

THE SASSANIAN DYNASTY (CE 224-641)

Introduction

The author, here, tries to recreate a brief history of the Sassanian Dynasty by narrating stepwise in chronological order an outline of events, which occurred during *the period of about 450 years (circa CE 200-641)*. In his attempt he, by no means, claims to relate the entire detailed history of the Sassanian rulers. If these brief chronological events happen to spark further inquiries, comments, additions and/or amendments from scholars and Zarathushtis of goodwill the author's efforts will have become worthwhile. These events appear to follow a certain trend, which we, in our present exilic state, might well be able to recognize and, perhaps benefit from, by trying to understand their implications through rational interludes. **After all we, as direct descendants, are, now, what the Sassanian Zarathushtis were, at one period in time.**

The sources, from which the chronology of events is briefly traced and the description of one coin (a silver drachma) representing each ruler, are given below in a separate page of **REFERENCES**. The author found the book, *History of the Sassanides (in Gujarati)*, which was commissioned by Sir Jamshedji Jeejeebhoy and authored by Barjorji P. Desai and Palanji B. Desai, Bombay 1880, particularly invaluable. In the book the Zarathushti dedication and clarity of narration shows.

The **chronology of events begins around CE 200** with the dedication and vision of a single man, as often happens in human history. This great man, *Sassan*, manages to change the course of history. There are several versions about who Sassan really was, including one, which traces his ancestry as a member of the Royal family of the last Hakhamani Emperor, *Daraius III*. As *the Mobedan-mobed of the Great Fire Temple in Istakhr, the Capital city of the province of Pars* in the Parthian Empire, he remained dissatisfied with the reluctantly Zarathushtrian approach to his Faith and the pro-Hellenic bias of reverence to a pantheon of Greek divinities encouraged by the Parthian rulers. Sassan's influence in Istakhr over some rightly thinking Zarathushti nobles in the Parthian Court grew after his marriage to *Princess Ram Behest, daughter of Gozhir*, the Khshathra Pavan (Governor) of Pars, appointed by *Vologases VI*, the Suzerain Parthian King of Kings in Ekbatana (the present Hamadan), Capital of Parthia. His brother, *Artabanus IV* who had strong pro-Hellenic leanings, frowned upon Vologases' Zarathushti affiliations. Sassan could see an advantage in the differences among the brothers and convinced *Papak (Babak)*, the Commander of the Parthian army in Pars to avail himself of this opportunity. With the assistance of his sons, *Shahpur and Ardeshir*, Papak ultimately managed to rid the Parthian Suzerain rule over the Province of Pars by defeating the warring Parthian brothers

separately - Vologases VI ruling in Ekbatana, the Capital city of Parthia and Artabanus IV in exile in the south, ruling from Ctesiphon.

Papak's elder son, Shahpur, unfortunately, died in a minor border skirmish [A line drawing of his beautiful coin, courtesy of the British Museum has been included. Some authors have confused him with Shahpur I (son of Ardeshir I) and even with Shahpur II]. But his younger brother, **Ardeshir triumphed and established his rule as Ardeshir I over the previous Parthian Empire in CE 224**. By CE 226 he had consolidated his sway over all the *Khshathra Pavans (Greek: Satraps)* of the entire Empire as King of Kings. Around that time the captive last Parthian ruler, Vologases VI also died in prison in Istakhr.

The events of the Dynasty end with the last Sassanian, *Yazdegard the Third*, defeated by the invading Arab armies in the *Battle of Nihavand (CE 641)* and driven into exile. The last remnant of hope ended in CE 651 when Yazdegard's attempt to rally support for an uprising against the Arab rule of the Empire failed and he was murdered in Merv (now, the City of Mary in Turkemeniya).

There is a stepwise **CHRONOLOGICAL LIST of 39 monarchs** and a chart showing the period of rule of each monarch in a '**GENEALOGY TREE**'. Each of the 52 pages presented here was depicted as a poster exhibited at the 7th World Zoroastrian Congress (Dec 28 1999 to 4th Jan 2000) in Houston Texas. To understand the *Regnal Years* on the coins the author has added an over-simplified version of a paper indicating that the *DAY of NO-RUZ* during Sassanian times was June 16. Details about how the conversion to March 21 was introduced have been given below. This new date was recognized in Iran in the year CE 1079. At the end of the rule of each monarch the **contemporary Roman Emperors**, whom the Sassanian ruler had encounters with, are shown as coins ('Roman Coins and their values', Seaby Numismatic Publications, London, 1964). This has been done mainly to show the bust of each Roman and Byzantine Emperor.

