecs et romains,” in *Licia e Lidia prima dell’Ellenizzazione; atti del convegno internazionale – Roma 11-12 ottobre 1999* (see [www.achemenet.com](http://www.achemenet.com)). His arguments, however, rest on circumstantial evidence that can be interpreted both ways: for establishing authenticity, or for lack of it. As in a judicial case, what favors one interpretation over the other is the motive factor. One fails to see how the mention of Darius’ ancestors, and the added qualification that Apollo was a deity who spoke the truth to the Persians, would have helped a presumed Roman forger of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. On the other hand, the motive that we see in this letter is to emphasize the Persian origins of this temple, i.e., its Mithrāic affiliation at a time when Mithrāism was popular and expanding in the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, Briant’s cautionary advice that no theory should solely rest on this problematic letter is well taken, and we use the relevant segment of this letter as additional support for arguments otherwise developed independently.

<sup>272</sup> For the political implications of the words *arta* and *drauga*, see Briant, *Histoire de l’empire perse*, 138-39.

region were esoteric, i.e., of a type not acceptable to mainstream Zoroastrianism.<sup>273</sup>

Two 6-5<sup>th</sup> century BC bronze objects—presently located at the Altes Museum in Berlin—may further confirm the early propagation of esoteric Mithrāism in the Greek world. The first is a tripod stand with a tri-faced band of animal motifs at the top (fig. 110).<sup>274</sup> On each face, a lotus-sunflower emblem is surmounted by a lion, framed on its two sides by bulls and horses, and underlined by a row of serpents. The sunflower-lotus combination represented of course the Mithrā/Apam-Napāt pair of deities, the lion symbolized Mithrā as a sun god,<sup>275</sup> the horse and the bull were sacrificial animals of Mithrāic rites, and the serpent is the ever-present animal of Mithrāic scenes of tauroctony (fig. 109). As a group, the motifs are specific to esoteric Mithrāism and must thus adorn a stand used in sacrificial ceremonies.

The second Berlin object is an enormous bronze cauldron (fig. 113) with four protruding ram-heads that somehow resemble the one carved on the side of the altar piece in figure 77, or the rams encircling the sunflower of the bitumen roundel in figure 75. The cauldron is too important to be considered a mere kitchen utensil. It was most probably

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<sup>273</sup> Bivar, *The Personalities of Mithra*, 12-13.

<sup>274</sup> The object was found in Metapontum, Italy. Claude Rolley describes it as Laconian (C. Rolley, *Greek Bronzes*, tr. R. Howell (Fribourg, 1986), 128-30) even though it may well be from Asia Minor.

<sup>275</sup> One of the most interesting examples of interchangeability of Mithrā and the lion is advanced by Bivar, who produced two similar coins from Tarsus under the reign of Gordian III, with one issue displaying the Mithrāic bull-slaying and the other issue substituting the lion for Mithrā; Bivar, *The Personalities of Mithra*, 32 (figs. 15-16).

used to collect the blood of sacrificed animals and then placed on a stand similar to figure 110.

Even though Zoroaster disapproved of those who did harm to the bull,<sup>276</sup> the memory of sacrificial ceremonies in Mithrāic rites remained alive in Iran as attested by the story of the Roman Emperor Aurelian's visit to the Sasanians in the *Historia Augusta*:

... when he (Aurelian prior to his ascent to the throne) had gone as an envoy to the Persians, he was presented with a sacrificial saucer, of the kind that the king of the Persians is wont to present to the emperor, on which was engraved the Sun god in the same attire in which he was worshipped in the very temple where the mother of Aurelian had been a priestess.<sup>277</sup>

If this story is true, it conveys two interesting points. The first is that the Sasanians must have given a sacrificial saucer, with an engraved effigy of Mithrā, in full knowledge of sacrificial rites associated with the sun god; and the second is the fact that the deity had an attire *similar* to those he wore in the mithraeums of the Roman Empire. It is hard to imagine that the Iranian craftsman who manufactured this

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<sup>276</sup> Yasna 32:12, 44:20, 49:4, 51:14; *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*. tr. by Bartholomae, from I.J.S. Taraporewala, digital ed. J.H. Petterson, [www.avesta.org/yasna](http://www.avesta.org/yasna); and Moqaddam, M., *Jostār dar bāreh-ye nāhid va mehr* (Tehran, 1380 reprint), 2 and 91. For the substitution of wine for sacrificial blood, see A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, "From the Royal Boat to the Beggar's Bowl," in *Islamic Art IV* (New York, 1990-91), 47-55; and A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, "L'archéologie en terrain littéraire" in *Pand-o-sokhan, Mélanges offerts à Charles-Henri de Fouchécour*, Bibliothèque Iranienne 44, eds. C. Balaÿ, C. Kappler, and Z. Vesel (Tehran, 1995), 156-61.

