

Astyages, Cyrus and Zoroaster: Solving a Historical Dilemma*

Abstract

*Casting Darius as a descendant of the Achaemenid main line of kings, and Cyrus as one belonging to a secondary branch, François Vallat has argued that Darius's contempt for his paternal cousin stemmed from the perception that Cyrus usurped his forefather's title and position. As it happens, it parallels my own theory by which I had explained that Darius' kingly ideology reflected his antagonism toward the Median ideology. Whereas Vallat sees Cyrus as the one who banished Zoroaster from his land, I propose instead that the real culprit was Astyages, and that in revenge, Zoroastrian priests eventually turned him into a *Daḥḥāk* portrayed with two serpents on his shoulders. They also modified Iran's ancient history to include "friends" and banish "enemies." The antagonism between the followers of Zoroaster and their enemies, however, was exacerbated by an ongoing feud between the cast of the Median magi and that of the Persian fire priests, the *pārsās*, to which belonged Darius and his ancestors.*

Keywords: Astyages, Cyrus, Zoroaster, *pārsā*, Ardashir-khwarrah

Introduction

Persian history has always suffered from a lack of documentation. When documents are available, they are often difficult to read, and when readable they are not readily understandable. One must then speculate on its meaning and its implications. In this climate of uncertainty, irrational speculations can blossom, like the idea that Darius (r. 521-486BC) was a liar and forged a fake lineage. It is irrational because it defies both common practice and common sense. As one can see from the tribal structures of modern Iran (e.g. the Bakhtiārīs), whenever there appears a strong leader (e.g. Hosayn-qulī Khān), within a few generations his descendants fill the leadership positions of their clan.¹ Every little valley is then ruled by a kinglest or *khān*, all cousins to one another. Same was probably true for the Persians. Thus, if Darius wanted to find a common ancestor for himself and Cyrus (r. 559-29 BC), all he had to do was to go back a few generations to find one (presumably Achaemenes), without lying. More importantly, when Darius had the Bisutūn inscriptions written, he had already crushed all his enemies and was in full control of the empire. Where was the need to lie for a king who took so much pride in combating the "Lie"? The following anecdote may be revealing:

* In memoriam to Xavier Tremblay (1971-2011), a most erudite and generous philologist who shall be missed.

After the conquest of Delhi (1739), when Nādir Shāh (r. 1736-47) was about to marry his son to the niece of the Mughal Emperor, protocol demanded that each side establish its ancestry seven times back. Lacking aristocratic pedigree, Nadir Shah instructed his secretary to recite that the groom was “the son of Nādir Shāh, the son of the Sword, the grandson of the Sword; and so on until they have a descent of seventy instead of seven generations.”² He was bluntly stating that naked force was his legitimacy, and an elaborate ancestry was of no use to him. From a position of force, neither Nādir needed to fake his ancestry nor did Darius.

Fortunately, François Vallat’s recent articles has debased this senseless theory by casting Darius as the descendant of the Achaemenid main line of kings, and Cyrus as one belonging to a secondary branch. Darius’ contempt for his cousin therefore stemmed from the perception of Cyrus usurping his forefather’s title and position.³ As it happens, it parallels my own theory in which I had explained that Darius’ kingly ideology could only be understood against the foil of a Median one that saw Mithra and Apam Napāt as purveyors of *khvarenah*—and therefore authority—in the two realms of night and day.⁴ But where Vallat sees Cyrus as the one who banished Zoroaster from his land, I shall propose instead that the real culprit was Astyages (r. 585-50), and that Zoroastrian priests rewrote history by eliminating those perceived as the enemies of their Prophet. In support, I shall present three types of argument: First, by analyzing the Pasargadae and Persepolis bas-reliefs, I shall demonstrate Cyrus’s reverence for Mithra and Apam Napāt, and bring added vista into Darius’ animosity towards the “Median” magi. Second, I shall present this theory as a logical construct that explains two extraordinary and otherwise unexplainable aspects of Iranian history: 1) the “Ḍahḥāk dilemma,” or the fact that the Iranian mighty king, Bivarasp, was portrayed with two serpents on his shoulders; 2) the “Cyrus dilemma,” or the fact that the memory of such an important figure was wiped out of Iranian history. Third, based on an explanation offered by Pierre Lecoq for “*pārsava*,” I shall explain that rather than deriving a meaning attached to the far side (“those from the frontier lands”), one should understand it as one pertaining to the near side, i.e., those who stood next to something,

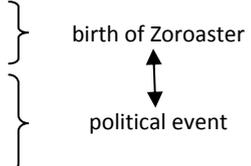
that something being the fire altar. This shall finally allow me to present a sensible interpretation for Darius' claim that he was "*Pārsā son of Pārsā, Arya Arya ciça*," a claim that was at the root of his quest for legitimacy, and deeply affected Persian kingly ideology.

For lack of documentation, my aim is to derive a meaning through correlating evidence from disparate sources whose content may not be entirely coherent. In this quest, mythical stories and tales following a recurrent structure cannot be discarded. If past historians reverted to *topoi*, it's generally because they were confused about a piece of information, and felt the need to wrap it into a familiar tale to make it more understandable to their audience. A *topos* may therefore contain elements of truth. Truth was of course often altered by political propaganda or for the sake of religious conformity. But aspects of it still found their way into myths and *topoi*, and manifest themselves in bits and pieces. If these can be correlated into a cohesive conjecture, an overarching theory can then be built upon it. Like for detectives on a crime scene, any information may be of value to formulate a sensible theory. The more coherent looks this theory in its different facets, the more valid it is.

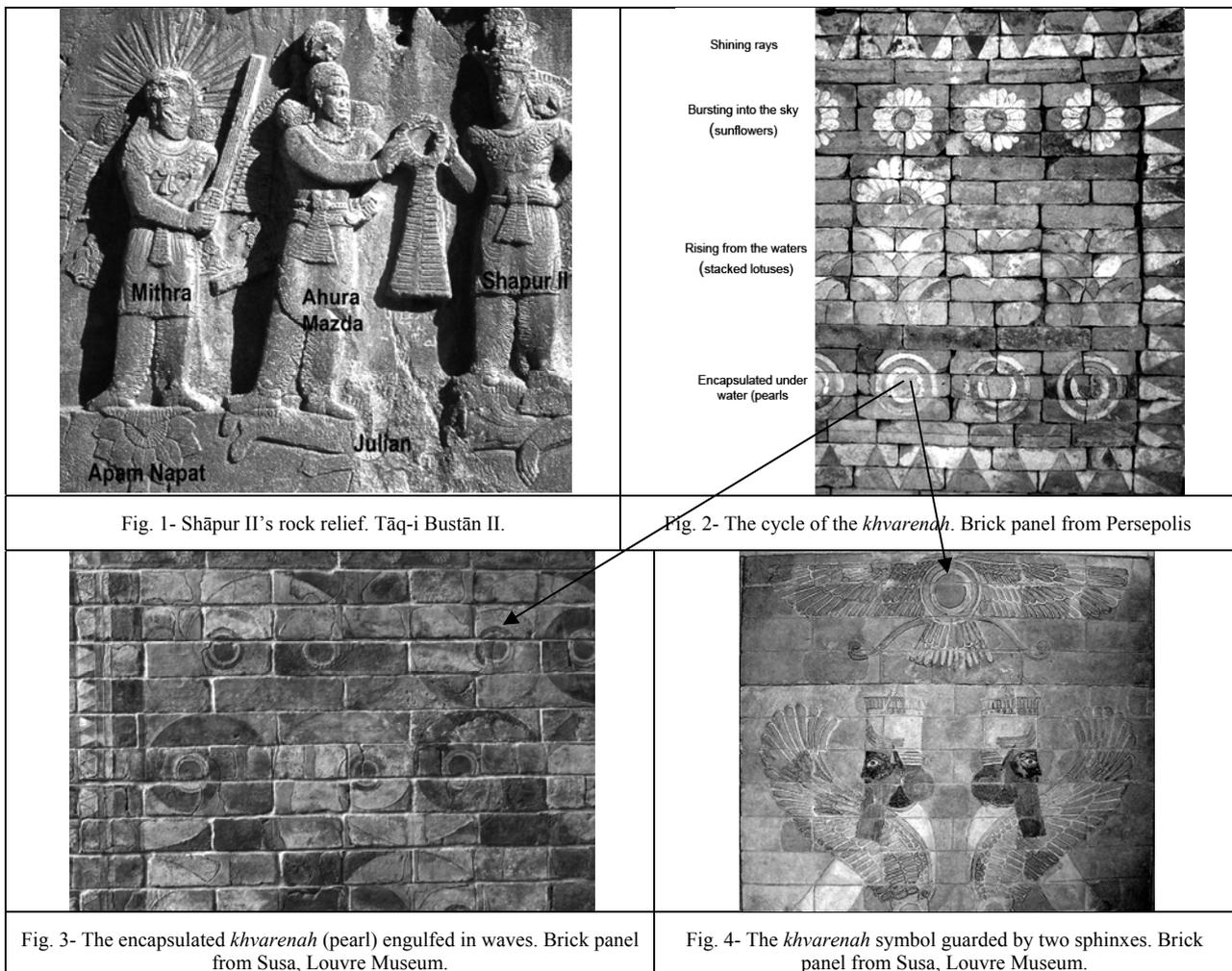
I. Background

Since what I am about to suggest goes against the grain of yet another misconception, that Zoroaster lived circa 1000 BC rather than 7-6th century BC, a little background is necessary. I shall not try to point out the inherent flaws of this misconception, for I have done it in my 2010 publication,⁵ and see no need to repeat it here since the present paper is in fact a sequel to said publication. But if I persist against this misconception, it's because I constantly discover new evidence in support of a conclusion that I only reached by accident. Indeed, in search of the origins of *farr* symbolism, I had stumbled—in 2003—upon two stanzas of the Avesta that I perceived to situate the birth date of Zoroaster in late 7th century BC.⁶ And the array of new discoveries since then has not only consolidated my initial hypothesis but has shed light on a multitude of obscure phenomena in Iranian history.

The fortuitous and revelatory stanzas were from the *Farvardīn Yasht*:

<p>13:94 'Let us rejoice, for a priestly man is born, the Spitamid Zarathushtra. From now on (<i>iḏa apām</i>)... From now on (<i>iḏa apām</i>)... 13:95 'From now on (<i>iḏa apām</i>), Mithra ... will promote all supreme authorities of the nations and will pacify those in revolt. From now on (<i>iḏa apām</i>), strong Apam Napāt will promote all the supreme authorities of the nations and will subjugate all those in revolt.</p>	
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I used them, in tandem with the *Bundahishn*, to explain the dual role of Mithra and Apam Napāt, as purveyors of *khvarenah* in the rock relief of Shāpur II (r. 309-79) (fig. 1), and the dual role of the sunflower and the lotus, as symbols of the *khvarenah* associated with each of these two deities. Consequently, I interpreted a brick panel from Persepolis as representing the full cycle of the *khvarenah*, from its encapsulated under-water state to its burst in the sky (fig. 2).⁷



But, *Yt* 13: 94-95 clearly pegged Zoroaster's birth date to a political event: the time when Mithra and Apam Napāt were paired up to uphold authority and vanquish rebellion in a plurality of nations. The two underlined words pointed to the formation of an empire, which could only be that of the Median Empire toward the end of the 7th century BC. Such a conclusion was in

perfect harmony with the axiom that “258 years had elapsed between the coming of Zoroaster and that of Alexander,” since, by the latter axiom, Zoroaster had to be born circa 618 BC. The validity of this didactic process, I had argued, was further strengthened by two independent observations.⁸ The first was purely iconographic: the pairing of the lotus and the sunflower, as emblems of Mithra and Apam Napāt, occurred circa 7-6th century BC, confirming once more that these two deities were integrated into the Median kingly ideology in conjunction with the vast empire that the Medes established at that time, by sacking Assyria and subjugating Urartu. The second was explanatory: it provided a context for Darius’ insistence on having his orders carried by “day and by night” (*DB* §7-8). Indeed, it is rather odd for a king to emphasize such a point, as kingly orders are absolute and must not be constrained by time. This oddity can only be explained against the foil of a Median concept that considered night and day as two separate realms, one governed by Mithra and the other by Apam Napāt. Darius’ monotheistic vision of a world presided by Ahura Mazdā alone, required an amalgamation of the two. He thus expressed it in writing at Bisutūn, and through images in his Persepolitan iconography. The study here below will add yet another array of evidence to a theory that already finds much support in a variety of corollary arguments.

II. Chasing Zoroaster from his land

In conjunction with establishing Cyrus as the one who dethroned Darius’ grandfather Arsames, Vallat also speculated that, where Zoroaster laments:

Y.46.1 “To what land shall I go to flee, whither to flee? From nobles and from my peers they sever me, nor are the people pleased with me [.....], nor the Liar rulers of the land. How am I to please thee, Mazda Ahura?”;

Y.46.14. O Zarathushtra, what righteous man is thy friend for the great covenant? Who wills to have good fame? It is the Kava Vishtāspa at the consummation.

he is referring to an ill-treatment perpetrated by Cyrus that led to his departure, while Vishtāspa and his family offered him protection and support.⁹

If one accepts a late date for Zoroaster based on the “258 axiom,” as I do, then one is almost compelled to see the Vishtāspa of the Avesta and Darius’ father as one. Therefore, Vallat’s

suggestion of the same was a step in the right direction, except for the fact that he perhaps carried it too far by suggesting that Zoroaster accompanied Vishtāspa in his eastern campaign of 521 BC; because, in the late date scenario, Zoroaster had died circa 541 BC.¹⁰ It was in the middle of a conversation with Vallat, and trying to reconcile his view with the “258 axiom” that it dawned on me: if we took Astyages, rather than Cyrus, as the one who chased Zoroaster, we would have a solution to many dilemmas.

The first dilemma concerns Daḥḥāk, the famous tyrant of the *Shāhnāma* and Arabic histories of ancient Iran, who has two serpents springing out of his shoulders. A close look at these sources, however, reveals that there is nevertheless a hidden praise about him. He is portrayed to have been more “powerful than pharaohs,” and had achievements “unequaled by any of the prophets,” and was more powerful than any known human being, and a king whose lineage reached back to the primordial man/king Gayumarth, and while Arabic texts called him Daḥḥāk, his Iranian name was Azhi-dahāg (snake-man) or Bivarasb.¹¹ The latter is more likely to be an epithet than a name, and by its very meaning (*bivarasp* = 10000 horses) designates a man of immense fortitude and fortune. More importantly, his descent from Gayumarth, who gave the Aryan people its *ciθra* (i.e., its *khvarenah*),¹² qualified him as a legitimate Iranian ruler.

As early as the 1900s, scholars have noticed a great similarity between Herodotus’ story of Astyages and that of Azhi-dahāg, not only phonetically, but also in the narrative details, such as: they were both defeated by the defection or mutiny of their own people, or both Astyages and Azhi-dahāg were left alive after defeat.¹³ Among the ancient chroniclers, Movsēs Xorenaci mentions that the King of the Medes was named Ādahak.¹⁴ And, whereas Berossus attributes the construction of certain gardens in Babylon, to Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 605-562BC) trying to recreate—in lower Mesopotamia—a Median climate for his wife Amytis, daughter of Astyages,¹⁵ the *Bundahishn* and other Zoroastrian texts relate that Azhi-dahāg made a dwelling in Babylon, and had many wonderful things there.¹⁶ There are simply too many correlating facts to ignore the possibility of common identity for the two.

The *Ḍaḥḥāk* dilemma is therefore about a mighty Iranian king, or emperor, vilified by subsequent chroniclers who, not only made him a snake-man, but wiped out his ancestors and/or predecessors by amalgamating them into one long reign of 1000 years. The question is by whom and for what reason? And secondly, where did the snakes come from?

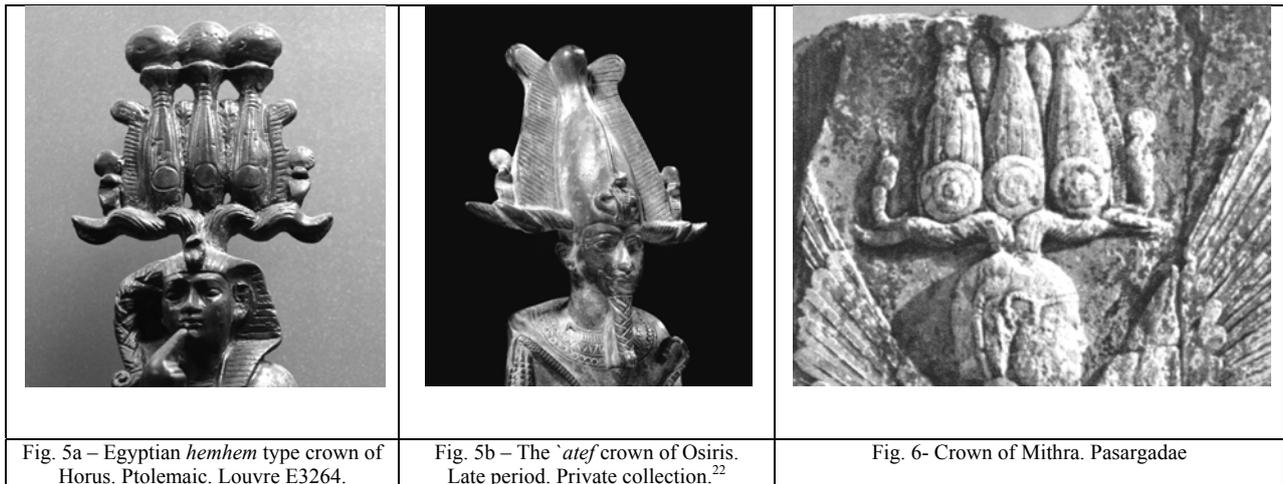
The scenario by which Astyages is the one who drove out Zoroaster from his land provides a ready answer to the first set of questions. Perceiving Astyages as the archenemy, the Zoroastrian priests who transmitted history to their own liking, turned him into a monster and obliterated his family. His grandson Cyrus probably shared the same fate, especially if he too upheld the Median kingly ideology. In my 2010 study, I had already produced much evidence in support of Cyrus' Median ideology, but a new look at Pasargadae shall deliver to us a decisive proof and the answer to both the Cyrus and *Ḍaḥḥāk* dilemmas.