The likeness of each Sassanian rulers, whose coins are known to have been minted, has been shown in a *silver Drachma*. The author was not able to acquire or borrow all coins to be able to create their color slides and jpeg Files. The color slides of the coins of eight rulers were sent by Dr. Vesta Curtis, Curator of the Coins and Medals Department of the British Museum, for the exhibition in Houston with a proviso that they will not be published later. Mr Ivor Kerslake, Studio Manager, The British Museum, Photography and Imaging British Museum has now granted permission to include these eight coin photographs in the text. A silver drachma of Vistakhm, the usurper of the throne from Khorasan, has been borrowed from an auction album.

Readers will notice from the page of **REFERENCES** that the word, **SASSAN** has also been spelt occasionally as **SASAN** in world literature. The author has, like many Zarathushti authors, taken the Avestan/Pahlavi alphabet letter '' = ss (as

published in Dastoorji Kavasji Edulji Kanga's monumental Avesta Dictionary, Bombay 1900). The majority of Iranians do spell their own name with a double 's' to the present day.

The author offers deep apologies to the many friends, who approached him during the Congress in Houston for copies of some of the pages and the coin slides, for his inability to do so and for the delay in putting the Houston 'Sassanian Coin + Chronological History' Exhibition on the Net.

UNDERSTANDING THE COINS OF THE SASSANIAN DYNASTY

This Internet presentation is a supplement to the **EXHIBITION during the 7th World Zoroastrian Congress** (each with a small photo in Coin trays) and the **55 (8x12 inches) POSTERS** outlining a brief **HISTORY of the Sassanian Dynasty**. Imprints from Roman coins of the **ROMAN and BYZANTINE Emperors** with whom each ruler had encounters are shown (as on the Posters). A composite (Obverse + Reverse) 4x6 inches laminated **COLOR PHOTOGRAPH** of each of the 39 Sassanian Rulers accompanied the laminated posters. The coins of the last two Parthians and the two Zarathushti Kings of Pars + the Gandharva Rupiya (also called 'Paisa') minted in honour of Varahran V -Behram Gaur (who visited the Kingdom of Maghadha and Kanouj in India and married the Princess Sapunid CE 435) are included.

The **SLIDE PRESENTATION**: A total of **90 slides** was screened. 2 slides were screened simultaneously to help simplify the explanation of the intricacies of these unique coins. _

The **TOPICS discussed were**:

1) **COIN DENOMINATIONS**: The weights and measures of **Gold, Silver and Bronze** coins.

SILVER:

DRACHMA (Draham/Darham/Dirham): 4.12 gms. **HEMIDRACHMA**: 2 gms (Ardeshir I to Varahran II). **DANG (Gk: Obol-1/6Drachm)**: 0.7 gms.

TETRADRACHMA: 16.5 grams (Ardeshir I to Varahran II)

GOLD:

DENAR (Dinar) 7.4 gms. **Double DENAR** (Ardeshir I, Hormazd II) 15 gms. **Half DENAR**: 15 gms (Shahpur I to Shahpur II). **Smaller Denars**: 4.5, 3.5 gms and **1/3 DENAR** 1.5 Grams

COPPER/BRONZE:

Gk-Chalkus. They were used mostly as Market & Festive coins

PASHIZ: 7 gms. **Double Pashiz:** 14 gms **Half Pashiz:** 3.5 gms. **Quarter Pashiz:** 1.75gms
[VALUE: 3 Pashiz = 1 Dang ; 18 Pashiz = 1 Drachm]

2) 'DECIPHERING' OF THE PAHLAVI SCRIPT:

In the classification of the Iranian Languages, the Middle period includes those languages, which were common in Iran from the fall of the Achaemenians to the fall of the Sassanians. During early Sassanian times a new alphabet (*Dindabeera*) was invented, modelled on the Pahlavi script, which was, in turn, derived from Aramaic. **The direction of writing was from right to left.** It was essentially made up of consonantal sounds. Vowels and even the length of the vowels were taken into account gradually. The frequent omission of the vowels and the fact that the Pahlavi characters like A, S & Sh / G, Z, L, R, N & Y / B, Y & Z / D & K often appear similar (in cursory writing) makes the script extremely difficult to read fluently. The letters P & B (Papak/Babak) and T, D & Z (Atar/Adar/Azar) were often interchanged through regional differences in the pronunciation. **In the legend (reading right to left) on the coins the missing letters have been substituted in 'low case' and in brackets for easy reading.**