<sup>277</sup> *Historia Augusta*, tr. D. Magie (Cambridge, MA, 1998 reprint), III:201.

vessel had actually traveled to the Roman Empire and made the god's effigy in the image of the deity that he had seen there. The more logical conclusion is that he dressed the deity in the attire that Mithrā was still depicted with in Iran. It confirms our contention that Phrygian-type bonnets were normally used for the representation of Mithrā in the Iranian context, and the Sasanians perhaps added an animal finial at the top (as in fig. 68) to differentiate the Mithrā of the Zoroastrian pantheon from the esoteric one who became popular in the Roman Empire.

A statue from the Mithraeum beneath the San Clemente basilica in Rome (fig. 48) brings added proof to the common origins of the Mithrā of Western Mithraism and the Iranian Mithrā. This statue is often believed to depict the birth of Mithrā from a rock. The iconography of the base on which Mithrā is standing, however, argues against such interpretation. For it is of circular form with precise rows of pointed protuberances that are petal-shaped and project an image of the Victoria Regia lotus rather than a pile of stones. As for the nakedness of Mithrā, it calls to mind that of the Oxus figurine (fig. 67), which also wears a bonnet; and rather than vouching for a birth scene,<sup>278</sup> it emphasizes the status of the represented persona as a deity. Overall, its composition is very similar to the representation of Mithrā in the *Investiture of Shāpur II* at Tāq-e Bostān (fig. 46) and clearly shows the Roman Mithrā's close iconographical ties with the Iranian Mithrā, whose functions and duties were supplemented by a companion deity often symbolized by a lotus.

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<sup>278</sup> It is hard to imagine a baby born with a bonnet on its head.

A pair of silver plates, from the Altes Museum in Berlin, further illustrates the Roman Mithrā's association with a companion deity. Both plates are Roman and datable to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. One displays at its center a gilt repoussé effigy of Mithrā (fig. 111), and the other, a similar effigy of Anāhitā wearing, as described in the Avesta, an eight-sided crown (fig. 112).<sup>279</sup> The plates are of similar date and manufacture and were clearly made to present Mithrā and Anāhitā as a deity pair. It's a pairing that probably reflects the earlier association of Mithrā with Apam-Napāt (whom Anāhitā later supplanted).

### **The inherent duality of Mithrāism**

The necessity to pair up Mithrāic symbols with those of a second deity is also manifest in one of the most powerful icons of Persepolis, namely the lion and the bull reliefs carved on the sides of the Apadana stairways (figs. 115-116). To grasp the symbolism of this motif we must first understand its setting.

The tribute processions of Persepolis are often described as representing those of Nowruz or Mithrākāna (Mehregān) festivities.<sup>280</sup> However, as already pointed out in respect to Sasanian reliefs, Iranian kingly iconography does not capture a real event but creates a fictitious setting for the enhancement of the king's glory. A perfect example of this mindset is the series of 19<sup>th</sup> century Qājār paintings labeled *Court of Fath-`Ali Shāh*. Each series is composed as a

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<sup>279</sup> In the Darmesteter translation, her golden crown is described to have "eight rays"; Ābān Yasht (*Yasht* 5:128), see footnote 169 supra.

<sup>280</sup> See, for instance, Bivar, *The Personalities of Mithra*, 36-37, also quoting Herzfeld and Merkelbach.

triptych depicting the *shāh* and his immediate entourage at the center, with two rows of ambassadors on each side of the throne (figs. 117a-b). Despite a meticulous rendering of the ambassador's clothing, the paintings anachronistically depict ambassadors who had visited the Qājār *shāh* on separate occasions, over a time-span of several years!<sup>281</sup> The series was sent to the major capital cities of the world in order to project the grandeur of a king, whose glory was supposedly measured by the number of ambassadors attending his court.

Accordingly, the correct interpretation of Achaemenid imagery is the one offered by Margaret Root, who sees the platform bearers depicted on Darius's tomb in Naqsh-e Rostam and the tribute processions in Persepolis not as actual people, nor as reflections of specific events, but as visual metaphors of kingly power.<sup>282</sup> Therefore, we cannot envisage the lion and the bull as astrological signs tied to a specific calendar date.<sup>283</sup> Nor can we accept Bivar's arguments that interpret this icon as a signpost delimiting an

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<sup>281</sup> Among the foreign personalities are: the French envoy Général Gardane, depicted with Monsieur Jaubert and Monsieur Jouanin, and the British envoys Sir John Malcolm, Sir Hartford Jones, and Sir Gore Ouseley, who successively visited the Persian Court between 1807 and 1809; see Soudavar, *Persian Courts*, 392-93, and L.S. Diba, et al., *Royal Persian Painting, The Qajar Epoch, 1785-1925* (London, 1999), 175, where the complete triptych is illustrated.