III. Gods of Cyrus

On a door jamb of Pasargadae, there is a relief that has been erroneously called “Winged Genius” even though it has two characteristics that qualifies it as a most powerful deity (fig. 8a). First is the fact that, in ancient iconography, anthropomorphic winged creatures invariably represent the supernatural counterpart to humans, i.e., deities. Second, he wears a royal Elamite attire,¹⁷ that must represent the supreme deity of Cyrus—King of Anshan¹⁸—in the same way that in Naqsh-e Rostam, Ahurā Mazdā is clad with the same attire as Ardashir I (r. 224-241), and Jesus is often represented in the attire of Charlemagne (r. 768-814). If Cyrus followed his grandfather's kingly ideology, then this supreme deity must have been Mithra, to whom sacrifices continued to be made at his tomb site long after his death.¹⁹ And indeed it can be perceived as such, provided we first put aside the common misconception that Mithra's head must necessarily be adorned with shining rays.

Mithra was first and foremost a god of covenants, but also associated with light and sun. His role as purveyor of the *khvarenah*, however, is emphasized in the Avesta,²⁰ and the qualities that *Yt* 13:95 recognizes in him, namely to support authority and vanquish rebellion, are predicated

on his control over the *khvarenah*. As such, the primary symbol of Mithra within the context of a Median ideology should be in reference to *khvarenah* and not solar luminescence. In fact, the regal crown of the winged figure projects just that (fig. 6). Granted that the origin of this complex crown was the Egyptian *`atef* crown (single cone, fig. 5b) or the *hem-hem* crown (triple cone, fig. 5a), which may have entered Iranian iconography via Syria or Mesopotamia, but so were the origins of the lotus, sunflower, and the winged-disk. Although the latter are of foreign origin, they were adopted because they could represent the Iranian concept of *khvarenah*. A borrowing without adaptation was simply of no value. And the process continued in Sasanian times; hence, the symbol of Eros, as a winged child, was adopted in Sasanian times to represent Apam Napāt. The wings naturally emphasized the supernatural qualities of the deity, and the child figure alluded to Apam Napāt's name, the Grandson of Waters.²¹

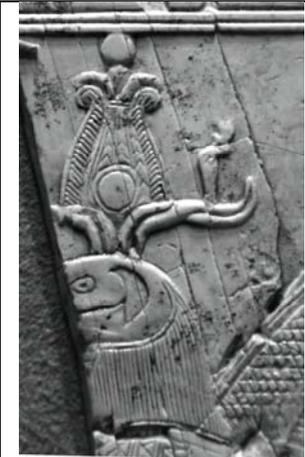


The choice of the Egyptian crown for the figure of Mithra was no different. It was adopted because it could admirably project the full cycle of the *khvarenah* as in the Persepolis brick panel (fig. 2). Indeed, at the bottom of the crown we have pearl roundels with concentric circles on a slightly spherical surface. Instead of stacked lotuses, we have a cluster of reeds tied together to indicate the rise of the *khvarenah* from the waters. And finally, at the top we have solar discs that radiate the *khvarenah* (fig. 8a). It is perhaps no mere coincidence that the *Bundahishn* states that the “*khvarenah* of Firaydūn sat at the bottom of the reed.”²³ Since Firaydūn is the one who defeats and captures ԉաղղհāk in the *Shāhnāma*, Cyrus' lore must have

been partially transplanted on this mythical figure of Indo-Iranian past. In addition, because the serpent was associated with the waters, especially in the Elamite tradition, the symbol of a solar disk on the head of a rising snake projected the rise of the *khvarenah* from the waters.²⁴

The adoption of the Egyptian crown was accompanied by an adaptation process, which made the symbol more relevant in the Iranian context. A Syrian intermediary (fig. 7) may or may not have facilitated this adaptation process, since we can see similar additions and modifications on it.

The Syrian model, as well as the Egyptian one, seems to incorporate a sun discus at the bottom level, whereas the Pasargadae one has a pearl roundel.²⁵ Therefore, at the bottom level, the former have celestial elements and the latter has aquatic ones. Also, the herringbone design at the centre of the Syrian crown—perhaps representing the bark of a palm tree—has been replaced with reeds. It is not clear whether the Syrian model projected a similar concept within its own context or not; but the Pasargadae characteristics were all chosen to enhance the projection of *khvarenah*. In choosing the triple-coned *hemhem* crown, rather than the more familiar *`atef* crown, the Medes opted for the bundle of reeds instead of the more common smooth-surfaced cone that imitated the crown of Upper Egypt. And the tripling of the motifs responded to a concept that I have termed elsewhere as *farreh-afzun*, or ever-increasing *khvarenah*.²⁶

			
<p>Fig. 7 – Syrian crown, c. 8th century BC. Metropolitan Museum of Art</p>	<p>Fig. 8a - Winged figure. From Ker Porter's book, (Courtesy of P. Briant)</p>	<p>Fig. 8b – Zahhak with two serpents. Detail of a <i>Shāhnāma</i> page. Freer Gallery F 1996.2</p>	<p>Fig. 9 – Head of Buddha with triangular light rays. Private collection.</p>

It now seems that, contrary to my 2003 assessment,²⁷ the composition of the Persepolis brick panel (fig. 2) was not a novel idea, but entirely inspired from the Pasargadae crown. In particular, the ingenious idea of projecting a sphere on a flat brick surface through concentric circles was derived from the encapsulated *khvarenah* at the bottom of the reeds.²⁸

But Darius wanted to sever the concept of *khvarenah* from Mithra,²⁹ and thus modified the reeds into—once again Egyptian—stacked lotuses, and the solar disks into sunflowers, and more importantly, presented the *khvarenah* as an independent source of regal power, created by Ahura Mazda and shining through its own light rather than through Mithra's. To emphasize the latter point he surrounded the *khvarenah* composition with triangles in lieu of light rays (figs. 2, 24) in conjunction with the use of the word *ciθra*, as manifestation of the *khvarenah* (see sec. VII). The string of outwardly pointing triangles subsequently gained widespread recognition as light rays, and appear, for instance, on the contour of the sun disk of the Buddha in Gandhara statues (fig. 9). Finally, size is important. In conjunction with its regal Elamite robe and *khvarenah*-projecting crown, the large size of this symbol of Mithra certainly vouches for its eminent position in the pantheon of Cyrus' gods.

Although *Yt* 13:95 mentions Mithra first, it gives equal status to Apam Napāt. It therefore behoves our theory to have an equally important and sizeable symbol for the second member of this deity pair. I believe that the remnants of a pair of broken door jambs indicate the existence in Pasargadae of a similar representation for Apam Napāt (fig. 10). They depict a fish-clad anthropomorphic figure, perhaps derived from Assyrian or Neo Babylonian prototypes (fig. 11). Whereas Mithra's figure has wings to qualify it as a supernatural being, a bull chimera stands guard behind him, possibly holding a long vertical spear. Through association with its supernatural guard, the fish-clad figure must be supernatural as well, and its fish cloak indicates aquatic affinity. The figure is thus well suited to represent Apam Napāt. Once again, we have a symbol that was borrowed from foreign lands but rendered meaningful in the Iranian context.

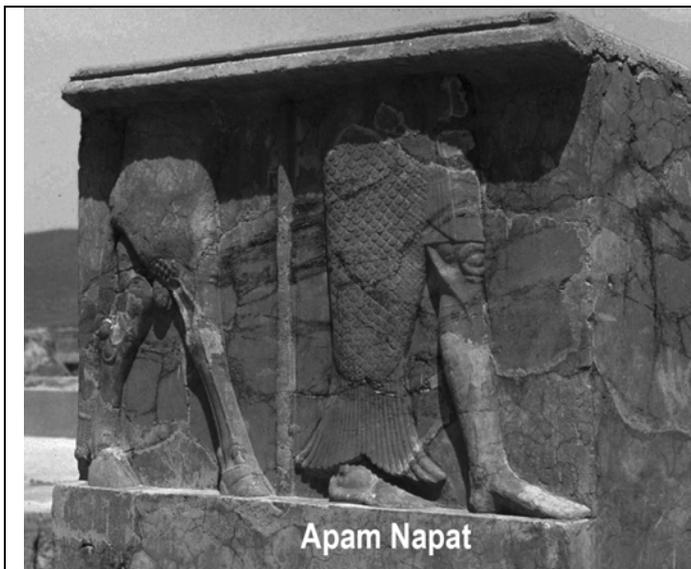


Fig. 10 – Lower part of door jamb depicting Apam Napāt. Pasargadae.



Fig. 11- Neo-Babylonian seal imprint. On loan to the Metropolitan Museum from the Morgan Library.

While the door jamb of Mithra stood tall until recent centuries, that of Apam Napāt seems to have suffered deliberate destruction. As Mary Boyce has explained, one aspect of Apam Napāt, which has miraculously survived in *Yt* 19:52, is that he seems to have been a creator-god, “who created men, who shaped men”. It obviously clashed with the creation prerogatives of Ahura Mazdā, similarly phrased in *Yasna* 1.1: “who created us, who shaped (us).”³⁰ Apam Napāt was therefore bound to disappear in the Mazdean pantheon and was gradually replaced with another aquatic deity, Anāhitā. On the other hand, the extremely popular solar deity Mithra was not easily replaceable, and in lieu of being pushed out, he was sanitized and reintegrated into the Mazdean pantheon. The fate of the Pasargadae door jambs may actually reflect the same phenomenon. As the surviving deity, Mithra’s symbol was kept, while that of Apam Napāt was discarded. In both cases, however, enough survives to ascertain that Apam Napāt once stood as tall as Mithra. As the symbols of the most venerated deities by Cyrus, they can only confirm what *Yt* 13:94-95 had implicitly suggested, that the primary gods of the Medians were these two, and Cyrus, as inheritor of the Median Empire, naturally followed the same kingly ideology.

IV. Zoroaster's revenge

Legends are never created out of thin air, and Daḥḥāk's transformation into a snake-man must have been inspired from a powerful symbol. Our Pasargadae crown of Mithra, with its two *uraei*, is where the denigrators of Astyages got the bizarre idea to plant two snakes on his shoulders (fig. 8b). It is not clear whether the crown of Mithra was the actual crown that Cyrus wore, but in the same way that the robe of the winged figure reflected the royal Elamite robe of Cyrus, it is a definite possibility. And, it may be that it was actually the crown of his grandfather, and he donned it to emphasize continuity on the Median throne. Be that as it may, the serpents on the crown of Mithra must have been so representative of the Median kingly ideology, that they became the instrument of the vilification of Astyages. So much so that Darius, when adopting the Egyptian winged disk for the ultimate symbol of the *khvarenah*, scratched its two *uraei* to avoid association with a Median symbol, and replaced them with floating ribbons (fig. 4). Astyages was thus equated with Azhi-dahāg, i.e., the mythical Indo-Iranian snake-man and labelled as such.³¹ It proved to be a lasting label, and by the same token, the serpent was qualified as a *xrafstar*, or noxious creature, by later Zoroastrians .

V. The idea behind Yts 13.94-95

In Pasargadae, we have found solid proof for our interpretation of *Yt* 13:95, as to how it reflected Median kingly ideology. What remains to be explained is why: *Yt* 13:95 came in the wake of 13:94, pegging it to the birth of Zoroaster.

It is a common trait of religious texts and hagiographic accounts, that they situate the birth of prophets or saintly figures at a fortunate time in order to convey the preordained nature of their mission or advertise the auspiciousness that it entailed. Iranian theologians, for instance, fabricated a *ḥadith* by which the Prophet Muḥammad had proudly proclaimed that "I was born during the time of the most just king," alluding to the reign of the Sasanian Khosrow I (r. 531-79) renowned for his justice.³² In so doing, they were associating the Prophet's birth with an era of justice, and at the same time moving the centre of gravity of the Islamic empire closer to the

Iranian lands. For the author of *Yt* 19, the defeat of the mighty Assyrians (circa 614) and the creation of the Median Empire was due to the auspicious birth of Zoroaster; but since he could not praise the glory of the Medes—who had chased Zoroaster from his land—he reinterpreted that period as the time when two Iranian deities became all powerful and cast their hegemony over the newly conquered territories. In the meantime Mithra, of Median name and fame, had been sanitized and fully reintegrated into the Zoroastrian pantheon, and Apam Napāt was lingering on but not totally banished.³³ Better to evoke them than the archenemy Medes.

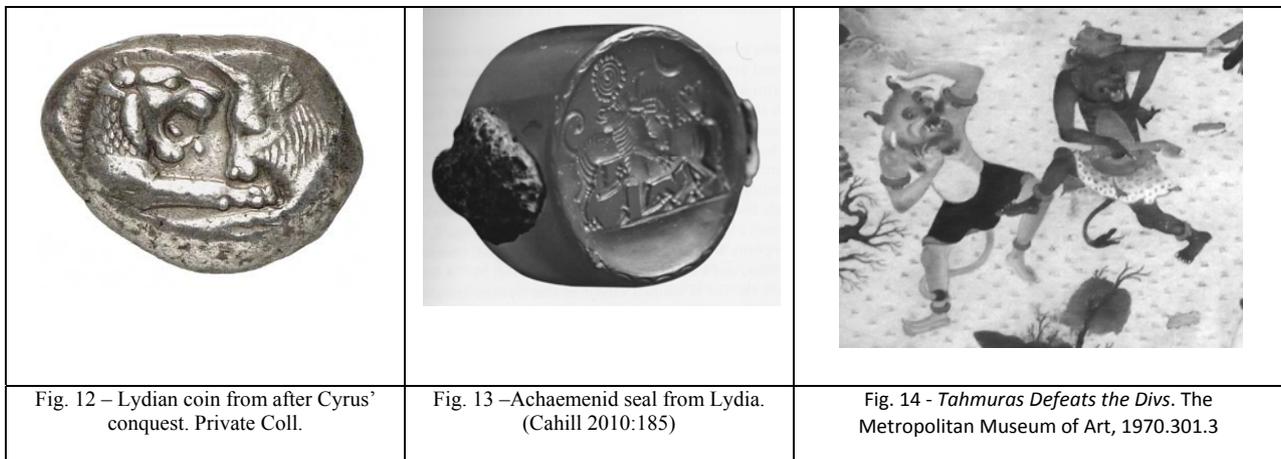
Cyrus being the grandson of the hated Astyages, and a king who did not recognize the supremacy of Ahura Mazdā, was not vilified as his grandfather was. His persona was partially transplanted on the dragon-slayer Thraetaona, who became Firaydūn in Iranian lore, the one who caused Daḥḥāk's downfall but did not kill him (in the same way that Cyrus put an end to the Median Dynasty but did not kill his grandfather Astyages). In the process, Cyrus' name was wiped out from Iranian history—as related by Zoroastrian priests—along that of his ancestors and predecessors, all perceived as Zoroaster's foes (see sec. XII). The Daḥḥāk and Cyrus dilemmas are in fact nothing but the reflection of Zoroaster's revenge on the Medes, as concocted by the Zoroastrian clergy.

VI. Darius' animosity toward the magi

Whereas Vallat had stressed the animosity of Darius toward Cyrus and what he perceived as the usurpation of his ancestral lineage, Daniel Potts has provided further proof of this animosity through his study of the area surrounding Cyrus' initial capital of Anshan, and the neglect which befell on it after the ascent of Darius to power.³⁴ In parallel, I had evoked Darius' antagonism toward the Median kingly ideology, which is nowhere more evident than under the foundation stones of the Apadana, where he had buried along with gold and silver plaques, Lydian coins that displayed on their obverse the opposing heads of a bull and a lion (similar to fig. 12). Since these coins were introduced in Lydia after Cyrus' conquest (see Appendix I), and seals from Sardis (fig. 13) unequivocally show the equivalence of the lion-bull pair to the sun and moon (or

day and night), Darius' act of burying Lydian coins was to signal the end of the day and night division of the world, which his predecessors had promoted. A host of other symbols and symbolic acts were conceived in Persepolis to project the same.³⁵

By their very size, the reliefs that depict Darius's killing a lion and a bull on door jambs' of Persepolis (figs. 15, 16) should be perhaps viewed as the most important expression of this antagonism. One can of course trace back the killing of a lion by the hero king to Assyria, where it was supposed to convey the power of the monarch in battle with the king of the animals;³⁶ we also have Assyrian scenes of royal hunts depicting the lion or a wild bull as preys.³⁷ But the killing of a normal bull by the hero king seems unprecedented or rare at best, and symbolizes perhaps an indirect attack on Apam Napāt through the bull as symbol of night time, and/or the bovine chimera that stood guard behind him (fig. 10).³⁸ Thus the pairing of the two scenes on opposite doorways by Darius must be seen as one more expression of animosity towards the Median division of the world into day and night realms.