3) RIMS ON THE COINS:

The coinage begins with a single Rim in the Silver Coins. Double and triple Rims appear for the first time in Copper Coins with *Shahpur II (CE 309-379)*. In the Silver Coins, double Rims appeared as late as Qobad I (CE 489-497) and triple Rims as late as *Khusru II (CE 590-628)*.

Rim decorations like Crescents appeared with Qobad I and the Star and Crescent motif with Khusru II and later. Khusru II had the word '*Afid*' meaning '*Praise be*' inscribed outside the Rim. After the fall of the Sassanian Empire the Arabs, being untutored in the art of minting coins, used the Coins of Khusru II and inscribed the name of the ruling Khalif outside the Rims.

Those who wanted to obtain Gold and Silver unethically did clipping of coins. However, they were careful to stop short of the Rim since damage to the rim made the coin of no worth for barter. Of special note is the coin of *Yazdegard III (CE 628-641)*.

4) MINT MARKS, MINT PLACES AND THE MAKING:

The control of the quality, denominations and volume of coins was centralised *from Ctesiphon, the Administrative Capital*. The Treasury released the quantity of the metal for the volume of coins expected in the final count. There were 30 or so regular **Mints** and about 10 or so used in emergencies in the vast Empire, usually situated in the major towns. The names of the places were abbreviated (e g

Airan for Airan Khurr Shahpur, *SK* for Sakasta, *AH* for Ahmatana, *ASP* for Aspahan etc). The dies were made for each year of reign (**Regnal Year**), which began on **the day No-Ruz (which was 16th June - a separate Poster explaining this discrepancy of the New Year's day is shown)**. Such was the volume of coins minted during the reign of Khusru II CE 590-628 that the Arabs, after the fall of Yazdegard III CE 641, used his coins as bullion for speculation. Not knowing the art of minting coins, they also used Sassanian Coins with the name of the ruling Khalif embossed outside the rim of the Coins, as legal tender.

The metal flan for gold and silver was cut out of rolled sheets with plate shears, the standard weight of each piece having been predetermined. Picture engravers and designers worked in a separate capacity occupying most of the Obverse face of the coin. The long-suffering scribes, then, had to manage to fit the legend in whatever space was left for them. A hammer blow on the die created the Obverse and Reverse impressions. Forgeries of recent, as well as contemporary, origins are known. Some forgeries have been copper coins coated with silver plating. The exhibited coins of *Piruz II CE 632 and Khusru V CE 632*, we believe, are counterfeits.

5) DESCRIPTION OF THE COINS

A: OBVERSE SIDE OF THE COINS:

1) BUST

The face always looks to the right (conversely, all the Parthian Coins show the King **always** facing left). The face looking forwards is only seen in some Gold Coins.

The Crown of Gold represented the Khwarena of the ruler and, thus, *was unique to each ruler*. The Crowns were commonly *dedicated to Verethragna, Mithra or Anahita*. If there was any interruption in the rule - i. e. a new phase or if the ruler was deposed and regained the throne, the Crown had to be replaced by a new crown.

The Tiara - thin rim or broad lamina: The tiara of gold was of variable thickness. It was either a thin ring, single or double rimmed, adorned with single or double layers of pearls or gemstones or a thicker lamina decorated with arcaded designs and studded with gemstones. The lamina is very thick in the case of *Shahpur III*. An exact replica of it was adopted centuries later by the (King) Henry V of English History. The Tiara is open at the back to fit the Head. The open end is suitably tied at the back with ribbon or held by a clip adorned with gemstones.

Extensions to the lamina: These were in the form of **Turrets**. The number of Turrets varied between one in front to three (with two on sides) or four (another at the back). **Arcaded designs**, **Wings** (Verethragna), **Eagle Head / Boar Head** (Verethragna), **Rays** (Mithra). Narseh's crown (CE 293-303) had a Tiara showing **Palm fronds** of gold as the Lamina with **Palm Leaves** in the place of Turrets. Yazdegard I (CE 399-420) had a large **Crescent** attached to the front of the Lamina. This was continued in all later crowns of the Dynasty.