<sup>282</sup> Root, *King and Kingship*, 160 and 282.

<sup>283</sup> In the *Cambridge History of Iran*, II:725-38, Willy Hartner offers an astrological explanation that at the winter solstice, when agricultural activities are to begin once more, while Leo culminates at twilight, the Bull (Taurus and Pleiades) disappears and remains invisible for a period of 40 days. He thus interprets the Lion-Bull combat as a symbol of that important yearly event. We reject this interpretation because, as previously mentioned, every other detail of the Persepolis friezes projects *continued* auspiciousness and does not allude to a particular event.

inner sanctorum or a no-trespass zone.<sup>284</sup> For, such was the authority of the Achaemenid King that one signpost should have sufficed; no ruler worthy of the name would post a double lion-bull warning sign, once on the outer façade of the stairway (fig. 115), and once again on the inner parapet (fig. 116).

In keeping with our previous arguments, we should seek for the lion-bull icon a meaning related to adjacent motifs. On each parapet, the icon is set within an *undivided* register, next to a field of lotus-sunflowers. The lion-bull icon must therefore present a similar imagery as the lotus-sunflower emblem, which, as previously argued, represents the *khvarnah* in a symbolism that also reflects the cycle of the rising sun in the sky followed by its setting into the sea.

In the *Bondahesh*, at the beginning of creation, the seeds of the Primordial Bull are taken to the moon to obtain the seeds of other animals;<sup>285</sup> and in various seal compositions, the chariot of the moon is pulled by four bulls.<sup>286</sup> Also, because of the rise of the seas at nighttime, water is described in the *Bondahesh* to be “associated with the Moon” while the latter is called the “*farr*-giver and lord of the clouds.”<sup>287</sup> The bull is thus the symbol of the moon and the seas, and a dispenser of *farr*, very much like Apam-Napāt. Since the lion is the symbol of the sun and Mithrā, the lion-bull icon of these registers must therefore represent the day and night cycle, which reflects the ancient Iranian division of daily hours between Mithrā and Apam-Napāt.

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<sup>284</sup> Bivar, *The Personalities of Mithra*, 36.

<sup>285</sup> Farnbagh Dādagi, *Bondahesh*, 78.

<sup>286</sup> Grenet, “Mithrā et les planètes,” 113.

<sup>287</sup> *āb beh māh payvand dārad*; Farnbagh Dādagi, *Bondahesh*, 110.

Indeed, a closer look at the icon reveals the scene not as a kill by the lion but an attempt to crush or overwhelm the bull. Also, the bull is represented not as a nefarious beast but as a majestic animal springing back up, at the other end. It's a metaphor for the sun that overwhelms the night at dawn but looses its grip at dusk.<sup>288</sup>

The parapet registers of figures 115-116, as a whole, project the auspiciousness of *khvarnah* in tandem with the continued protection of the lords of day and night, who are also the givers and guardians of the *khvarnah*. In a very Persian way, past beliefs are injected into a metaphoric formula that lends itself to multiple interpretations.

Interestingly, the lion and the bull are used to convey the same type of kingly metaphors on a throne scene from the Windsor Castle *Pādshāhnāme* produced for Shāhjahān. In a scene reminiscent of our fig. 4, a haloed and enthroned Jahāngir (fig. 118) offers a *sarpech* to his crown prince, Shāhjahān (who is equally haloed).<sup>289</sup> And, on the wall beneath the balcony-throne—before which stand the courtiers—are depicted two holy men, one of whom

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<sup>288</sup> The sun and moon emblems often appear in the upper corners of various crucifixion scenes. The appearance of the lion and bull (in lieu of the aforementioned motifs) on the upper corners of the magnificent 12<sup>th</sup>-century mosaic panel of the San Clemente basilica, as part of the Four Evangelists/Four Living Creatures (Apocalypse 4:7) symbols framing Christ Pantocrator set on top of a crucifixion scene, may point out to an adaptation from Mithraic tauroctony scenes, which regularly display sun and moon figures in the corner positions, especially because the basilica was built over a Mithraeum.