Furthermore, the widespread attack on the Median magi must have had some bearing on the decoration program of Persepolis. For Herodotus recounts (III:79):

Such was their fury, that, unless night had closed in, not a single Magus would have been left alive. The Persians observe this day with one accord, and keep it more strictly than any other in the whole year. It is then that they hold the great festival, which they call the Magophonia. No Magus may show himself abroad during the whole time that the feast lasts; but all must remain at home the entire day.

This day of Magophonia is also alluded to by Ctesias and Agathias.³⁹ Moreover, in later chronicles we have the additional information that Firaydūn captured Bivarasb (alias Astyages) on the Mihr day of the month of Mihr, called Mihrigān, a day that was celebrated every year thereafter.⁴⁰ Once again, the information from Greek and later Iranian sources seems to be complementary rather than in opposition, as both seem to celebrate the demise of the Median magi. And in tandem, they allude to an intense propaganda aimed against the magi. If so, one must be able to see its repercussions in Persepolis.

I suggest that the image of a winged monster with a lion face, bull's horns, bird feathers, ostrich feet and scorpion tail, with whom Darius is grappling, alluded to a certain group of Mithraic magi (fig. 17). Its justification lies beyond the scope of this study and shall be part of a book that I am writing about Mithraic societies.⁴¹ Suffice it to say for the moment that one of the main symbols of these magi is the scorpion, traces of which we can detect in the avatars of both Roman and Iranian Mithraic societies. In any case, the many features—including the scorpion tail—that this chimera shares with the demonic Assyrian monster Pazuzu clearly qualifies it as a malevolent creature, whom Darius is trying to exterminate, rather than a powerful animal, the grappling with whom was supposed to project the strength of the ruler (fig. 18).



Fig. 15- Darius killing a lion as symbol of day. Tachara, Persepolis.



Fig. 16- Darius killing a bull as symbol of night. Hundred columns Hall, Persepolis.



Fig. 17- Darius killing a monster as symbol of the magi. Museum, Persepolis.



Fig. 18 – The monster Pazuzu. Surena Collection.

On a fourth door jamb, Darius is killing another chimera in the form of a griffin, the symbolism of which I cannot fully explain. However, the four pair of animals and chimeras, which first appear in Darius' Palace (fig. 15), and are thereafter repeated in the colossal door jambs of the Hundred Columns Hall (fig. 16) as well as those in the "Harem" of Xerxes (fig. 17), always maintain the same East-West orientation. As a recurring theme, they surely symbolized a major politico-religious expression aimed against Median ideology. While the struggle with the bull and lion may reflect Darius' quest to abolish the day-night division embraced by the Medes, the symbolism of the battle with chimera monsters may be more in tune with the combat against the magi and *daiva* worshippers as expressed by Xerxes' in his *XPh* inscriptions:

*And among these nations there was a place where previously demons (daiva) were worshipped.
Afterwards, by the grace of Ahura Mazdā I destroyed that sanctuary of demons, and I
proclaimed: 'The demons shall not be worshipped!'*

Perhaps that is why *divs*, as opponents of Zoroastrianism, were thereafter portrayed as creatures similar to these monster chimeras (compare figs. 14, 17). Be that as it may, the relevant question here is: if Darius killed the magi, who was then left to officiate the ceremonies? The answer is the *pārsās*, who were in fact the adversaries of the magi.

VII. *Pārsā* son of *pārsā*

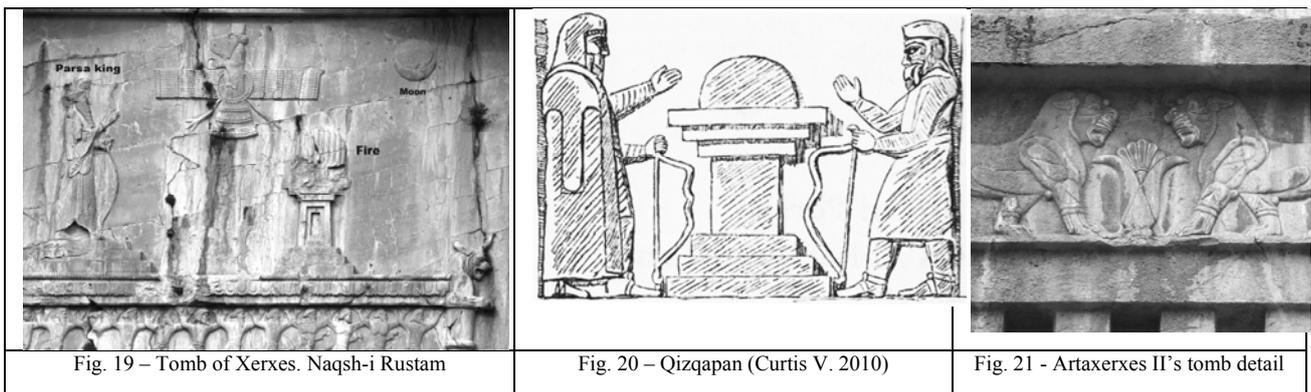
In Naqsh-i Rostam (DNa §2) Darius declares to be:

adam Dārayavauš ... Vištāspahyā puça, Haxāmanišiya, Pārsa, Pārsahyā puça, Ariya, Ariya ciça

a sentence that is generally translated as: "I Darius ... son of Vishtāspa the Achaemenid, a Persian (*pārsā*) son of Persian, an Aryan, having the Aryan lineage." The primary purpose of such inscriptions was political propaganda, and in that respect, this translation has zero value, for, half of the enemies that Darius depicted in Bisutūn were Aryans, and most of his own servants were Persians; and as I have explained elsewhere, such a translation would only draw ridicule from a tribal person. Its meaning hinges on the correct understanding of the word *ciça*, long afflicted by erroneous translations such as "seed," "lineage", "nature" or "family." *Ciça* meant radiance, and as such, was a manifestation of the *khvarenah* and a gage for measuring its

intensity. Darius used this word to circumvent the linkage that the *khvarenah* had developed under the Medes with Mithra.⁴² As we shall see Darius' choice of this word stigmatized his aura, and continuously remained in use until Sasanian times.

In addition, I had noticed a structural difference in the use of the words "Achaemenid" and "*pārsā*" in Darius' above mentioned declaration: one was repeated and the other not.⁴³ It's a distinction that doesn't seem to affect modern philologists, but if Darius' father was an Achaemenid, so was he; there was no need to repeat it. On the other hand, if the *pārsā* qualification is repeated for father and son, like "Sultan b. Sultan," it must point to a title that was not automatically transferable to sons; to one maybe, but not all. The modern use of the word *pārsā* (pious man), and a 14th-century reference by Ḥamdullāh-i Mustawfī to nocturnal ceremonies held by non-Moslem priests qualified as *pārsā*, vouched for a religious function.⁴⁴



Despite several attempts, I had no further insight into the word until I revisited Lecoq's seminal work on Achaemenid inscriptions. As Lecoq explains it, *pārsava* and *parthava* were the Median and Persian dialectal pronunciations of the same ethnic designation, and were words that eventually produced MP *pahlav* and the NP *pahlu* (side).⁴⁵ From the latter, he extrapolated a meaning attached to the far side ("those from the frontier lands"). I believe that he went slightly too far, as *pahlu* implies the near side rather than a far one.⁴⁶ With that in mind, the pointer to its true meaning comes from the imagery.

On their tomb facades, Darius and Xerxes who both claim to be "*pārsā* son of *pārsā*," depict themselves bow in hand and facing a fire altar (fig. 19). It's obviously not the representation of a

pre-death ritual, but an explanation before Ahurā Mazdā, of the most important function that they held during their lifetime. Since they are facing a fire altar, the closeness implied by the word *pārsā* must be in relation to the fire altar. And whereas Mustawfī emphasized the nocturnal aspect of the ceremonies, the moon symbol above the fire altar may indeed indicate that the fire ceremonies presided by the *pārsā* were also held at night time.⁴⁷

In Qizqapan, we have a rendering of “*pārsā* son of *pārsā*” as two princes, one young and the other older, stand bow in hand by a fire altar (figs. 20). A similar composition appears on a number of seals.⁴⁸ Consequently, Herodotus’ remark (I, 125) about the Persian tribes: “and of these the Pasargadai are the most noble, of whom also the Achaimenidai are a clan,” is quite revelatory. As Lecoq observed, Pasargadai is the “Greek rendering of *Pārsā-gird*” (or rather *Pārsā-kadag*), the city or dwelling of the *Pārsās*.⁴⁹ Herodotus therefore seems to confound the name of the dwelling with the name of the cast of *pārsās*. This minor mistake notwithstanding, his statement, about the Achaemenids belonging to the same cast, tallies well with Darius’ boast that he was *pārsā* son of *pārsā*. The eponymous founder of the dynasty, Achaemenes, must have been a *pārsā*, whose function was eventually transmitted to Darius through a lineage that he claimed to represent the paramount branch of the Achaemenids (see sec. XIV).⁵⁰ To this paramount branch Cyrus did not belong. Therefore, Darius’ hereditary function of *pārsā* is what differentiated him from Cyrus. His right to rule and legitimacy were based on this inheritance. In bringing back kingship to his own lineage, he was rehabilitating the *Pārsā* line of the Achaemenids.⁵¹

The image of the *pārsā* on the reliefs seems to be that of a presiding officer and/or keeper of the fire. As such, the fire in his custody must have been the main fire to which were affiliated a group of Iranians known as Persians. Significantly, the kings of Persis who sought to continue the Achaemenid traditions represent themselves bow in hand and next to an edifice that supposedly harboured the same fire (figs. 22, 23).⁵² As Vesta Curtis has noted, some coin inscriptions from Persis even incorporate the letters *br prs* (son of *pārsā*).⁵³ But if the Persis

kings tried to emulate their Achaemenid predecessors, they would have probably used Darius' motto in its entirety, for it is a constant feature of Iranian history that lofty titles, claims, and slogans, get debased with time, and are then used by lesser rulers who do not merit it. I therefore suggest that, while the scene to the left of the fire building established the *pārsā* claim of the Persis ruler, the standard to the right projected *Arya ciça* or the claim to be empowered by the Aryan *khvarenah*. Said standard, which is similar in shape to the one that the army of Darius III (r. 336-330BC) carries in the famous mosaic battle scene of the Naples Museum,⁵⁴ and to the Persepolis tile of fig. 24, was probably a replica of the main Achaemenid standard and one that embodied the Aryan *khvarenah*. This contention is justified by the presence of a bird, the *vareyna*, on top of the standard in some Persis coins (figs. 23).⁵⁵ The presence of the bird *vareyna* signalled that the *khvarenah* still resided with the standard.

			
Fig. 22 –Autophradates I by fire-temple with Ahura Mazdā above	Fig. 23-Vadfradad II, Ahura Mazdā and symbol of <i>Arya ciça</i>	Fig. 24- Reconstructed square tile (courtesy of S. Razmjou)	Fig. 25 –Shāpur I and Ahura Mazdā flanking a fire altar

The question then is: if the Sasanians also placed a fire altar on the reverse of their coinage and appeared themselves on its left side (fig. 25),⁵⁶ why didn't they continue the practice of the Persis kings of claiming the Aryan *ciça* or *khvarenah*? It's because, in the meantime, orthodox Zoroastrian priests had allocated the Aryan *khvarenah* to Zoroaster (*Yts* 19:57, 5:42), and it was therefore no more available to kings. As I have argued elsewhere, this must have necessarily occurred after the demise of the Achaemenids as no priest would have dared to do so while the King of Kings still ruled the Achaemenid Empire.⁵⁷ The disappearance of the standard on coinage may be in fact an indicator for when this shift in *khvarenah* allocation occurred.

Like the Shiite clergy who benefited from the demise of the Safavids and the chaotic situation of 18th-century Iran to establish their ascendancy, the Zoroastrian magi must have profited from the upheavals that afflicted the Iranian lands in the wake of Alexander's conquest to strengthen their religion, and empower their Prophet at the expense of kingship. The Sasanians who tried to conform to the newly strengthened Zoroastrianism had to use a different slogan. Hence the famous "*cihr as yazatān*" that still made use of the word *ciça/cihr*, but instead of claiming the *khvarenah* of the Aryan people, proclaimed empowerment through the support of the gods.

VIII. Ardashir-khwarrah

The *Nāma-yi Tansar*, which extols the virtues of Ardashir I (r. 226-42) relates that: "after Dārā, the Parthians each made a fire temple for themselves, without consideration for (the rites established by) previous kings; the Shāhanshāh (i.e., Ardashir) eliminated them, captured their fires and returned them to their original site."⁵⁸ It acknowledges that in placing a fire altar on the reverse of his coins, Ardashir was following a tradition established by the Achaemenids, and was reigniting the fire that the Parthians had dispersed. The *Tārīkh-i Ya`qūbī* further confirms that Ardashir built a "fire temple" in Ardashir-khwarrah.⁵⁹ Moreover, in the same way that Pasargadae was used for the enthronement of Achaemenid kings, the fire temple of Ardashir-khwarrah was where Sasanians were supposed to get consecrated as kings. Ṭabarī recounts that when the Sasanian generals wanted to put the young Yazdagird III (r. 632-51) on the throne, they took him to the fire temple of Ardashir and crowned him there.⁶⁰

In his detailed study of Fīrūzābād (formerly Ardashir-khwarrah), Dietrich Huff suggests that the fire temple mentioned by the sources must be the off-centre building, with four *ayvāns* and a central brick dome, known as the Takht-nishīn.⁶¹ I beg to differ and suggest that said fire edifice referred instead to the tower structure placed at the very centre of the circular city of Ardashir-khwarrah that he built (fig. 26). The reason being that the purpose of the fire edifice was not to worship fire therein, but to proclaim, in a most blazing way, the acquired *khvarenah* of Ardashir. If the city was called Ardashir-khwarrah, the imposing tower at its very centre must have been

the very embodiment of that *khvarenah*. In three successive passages, the *Kārnāmag* provides some insight about Ardashir's preoccupation with this notion: a) he hopes that the *khwarrah* of Irānshahr would help him, b) he then obtains the Kiyānian *khwarrah*, c) his Kiyānian *khwarrah* rose from the waters.⁶² Based on information provided by Ibn-i Balkhī and Istakhrī, and as Huff explains, Ardashir-khwarrah was actually built on marshlands partially covered by water.⁶³ As a result, water had to be constantly drained through canals.⁶⁴ On the other hand, the structure that Huff proposes for this tower shows a staircase on the inner contour leading to the top (fig. 27). In other words, the tower was built to have fire, as symbol of the king's *khvarenah*, shining from atop, and accessed by the inner staircase. It symbolized the emergence of the *khvarenah* from the waters, the very image that George Dumézil had once qualified as "fire rising from waters," which alluded to the release of the *khvarenah* that Apam Napāt had guarded under water.⁶⁵

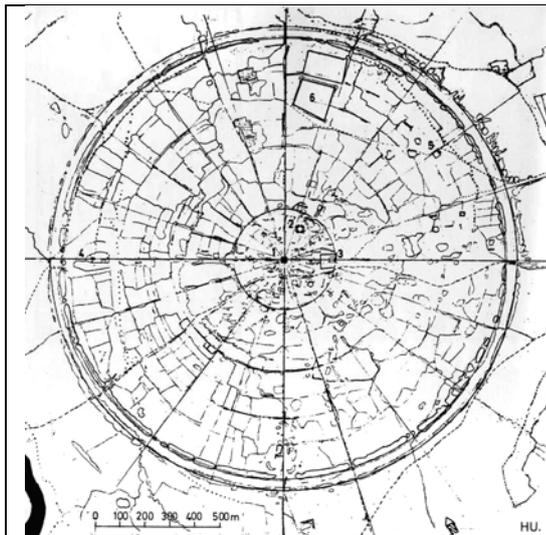


Fig. 26 – Circular layout of Ardashir-khwarrah with irrigational canals. (Huff 1998, with his kind permission)

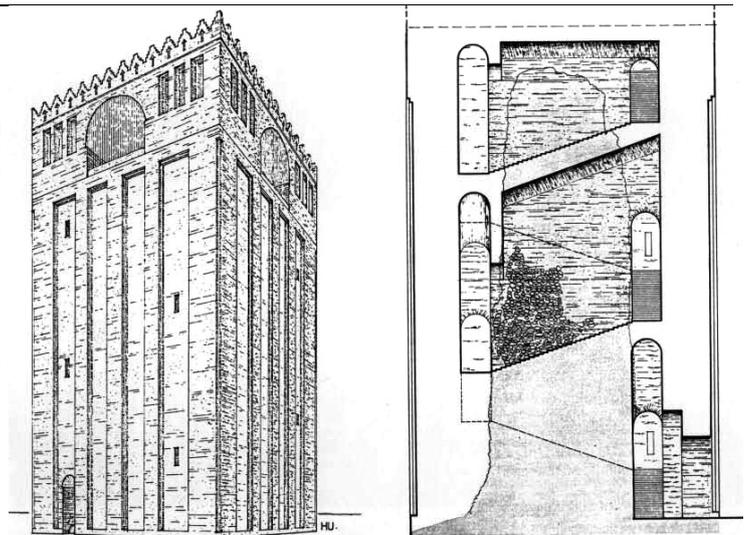


Fig. 27- Suggested structure of the Fire Tower at the centre of Ardashir-khwarrah. (Huff 1998, with his kind permission)

Whereas the *pārsās* of old were the keepers of the fire that they perhaps thought to represent the *khvarenah* of the Aryan nation, the Sasanians seem to have had an ambivalent attitude toward their own dynastic fire. The switch of terminology in the *Kārnāmag* is quite revelatory: Ardashir aims for the ultimate *khvarenah*, the *khwarrah* of Irānshahr (i.e. the Aryan *khvarenah*), but settles for the Kiyānian one, although in effect they are one and the same because, if it must rise

from the waters, it's precisely the one that Jamshīd had lost, and was then guarded by Apam Napāt under water. The subsequent pivotal role that Apam Napāt plays in the rock reliefs of Shāpur I, and his progenies, only confirms the Sasanians' implicit and systematic reference to the possession of the Aryan *khvarenah*, especially for those who had vanquished a foreign enemy.⁶⁶ The allocation of the Aryan *khvarenah* to Zoroaster necessitated the invention of a similar one for kings, hence the Kiyānian one. Not to offend Zoroastrian orthodoxy, the Sasanians may have referred to their *khvarenah* as Kiyānian although it had all the attributes of the Aryan one.