The Headdress: *The make up of the headdress was unique, too. No one but the King could possibly have it. Only the Prince, after the Council of Nobles and Mobeds had officially and ceremoniously installed him as heir to the throne, was allowed to sport it.* Nearly 1500 years later the Sikhs, a breakaway martial group from among the Hindus of the Punjab, adopted the Headdress. Again, the eldest son of volunteer Punjabi families was ceremoniously invested with this unique headdress covered by a turban and installed as a Sikh to uphold and defend the cause of Hinduism, while opposing the spread of Islam, during Aurangzeb's rule.

For the Sassanian crown the top part of the Hair from the vertex of the scalp was twisted like a rope, which was then wrapped into a large round '**Orymbos**' (**Gujerati 'Ambooro'**), which was tied at its waist with a ribbon. The Orymbos and the rest of the top hair was *covered over by a silk cloth or felt, richly embroidered with gold and silver thread and studded with pearls and gemstones.* The loose ends were tied again at the back by a ribbon in the form of fillets (like the '**Mathubanu**' of the Zarathushti women on the Subcontinent or the '**Lachak**' of the Iranian Women).

Western writers called this silk or felt headdress *the 'Cap'* and divided the Crowns into 'capped' and 'not capped'. When the Lamina was thick the 'Cap' was, naturally not visible and the western writers erroneously deemed the Crown as 'not capped'. It is interesting to note the later Sassanians did have a **firm Cap** (probably made of Papiere Mache like the Zarathushti 'Pheto') above the Tiara, starting with **Qobad I (CE 489-497)**. [There is a suspicion that at least some of the latter kings used a firm cap to mask the sparseness of hair on the vertex of their head. In fact these crowns had a superstructure above the Lamina on which was exhibited a clump of artificial hair. This may well have been the beginning of the wearing of the '**Wig or Toupe**' by the Royalty and Nobles by the subsequent rulers of the Royal Dynasties of Europe].

The remaining hair of the back of the Head below the Lamina was again bound together (like a ponytail) by a Ribbon and artificially curled, bobbed or plaited, as was the Hair on the sides of the head below the Lamina. Narseh kept the hair in this region straight. Queen Purandokht (CE 6 June 629-midOct 630) and Queen Rezme, wife of Varahran II (CE 276-293) had plaited tresses of hair richly

decorated with jewels and flowing gracefully down, front and back of each shoulder. *Ardeshir I (CE 224-240)*, *Shahpur I (CE 240-271)* and *II (CE 309-379)* had an attached *Ear-flap*, decorated with embroidery and pearls on each side, running downwards to cover the ears and cheeks, not unlike their Indo-Iranian warrior ancestors.

The Beard and Moustache: These were deemed to represent signs of Royal dignity. The beard hair was either *plaited or curled*. Mostly it *was twisted at the tip, again tied with a Ribbon holding one or a cluster of gemstones or a round clump of hair*. Sometimes the beard was trimmed horizontally to cut it short. The Moustache was always huge and undulating sometimes reaching as far as the ears.

The Earrings and Necklace: The ears were never without **Earrings**, often having a single large gem or a cluster of gemstones.

The Necklace comprised of a single, double or triple layer *of Pearls or huge gemstones*. Often a richly engraved *Pendant* with a large gemstone in the middle is seen [in the case of *Khusru V (CE 632)* and *Yazdegard III (CE 632-641)* the gemstone looks like a massive diamond]. Precious gemstones like *Diamonds, Pearls, Rubies, Sapphires, Emeralds, Pure Jade, Aquamarine, Amethyst and Beryl* were well sought after. Less precious stones of rich quality like Turquoise, Topaz, Garnet, Zircon, Lapis Lazuli, Moonstone, Rhodonite, Calchedony, Chert, Tiger's Eye were used, often included in rich embroidery and accompanied by discs of Gold and Silver to create decorative designs.

