

## THE DAY OF NO-RUZ DURING SASSANIAN TIMES WAS JUNE 16

### ITS CONVERSION TO MARCH 21

Numismatic and historical evidence shows that the Sassanian Emperors continued to follow **the Old Roman Calendar**. Legend has it that (in the absence of a specific date the Romans could come up with) the Old Calendar was presumed to have its origins, during the times of Romulus and Remus, commonly dated as 753 BCE, that is, "from the founding of the City" (of Rome) *ab urbe condita (a.u.c.)*. Had this Old calendar continued to remain in use, **the year CE 2000** would have been the **year 2753 a.u.c.** Records show that it was first devised and adopted by the Babylonians and then passed on to the Egyptians and, later the Greeks. Aramaic documents from Egypt controlled by Iranian Emperors bear witness of Babylonian dates besides the Egyptian dates.

#### The Julian Calendar:

Following his conquest of Mizr (Greek-Aegyptus) in **48 BCE Julius Caesar**, while in Alexandria, consulted **the astronomer, Sosigenes** about calendar reform<sup>1</sup>. Caesar considered **the a.u.c. Calendar**, then used by the Romans, inadequate to the needs of the emerging empire. The new calendar, which he adopted in the year 709 a.u.c. (we now call 46 BCE) was identical to the Alexandrian Aristarchus' calendar of 239 BCE, and consisted of a solar year of twelve months and of 365 days with an extra day every fourth year. It was, clearly, with the help of the ancient Babylonian sexagesimal system of counting and dating that Aristarchus had deduced his calendar from. **It was called the Julian Calendar**. Subsequently, **the Julian Calendar became widespread as a result of its use throughout the Roman Empire** (including Antiochia and Byzantium and later by various Christian churches, which inherited many of the institutions of the Roman world). In the opposing **Eastern 'Hellenised' portions of the Classical World**, where Roman influence was minimal or absent, the legacy of Alexander's conquest appeared to have continued since his death. On the reverse side of the Parthian Coins was minted the word 'Phil Hellenes' - meaning 'friends/allies of the Greeks'. The Seleucid and Parthian rulers continued to maintain the ancient Babylonian Calendar. The fiscal administration in Northern Iran from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE used Zoroastrian months and days in official documents in the Pahlavi script and the Zoroastrian Calendar of 12 months of 30 days + 5 Gatha days and it became official during Sassanian times (CE 224-641)<sup>2</sup>. **The Empires of the East, thus, completely ignored the Julian Calendar.**

#### The Gregorian Calendar:

When **Pope Gregory XIII** (CE 1572-1585) was elected he found additional proposals for calendar reform before him<sup>3</sup>. In **1582** he issued a papal decree, establishing what is now called **the Gregorian Calendar reform**. The Gregorian Calendar was adopted immediately upon the promulgation of Pope Gregory's decree in the Catholic countries of **Italy, Spain, Portugal** and **Poland**, and shortly thereafter in **France** and **Luxembourg**. During the next year or two most Catholic regions of **Germany, Belgium, Switzerland** and the **Netherlands** came on board. **Hungary** followed in 1587. The rest of the **Netherlands, Denmark, Germany** and **Switzerland** made the change during 1699 to 1701. The Gregorian Calendar was adopted in **Britain (and in the British colonies)** in 1752. **Sweden** adopted the Gregorian Calendar in 1753, **Japan** in 1873, **Egypt** in 1875, **Eastern Europe** during 1912 to 1919 and **Turkey** in 1927.

**In many countries the general population continued to use the Julian Calendar, long after the official introduction of the Gregorian Calendar. Thus, events were recorded in the 16th to 18th Centuries with various dates, depending on which calendar was used. Dates**

recorded in the Julian Calendar were marked "O.S." for "Old Style", and those in the Gregorian Calendar were marked "N.S." for "New Style".

It is the Gregorian Calendar, which is currently in use in all Western countries and internationally for commercial reasons. The abbreviation *A.D.* is short for "Anni Domini Nostri Jesu Christi", i.e., "in the year of Our Lord Jesus Christ". Since Muslims, Jews, etc. found this term not entirely acceptable the designation *A.D.* has been replaced by the more neutral *C.E.* (for "Christian Era"), and *B.C.* replaced by *B.C.E.* (for "Before Christian Era").