If Ardashir was consciously re-establishing the *pārsā* tradition of a central dynastic fire, the use of the word *cihr* in his slogan was also deliberate and followed the same tradition. The equivalence of light and *khvarenah* was never lost in the Persian tradition and that is why the celebrated thirteenth-century geographer Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī explains that Ardashir-khwarrah meant "light of Ardashir."⁶⁷ Ardashir had in fact asserted his possession of the *khvarenah* through the radiance (*cihr*) of his fire in Ardashir-khwarrah. Furthermore, the series of odd terms that have come to us through copies of geographical manuscripts in respect to this fire tower clearly show confusion about the association of its fire with a particular *khvarenah*. Indeed, Ibn-i Balkhī and Istakhrī state that the Arabs called it *ṭirbāl* (i.e. tall structure), but the Persians called it *Iran khwarrah* according to the former, and *Iran* or *Kiyā khwarrah* according to the latter.⁶⁸ Clearly, while the Arabs referred to it by its appearance, the Persians were referring to it by what it stood for, i.e. a tower that projected the ultimate *khvarenah*, characterized as either Iranian or Kiyānian.⁶⁹ By simultaneously referring to it as Iranian and Kiyānian *khwarrah*, Istakhrī shows how the two notions were equivalent in the Persian mind. Moreover, the numerous fire temples that an early Persian translation of Istakhrī qualifies as *bih-khwarrah* (of good *khwarrah*), confirms the direct association that Persians envisaged between fire, light and *khvarenah*.⁷⁰

In stark opposition to the amnesia theory advanced by P.O. Skjaervo, that the Sasanians had no clue as to what *ciça* meant for Darius and therefore created a meaning of their own for *cihr*,⁷¹ we can now see that Ardashir was fully aware of the implications of Darius' slogan, and had to alter it because of newly developed concepts within Zoroastrianism. His own version of kingly propaganda, however, incorporated the basic tenets of the Achaemenid kingly ideology. Darius had asserted (*DSf* 8-22) that Ahura Mazdā chose him as “a man” to be his deputy on earth; so did the kings of Persis who styled themselves as *frataraka* (i.e. deputies) of gods.⁷² In proclaiming to obtain their *cihr/khvarenah* from gods, the Sasanians were still mortals who claimed to reign by the power that gods conferred to them.

IX. Personal fire vs. fire temple

The difference between the motifs used in Cyrus' tomb and those for Darius and his progenies is quite telling. Whereas the latter, in keeping with their *pārsā* title, portray themselves next to the fire altar, Cyrus' tomb only displays a lotus and sunflower emblem as symbols of Mithra and Apam Napāt.⁷³ On the other hand, on the tomb of Artaxerxes II (r. 405-359 BC) above Persepolis, we can see that in addition to the traditional design of Naqsh-e Rostam tombs, we have a frieze of lions converging toward a symbol combining again the lotus and sunflower (fig. 21).⁷⁴ As the ruler who, despite his belief in Ahura Mazdā, sought the protection of Mithra and the aquatic deity Anāhitā (in lieu of Apam Napāt), it was only natural for him to reintroduce design elements that evoked these deities.

More importantly, the fire altars depicted on the tombs of Darius and his successors rest on a platform throne that has recently been convincingly argued to represent the transportable version of the Achaemenid throne, lifted by men and guided by “pilots” on its four corners.⁷⁵ As such, the fact that the fire altar stands on it—along with the king—indicates perhaps that this fire was to accompany the king in his movements. Conversely, the fire in the Ka'ba, a building referred to as *bun-khānak* (lit. fundamental house) by Kirdir,⁷⁶ was the fundamental one from which all other fires were derived. The fire altars depicted on the verso of Sasanian coins, which are

similar in design to the ones before the king on the Naqsh-e Rostam tombs, must have had a similar function. And since their fire was named after the king (e.g. “Fire of Ardashir” for those on the reverse of Ardashir I coins),⁷⁷ we can assume that the Achaemenid ones too represented the king’s personal fire, were named after him, and were extinguished after his death as reported by Diodorus of Sicily.⁷⁸

X. Pasargadae rehabilitated

Proponents of the “Liar Darius” theory have found much support in the flawed art-historical analysis of Pasargadae. Conjecturing that the Old Persian cuneiform script was invented by Darius—now rebuked by Vallat⁷⁹—they were ready to accept any convoluted argument that would suggest that both the reliefs and the inscriptions, which tied Cyrus to Achaemenes, were planted by Darius as misinformation. And so, one flawed argument bounced on another to describe Pasargadae as a monument of deceit. The theory now finds its consecration with the “Pasargadae” entry by Stronach and Gropnik in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.⁸⁰

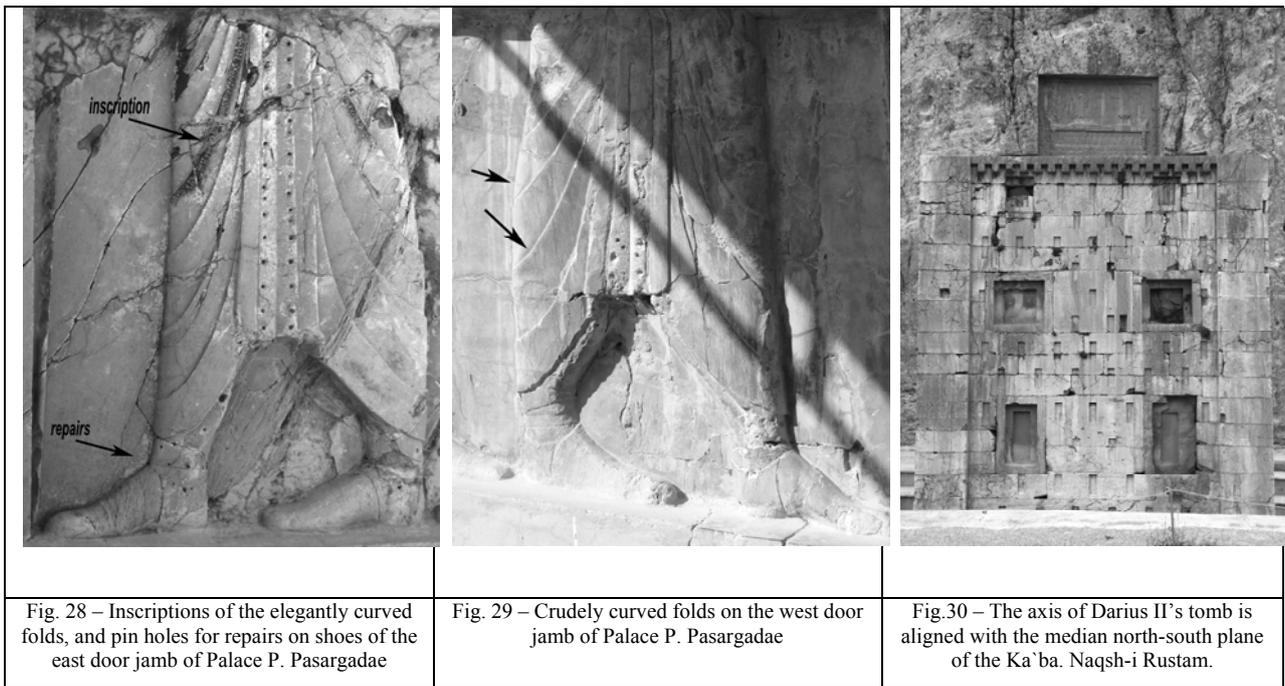
At the root of the problem is art historians’ tendency to rely on the “famous and familiar” as authentic, and “unfamiliar but resembling items” as copy or forgery. In a recent study of medieval painting I had noticed the same: a readiness to discard the magnificent altar piece of the Prado Museum, *The Fountain of Grace*, as a copy of the famous and more familiar Ghent Altarpiece by Jan Van Eyck, despite all evidences to the contrary.⁸¹ Nobody bothered to investigate the reverse possibility: that if we have similarities, the familiar can be a copy of the unfamiliar. Same is true for Pasargadae. Stronach and Gropnick posit: a) “that the stacked folds of the Persian robe depended on certain formal refinements in the rendering of drapery in Greece that only came into existence ‘about 540 and later’,” b) that the Palace P reliefs could logically post-date only the pioneer representations of Persian dress in the Bisutūn relief of c. 520.”

Because Darius’ monuments are more abundant, and thus more familiar, Darius is seen as the originator of the Achaemenid style, a belief reinforced in turn by the wrong assumption that he was the originator of the Old Persian script. At the very least, my comparison of Mithra’s crown

in Pasargadae with the Persepolis panel (figs. 2, 7) now proves that Darius did not invent all by himself but copied Cyrus in certain instances. Similarly, the familiarity with Greek sources has created a Greco-centric vision of art history that cannot conceive the possibility of Greeks being inspired from Iranian traditions, even though one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, is basically conceived after an Iranian tomb model. As Dietrich Huff has demonstrated, the palace tradition in Iran follows a continuous style, principles of which are evident in the pre-Achaemenid era as well as in the Safavid and Qājār era.⁸²

These arguments also show a fundamental unawareness about the richness of the Median artistic tradition, as items from the Kalmākara grotto tend to show. By disregarding “illegally” excavated material, archaeologists are shooting themselves in the foot since these grotto objects show an aesthetic sensitivity, and technical ability, far surpassing the standardized format of Achaemenid artworks.⁸³ With such a strong Median tradition at hand why would Cyrus need to emulate the Greeks?⁸⁴ And why wouldn't Cyrus' conquest of Asia Minor not be the reason for changes in the Greek style at 'about 540 and later'? On the other hand, as noted by Margaret Root, “not a shred of Attic pottery has been discovered at the entire site” of Persepolis to suggest a Persian infatuation with Greeks in that period.⁸⁵ If Persians wanted to emulate a certain monumental style, Babylon and Assyria were the empires that counted, not the Greek city states. Whereas Stronach and Gropnick assert that the Pasargadae style is “reminiscent of the Greek tendency to treat stone forms as organic, as well as the naturalistic rendering of human feet,” the feet in figs. 10, 28, 29 are clearly not “naturalistic,” but as stylized as any other Iranian sculpture and certainly less “naturalistic” than those of the neo-Babylonian seal of fig. 11.

A fundamental point to establish “forgery” is to find who the interlocutor was. One should try to find why Darius carved his presumed forgery on such an inconspicuous place (fig. 28) as on the border of the stacked folds of a robe and for who? Also, as the comparison of the two sides of the door jamb may quickly show (figs. 28, 29), the one with the inscription is finely carved but has numerous repairs, and the one opposite is cruder in execution and has no inscription.



Traditionally, the two sides are mirror reflections of each other, and since they are not in here, one is original and the other a replacement. But it is very difficult to decide which one of the two is older. Normally, the one with inscriptions should be the original—because of its numerous repairs—and the cruder one, a replacement; especially since the other door jambs (on the opposite end) also display the refined style. Either way, the existence of the two styles side by side shows how tenuous stylistic arguments can be.

More importantly, since the building surfaces were supposed to be all carved and/or painted, why would Cyrus leave so many empty places for Darius to fill with inscriptions? At first sight, a *CMa* inscription that reads: *I Cyrus, Achaemenid King*, over the now isolated symbol of Mithra (fig. 8a), may seem to claim godly status for the king. But such a claim doesn't make sense in the Iranian context. Darius, for instance, insisted that he was a man here on earth (*DSf* 8-22). With the intention to prove the *CMa* inscriptions as later additions, one can always produce imaginary scenarios, but absent a technical proof to the contrary, one must consider them as authentic. As a matter of fact, two arguments support such an outlook. Firstly, if Cyrus gathered the *pārsās* in Pasargadae/Pārsā-kadag, it made sense to remind them that he was a great

grandson of the Achaemenes who initiated this institution. Building this site did not mean that he adhered to the practices of the *pārsās*, but showed his respect for the beliefs of his kinsmen, similar to the respect he showed for the practitioners of other religions. Second, the formula that Cyrus uses recalls the one in Elamite inscriptions of 12th century BC, carved on an elaborate baked brick edifice now in the Louvre (fig. 31):

I, Shilhak-Inshushinak, son of Shutruk-Nahhunte, king of Anshān and Susa.

*Kutir Nahhunte had had made figures in baked brick and had decided "I shall erect them in the temple of Inshushinak" but could not do it since he died before (achieving it). I, placed (on the throne), I completed the exterior chapel by having supplemental brick figures made. I dedicated it to my god, Inshushinak. May the work that I have done be agreeable as offering.*⁸⁶

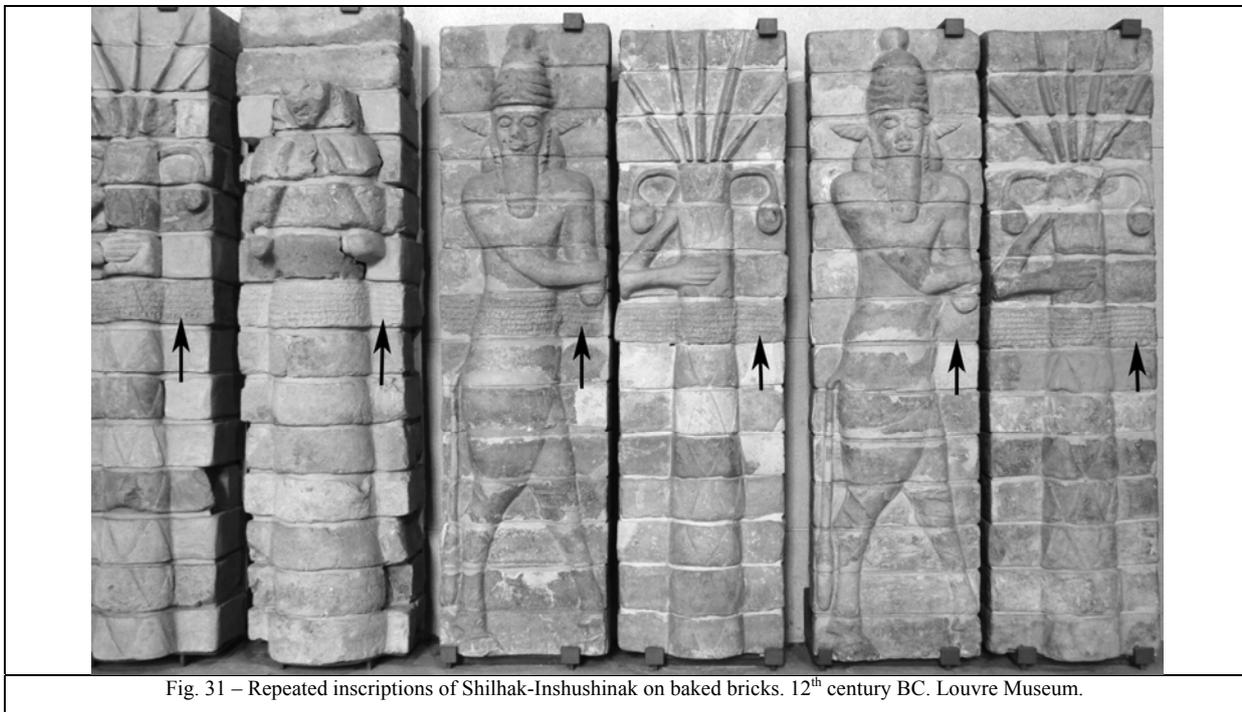


Fig. 31 – Repeated inscriptions of Shilhak-Inshushinak on baked bricks. 12th century BC. Louvre Museum.