<sup>289</sup> For a complete illustration and discussion of the scene, see M.C. Beach and E. Koch, *King of the Worlds: The Padshahnama, an Imperial Mughal Manuscript From the Royal Library, Windsor Castle* (London, 1997), 96-97, 201-03.

brandishes a sword over the earthly globe to project Mughal power, which supposedly encompassed the whole world (fig. 118).<sup>290</sup> The other holy man holds a paper inscribed with the following:

عمر دولت شه افزون باد

May the span of the king's fortune be (ever)-increasing

The two necessary attributes of kingship, namely power and good fortune, which are bestowed by the holy men, are complemented by the depiction of the lion and bull tandem, as a symbol of day/night perpetuity, on a lower register.

The wish for perpetual good fortune is a recurrent theme of Mughal regal imagery. In another instance, against an enormous radiating sun supported by a white crescent that emphasizes the day/night radiance (*nayyerayn*) of his Divine Glory, Jahāngir is depicted as seated on a gigantic hourglass on which angels are inscribing: "O Shāh, may the span of your life be a thousand years."<sup>291</sup> Thus, in Mughal India, perpetual time as the carrier of good fortune was visualized by both, an hourglass and the lion-bull tandem.

### The Elamite legacy

In figures 75 and 77, we provide examples of groupings of *farr*-related symbols on objects that not only predate the Medians but, most probably, also the arrival of Iranian tribes on the plateau that would be named after them. More

<sup>290</sup> These holy men are most likely Shaykh Mo`in-od-din Chisti and Shaykh Salim Chisti, the patron saints of the house of Akbar.

<sup>291</sup> See *Jahāngir Preferring a Sufi Shaykh to Kings*, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (42.15), in Beach, *The Imperial Image*, 78 and 168.

importantly, the writing of *farr* in the Pahlavi script comes as an Aramaic ideogram (GDE), which usually means that it was a word that scribes were so used to that, when writing in Pahlavi, they opted for an *en bloc* (i.e., ideogram) representation rather than an alphabetical spelling.<sup>292</sup>

In Pahlavi, the word for “scribe” is *dibir* (New Persian: *dabir*), derived from Old Persian *dipira*, which in turn was a borrowing from the Elamite *tup-pi-ra/tipira*.<sup>293</sup> This may suggest that the scribal tradition in Iran originated with the Elamites.<sup>294</sup> One wonders, then, if the scribal tradition of maintaining “Iranian” values, invasion after invasion, started before the Achaemenids and whether it was already in motion at the time when the Elamites had to confront the invasion of Iranian tribes (i.e., Medes and Persians); and in the same way that the cast of scribes and administrators successively “Iranianized” the invading Greeks, Arabs, and Mongols, whether they “Elamitized” the Iranian invaders by amalgamating local concepts with those of the conquerors.

Such speculative theory finds support in the previously quoted passages of the Farvardin Yasht that specify that Mithrā and Apam Napāt were entrusted with a *new* political function (i.e., that they did not have before) around the time of the birth of Zoroaster (which we have equated with the

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<sup>292</sup> Such is the case, for instance, for the word *shāh* spelled as MLK<sup>7</sup> (similar to Arabic *malek*). The concept of king was well attested for the Mesopotamian scribes and therefore MLK<sup>7</sup> was used integrally in the Iranian context.

<sup>293</sup> A. Tafazzoli, *Sasanian Society* (New York, 2000), 18.

<sup>294</sup> On Elamite scribes under the Achaemenids, Vallat remarks “as if Darius had wished to make use of a class of scribes belonging to an already existing administration”; F. Vallat, “Elam I: The History of Elam,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, VIII:311.

height of Median power). In other words, the power to grant authority to kings and combat the rebels was acquired by these two deities only when the concept of *farr* was enmeshed in their attributes and functions under the Medes. As lords of the day and night, or sun and water, the coupled pair of Mithrā and Apam Napāt were ideally suited to represent the two sides of *farr* (i.e., that its possession or loss of it, meant authority or lack of it). This coupling concept, symbolized by the lotus-sunflower combination, may indeed have been a product of the imagination of Elamite scribes, for one can difficultly envision the lotus to be a native symbol of Central Asian tribes.

Although the participation of the Elamite scribes in formulating the Median theories of kingship remains highly hypothetical, the appearance of the scorpion on fig. 39, in conjunction with the wing symbol of *farr*, certainly vouches for an Elamite connection, because the scorpion was a cultic symbol of auspiciousness that frequently appeared on the stone carvings of Tapeh Yahyā and other related Elamite sites of the Kermān-Jiroft area (figs. 119, 120).<sup>295</sup> These sites engaged in active trading and exportation of their ceremonial stone objects to a vast area that stretched from Mesopotamia to Central Asia,<sup>296</sup> setting the stage for Elamite influence in iconographical symbolism for generations to come.