The Dress: The Royal dress is interestingly not unlike the revered dress seen in the traditional image of Zarathushtra. **The Shirt:** There *is a loosely fitting, long-sleeved and knee length shirt*, like the modern Iranian '*Pirhaan and the Khamis*' of the Subcontinent and loose '*Pathaani trousers*' or '*Pyjamas*' like the modern '*Sawwaal*'. **A Cape:** ('*Shekel*') covers the Shoulder. **The Embroidery:** The Neck braid of the Cape bears a broad richly embroidered border, decorated with Gemstones. This thick broad border of the Cape (like the '*Kor*' of a lady's *Sari (or 'Gaaraa')*) or the decorated border edge of the '*Meghnaa*' of Iranian ladies) crosses over in front on the chest below the Necklace held together by a circular jewel or a clip bearing Gemstones. Starting with *Khusru I (CE 531-579)* a Star and Crescent symbol has been embroidered on the Shoulder flap of the Cape – shown symbolically above the shoulders on the coins. *Valakhsh (CE 484-488)* has a flame embroidered on his left shoulder flap. It is of interest to note that everything in the way of life in Sassanian Courts was adopted centuries later in the Royal Courts of Europe. The Cape became a sign of high social standing worn by the Kings and Queens and Noblemen - Counts, Earls in Europe, nearly a thousand years later.

2) **MARKS AND SYMBOLS**

a) **Dots:** There may be a single dot or in multiples. It is possible each dot represents a mintmark to represent the badge of coins minted mainly for ease of accounting.

b) **The Star and Crescent motif:** These astral symbols seem to occur regularly after Shahpur I. They became very powerful symbols of Zoroastrianism, when a startling astral observation was made. *A complete conjunction of the Moon and the planet Venus was observed in 461 CE during the 3rd Regnal Year of the reign of Piruz I (CE 459-484). Since that date the Crescent of the Moon appears to the right of the Fire and the Star, representing Venus, appears to the left of the Fire on all subsequent coins of the Sassanian Dynasty.* The Symbols also appear outside the Rims of the coins on all coins, starting with Khusru II (CE 590-628). Sadly, our sacred symbol of the Star & Crescent motif (associated with the color, green, representing 'Urvara' - the rich greenery of the vegetable kingdom, one of the 7 Creations of Ahura Mazda) has been known to the world as the symbolic representation of Islam. It, proudly, appears on all representations of Islam (to the present day) since the fall of Yazdegard III in CE 461.

c) The circular '**Wreath of Victory**'/'**Crown of Glory**': This is shown on the coins of a) *Varahran II (CE 276-293)*. The king and Queen Rezme face their son who is respectfully holding the 'Wreath' with both his hands to offer it to his parents and b) the coins of *Zamasp (CE 497-499)*, whose son likewise offers him the wreath of glory.

d) **The Fravahar Symbol:** It is engraved either on one side of the Fire or on the Altar Shaft.

e) **The Bull's Head Symbol:** This symbol is depicted on all the full-length traditional images of Zarathushtra at the top end of his mace. Again, like the Fravahar Symbol, it was shown on one side of the Fire or on the Altar Shaft.

f) **The Swasti Tika - the sign of well-being/good health.** This symbol is seen very often on coins minted in the East in the Satrapies of Khwarezm and Sughda, mainly in the mint at Balkh. The *original Swastika*, a prehistoric Indo-Iranian charm of good health, is generally made up of two Z's crossing each other and forming a square shape. In contrast, the *distorted pseudo-Swastika* of the Nazis was comprised of two S's crossing each other and forming a diamond shape.

3) LEGEND

Two separate groups of artisans executed the structuring and designing of the bust and markings on the coin. The *picture engravers* were given first preference to fill the Obverse of the coin with the bust of the ruler and some markings and the Reverse with the Fire Altar and the two Attendants. *There was often not very much space left for the scribes to insert the required legend, which they were forced to write in short form, omitting as many vowels as possible and using*

calligraphy to fit in the remaining characters. This made reading the legend rather difficult, although identifying the Crown, which was unique to each ruler, could make the identification of a good coin simple. ***The reading of the script is to done from right to left looking in from outside the edge of the coins.***

The legend of the initial coins was lengthy [e.g. the coin of Shahpur I the vowels in small (lower case) are omitted - ***MaZDISN BaGI, ShaHPUHRI, MaLKAN MaLKa AIRAN Va ANAIRAN, MiNUCheTRI MeN IeZDAN (Defender of the Faith, Mazdayasna, Shahpur, King Of Kings of Airan and UnIran (i.e. coquered territories), of Celestial origins).*** While describing the legend I have substituted these missing letters in 'low case' for easy reading.