Clearly, because the inscription is repeated on every chimera and palm tree, its main purpose is to advertise the name of the founder of the edifice. If Shilhak-Inshushinak had built the entire chapel himself, there would have been no other lines after the first one. Therefore, the *CMa* inscription is more akin to Shilhak-Inshushinak's first line with no other information to follow, for it was Cyrus' own building. The repeat pattern of the *CMa* inscription, on a number of columns (totaling perhaps 30)⁸⁷ as well as on the border of a robe, imitates the repeat pattern used by Shilhak-Inshushinak. It was the Elamite way to designate the founder of the edifice, without any intention of identifying nearby figures. They inscribed it on as many places as they

could. Obviously, the name of Shilhak-Inshushinak appearing on the bull chimera, as well as palm trees, was not meant to represent either of them! By the same token, the *CMA* above Mithra was just one of many inscriptions designed to tell the visitors who the founder was. It bore no direct relationship to the figure of Mithra.

The repeat pattern of the *CMA* inscriptions therefore vouches for an Elamite tradition, unfamiliar to Darius, or at least not to his liking. If the assumption is that he forged these inscriptions to advertise a fake common ancestry with Cyrus, he would have done the same in Persepolis and elsewhere, by writing the name of Achaemenes on every column and door jamb. He has not.

In any case, it is the word *pārsā* that explains the *raison d'être* of Pasargadae. Since it was the home of the *pārsās*, the Zindān monument—which is in the shape of the fire temples of the Persis kings as well as that of Ardashir-kwarrah—must have been the focal point of Pasargadae. It also gives added credence to Xenophon's assertion (Cyr. 8.1.23) that “for the first time the college of magi was instituted” under Cyrus. By its very name, Pasargadae was created to harbor this college of the magi (who were actually *pārsās*). But given Darius' animosity toward its predecessor and what he perceived as usurpation of a privilege that belonged to his own lineage, he must have decided to move the sacred fire of the Persians elsewhere, most probably to the Ka`ba of Zardusht in Naqsh-i Rostam. Indeed, the fact that the tomb façades of Darius and his successors depict them as fire officers vouches that the Ka`ba—down below—was where they exercised their function. And the last of these tombs, the one usually ascribed to Darius II (r. 423-05 BC), is strictly aligned with the axis of the Ka`ba in order to emphasize this relationship (fig. 30). Thereafter, the Zindān must have fallen in desuetude and perhaps that is why, Cyrus' tomb became the focal point of ceremonial activities in Pasargadae.

XI. Pārsā in Roman Mithraic societies

Among the many misconceptions that have afflicted Iranian studies in the past quarter of centuries is the idea that Roman Mithraic societies were home-grown and bore no relationship to Iranian beliefs or practices. The separation of the two is to the detriment of both, because it

obstructs the possibility of each benefiting from the other. For instance, the names of two grade holders, Heliodromos (6th grade) and Perses (5th grade), have remained a mystery because they cannot be explained within the Roman context. As I shall argue in my forthcoming book, Heliodromos is the Greek translation, or counterpart, of the Iranian rank of Mihr-astāt—the one who stood by Mithra's chariot, and who was responsible to relay his messages.⁸⁸ The latter part of this name has given us NP *ustād* (master), and the word *astandes* in Greek,⁸⁹ which by no mere coincidence, is translated as “courier,” “runner” or “messenger,” the same words used to describe Heliodromos. Be that as it may, our interpretation of the word *pārsā* as fire keeper can now explain Perses in the Roman context: he was the officer in charge of the fire, and one below Heliodromos who was closest to the Pater/Papa.⁹⁰ For the Greeks, as for us today, *pārsā* naturally meant Persian; hence the appellation Perses.

XII. Rewriting history

A logical construct is a powerful argument. Taqizadeh, Henning, Gershevitch, and Gnoli, had all perceived the value of the logical construct based on the “258 axiom,” which explained the otherwise unexplainable aspect of the Zoroastrian historical record that reduced the Parthian period by 266 years (see table 2).⁹¹ To counter this argument, Jean Kellens questioned the reliability of a number derived from texts that produced unrealistic reign periods of hundred years and beyond.⁹² I believe that a more pertinent question is: how could learned priests produce these numbers, when it was evident to all that life cannot be stretched that wide? The answer is: the priests who wrote it were not pursuing historical veracity but trying to produce religious propaganda, by aggrandizing friends and seeking *damnatio memoriae* for their enemies.⁹³ In so doing, they also had to contend with two types of time brackets already engrained in the Zoroastrian mythology. The first was the millenary division of Creation into four three-thousand years periods, and the second was the “258 axiom” that fixed the elapsed time between Zoroaster and Alexander. Our below analysis of their texts shall open a vista into their modus operandi, and will provide much support for the theories that we have proposed.

XI.1 The Bundahishn regnal list

For the 258 time bracket, the *Bundahishn* (XXXVI , 8) gives the following regnal years: Kay Gushtāsp, 120 years (30 years of which were prior to Zoroaster); Bahman son of Isfandyār, 112 years; Humāy-i Bahman-dukht, 30 years; Dārā-yi chihr-āzādān (‘who is Bahman’), 12 years; Dārā-yi Dārāyān, 14 years.⁹⁴ As expected, neither Cyrus nor Astyages appear in there. Perceived as enemies of the Religion they were scratched, along with all their ancestors. Also to be expected is the disappearance of the Artaxerxes because they reintroduced Mithra into the Achaemenid pantheon. The presence of Darius III (r. 336-30 BC) as Dārā-yi Dārāyān, irrespective of his religious beliefs, was necessary, since Alexander needed to have an adversary from whom he would wrestle the Persian throne. Also well known was the fact that, besides Darius III, there were other Dariuses. Thus, another Darius therein is Dārā-yi chihr-āzādān, who is immediately re-identified as Bahman, i.e. the one who reigned after Gushtāsp (Vishtāspa). Presumably, they both refer to Darius I, who is split in two because there were two other Dariuses before the last one. Bahman (Vohuman), however, is not a name but a qualifying adjective meaning “of good thought.” It fits the facts as we know them: Darius worshipped Ahura Mazdā but did not profess to be a Zoroastrian, nor did he ever mention the Prophet’s name. He is thus a man “of good thought” and not an enemy of the Religion.

Interestingly, Darius’ name is followed by “chihr-āzād-ān” the last two letters of which could be interpreted in two ways. First, as an affiliation suffix giving “Darius son of chihr-āzād,” a translation accepted by many.⁹⁵ Second, as an adjective indicator, making “chihr-āzād” an epithet of Darius. The latter must be the correct one, for we know no such a person, and this is what Ṭabarī and other post-Islam historians of Iranian descent understood.⁹⁶ We can then immediately guess that it must have some connection to the *Arya ciça* that Darius had introduced and was subsequently adopted by his successors. As the originator of this slogan he was marked by it, to the extent that it became his epithet: *chihr-Āryā*. The question then is: Why did it get transformed into *chihr-āzād*?

In a recent article, H.P. Frankfort and X. Tremblay explain a recurring pattern of name changes that are phonetically similar and have a common link. In Paris, for instance, “rue aux Oues” (an archaic pronunciation of Oies, i.e. geese) was transformed into the more comprehensible rue aux Ours (bears). A similar pattern can be seen in the name changes affecting Tehran in the wake of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.⁹⁷ I suggest that the change from *chihr-Āryā* to *chihr-āzād* followed the same model. Hampered by the assignment of the Aryan *khvarenah* to Zoroaster, the epithet that marked Darius had to be changed: *chihr-āzād* (of noble *khvarenah* and brilliance) was invented as the phonetically closest and yet meaningful substitute.

Of all the Achaemenid clan members, the only one who paid any attention to Zoroaster must have been Darius’ father, Vishtāspa. But he was not a king, and to aggrandize Zoroaster he had to be turned into a great king. Thus, the reign of Vishtāspa in these texts is an amalgam of many, including Cyrus and Cambyses on the lower side and some of Darius’ forefathers on the upper side. Nonetheless, some additional information that trickled down into chronicles, corroborates the fact that Vishtāspa and Zoroaster were contemporaries. Mas`udī, for instance, states that the father of Vishtāspa, i.e. Luhrāsp, was a contemporary of Nebuchadnezzar II.⁹⁸ It lacks precision but situates more or less Vishtāspa circa 550 BC. As for Birūnī, he tabulates the kings of Iran from Gayumarth until Vishtāspa, in the middle of whose reign he specifies that Zoroaster appeared, and thereafter counts 258 years until the year Alexander killed Darius III.⁹⁹

The most problematic aspect of the tabulated names is the fact that Bahman (alias Darius) is presented as grandson, and not the son, of Vishtāspa. But as the change in Darius’ epithet may suggest, the compilers of these tables were not without humour. In the *Shāhnāma*, the presumed father of Bahman, Isfandyār, is the hero who longed to become king but was sent eastward to fight the presumed rebellion of Rostam; he died in battle and therefore never reigned. In a way, it parallels the fate of the historical Vishtāspa, father of Darius, who was never king, but was sent eastward to quell a rebellion. It may be that in making a mighty king out of Vishtāspa, the compilers saw the necessity to recreate a father—who never reigned—for Darius. Hence

Isfandyār, who is presented as Bahman's father but has no regnal years allocated to him. The question then is: where did the name Isfandyār come from?

A similar name is related by Ctesias in relation to the story of the usurpation of the throne by the Magus Gaumāta prior to Darius' ascent to power.¹⁰⁰ Cambyses (r. 559-530 BC) had killed his brother Bardiya, before or while campaigning in Egypt, and a magus declaring to be the latter seized the throne and ruled for a while.¹⁰¹ Ctesias mentions that Sphendadates was the name of the usurper magus, whose Avestan counterpart is Spəntōdāta ("created by the holy"), itself a forerunner of Isfandyār. Whether it was his regnal name when ruling in lieu of Bardiya, or the latter's epithet does not matter. This is the name by which the usurper who should have not ruled is remembered. The name of the one "who should have not ruled" was ironically transposed on the one "who never ruled."

In full circle we are back to Darius' account, which in essence concords with Ctesias' account, as he talks about one usurper only, whereas Herodotus introduces a second persona by the name of Patizeites, as brother of the magus. As it has been suggested, *patizeites* is the Greek rendering of OP *pāti-xshāyaθiya*, i.e. viceroy or regent, and most probably a title that the magus held but Herodotus mistook as representing a second person.¹⁰² To usurp the throne, the magus must have held the highest rank in the absence of Cambyses, a rank akin to regency; otherwise the actual regent would have prevented the magus from taking power. Ctesias alludes to an ongoing feud between the magus and Bardiya, whom he names Tanyoxarces (OP **tanu-wazraka* "large bodied"). His name ties in with Herodotus' account of Bardiya who displayed much strength when pulling an exceptionally heavy Ethiopian bow.¹⁰³ It then stands to reason to cast the magus' usurpation within the broader context of the competing interests of the Median magi and the *pārsās*, with Cambyses siding with the former, and Bardiya sympathizing with the latter. To judge by the Megaphonia reaction, the competition between the two groups must have been highly antagonistic. If we then consider Sphendadates to be a title or epithet of the real Bardiya that the magus usurped as well, we may have a good reason to see Isfandyār's name within the

Zoroastrian chronology tables: He was a supporter of the *pārsā* clan who believed in the supremacy of Ahura Mazdā, and therefore, as the Pahlavi books confirm, a supporter of the Religion.¹⁰⁴

XI.2 The enigmatic queen Humāy

An enigmatic name within the *Bundahishn* chronological tables, Humāy-i Bahman-dukht, i.e. Humāy daughter of Bahman (alias Darius), needs elaboration. For the name Humāy, which is rendered as Amytis in Greek (from OP **Umati*—equivalent to Avestan *humaiti*—“having good thought”) is a major source of confusion as it can refer to four different women (Table 1):

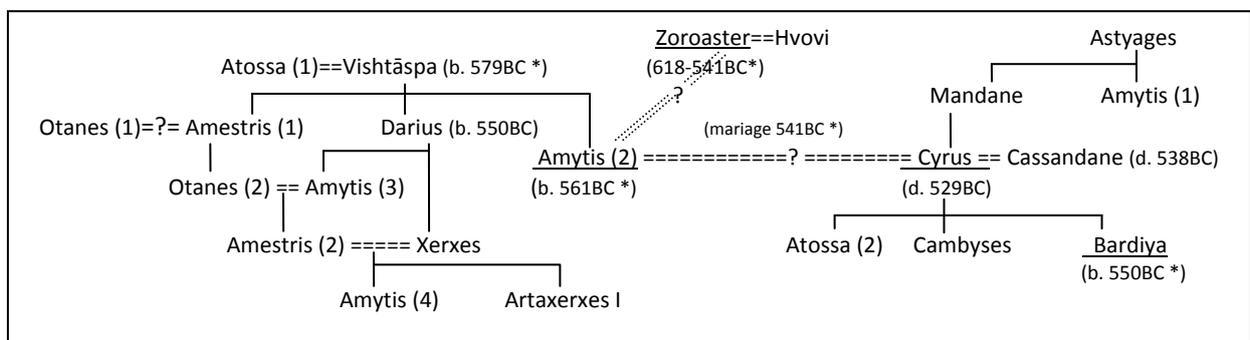


Table 1 – The Achaemenid women named Amytis according to the sources (? means one source only, * is a hypothetically calculated date). Since Darius’ father and grandfather were alive in 519 BC, Vishtāspa’s age on that year is estimated at 60, his father at 78.

The primary information is provided by Herodotus (VII, 61), who after describing the armour and equipment of the Persians of Darius’ army, mentions in passing that: “Their commander was Otanes, father of Xerxes’ wife and son of Amēstris.” This commander Otanes (2) is obviously not the elderly statesman Otanes (1), who led the conspiracy against Gaumata, was a contender to the throne, and got privileges that no other Persian had (Her. III.83). If Herodotus’ sentence is not clear, it’s because this Otanes (2) was the son of one Amēstris and the father of another one. The latter information is provided by Ctesias (fr. 13 §24) who says that “Xerxes married Amēstris,” the daughter of Otanes (or Onophas as Ctesias spells it), from whom he had a daughter called Amytis (4) named “after her grandmother.” This last information, in conjunction with Herodotus’ statement (V, 116) that a daughter of Darius was married to an Otanes, indicates that the wife of Otanes (2) was also named Amytis (3). As for the father of Otanes (2), Diodorus mentions that Otanes (spelled Anaphas) who was one of the Seven Conspirators, had a

successor by the same name.¹⁰⁵ We clearly have a confusing pattern of repeated names from one generation to the other. The identification of Humāy with Humaiti, however, unifies the *Bundahishn* list with that of Mas`udī and Ṭabarī who name her as Khumānī: because the latter spelling is a scribal mistake and the result of the transposition of one diacritical dot in the Arabic rendering of Humaiti: حُمَاتِي vs. خُمَانِي.¹⁰⁶ While much of the early post-Islam histories seem to be bewildered by the introduction of a fictitious woman king with multiple personalities, they nonetheless provide crucial information lacking in Ctesias: that Khumānī, alias Amytis, was the daughter of Vishtāspā.¹⁰⁷ Again, it stands to reason that if Vishtāspa was sympathetic to Zoroaster, one of his children, namely Amytis (2), would have developed a special relationship with the Prophet. This would then explain the odd presence of a fictitious queen among the Achaemenid list of rulers. For, the priests who unabashedly portrayed Vishtāspa as king, carried their scheme one notch further, by squeezing Amytis (2) into the same list.

Such a supposition finds support in Ctesias' account about Amytis (1) whom he introduces as daughter of Astyages and the wife of a certain Spitamas subsequently killed by Cyrus. She is then taken by Cyrus, and said to be the mother of Tanyoxarces/Bardiya, and an opponent of the magus Sphendadates; she drinks poison out of despair for the loss of her son and Cambyses refusal to punish his murderer.¹⁰⁸ It is as garbled an account as the later Arabic texts, but one may still conjure that Amytis (2)/Khumānī was close to a Spitamas, whose name alludes to Zoroaster Spitama, supposedly eliminated by Cyrus. Her marriage to Cyrus, should not come as a surprise because the latter must have engaged in matrimonial alliances with the main line of the Achaemenids. This would then explain not only Darius' privileged position with Cyrus and Cambyses, but his closeness to Otanes, as they would be both brothers-in-law to Cyrus. The closeness of Amytis (2) to Zoroaster, however, is corroborated by the Avesta itself (*Yt* 13.139), where it names Humaiti as the person to be worshipped right after her own mother Atossa (1) (Hutaosā), and following Zoroaster's original wife, Hvovi.