### **Changes in the Old Roman Calendar and the Iranian NoRuz.**

**The conversion of June 16 to March 21: -**

We are here concerned with how **the first day of Spring, the day of No-Ruz in Airan, (the name used for 'Iran; is 'Airan' <sup>4</sup> on the Sassanian Coins. The derivation of the name 'Airan' could well have had its origins dating back to our pre-historic homeland 'Airyana Vaeje' through to Airyana -> Airyan -> Airan). The day of No-Ruz occurred on June 16 during Sassanian times. The same day (the first day of Spring) and date (June 16) became March 21<sup>5</sup> when the Julian Calendar was adopted in CE 1079.**

The following is an oversimplified version (of an extremely complex manoeuvring of days and months) of how changes were made in the year 46 BCE during the reign of **Julius Caesar (49-44 BCE)** in the 'Old Roman Calendar' to modify it into the 'Julian Calendar'. **[More changes were made during the reign of his successor Augustus Caesar (27BCE-CE14), mainly for political reasons <sup>6</sup>. Later, Augustus, not wanting to be regarded as inferior to Julius, renamed the 6<sup>th</sup> month as Augustus (August) and also added an extra day, August 31, to the month (he, probably, borrowed the day of February 29, thus leaving February with 28 days) ].**

**The changes introduced by Julius Caesar were: -**

- a) 23 days were added after February 23 (The month of February had 29 days in the Old Calendar).
- b) The 5<sup>th</sup> month, Quintilus, was renamed Julius (July) and in his honour was given **1 more day** - July 31. (The month of February was left with 29 days).
- c) Two months of 30 days were added between November and December. The total addition of 67 days caused the beginning of March to fall on January 1.

**The calculation (taking into account the changes introduced by Augustus) runs as follows: -**

The addition of 23 days after February 23 (with 29 days in February) brings us to March 17.

The deduction of 1 day from February brings us to March 16.

The addition of 60 days (2 months of 30 days) brings us to May 16.

**The conclusions are: -**

Thus, so far, February 23 equals May 16.

**Therefore, March 21 (30 days later with 28 days in February) equals June 16 (the first day of Spring - No-Ruz).**

**The acceptance of the Julian Calendar in Iran occurred in CE 1079 with the insertion of an auspicious day (Ruz e Vahiszak) on March 29 during each Leap Year<sup>7</sup>.**

**The numismatic convention of dating during Sassanian times:**

Attempts at historical reconstruction depend on the piecing together of bits of information, often from coins and seal impressions<sup>8</sup>. From the testimony of coins found in archaeological diggings, those of the late Sassanian period (Khusru II and later) greatly outnumber the others<sup>9</sup>.

The Sassanian Mint convention was such that **if a Ruler ascended the throne before the first day of Spring - the day of No-Ruz - June 16 <sup>10</sup> and <sup>11</sup> (even if it be one or two days) his**

**year of rule was considered as Regnal Year 'One'.** This accounts for the fact that some Sassanian monarchs, who although ruled only for a few weeks (around the first day of Spring), had their Coins minted with Regnal Year 'One' (Ayuki) and Regnal Year 'Two' (Talin). **The first dating of the coins with Regnal Years of the Sassanian Kings appears under Piruz I** (he ruled CE 459 to 484)<sup>12</sup> on the Obverse of the coins from Regnal year 'Three' (Talta) until year 'Eight' (Tomana). The first dating of his Regnal years is, however, Year 'Two' (Talin) according to the book on numismatics by *Robert Gobl*<sup>13</sup>.

The following are some noteworthy dating of the Regnal Years (each commencing on the day of No-Ruz): -

**ZAMASP CE 497-499, son of Piruz I:** His Coins show (on the Obverse) the Regnal Years 'One', 'Two' and 'Three'<sup>14</sup>. Since it was common to avoid the rigours of winter, it is possible his brother, Qobad I returned with the Hephthalite army of Khush Nawaz to reclaim his throne from Zamasp<sup>15</sup> after the middle of June by which time the third regnal year coins of Zamasp were already minted.

**QOBAD II CE 628, son of Khusru II:** His Coins show (on the Obverse) Regnal Year 'Two' only. Engaged in the upheavals of the murder of his father and brothers and stepbrothers it took him a while to settle down in his rightful place on the throne. But, he ruled for only about 6 months from **February 25, CE 628 to September 6, CE 628.** All his coins show Regnal year 2 only<sup>16</sup>. The reason for Regnal year 1 not appearing on his coins was internal strife and uncertainty during the first few months of his reign.

**PURAN DOKHT CE 630-631, daughter of Khusru II:** Her coins show three regnal years. She ruled for 16 months from **June 9, CE 630 to mid-October, CE 631.** She would thus, have been honoured with 2 Regnal years in June CE 630.

**HORMAZD V CE 631-632, grandson of Khusru II:** He ruled for about 7 months, **between mid-May, CE 631 and early Jan, 632.** His coins show two Regnal years. Some coins showing a third Regnal year appear to have been made in error or the coins may have been counterfeits.

**KHUSRU V CE 632, the only son of Khusru II not assassinated in CE 628, since he was not born:** He became Emperor as a baby king of 3, he ruled only 8 weeks - just before **mid-April, CE 632 to just before mid-June, CE 632.** His coins show only Regnal Year 'One'. He was not on the throne on the day of No-Ruz June 16, CE 632, the Coronation day of Yazdegard III.