Ardeshir II (CE 379-383) dropped the ***words 'of celestial origins'*** and Varahran IV (CE 388-399) dropped the words '***AnIran***'. Yazdegard I (CE 399-420) and his son Varahran V (CE 420-438) inserted the title '***RamShatri***' meaning '***Delight of the Realm***'. Yazdegard I (CE 438-456) and his son, Piruz I (459-484) inserted the title '***Kadi***', meaning '***the Fortunate***'. Piruz's brother, Valakhsh changed the title to '***Hukad***' meaning '***of good fortune***'. The legend thus became more and more brief until it was fixed during Qobad I (CE 488-497) as ***KaVaTU AFZuT (Kavat/Qobad Increaser/bestower (of prosperity))***. All subsequent rulers of the dynasty maintained this brief legend with only minor variations of Afzut - Afzuti, Afzu, Afzui, and Afzun.

B: THE REVERSE SIDE OF THE COINS

Just as in the making of the Obverse side of the coin, the designer/picture engraver was given the first preference to construct the Fire Altar, the Fire Attendants and their body language. The scribe then entered the Mint Abbreviation and the Regnal Year in the remaining blank spaces.

1) **FIRE ALTAR**

The coins of ***Ardeshir I*** (CE 224-240) shows a massive Fire Altar of the Achaemenian Type without Fire Attendants. It has two large Base plates as ***platform and foundation***, a large square ***Altar Shaft*** topped by layers of 4 ***bulky plates***, the topmost being smaller and having a crater in the centre for the collection of the ash. The top plates are so heavy they are supported by (replicas of the Achaemenian) four ***Lion's Paw legs*** (found in the Persepolis Throne Rooms) resting on mushroom-like stools for support.

Later, the Altar Shaft becomes round and less bulky as the plates become thinner and smaller. The other rulers, who show this heavy Achaemenian Fire Altars, are

Shahpur I (CE 240-271) Shahpur II (CE 309-379) Varahran IV (CE 388-399) and Yazdegard I (CE 399-420).

The Shaft becomes double conical during Ardashir II (CE 379-383).

Various designs appear on the shaft with *ornamental edges and decorating Ribbons* hanging downwards and later curving upwards with Khusru II. The word '**RAST**' meaning '**Just**' appears on the Shaft frequently. As the Fire Altar becomes smaller, the Shaft becomes a thin rod-like structure.

The Fire itself is depicted in various varieties of flames. The *Bust of Zarathushtra* and the *Bust of Kings begin to appear engulfed in the Flames* of the Fire. Western numismatists have wrongly labelled the busts as being those of Ahura Mazda (whose image we do not recognise). This error on the part of the western numismatists could well have occurred because one of the Rulers to have his Image engulfed by the flames of the fire was Hormazd II (CE 303-309). The legend, on the Obverse, bears the inscription - '**AUHRMZDi**', which (as *Hormazd*) was the king's name.

2) FIRE ATTENDANTS

Some coins do not show the Fire Attendants. When present, there are *always two attendants*, one on each side of the Fire. The pair may be the King, wearing his unique Royal Crown and Orymbos and the High Priest, wearing the *Mithra Crown of Rays* attached to the lamina of the tiara. Or, there may be pairs of the King and the Prince, two Priests, the King and the Queen or the King and an image of the divinity, Anahita. *The King (with his Orymbos in the crown) is always shown to the left of the Altar.*

The Attendants *usually face the Fire with reverence* but on the coin of Shahpur I and Varahran I both attendants are looking away from the fire and holding the long mace of Zarathushtra with the Bull's Head symbol atop. Sometimes, there are two Guards as attendants, their full frontal image facing forwards and their two hands resting on a sword in front.

Reverence to the Fire is always shown as being done *with the right hand* while the left hand rests on the sword scabbard at the hip or holds a short 9 inch or a larger bundle up to 2 feet long (tied with two knots). If the bundle is longer - upto 5 feet (tied with four knots), it is held with two hands facing the Fire.

3) BARSOM RODS (Av: BARESMAN)

The length of these bundles varies from 9 inches to 5 feet, the maximum breadth being 1/3 inch. *Bahman Yasht* states: '*the merit equals the wearing of the kusti - to him the Fire gives a blessing*'.