It's hard to believe that Ctesias would have invented, for Cyrus, a wife by the name of Amytis, and would emphasize, concurrently, that she favored Bardiya. Given that the latter's real mother, Cassandane, died circa 538BC,¹⁰⁹ one can very well imagine that another wife of Cyrus took the young boy under her wings, and became a second mother to him. She who had been under the spell of Zoroaster, in turn influenced the young Bardiya. The scenario is even more appealing since it ties well with the fact that the names of both Amytis (2) and Bardiya/Isfandyār appear in the *Bundahishn* list, as supporters of Zoroaster. It also adds more credibility to our contention that the antagonism between Gaumata and Bardiya was perhaps reflective of the rift between the Median magi and the *pārsās*. In addition, Ctesias' remark that Bardiya was "put to death by being forced to drink bull's blood" refers to a practice dear to the Mithraic magi, and one that Zoroaster abhorred. It was a forerunner to the violent rift that led to Magophonia.

Indeed, the animosity between the magi and the *pārsās* did not develop overnight: it must have been simmering for some time. Therefore, one must assume that toward the end of Astyages' reign, the conflict between the Median magi and the Ahura-Mazdā-worshipping *pārsās* got so intense that the Median king evicted their chief proponent, i.e. Zoroaster. Cyrus may have ridden this wave of unrest to victory over Astyages, and later on married Amytis (2) in order to reconcile the two antagonistic factions. He probably married her right after Zoroaster's death in 541 BC, at the age of 77. For Ctesias though, Cyrus must have murdered Zoroaster in order to marry his wife. This comes on top of another confusion caused by the fact that Astyages and Vishtāspa had both a daughter named Amytis. Ctesias emphasizes (fr. 13 §8), however, that Amytis (2) had two sons from Zoroaster whom Cyrus appointed as satraps at a very young age, "bidding them to obey their mother in everything." She thus exercised much authority; which probably aroused the animosity of Cambyses. Rather than committing suicide she may have been poisoned by him. The Magophonia killings, therefore, seem to have been in reaction to the murders of Amytis (2), Bardya, and perhaps the two sons of Zoroaster.

XI.3 Forging a tale out of confusion

When history writers are confused by a piece of information, they usually seek supplemental information or try to embed it in a familiar tale. In the case of Amytis/Humaiti, for instance, Ṭabarī first introduces her as a daughter of Vishtāspa, with no additional comment. It's an information that he must have received through the Zoroastrian tradition built around Vishtāspa. But later on, he situates her thirty-year reign right after Artaxerxes I (r. 465-24 BC), because of the name of his sister, Amytis (4), that was transmitted through the Jewish tradition.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, the author of the *Bundahishn*, who seems to have known that Darius had a daughter by the name of Amytis, presents this queen as the daughter of Bahman (alias Darius) and therefore places her right after him. Birūnī names her as daughter of "Ardashir son of Bahman."¹¹¹ Since the name Xerxes had no equivalent in Sasanian times, while Artaxerxes became Ardashir, it seems that later historians amalgamated the two, and used the name Ardashir (alias Artaxerxes) also for Xerxes. Hence, Birūnī's Humāy refers to Amytis (4), whose reign is situated after the son of Bahman/Darius, i.e. Xerxes. As for Ibn-i Athīr who states that Khumānī was both the mother and sister of Dārā (Darius), he was obviously in possession of a list very much like our Table 1.¹¹²

More generally, the reign of a woman seemed so odd that later historians felt compelled to explain it with an elaborate tale. The model they had was that of the Sasanian Burān (r. 630-31), a queen who truly reigned. Thus, many particularities of her reign are transposed on Amytis/Humāy/ Khumānī, including Dīnāvarī's scornful remark about the situation leading to Burān's reign: that "Iranians had no man left to rule,"¹¹³ which is repeated verbatim for Humāy in the *Bundahishn* (XXXIII.13). In this game of rewriting of history, however, what is certain is that the only reason for allocating regnal years to a certain Amytis was that Zoroastrian priests perceived her as a dedicated supporter of Zoroaster.

Whereas each of the preceding explanations may seem tenuous on its own, as a group they show a pattern that clearly rules out fantasy or haphazard alteration of facts. They were all performed

long after the demise of Darius, by Zoroastrian priests trying to enhance the prestige of their Prophet *vis à vis* kings.

XIII. The “258 axiom” revisited

In light of the above, we may go back and revisit Taqizadeh’s explanation of the 258 axiom—subsequently expanded by Gershevitch—because it rested on the assumption that the Sasanian magi “imagined the Seleucid era” as the “era of Zoroaster.”¹¹⁴

Year 538	=	258 years	+	14 years	+	266 years
Ardashir’s ascension date in the Seleucid calendar (equated with the Zoroaster era)		Between Zoroaster and the death of Darius III		Reign of Alexander		Reduced Arsacid rule

Table 2 - Equation showing how Parthian rule was decreased as per the 258 Axiom

For Zoroastrian priests, who so blatantly eliminated their enemies from the face of history and replaced them with fictitious kings, and who allocated the Aryan *khvarenah* to Zoroaster, the epoch year of the Seleucid era (i.e. the year 312 B.C.), against which the most important events of the previous five centuries were measured, constituted yet another trophy to be brought into the Zoroastrian realm. With the Seleucids long gone, and the Arsacids no longer around, the beginning of known history was simply equated with the day Zoroaster proclaimed his religion. It was a deliberate decision in order to uplift Zoroaster’s glory rather than a decision stemming from confusion or oblivion. And whereas the elimination of certain kings within the 258 years time bracket had elongated the reign of others, the adoption of the Seleucid era as Zoroaster’s, in combination with the dogmatic 258-years time bracket, necessitated the shortening or elimination of reigns in the post-Alexander era. Hence the reduced Arsacid rule of 266 years.

XIV. Legitimacy vs. forgery

Like historians of past, modern historians have also sought to explain confusing information by wrapping it into a familiar tale. Thus, forgery is often claimed to explain ill-understood situations. But with a claim of forgery must come the burden of proof, and the bar must be set very high when it pertains to an ancient document, for one has no right to eliminate scarce information by a frivolous claim. The forgery claim about the Pasargadae inscriptions rose out

of incomprehension of its very function as the dwelling of the *pārsās*, and of the Elamite practice of inscribing the founder's name in multitudes. It was compounded by the mistaken belief in Darius inventing the Old Persian cuneiform script, confusion about texts, and wrong methodology in the art-historical analysis.

The forgery tale became so attractive that technical analysis was avoided, and historical analysis was even eschewed to fit the tale: if Herodotus actually states (III.75) that Cyrus descended from Achaemenes, he cannot be trusted; neither can be Cyrus' own inscriptions. Instead, Achaemenes is labelled by Pierre Briant as a "wholly invented" ancestor and fictitious dynasty founder.¹¹⁵

But whoever forged his lineage among the kings of Iran, if not elsewhere, did it by claiming descent from a known and famous figure and not a fictitious one. It also seems odd that in a tribal society where clans are generally identified by the name of a powerful ancestor, Darius and his progenies would cling to a fictitious ancestor. Darius had gained such fame that for his progenies, claiming descent from him alone would have surely sufficed; they did not need to repeat a false claim.

With strong belief in the "Liar Darius" theory, documents proving the contrary, such as the two gold plaques in the name of Darius' forefathers, were simply labelled as suspect and unworthy of consideration.¹¹⁶ Said plaques bear the name of Darius' grandfather and great grandfather, Arsames and Ariaramnes, who declare to be: ... *a great king, King of Kings, Pārsā King (Amh and AsH)*. They were found in the 1920s, at a time when forgers didn't have access to knowledge permitting the creation of such an inscription. No technical or epigraphic analysis has ever been conducted to prove them fake. Doubts were raised about the inscriptions because, unlike other Achaemenid inscriptions, they do not say *xšayaθiya pārsaiy* (King in Persia) but *xšayaθiya pārsā/pārsa*, literally Pārsā King. These qualifications are translated as "Persian King" by Pierre Lecoq and "King (in) Persia" by Reverend Sharp.¹¹⁷ But the *pārsā* therein cannot be translated as Persian, for it does not make sense to have, after the lofty title of King of Kings, a lesser qualifying term such as Persian King or King in Persia. What we have, instead, is

an allusion to a second role of the King, his responsibility as *pārsā*, or keeper of the sacred fire. It was a title as prestigious, if not more, than his title of King of Kings. It also militates for the genuineness of the plates rather the other way around.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Kellens suggests that the name Achaemenes meant “the one who thought (the fire) was his friend.”¹¹⁹ If true, we have solid support for an almost complete line of *pārsās* from Achaemenes to Darius. Far from being a fictitious character, Achaemenes must have been the one who established the prominence of his clan, to the extent that at Pasargadae, Cyrus saw it necessary to remind his *pārsā* constituency that he was one of Achaemenes’ descendents.

If Darius had lied about Bardiya, or his ancestry, no lesser persons than his wives Atossa and Parmys, who were Bardiya’s sister and daughter, would have known that, and would have exposed him at one point or another. What’s more, Darius’ marriage to them is often presented as his only succession right to Cyrus’ throne. But if that was a sufficient condition, then Gaumata who had married Atossa, would have enjoyed the necessary legitimacy to carry on. He obviously didn’t.

More importantly, the early rebellions against Darius are considered as proof of his illegitimacy.¹²⁰ And yet, what is astounding in the historical narratives is the fact that so many army commanders deemed him legitimate enough to fight the rebels, on his behalf and *far away* from him. His legitimacy, as perceived by the Conspirators, is one thing, and for the army commanders, is another. For the former, his descent from the main line of the Achaemenids, i.e., the *pārsā* line, was perhaps sufficient. For the latter, however, he must have been recognized as a worthy commander as well as part of the inner circle of Cyrus’ family. Cyrus’ marriage to Darius’ sister had opened the doors to the inner circle (see Table 1), and Darius’ past positions as quiver-bearer of Cyrus and lance-bearer of Cambyses had given him impeccable credentials.¹²¹ This explains why among the Conspirators, it was the young Darius who was elected king. Indeed he had a legitimacy that no other had: he belonged to the paramount Achaemenid line, was *pārsa* son of *pārsa*, a warrior, and a close member of Cyrus’ family.

XV. Of kings and priests

Xavier Tremblay has pointed out to me two odd aspects of the Avesta: 1) unlike all other priests of the Iranian world, which are called *magu*, the Avestan priest is called *aθravan*; 2) despite the fact that the word “king” is derived, in all Iranian languages, from either the root *xšā* (NP *Shāh*) or *rāz* (Old Ind. *Rājā*), no such word exists in the Avesta; we have instead the odd title of *daiṅhu.paiti* or nation chief.¹²²

Since the magi were so reviled by Magophonia, Zoroastrian priests couldn't be called *magu*. Nor could they be called *pārsā*, which had become a kingly epithet. They therefore settled for an equivalent term, *aθravan* (fire keeper), in lieu of the *pārsā* who stood by the fire and shared the same belief in Ahura Mazdā. The choice of this word, rather than *magu*, indicates that it was a compromise and adopted after the advent of the Achaemenids. Because artificial solutions never last, *magu* came back when Magophonia vanished after the demise of the Achaemenids.

As for *daiṅhu.paiti*, it was deliberately used to downgrade kings by following an existing tradition. In the new world order of Zoroastrianism, it was preferable not to use lofty titles such as King (*xšā*) or “King of Kings” lest they would overshadow their Prophet. *Daiṅhu.paiti* was derived from a tradition that went back in time, probably to the name of the supposed founder of the Median dynasty, Deioces. For, in the same period, we also had a Mannean leader named Daiaukku—imprisoned by the Assyrians.¹²³ And since Deioces' name is spelled *dahiyu-ukka* in Elamite, the first part of which is the same as OP *dahyu* (nation),¹²⁴ we must be dealing with a word that was synonymous with *daiṅhu.paiti*, and was applied to Median and Mannean kings alike. It's important to note that Media was not a homogeneous clan of Iranians but a confederacy with an Iranian elite at the top, but steeped in Elamite culture, and with names of mixed origins.¹²⁵ Thus, *daiṅhu.paiti* is the Avestan version of *dahiyu-ukka*, the latter part of which is derived from the Elamite *uk-ku* (head).¹²⁶ They all mean nation chief or group leader. Interestingly, Vishtāspa is qualified as *dahibed* in *Denkard* VIII,¹²⁷ and as *kavi* in Zoroaster's Gāthās. The *dahibed* appellation followed Vishtāspa's false promotion to kingship by

Zoroastrian priests, while *kavi* reflected his true function as *pārsā*. As a word, *kavi* derives from an Indo-Iranian root that also gave the Vedic *kavi* (seer, sacrificer, hymn composer), and must have been used as a generic term to designate priests and shamans, but not kings. The priestly connotation of *kavi* is corroborated by Y.46.11, in which the *kavis* gang up as enemies of Zoroaster. Clearly, there was no multitude of kings in Zoroaster's community to attack him. Zoroaster appropriately applied it to Vishtāspa, who was *pārsā* but not king. He used an archaic term in the archaistic language of the Gathas. Later on, it was extended to the *pārsā* line of the Achaemenids, and eventually, came to encompass all members of the House of Achaemenes. The Kavis/Kiyāns are therefore no other than the Achaemenids, and the Kiyānid *khvarenah* was meant to designate their *khvarenah*, supposedly distinct from the Aryan *khvarenah*.

The Avesta, is thus permeated with Median and Elamite terminology, and its Gathic core reflects Achaemenid history. They all loudly negate the 1000 BC dating of its text.

XVI. The bugbears

In his passionate 1995 defence of the "258 axiom," Ilya Gershevitch qualified as "bugbears" the ideas whose "growls" impeded the understanding of Zoroastrianism and its development.¹²⁸ It seems that, since then, many more have joined the chorus to obstruct our understanding of Iranian history. The most harmful is the renewed vigour in the idea that Zoroaster lived circa 1000 years BC. A close second is the wrong translation of *ciθra/ciça/cihr*. As I have tried to explain, both matters have their roots in the 6th century BC and are interrelated.

The words *ciθra/ciça/cihr* not only play a pivotal role in Iranian kingly ideology, but act as the primary gage for the good and bad in Zoroastrian religious texts. As long as scholars insist on the wrong meanings of old, their translations will inevitably be flawed. Almut Hintze's recent translation of Yt 13:89 is yet another example. She translates *ciθrem* as "offspring" to obtain: "(Zarathustra,) who (was) the first to put to flight the (offspring) coming from the evil breed of both *daevas* and mortals."¹²⁹ To me, there are two major problems in such a translation: a) one of common sense: If Zoroaster wanted to eradicate evil why did he attack the offspring and not

the root itself, for as long as the *daevas/daivas* and evil men are alive they can procreate indefinitely; b) one of logic: Even if one believes that *ciθra* meant “lineage, origin or seed” as she posits in her preamble, it baffles me to see that said meaning is turned on its head. How can “origin” suddenly become “offspring”, and how can the generator become the generated? The obstinacy to extract some kind of meaning based on “nature, origin, or seed” can only lead to incongruent translations.

Similarly, the dogmatic belief in a Zoroaster that lived in very ancient times and within a pastoral surrounding can push to wrong translations. I had previously criticized P.O. Skjaervo’s translation of the very *Yt* 13:95 (that was my launching pad into these studies):

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

*(iḏa apam * napā sūrō fraḏāt ...) Here the strong Scion of the Waters shall further all that is foremost of the lands, and he shall restrain those that are in commotion.’¹³⁰*

He not only opted for “lands” and “commotion” in lieu of “nations” and “rebellion”, but he also broke the symmetry of the two parts, by accepting the manuscript text as is, and not filling in the missing *apam* that I have marked with an asterisk. I had contended that the rhythmic punctuation of this narrative text—with *iḏa apam* at the beginning of each sentence—required the reintroduction of the missing *apam*, because scribes who are confronted with a repeat word, or grouping of letters, tend to suppress one of them.¹³¹ No sooner had I written this that I stumbled on a 16th century document, which vividly illustrated my contention. In a manuscript penned by one of the greatest calligraphers of the Islamic lands, `Allā’al-dīn-i Tabrīzī, the text talks about the predicament of man in a series of sentences each punctuated at the beginning with the word “if” (*agar*). They all follow the formula: “if man does ..., it will be said that...” (fig. 32).¹³²

Four of the sentences therein start with *agar* (marked by circles), but in a fifth one (highlighted by a rectangle), two letters are missing. Because *agar* (spelled *a-g-r*) was to be followed by a word beginning with the two letters *g-r*, the scribe inadvertently dropped the second one.¹³³ This example demonstrates a few points. First, that the dropping of a repeat word or group of letters

was a common error, one that even a renowned calligrapher such as `Allā`al-dīn could not avoid. Second, that context is as important as words for translation. Thus, scribal mistakes need to be corrected, as we have done it in respect to the transmitted texts of Ṭabarī, Mas`udī, Ibn-i Balkhī and Istakhrī. Third, that the continuity in expression modalities (as the repeat pattern to punctuate the beginning of a sentence) is a staple of the Persian culture. Therefore one cannot remain compartmentalized in time, but must be able to check the viability of one's arguments over extended periods of time. If one remains in the hermetically closed world of philology, then one can build error upon error, with no possibility of verification.