**YAZDEGARD III, grandson of Khusru II:** This 16 year old Emperor (the last Sassanian) was crowned in the Great Fire Temple of Istakhr on June 16, CE 632<sup>17</sup>. [I possess a coin showing the beardless bust of this boy king (on the Obverse) and bearing the word '**Talin**' - meaning (Year) '**Two**' (on the Reverse). I also possess a coin showing his bearded bust on the Obverse and the Year "**Dah**' meaning '**Ten**' on the Reverse]. Since **he ruled only nine years CE 632 to 641**, it is possible his coins showing Regnal Years 'One' and 'Two' must have been minted within a few days. The coins of the first Regnal Year would have been minted a day or two before June 16, 632 while preparations were under way for his Coronation and the coins of his second Regnal Year on the day of No-Ruz, June 16, 632, the Coronation day. This date, **the first day of the Era of Yazdegard, has been followed in our Calendar for over 1370 years**].

#### **The Sassanian intercalations of a 13<sup>th</sup> auspicious month:**

After the fall of the Sassanian Empire (CE 641) the Arabs introduced the Muslim Lunar Year Calendar but the Iranians continued to use the Sassanian Solar Year, with an intercalation of a month ('**Vahiszak**' - **auspicious month** of 30 days)<sup>18</sup> every 120 years (instead of a day every 4 years). This practice of intercalating a 13th month of 30 days (**doubled month of 'Adar'**) every 120 years had been used by the Babylonians in their Akkadian Calendar. After the death of Alexander in 323BCE the Seleucid and Arsacid rulers called the 13th month '**Arakh-makhru**' (**incidental month**). The Parthian rulers continued the practice from Parthian year 1 in 250 BCE.

During Sassanian times the Iranians took over **the intercalation of a 13th auspicious month of 30 days**, which could be introduced **every 120<sup>th</sup> year only by Royal decree by the, then, ruler**<sup>19</sup>.

This intercalation occurred as follows: -

- 1). **CE 286** during the reign of **Varahran II (CE 276-293)**
- 2). 120 years later, **CE 406** during the reign of **Yazdegard I (CE 399-420)**. Historical records show that 2 months were intercalated - one for CE 406 and another (in advance) for the year CE 526 since a major calamity was predicted during CE 526 by the sooth-sayers.
- 3). 120 years later, it would appear that the prediction was correct. In **CE 526**, during the second reign of Qobad I, there was strife and uncertainty. **Qobad I (first reign CE 489-497)** had been deposed in favour of his brother, **Zamasp (CE 497-499)** but had unpopularly regained his throne by force (**Qobad I's second reign CE 499-531**).
- 4). Another 120 years later, the intercalation, which was due in **CE 646**, was also not possible by Royal decree, since the Sassanian Empire under **Yazdegard III (CE 632-641)** was lost in the Battle of Nihavand CE 641. 10 years later, CE 651 on his return to Iran, hoping to commence an insurrection against the ruling Arabs, Yazdegard III, the last of the Sassanians perished - assassinated in Merv (now, the City of Mary in Turkemenia) <sup>20</sup>.

### **REFERENCES :**

1. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "The Western Calendar and Calendar Reforms", Chapter on '**Ancient and Religious Calendar Systems**', Book 15, p.429: Macropaedia Britannica, 1998.
2. Ibid., p.421.
3. Ibid., p.430.
4. Hormazdyar Dastur Koyaji Mirza, **Outlines of Parsi History**, p.1-3: The Industrial Press, Bombay, 1974.
5. Ibid., p.442-44.
6. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "The Western Calendar and Calendar Reforms", Chapter on '**Ancient and Religious Calendar Systems**', Book 15, p.430: Macropaedia Britannica, 1998.
7. Ibid., p.421.
8. Frye, Richard N., **Sasanian Remains from Qasr-i Abu Nasr**, Vol One, p.23: Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1973.
9. Ibid, p.3.
10. Parukh, Furdoonji D. J., **Sasanian Coins**, p.121: Times Press, Bombay, 1923.
11. Ibid., p.523.
12. Ibid., p.101
13. Gobl, Robert, **Sasanian Numismatics**, p.23, Klinkhardt & Biermann, Braunschweig, 1971.
14. Mitchiner, Michael, **Oriental Coins and their values: The Ancient and Classical World, 600 BC/AD 650**, p.170: Hawkins Publications, London, 1978.
15. Rawlinson, G., **The seventh great Oriental Monarchy: the geography, history and antiquities of the Sassanian Empire**, p.339: Longman Green & Co., London, 1876.
16. Sellwood, David, Whitting, Phillip and Williams, Richard, **An Introduction to Sasanian Coins**, p.160: Pardy & Son (Printers) Ltd., London, 1985.
17. Desai, Barjorji P. & Palanji B., **History of the Sassanides (in Gujarati)**, p.437: Duftur Ashkara Press, Bombay, 1880.
18. Hormazdyar Dastur Koyaji Mirza, **Outlines of Parsi History**, p.438: The Industrial Press, Bombay, 1974.
19. Ibid, p. 443-44.
20. Sykes, Sir Percy, **A History of Persia**, p.502: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1930.

Sam Kerr (Sydney, Australia) - March 21, 2000