The Barsom ritual is of Pre-Zarathushtrian origin. Each sacred bundle of twigs is tied with strips obtained from date palm leaves. It is *held in the left hand while*

tending the Fire with the right hand. On certain pious days the Magi (Maghavans) would carry the sacred bundle of twigs vertically in their right hands. The practice was known to establish a connecting link between the Geti and the Mino realms. So intense was the holy significance that non-Zarathushti observers later labelled it as the '*magic wand*'.

The number of twigs (copper wires are now used, instead) prescribed are: - 23 for Yasna, Vendidad, 35 for Visparad and Sraosh Yasht, 15 for Rapithwin, 7 for Yazeshne of Navar and 5 for Baj.

Some western numismatists have incorrectly described these bundles, held by the Fire Attendants on the coins, variously, as swords, daggers, spears, maces, staves for stoking the Fire, etc. A careful look at the coins will show *the knots (made with the help of thin slivers of Palm leaves holding the twigs together) on the bundles* - two on the shorter bundles, four on the longer bundles.

4) LEGEND

The description is brief - e g '*Nura zi Artakshatri*' (Fire of Ardeshir). Later, commencing with Shahpur III (CE 383-388) the word '*Nura*' for Fire became '*Atur*'. The Altar Shaft often shows the inscription '*Rast*' meaning '*Just*'. Yazdegard II (CE 438-456) had '*NaVaKI IezDKart*' meaning '*Yazdegard, the adorer (of Fire)*' inscribed.

5) MINT MARKS

There were 30 or so regular Mints and about 10 or so were used in emergencies in the vast Empire, usually situated in the major towns. The names of the places where the coins were made were abbreviated e g *NIH* for Nihavand, *NIHCh* for Nishapur, *IZ* for Iezd, *ST* for Istakhr, *SK* for Sakastan.

Inscription of *these mint abbreviations commenced on a regular basis with Varahran IV (CE 388-399)*. Initially the marks appeared to the Right or Left of the Fire. From *Yazdegard I (CE 399-420)* onwards the marks appeared regularly to the Right of the Altar Shaft.

6) REGNAL YEARS

It is inscribed in running words (not in numerals) in the Pahlavi script but naming the number in the **Aramaic language**. For example: - one is *Aiyuki* (not Yak/Yaj), two is *Talin* (not Doh), three is *Talta* (not Seh), four is *Arba* (not Chahar), five is *Khomasha* (not Panj), six is *Shata* (not Shesh), seven is *Shaba* (not Haft), eight is *Tomana* (not Hasht), nine is *Tisha* (not Noh) and ten is *Ashara* (not Dah, except on Year 10 of Yazdegard III -see last coin). Strangely, after the tenth year of reign for **all** rulers the numbers are inscribed in the **Pahlavi language** eg eleven is Yajdeh and Fifteen is Panjdeh, etc.

The Regnal Year is always inscribed to the right of the Fire Altar. It appears for the first time during the reign of Piruz I (CE 459-484) but only for the first 3 years of his rule.

The year of reign of all Sassanian Rulers was dated from the first day of Spring - the day of No-Ruz, which occurred on 16th June each year. The Sassanians did not recognise the Julian Calendar. The conversion to 21st March occurred as late as CE 1079.

THE DAY OF NORUZ DURING SASSANIAN TIMES WAS JUNE 16

ITS CONVERSION TO MARCH 21

We are here concerned with how **the first day of Spring, the day of No-Ruz in Sassanian Airan (Modern Iran), occurred on June 16 during Sassanian times and how, in later times, the same day (the first day of Spring) and date (June 16) became March 21.**

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' [the Sassanian ('Old') 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.

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 5th month, **Quintilis, was renamed Julius (July)** and in his honour was given **1 more day** - July 31 in honour of Julius Caesar. (The month of February was left with 29 days).

Later, Augustus, not wanting to be regarded as inferior to Julius, renamed the **6th month as Augustus (August)** and also **added an extra day**, August 31, to the month (he borrowed the day of February 29, thus leaving February with 28 days).

c) Two months (September and November) were given 30 days between July/August and December.

The total addition, thus, 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 - September & November 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 - the day of No-Ruz).

The acceptance of the Julian Calendar in Iran (as the 'new' Calendar) occurred as late as CE 1079 with the insertion of an auspicious day (Ruz e Vahiszak) on March 29 during each Leap Year.

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February 20, 2002.