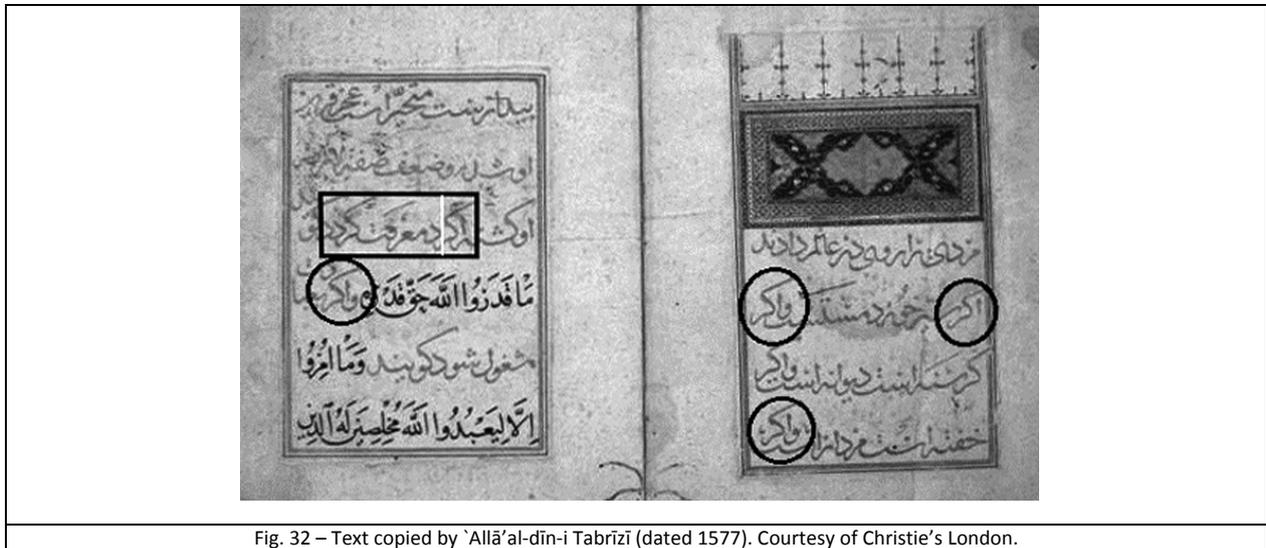


Fig. 32 – Text copied by `Allā`al-dīn-i Tabrīzī (dated 1577). Courtesy of Christie's London.

XVII. Tabulating the evolution of Zoroastrianism

As the staunchest proponent of an early date for Zoroastrianism, Jean Kellens' latest insight on the development of the Avesta is now available through the proceedings of his 2010-2011 courses at the Collège de France. His views are summarized in the Table 3. The predicament of a philological approach is that such tabulation only creates a relative order that floats in time and must be anchored to some historically meaningful event in order to assess its starting point. There is simply no philological method to measure the time elapsed between the categories produced in the above table. But even if we accept the evolutionary process as presented in the first two columns, we can see that Kellens' only historical anchoring to a pre-Achaemenid point of reference lies in a correspondence that he tries to establish between what he terms as "Recent

Avestic” and Median onomastics. In fact his sole concrete argument for the latter is to suggest that the name of the Median king Phraortes was derived from *fravashi*, a concept that he believes to have emanated from the Avesta.¹³⁴ To me, it’s a futile effort, for even if the linguistic derivation proves to be correct, the idea that the Avesta generated the concept of *fravashi*, is like saying that it also generated the tribal concept of the *khvarenah*.¹³⁵ As the wandering soul of ancient warriors, the *fravashi* is certainly not a religious concept, but most probably a tribal one.¹³⁶ In Farvardin Yasht, Ahura Mazdā is in need of the *khvarenah* of the *fravashis* of the Righteous to achieve various functions such as supporting Anāhitā (*Yt* 13.4) or the Earth (*Yt* 13.9).¹³⁷ These stanzas not only link the *khvarenah* and the *fravashis* together, but clearly present them as long-existing entities that brought assistance to Ahura Mazdā for the creation and protection of the waters and the earth. But no matter how the concept of *fravashi* is twisted to make it Zoroastrian,¹³⁸ the fact is that reliance on this sole tenuous argument, to establish a pre-7th century BC date for Zoroaster and the Avesta, is symptomatic of desperation and paucity of arguments.

<i>Kellens</i>			<i>Soudavar</i>
Linguistic level	Evolution of the corpus	Historical correspondence	Historical correspondence
Old Avestic	Two traditions: Gāthās, Yasna Haptanḥāiti		Zoroaster living in 1 st half of 6 th century BC: per 258 Axiom, Bīrūnī per <i>Yts</i> 13:94-95. Astyages labeled as snake-man Linkage to Vishtāspa and Humaiti <i>aθravan</i> in lieu of <i>magu</i> Vishtāspa as <i>daijhu.paiti</i> and <i>kavi</i>
Middle Avestic	1 st exegesis: the two traditions combined		Development of the Zoroastrian calendar under the Achaemenids
Recent Avestic	2 nd exegesis: the Ages of the World	VIII-VII century: Iranian proto-history Median onomastics	2 nd cent BC - 1 st cent AD: Allocation of Aryan <i>khvarenah</i> to Zoroaster
	3 rd exegesis: the Grand Ritual	522 : Iranian history Achaemenid onomastics Sedentary fire, goddess Mizduši	2 nd – 3 rd century AD: Creation of the Kiyānian <i>khvarenah</i>

Table 3 – Anchoring Avestan relative chronology (first 2 columns) to historical events

In consideration of our conclusion about Zoroaster being a contemporary of Darius’ father, and the Kiyānian *khvarenah* introduced sometime in between the demise of the kings of Persis and the rise of the Sasanians, the first two columns must slide down to cover a time scale starting in

early 6th century BC and ending in 3rd century AD, as presented in the fourth column above. As a result, Mary Boyce's remark that the Zoroastrian calendar was conceived in late Achaemenid period falls into its right place.¹³⁹ By contrast, what the proponents of a circa-1000 BC-conceived Zoroastrianism cannot explain is why Darius was still using a non-Zoroastrian calendar five centuries later, and why its seventh month was named *bayayadish* (i.e. god-worship) in which *baya* implicitly referred to Mithra, and thus made him—and not Ahura Mazda—the god *par excellence* of that calendar?¹⁴⁰ To treat this calendar as inconsequential, and merely reflecting an agricultural timetable, is like treating coins as mere commercial instruments. Beside their utilitarian aspect, they were both political instruments that reflected kingly ideology. And that is why, upon ascending the throne, the Sasanian Ardashir I modified both the pattern of his coinage as well as the basis of his calendar.

XVIII. Conclusion

As Gershevitch had emphasized, there is no precision in evaluating the age of a language through philology.¹⁴¹ Linguistics can only establish a relativity that floats in time and must be anchored down at some point to a historical event. To understand the evolution of the Avesta, one must be cognizant of the existing tensions between the Median magi and the desires of Zoroastrian priests trying to establish the supremacy of their religion. To think of Zoroastrianism as a monolithic religion emanating from the teachings of a single prophet, is like to forget the role of active apostles such as St Paul, and the political nature of successive ecumenical councils, in shaping Christianity as we know it today. Politics played a major role in shaping the Avesta, which in turn affected subsequent Iranian politics. Thus, Zoroastrian priests, seeking to honour their Prophet in the highest terms, made him the possessor of the Aryan *khvarenah* after the demise of the Achaemenids. In the same vein, the fall of the mighty Assyrians was projected as an event caused by the auspicious birth of Zoroaster, and the epoch year of the well-established Seleucid era was reinterpreted as the year of Zoroaster's birth.

The fact that later Zoroastrian priests were designated by *magu* and *mubad*, instead of *aθravan* of the holy Avesta, can only be explained in terms of an artificial appellation that Zoroaster himself did not use, but the authors of the *Yashts* adopted in reaction to Magophonia on the one hand, and in imitation of the *pārsā* designation of Achaemenid kings, on the other. If later priests were not called *aθravan*, it's because it was an artifice that served its purpose during the Achaemenid period and was no longer useful afterwards.

One cannot read the Avesta and not be shocked by the unnecessary redundancy of the “Mazdā-created” label for so many entities. As I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere, this repetition was symptomatic of the reallocation to Ahura Mazdā of attributes previously characterizing other deities.¹⁴² In particular, the oft-repeated “Mazdā-created” label for the *khvarenah* and the waters came in reaction to their prior attachment to Mithra and Apam Napāt. The shift of power from these two deities to Ahura Mazdā was essentially a political necessity for the transition from a Median kingly ideology to an Achaemenid one. Therefore, *Yts* 13:94-95 as the reflection of Median ideology, the animosity that Darius expressed towards its predecessors, and Darius’ reformulation of the *khvarenah* concept with its emphasis on *ciça*, and the appearance of the Kiyānian *khvarenah* in competition with the Aryan *khvarenah*, and the use of the epithet *kavi* for the Achaemenids, are all necessary elements that help situate in time the mutations of the Avesta. Whereas Kellens suggests that Darius forged his genealogy by modelling his ancestry according to names found in the Avesta,¹⁴³ it now seems that the opposite is true. What Kellens perceives as the mythical kings of Iran is in fact the garbled product of Zoroastrian priests’ manipulation of ancient Iranian history. And therein lies the problem; for as long as philologists think of the Avesta as an immutable text that regulated every aspect of Iranian thought, they would never be able to understand its true nature. Rather than the Achaemenids trying to conform to its precepts, it was the Avestan priests who opportunistically modified its content to shift the balance of power from kingship to priesthood.

A sound theory must be able to stand the test of time in confronting new evidence. Since I first realized the crucial importance of *Yts* 13:94-95 for determining the birth date of Zoroaster—as well as Median kingly ideology—I have been able to cumulate much corroborating evidence, and build layer upon layer to allow further progress. An unsound theory would have unravelled by now, or stagnated at best. It has not. What's more, each new layer has not only revealed hidden facets of Iranian history and religion, but has also added coherence to the whole structure. Coherence is in fact what differentiates our views from adverse theories.

I dare say now that dissociating Zoroaster's birth date from *Yts* 13:94-95 and pushing him into the stratosphere of the second millennium BC is an act of obstructionism, akin to what Zoroastrian priests did to the memory of Cyrus. More importantly, it shrouds Zoroaster's monotheistic vision of Ahura Mazdā, and his “spiritual esoterism,”¹⁴⁴ in all the encumbrances that political-minded priests added to the Avesta.

Abolala Soudavar
Houston TX, USA
aas@soudavar.com

Appendix I

Among the misconceptions that is about to become accepted fact through repetition is the attribution of a certain type of Lydian coins (known as “Croeseids”) to Croesus' reign (r. 595-546BC), even though there was a long tradition to consider them as Achaemenid issues. It was first proposed by Nicholas Cahill and John Kroll in 2005, and now reiterated as fact in a new publication on Lydia. Their original analysis was prompted by the discovery of such coins on a body buried under the rubbles of a burned and collapsed structure on the outskirts of Sardis. The aim of the study was to choose between two possibilities: a) Cyrus' occupation of Sardis in 546 BC, b) the burning of Sardis in 499 BC by Greek rebels. Somehow they preferred the latter, based on a number of “facts” that warrant no such a conclusion:

1- Their primary technical analysis is carbon dating of wood pieces found in the rubbles. The imprecision inherent to carbon dating notwithstanding, the very table that Cahill and Kroll rely on, unequivocally puts the two possibilities on equal footing (%90.2 probability each).¹⁴⁵

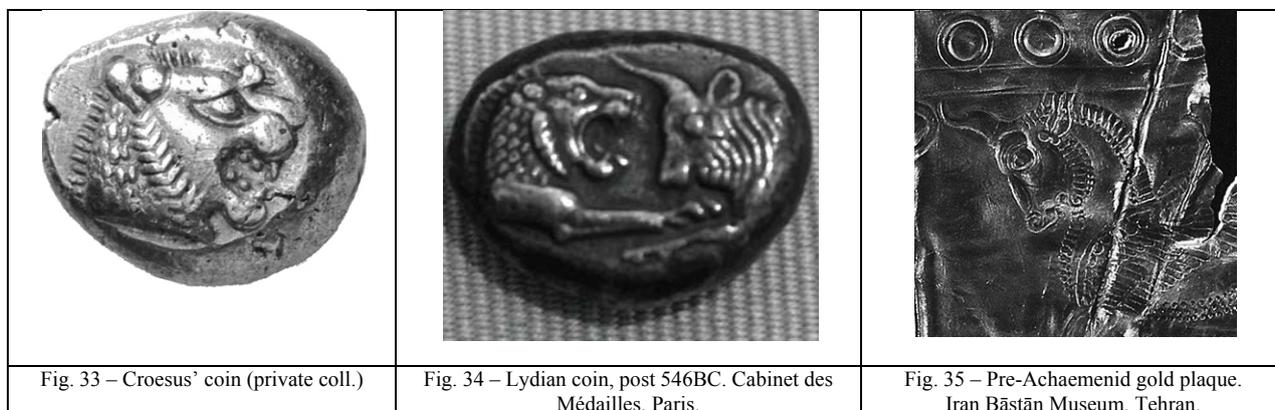
2- Their main argument, that no item datable to post 550 BC was found in the debris, rests on a dating of Greek vases that, as they avow themselves, is contested by some scholars.

3- The body with coins was found within a recess in the fortified wall of the city, facing *outside*. Cyrus had defeated the Lydian army on the Plain of Thymbra and then marched toward Sardis, which he took after a short siege. If it was during Cyrus' assault on the city, defenders would have been inside and not outside of the wall. On the other hand, since during the 499 BC rebellion the fire and burning of the city spread from inside, it would have been logical for those who wanted to protect themselves from the fire to seek refuge outside the walls. Cyrus' army may have looted the city, but it would have been uncharacteristic of him to let his army burn a surrendered city.

4- Against these uncertainties, we have, undeniably, a major iconographical shift in Lydian coins, from a single lion head (type 1, fig. 33) to a double head design (type 2, fig. 34). The latter is the more ancient, and was abundantly found on Lydian soil as the new catalogue of Cahill and Kroll bear witness: some 43 coins dated to 630-560 BC are illustrated therein.¹⁴⁶ Its lion head has a hairy bulbous protrusion that is characteristic of the Lydian style. The lion on type 2 is devoid of such an important characteristic, often lacks the comb-like mane, and has instead the jaw of Iranian lions. The stylistic shift is even more evident for the bull head. In a survey that I have conducted on Greek bull horns, from Magna Graecia to Lydia, not one displayed the up and forward leaning horn that is emblematic of the Iranian bull, of perhaps Babylonian inspiration (see for instance fig. 35).

5- More importantly, coins were propaganda tools that were supposed to convey, majesty, power, and authority. A single lion head, representing the king of the animals, did that. On the other hand, two confronting animals, one bull and one lion, neither subjugating the other, has at best an ambivalent or confusing message. Unless one can find a Lydian or Greek justification—which I doubt—the only valid one is the Median kingly ideology, in which these two animals projected day and night, and through them, Mithra and Apam Napāt.

6- Finally, such a double shift, in style as well as philosophy, can only happen after a cataclysmic event such as invasions and changes in dynasty. It could only be prompted by Cyrus' conquest of Anatolia followed by the satrapal rule of his Median generals.



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¹ From 1862 to 1956, all Bakhtiārī chieftains were either descendents of Hosayn-qulī Khān or his brother Imām- qulī Khān, of the Haft Lang Bakhtiārīs; Digard 1989.

² Axworthy 2006:11.

³ Darius completely ignores Cyrus. When he mentions Cyrus's name, it is in passing and only to inform: which person was a son of Cyrus, or who claimed to be one; Vallat 2011:278.

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- ⁴ Soudavar 2010 :125-31.
- ⁵ Soudavar 2010: 112-19.
- ⁶ Soudavar 2003: 85-88, 122.
- ⁷ Soudavar 2003: 93-97 ; Soudavar 2010: 121-25.
- ⁸ Soudavar 2010: 126-28.
- ⁹ Vallat 2010: 66.
- ¹⁰ Zoroaster had lived 77 years (Zadspram 23 :9); Soudavar 2010: 136, n.10.
- ¹¹ Ṭabarī 1996, 1:136, Ibn al-Athīr 1996, 1 :264, Maqdisī 1995 :502, Dādagī 1997 : 128. Martin Schwartz renders Ài Dahāka as “he hominoid serpent, the Snake-man” (Skjaervo 1989).
- ¹² See *Yt* 13:87, and its interpretation in Soudavar 2006b:169-70.
- ¹³ See for instance Oldham 1905:37-40.
- ¹⁴ Schmidt 1987c; Skjaervo 1989.
- ¹⁵ Kuhrt 2007, 2:44. Briant notes that Berossus’ account of Amytis cannot be reconciled with facts (Briant 1996: 35), even though the name of Amytis concords with Ctesias’ account (see 108 infra) and despite the fact that Emily Kuhrt believes Berossus had access to “original documents” (*id.*, 2:45). What is of interest to us, though, is that the Babylonian Berossus saw a tie between Astyages and Babylon, which concords with the *Bundahishn* (see next note).
- ¹⁶ Skjaervo 1989; *Bundahishn* (XXXII:15): “Dahāg’s mansion in Babylon was just like a crane.”
- ¹⁷ See for instance Sekunda 2010, 268-71.
- ¹⁸ For Cyrus’ dynastic hold on the Elamite capital city of Anshān see Potts 2005.
- ¹⁹ Briant 1996: 106 and 108.
- ²⁰ See for instance *Yt*10:16, 27.
- ²¹ Soudavar 2009: 426-27; Soudavar 2012: 3-5.
- ²² Pierre Bergé, auction catalogue of 17-6-2010, lot188, Paris.
- ²³ Dādagī 1990, 151.

