

# THE SASSANIAN DYNASTY (CE 224-641)

## HORMAZD I (CE 271-272), son of Shahpur I

Since he ruled only one year **his coins are extremely rare**  
(Silver Drachm - courtesy of the British Museum)



**Obverse:** 'MaZDISN BaGI AUHRMaZDI MaLKAN MaLKA AIRAN Va ANAIRAN, MiNUCheTRI MeN IeZDAN' (**Defender of the Faith, Mazdayasna, AUHRMaZD, King of Kings of Airan and AnIran, of celestial Aryan origins**). Tiara bears large gemstones. Embroidered silk cloth covers hair and Orymbos. Curled locks of hair and tip of beard tied with ribbon, holding gemstones. Gemstone necklace. Cape border over shoulders held in front by a clip.

**Reverse:** 'NURA ZI AUHRMaZDI' (**Fire of Hormazd**). The King on left (crown shows Orymbos) and the Priest with Mithra crown to right of Fire Altar. Right hands held high in reverence. Left hands hold bundle of small Barsom rods.

### Campaigns:

During his father's reign, as King of Khorasan, he had shown bravery in battle against the Sughdians. He was nicknamed '**The Hero**'. Yet, when

he ascended the throne, he seemed reluctant to plan any campaigns. He failed to realize the importance of Palmyra as a buffer state. He ignored Zenobia's pleas for help when **Aurelian CE 270-275** prepared to invade and repossess Palmyra. Aurelian went on to defeat the Palmyran forces in **Battle of Palmyra CE 272** and took Zenobia, under fetters of gold, as a prize captive to Rome. She was allowed to retire in dignity in a villa outside Rome. Aurelian, as was feared, then returned later with a grandiose plan to reconquer Mesopotamia and destroy Ctesiphon.

***Mani:*** Hormazd appointed ***KIRTAR as Pontiff***, who quickly pointed out that "*Airan was infiltrated by Zarathushti sectarians and by adherents of alien religions*". Yet, Hormazd favoured ***MANI*** and assigned him a Castle to set up his mission and to found the ***Order of Manichi***. Mani's doctrine proclaimed the world was an evil place, since it was a mixture of light and darkness. The particles of light were being constantly impeded from re-assembly into pure light. Everything, therefore, was to be done to negate this evil by fasting, celibacy, absence of marriage and procreation until the ***Final Conflagration*** of the world was reached, when the ***redemption of pure light***, by its dissociation from darkness, would occur. Hormazd died suddenly during an epidemic of Plague and Mani fell into disrepute again.



Aurelian CE 270-275



Zenobia CE 267-273

# VARAHRAN I (CE 272-276), brother of Shahpur I

(Silver Drachm)



**Obverse:** 'MaZDISN BaGI VaRaHRAN MaLKAN MaLKA AIRAN Va ANIRAN, MiNUCheTRI MeN IeZDAN' (**Defender of the Faith - Mazdayasna, King of Kings of Airan and AnIran, of celestial Aryan origins**). Tiara (of the Mithra Crown showing rays of the Sun) is thick to hold the rays of the Sun and has earflaps (hemmed with pearls). Bejeweled silk cloth covers hair and Orymbos. Ribbons hold the posterior free edges of the Tiara and the plated locks of hair at the back. Hair on sides and beard is in many plaits too and is cut short. Decorated borders of Cape appear open in front.

**Reverse:** 'NURA ZI VaRaHRAN' (**Fire of Behram**). King (crown shows Orymbos) to left and Priest (with Mithra Crown) to right of Fire Altar. Both face away from the Altar, one hand holding spear, the other on the sword. **Fravahar symbol** (right of the Fire) **appears for the first time** on a Sassanian coin.

## Campaigns:

This elderly prince, brother of Shahpur I and previously governor of Mazandaran, had taken part in no campaigns and was given to pleasure and comfort. He was as feeble and insignificant as his nephew.

\***CE 272-273:** After Aurelian had conquered Palmyra and taken Zenobia captive to Rome CE 272, he returned as expected to Antioch in CE 273 with a dream of conquering Airan and sacking Ctesiphon. It did not

materialize, because he proceeded north choosing to take Caesaria first. His own people in Cappadocia murdered him the same year.

**\*CE 276:** A strong supporter of the **Pontiff, Kirtir**, Behram did not favour **Mani's anti-Zarathushtrian preaching** and had him seized and put to death CE 276. His followers were severely persecuted and the Christians to a lesser extent. But the **Order of Manichi** continued to thrive in India, Tibet and China. In the west it reached Egypt and thence to North Africa, Spain and the South of France (Roman Gaul), where the followers were called *the Albigenis*. *Saint Augustine* was an avid follower of Mani's doctrine until he embraced Christianity. Thereafter, the Albigenis were persecuted by the Crusaders and under *Simon de Montford in CE 1209* they were arrested and imprisoned. Even in Airan, in spite of persecution the doctrine continued to have followers, who were put down from time to time until the reign of Shahpur II (The Great) CE 309-379, who took radical measures and eradicated the sect from the country.



Aurelian CE 270-275

# VARAHRAN II (CE 276-293), son of Varahran I

(Silver Drachm)



**Obverse:** *'MaZDISN BaGI VaRaHRAN MaLKAN MaLKA AIRAN, MiNUCheTRI MeN IeZDAN (Defender of the Faith - Mazdayasna, Behram, King of Kings of Airan, of celestial Aryan origins).* The King's Tiara bears wings of Verethragna, one on each side (Varahran and Behram are Pahlavi and subsequent corruptions of Verethragna). Embroidered and jewelled silk cloth covers hair and orymbos. Ribbons hold curled locks of hair at the back. Beard tip tied with ribbons, holding gemstones. **Queen Rezme** bears a boar's head crown (again a feature symbolic of Verethragna). Both face bust of son with fluted cap, respectfully offering wreath of victory held in both hands. This feature of the bust of a king with his Queen and heir occurs for the first time ever on a coin.

**Reverse:** *'Nura ZI VaRaHRAN' (Fire of Behram).* Fire attendants are King (winged crown) on left and Queen (boar's head crown) on right of Fire Altar. Both hold right hand high in reverence to Fire. **Fravahar symbol** to right and **Bull's Head symbol** to left of the Fire. Shaft of Fire Altar is decorated with ribbons.

## Campaigns against the Romans:

Varahran II was given the title '**Sakan Shah**' because he had controlled the warring tribes of Sakas in Seistan, when, as the Prince, he was Governor of the Province. His encounters against Rome were not so rewarding.

\***CE 276-282:** He entered into a non-aggression pact with **Probus**, which ended when Probus was murdered.

\***CE 282-283:** **Carus** decided to take over, where Aurelian had left. He conquered every important fortress in Mesopotamia and captured Ctesiphon. While preparing to pursue the Iranians he camped overnight on a hill. There was a violent electric storm that night. His tent was struck by lightning and he was killed instantly. The entire Roman legion, taking the sign as an evil omen, gave up the campaign and retreated to Antioch.

\***CE 286:** When Ardeshir I had conquered Armenia and annexed it as a Province of Airan (48 years ago in CE 238) from the Romans under Gordian. Tiridates, the infant son (of the Armenian ruler Khusru) had been spirited away to Rome. In CE 286 **Diocletian** hastily invaded Armenia with Tiridates, trained in warfare, as Commander. Caught unawares, the Iranian Army was ousted and Tiridates was put on the throne. The Armenian persecution of Zarathushtis, once more, commenced



**Probus CE 276-282**



**Carus CE 282-283**



**Diocletian CE 283-305**