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<sup>295</sup> The jar in figure 120 displays three consecutive “scorpion-men” (i.e., a human torso and head, with a scorpion body) and clearly elevates the scorpion from the category of auspicious-animal to the level of a cultic one. The attack of scorpions and serpents on the bulls of figure 119, on the other hand, provides a possible linkage to tauroctony scenes; see also footnote 76 supra.

<sup>296</sup> E. Carter, “Elam II: The Archeology of Elam,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, VIII:318; see also footnote 77 supra.

## CONCLUSION

By instituting a state ideology that considered the rule of its predecessors as Ahrimanic, the Sasanians almost managed to eclipse the Parthians from the Iranian memory of history. Similarly, the Achaemenid state ideology, which promoted Ahura-Mazdā at the expense of the deities whom the Medes revered, almost obliterated the memory of the Median Empire and blurred the origins of an Iranian kingly ideology, which began to take form under the Medes, most probably through the agency of Elamite scribes.

At the center of this kingly ideology were two concepts: investiture and *khvarnah*. One signaled ascent to the throne and the other projected continued authority and power. Although both the Achaemenids and the Sasanians tried at first to concentrate the conveyance of investiture and *khvarnah* in the hands of Ahura-Mazdā, rulers such as the Achaemenid Artaxerxes II and the Sasanian Khosrow II, whose rights to rule were contested, saw a necessity to further emphasize the *khvarnah* by invoking the deities that had originally been associated with it.

A passage of the Farvardin Yasht mentions that the *khvarnah* was originally associated with the *ahuras* Mithrā and Apam-Napāt and this association began at the time when Zoroaster was born. These two *ahuras* were subsequently demoted by Zoroaster, who favored Ahura-Mazdā as Supreme Ahura. Of the two, Apam-Napāt suffered the more

severe demotion, for his powers clashed with the creation functions now attributed to Ahura-Mazdā. He was gradually replaced by Anāhitā, who assumed the role of protector and conveyor of *khvarnah* in his stead.

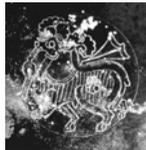
But references to the *khvarnah*, or its related concept of *farreh-afzun*, consistently resurfaced through inscriptions, symbols, anthropomorphic representations, or any combination thereof, and kept alive the memory of the pre-Zoroaster *ahuras* as protectors of kingship and purveyors of *khvarnah*.

More importantly, the iconographical development of *khvarnah* symbolism reveals that the lotus and sunflower were combined as an emblem of the deity pair Mithrā/Apam-Napāt at the height of Median power, which, in conjunction with the aforementioned passage of the Farvardin Yasht, not only provides a vista into the kingly ideology formulated under the Medes but also firmly places Zoroaster's birth at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. In other words, it is the text of the Avesta, and not its archaistic language style, that carried all along the more relevant information about Zoroaster's era.

As a symbol of divine sanction, the *khvarnah* affirmed the authority of the ruler. Its most important characteristics, however, were its fluctuating nature and its availability to all mortals. The recipient of *khvarnah* could lose it in defeat or could see it increased with victory and success. Therefore, the ruler in need of asserting authority inevitably tried to project divine favor in as many ways as his imagination would permit. The repertoire of *khvarnah* symbolism thus expanded as new emblems were devised and added to previous ones. The resulting multiplicity was similar in

essence to the multiplicity of Islamic royal epithets as variations on the same theme, with a tendency to expand as the dynasty got older and weaker.

Among all the metaphors and devices used to enhance the projection of the *khvarnah*, perhaps none has had more impact than its association with the sun. As Efenbein has suggested, *khvarnah* was derived from an Indo-European root *\*(s)p(h)el-* meaning “brilliance and shine,” the same that eventually led to “splendor” in English. And when the word evolved and began to be pronounced as *khvarnah*, the idea of a wordplay and punning with *khvar* (sun) became irresistible for the “Avestan speakers, priests, and hymn-writers,”<sup>297</sup> and *khvarnah* was thus linked to the sun. Consequently, the universal symbol of holiness that the aura has become, and which appears as a halo and nimbus behind the head of Buddha, Jesus, prophets, saints, and kings, was in effect the result of just one more effort to emphasize the power of the *khvarnah*.




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<sup>297</sup> Efenbein, “Splendour and Fortune,” 492.

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