²⁴ It is interesting to note that, according to Kellens, the Vedic Apam Napāt was a serpent at the bottom of the sea; Kellens 2010-11, Cours 6.

²⁵ Since the origin of the *hemhem* crown is generally traced back to the reign of Akhenaten (r. 1380-1362 BC) and the worship of the sun disk, Aton, it is tempting to imagine that the adoption of this precise crown was in full knowledge of its solar connotations. One must note however that said crown had two more pairs of *uraei* hanging from it (see for instance: Freed 1999: 180, fig. 139). But, since most extant representations of the *hemhem* crown are from the Ptolemaic period, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the reappearance of a symbol associated with the Atonian heresy was due to the Persian conquest of Egypt by a Cambyses who most probably adhered to the kingly ideology of his father, and may have worn it there.

²⁶ Soudavar 2003: 16; Soudavar 2010b.

²⁷ Soudavar 2003: 102.

²⁸ An earlier version of the concentric circles appears on the Bukān bricks.

²⁹ Soudavar 2010 : 121-25.

³⁰ Boyce 1987; see also Kellen 2010: Cours 5, which echoes the same.

³¹ The switch from Astyages' name to the snake-man Azhi-dahāg, also followed the rules of a game followed by the man on the street as opposed to philologists (see note 97 infra, especially last example). Thus Astyages, whose name Ishtevegu (Babyl. Iš-tu-me-gu), reflected the Old Iranian form *Ršti-vaiga- "swinging the spear, lance-hurler" (Schmidt 1987c) was easily switched to the similarly-ending name of Azhi-dahāga, the snake-man.

³² (ولدت في زمن الملك العادل انوشيروان), Majlisī 1983, 5:250, 254, 275.

³³ Mithra's name is philologically Median; Lecoq 1997: 47-48

³⁴ Potts 2011.

³⁵ Soudavar 2010: 127-28.

³⁶ See for instance Collon 2005: 129.

³⁷ See Curtis & Reade 2005: 52-53, 88.

³⁸ Deities and supernatural entities, however, grappled with both lion and bulls, without stabbing them, in early Mesopotamia; see the Akkadian seals in Lambert 2001, nos. 434, 435.

³⁹ De Jong 1997 : 377.

⁴⁰ See for instance Ibn al-Faqīh 1970 : 115 ; Ṭabarī 1996, 1 :138.

⁴¹ Soudavar (forthcoming). A seal from Sardis (Cahill 2010:183, fig. 5) depicts the same monster chimera accompanied by a moon sign, which perhaps ties the creature to Apam Napāt as Lord of the Night.

⁴² Soudavar 2010: 128-33.

⁴³ Soudavar 2010:133-34.

⁴⁴ Soudavar 2009: 434.

⁴⁵ Lecoq 1997: 146.

⁴⁶ Tremblay (1998:191) expresses doubt if **parśu-* (as root of *parthava*) could be extended to “frontier people.” Also, there are a number of terms in the Iranian languages that provide a meaning of frontier person such as *marzbān* or *karān-pā*; another term was really unnecessary.

⁴⁷ Since the emblem above the fire altar combines a globe with a crescent, it is possible that it alludes to bi-monthly ceremonies held at the beginning of the lunar month (crescent) and the middle of the month (globe = full moon).

⁴⁸ For instance, on seals from Anatolia (Facella 2009: 406), Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (Kuhrt 2010:2:561), or from Persepolis (Garrison 2010: 384, fig. 32a).

⁴⁹ Lecoq 1997: 146. Anaximenes of Lampsakos (4th century BC) also relates that the name of Cyrus’ capital meant “encampment of the Persians”, Stronach and Gropnick 2009.

⁵⁰ Certain offices seem to have been transmitted from father to son, like the guardianship of Cyrus’ tomb as reported by Arrian; see Panaino 2010: 111.

⁵¹ Vallat astutely notes that when Darius claims that 8 kings of his “family” ruled, he uses the word *numun*. But when talking about his lineage to whom belong Achaemenes, Teispes, Ariaramnes and Arsames, he uses the word *eippi*, (lineage); Vallat 2011:274-75.

⁵² For a detailed analysis of these fire edifices see Haerinck and Overlaet 2007.

⁵³ Curtis 2010: 392-95.

⁵⁴ See for instance Briant 1996: 241

⁵⁵ It is not beyond the realm of imagination to think that the square tile of Persepolis (fig. 24), with a *vareyna* bird that holds two pearls in its talons, whose wings mimic the winged-disk design of the *khvarenah*, and is surrounded by light rays, reflected the Achaemenid standard. The bird on top of the standard on Persis coins was then a reminder of the former insignia.

⁵⁶ Soudavar 2009:419-23.

⁵⁷ Soudavar 2010a :130-31.

⁵⁸ Minovi 1966 : 68.

⁵⁹ Ya` qūbī 1992, 1:192.

⁶⁰ Ṭabarī 1998, 2:785.

⁶¹ Huff 1999.

⁶² Grenet 2003: 66, 77, 87.

⁶³ Ibn-i Balkhī 1968: 137; Istakhrī 1994: 110.

⁶⁴ Huff 2008a : 50-51.

⁶⁵ Kellens 2010-11, Cours 5. For Apam Napāt's link to fire see also Gnoli 1987, 4535.

⁶⁶ Soudavar 2006: 174-75 ; Soudavar 2012: 5-8; see also fig. 1 here.

⁶⁷ Yāqūt 1995: 146; اردشیر خوره، هو اسم مرکب معناه بهاء اردشیر

⁶⁸ Ibn-i Balkhī 1968: 138 (ایران گرده); Istakhrī 1961 :76, (و هو بناء بناه اردشیر و يعرف بلسان الفرس بایوان و کیاخره).

It is clear that in one of the extant texts the scribe miswrote the word *khwarrah* as *gardeh*, and in the other, the word Iran as *ayvān*. What the Arabs called *ṭirbāl*, or tower-like structure, Persians could not call *ayvān* as it would have implied a vaulted structure. Also another text, the *Shirāz-nāma*, refers to it as the "Iran Column"; Ibn-i Balkhī 1995: 335.

⁶⁹ There is an enigmatic sentence following Ibn-i Balkhī's description of the tower structure, and the water that was brought from afar to emerge as a fountain on its top (Ibn-i Balkhī 1968: 138):

“and there are two *ghadīrs* (water recipient), one named the Young Bum (*bum* is the colloquial of *bām* meaning light), and the other Old Bum, and on each *ghadīr*, a fire altar.” It describes two water recipients that capture the water of the fountain and emit light through their fires, while the Young and Old designations may relate to a Qizpaqan-like image, and the “*pārsā* son of *pārsā*” legend, by which father and son, each stood by their own fire. More importantly, it would emphasize once again the idea of fire springing from water.

⁷⁰ Istakhrī 1994: 105.

⁷¹ Skjaervo 2007: 34-37. I had criticized this amnesia theory in Soudavar 2009: 442-50.

⁷² Soudavar 2006b: 163-64; Soudavar 2009: 422.

⁷³ Soudavar 2003: 88; Stronach 1971: 156-57.

⁷⁴ The assignment of the two tombs above Persepolis has been done arbitrarily. Rather than accepting the traditional view that the closest tomb belongs to Artaxerxes III, I believe the opposite to be true. It not only makes sense for the elder (Artaxerxes II) to be closest and right above Persepolis, but its joint symbol of lotus and sunflower also relates to a king who invokes the solar and aquatic deities, Mithra and Anāhitā; a similar frieze on the tomb of Artaxerxes III, who invokes only Mithra, only contains a row of lions symbolizing the sun, daylight and Mithra.

⁷⁵ Saidi 2010:79-86.

⁷⁶ Von Gall 2009.

⁷⁷ Gyselen 2003: 132.

⁷⁸ Shahbazi 1993.

⁷⁹ Vallat demonstrates that the combination of the Elamite verb *hutta-* (to do) and the directional *ikki* (toward) should be understood as “to translate.” Therefore in *DBa*, Darius was stating that what he first wrote in Elamite was translated differently in OP, and carved in an adjacent empty location, rather than: he wrote it in “a new script” that did not exist before; Vallat 2010: 59.

⁸⁰ Stronach and Gropnik 2009.

⁸¹ Soudavar 2008: 95-109.

⁸² Huff 2008b, Huff 2010.

⁸³ Those that I have published (Soudavar 2003: figs. 79, 81, 83), together with items from the Miho Museum, auction houses and art dealers, show incredible creativity and workmanship.

⁸⁴ Similar to Akhenaten's monuments that were dismantled and reused in later Egyptian works, material from the Median palaces were possibly reused in Achaemenid monuments. See for instance the slabs (Curtis & Tallis 2005:96, cat. no. 79), for which Herzfeld had proposed that they were perhaps positioned under the pivot-stones of doors, an idea rejected by Curtis and Tallis. These "square" slabs found in Persepolis, for which, neither use nor location can be determined, may be of Median origin. For, the petals of their sunflower are—unlike all others in Persepolis—of convex shape, and they have been resized and are no more square.

⁸⁵ Root 1979: 41-42.

⁸⁶ Malbran-Labat 1996 : no. 4. I am most indebted to Gian Pietro Basello, who pointed out to me the existence of these inscriptions and provided their full text and reference.

⁸⁷ Lecoq 1997: 80.

⁸⁸ Soudavar (forthcoming).

⁸⁹ According to Plutarch, Alexander berates Darius III as one who had been the slave (probably translation of *bandakā*) and courier (*astandes*) of Artaxerxes III, Lenfant 2009: 326.

⁹⁰ The three highest Roman grades have counterparts in the Iranian avatars of Mithraic societies: *bābā/pir* (*pater*) as head of Sufi sects, *ustād* (*heliodromos*) as head of guilds, *pahlavān* (*perses*) as head of wrestling societies.

⁹¹ Soudavar 2010: 116.

⁹² Kellens 2001: 177.

⁹³ A similar view, but milder in scope, is expressed in Yarshater 1983: 395.

⁹⁴ Dādāgī 1990: 156.

⁹⁵ See for instance J.H. Peterson's translation in <http://www.avesta.org/mp/grb.htm>.

⁹⁶ Ṭabarī 1996, 2:488 (که لقب چهارآزاد داشت). A similar epithet, *shahr-āzād*, is given for Khumānī (Ṭabarī 1996, 2:483), which may be the Arabicized version of Darius' epithet, and may indicate a relationship between the Darius and Khumānī.

⁹⁷ Tremblay and Frankfort 2010: 89. In post-Revolution Tehran, Valī-yi `ahd (Crown prince) square was changed into the Valī-yi `asr (the Mahdi) square. Soraya (Thoraya) street was changed to Somayya (both women, with a name starting with an S sound), but Takht-e Jamshid avenue was changed to Ṭaliqānī, only on account of the T sound at the beginning.

⁹⁸ Mas'ūdi 1962, I: 202

⁹⁹ Birūnī 1998:148.

¹⁰⁰ Ctesias (Books 12, 13, 14 as per Photius).

¹⁰¹ Aeschylus (Persians 770-775ff) names the usurper as Mardus, who "came to power, a disgrace to his native land and to the ancient throne."

¹⁰² Shayegan 2010, favors the two usurpers account and contends that "it is doubtful that regency could be entrusted to a magus, for one of its purposes was to assure the succession to the throne." Unfortunately, it's an assertion without basis. The Seljuqs, for instance, nominated as viceroys and regents, *atābaks* who were usually not related to the royal family, the Safavids used *ghulāms*, and the Il-Khānids appointed warlords.

¹⁰³ Herodotus (III.10); Dandamayev 1989.

¹⁰⁴ Yarshater 1983: 469.

¹⁰⁵ Briant 1996, 145. Briant qualifies Diodorus' account on the ancestry of the kings of Pontus as based on a later lore, objecting among others, that the Atossa therein is not Cyrus' aunt but his daughter. But considering the repetition of names in Table 1, and the existence of two later Atossas, it is by no mean sure that such an aunt did not exist.

¹⁰⁶ Ṭabarī 1996, 2: 477-79; Mas'ūdī 1986:85-88. Note that I had already explained a similar scribal error for the Persian word *ghurm* written as *khurram* in Arabic; Soudavar 2006b: 174.

¹⁰⁷ Ṭabarī 1996, 2: 477-79

¹⁰⁸ Schmidt 1987a. Berossus too names Astyages's daughter as Amytis (see note 15 supra).

¹⁰⁹ Dandamayev 1990.

¹¹⁰ Artaxerxes is referred to therein by his real name Kurash (Cyrus), a name revered by the Jews; and Ṭabarī's tale leads to the story of Jerusalem and its resurrection seventy years after Nebuchadnezzar II; Ṭabarī 1996, 2: 486.

¹¹¹ Birūnī 1998: 148.

¹¹² Ibn-i Athīr 1996, 3:153.

¹¹³ Soudavar 2006 :180.

¹¹⁴ Taqizadeh 1947: 34–38; Gershevitch 1995: 6–7; Soudavar 2010: 116.

¹¹⁵ Briant 1996, 123 ; and 150: “un héros fondateur, Achéménès, inventé de toutes pièces. ”

¹¹⁶ Briant 1996, 27.

¹¹⁷ Lecoq 1997:179-80, Sharp 1975: 21. Sharp provides additional proof of authenticity (*id*:19).

¹¹⁸ Our previous contention that in early OP inscriptions the word-separator mark appeared even before the first word (Soudavar 2010: 128) may no longer be true, for these plates have none.

¹¹⁹ Kellens 2009: 809.

¹²⁰ Briant 1996: 126-39.

¹²¹ Briant 1996, 124-25

¹²² Personal communication.

¹²³ Dandamayev & Medvedskaya 2006.

¹²⁴ Schmidt 1994. Schmidt believes that Deioces' name reflects “Iranian *Dahyu-ka-, a hypocoristic based on *dahyu-* ‘land’.” But *dahyu* refers to land only by virtue of a group of people living on it. As Darius' inscriptions show, *dahyu* meant “nation” in the sense of a group of people because in DN_a and DSe he is also qualified as “King of many races/all races”: *nation* and *races* must be homogeneous, and both about people. That is why *dahyu-kadag* (NP *dih-kada*) means a settlement and not “home of land”! The mindset of the Achaemenids was tribal

and kingship for them applied to people. For sedentary dynasties such as Elamites or Babylonians though, kingship was over land.

¹²⁵ Alief 2009: 119-30. He quotes Justi for a parallel between *daiṇhu.paiti* and *dahiyu-ukka*.

¹²⁶ Starostin 2002: 22. In Safavid times, the Turkish *bāsh* (head) has a similarly function.

¹²⁷ MacKenzie 1991. In the *Bundahishn* list, Vishtāspa is named among the kings.

¹²⁸ Gershevitch 1995: 5.

¹²⁹ Hintze 2009: 58

¹³⁰ Skjaervo 2005: 67.

¹³¹ Soudavar 2010:117. For objections to the translation of *dahyu* as land see note 124 supra.

¹³² Christie's, South Kensington sale of 15 Apr. 2010, lot 203.

¹³³ The sentence should have read : اگر گرد معرفت گردد :

¹³⁴ Kellens 2010-11, Cours 10.

¹³⁵ For a *khvarenah*-type concept in Turco-Mongol societies see Soudavar 2006a: 412-14.

¹³⁶ See for instance Gnoli 1987 (p. 4537) where he qualifies the *fravashi* as an “immortality concept, typical of aristocratic and warrior societies.”

¹³⁷ Soudavar 2010: 123.

¹³⁸ See Boyce 2000 for further discussion on the subject.

¹³⁹ Approvingly quoted in de Jong 2010: 89.

¹⁴⁰ Razmjou 2003:22-24, 31-32; Soudavar 2010:114.

¹⁴¹ Gershevitch 1995: 4.

¹⁴² Soudavar 2010: 122.

¹⁴³ Kellens 2009, Kellens 2002. I fail to understand how names from the Avesta would have assured Darius' clan and subjects, of the veracity of his “forged” lineage.

¹⁴⁴ Humbach 2000.

¹⁴⁵ Cahill and Kroll 2005: 608.

¹⁴⁶ Cahill 2010: 427-28.