



## ARDAŠĪR II

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**ARDAŠĪR II**, Sasanian king of kings, A.D. 379-83. When his father, **Hormozd II**, died in 309, leading nobles and priests wrested the power from his eldest son, Āḍar Narseh, blinded a second son, and forced a third, Hormozd, to flee to the Romans (Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 51 n. 3). A fourth son, Šāpūr Sagānšāh was away, ruling in the east (E. Herzfeld, *Paikuli*, Berlin, 1924, I, pp. 50, 121; R.N. Frye, "The Persepolis Middle Persian Inscriptions from the Time of Shapur II," *Acta Orientalia* 30, 1966, pp. 83ff.). To maintain their supremacy, the nobles made a posthumous prince, Šāpūr, king of kings (Agathias 4.25, based on Sasanian annals; Nöldeke, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70; according to Ferdowsī, *Šāh-nāma* (Moscow) VII, p. 218.1, Šāpūr was born forty days after his father's demise; however, when Šāpūr (II) came of age, he restored the royal authority and reigned for a long time (ca. 70 years, see Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 234ff; Nöldeke, *op. cit.*, p. 68).

Šāpūr had a slightly younger half-brother Ardašīr (Ṭa'ālebī, *Gorar*, p. 532; Agathias, *loc. cit.*) who was king of Ḥaḡab (Adiabene) in the years 344 and 376 (St. Ev. Assemani, *Acta Sanctorum Martyrum* I, Rome, 1748, pp. 99, 105, cited by Nöldeke, *op. cit.*, p. 70 n. 1). In 379 Šāpūr appointed Ardašīr as his successor, securing from him the pledge that he would resign in favor of Šāpūr's son, also called Šāpūr, when the latter came of age (Nöldeke, *op. cit.*, p. 69; Ṭa'ālebī, *loc. cit.*; Ferdowsī, *op. cit.*, VII, pp. 253ff.). This appointment and the long reign of Šāpūr II led some Armenian writers to make Ardašīr a son of Šāpūr (O. Patkanian, *Essai d'une histoire de la dynastie des Sassanides d'après les renseignements fournis par les historiens arméniens*, tr. E. Prud'homme, *JA*,



1866, p. 155; Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians* 3.50, tr. R. W. Thomson, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1978, p. 314) but such a relationship, although accepted by some modern scholars (starting with G. Rawlinson, *The Seventh Great Monarchy*, London, 1876, p. 255 n. 2), is contrary to the official Sasanian records as reflected in Agathias and Oriental sources. Shortly after, Ardašīr ascended the throne and reigned for four years (Agathias, loc. cit.; Nöldeke, op. cit., p. 69; Ferdowsī, VII, p. 257; Ta'ālebī, op. cit., pp. 532f.; Bīrūnī, *Chronology*, pp. 123-28 with reference to older authorities; Ferdowsī gives him a reign of ten years, but his source had incorporated some years of other kings in this period). He was deposed by the nobles in favor of Šāpūr III (Nöldeke, op. cit., p. 70; Ta'ālebī, pp. 533f.).

Of Ardašīr's foreign policy little is known. When the Armenian general, Manuel, deposed a king appointed by the Romans and sought Ardašīr's help, he received it, and Armenia became a Persian protectorate. Soon after, however, Manuel turned against the Persian garrison, and, as war ensued, Ardašīr died or was deposed. Under his successor, Šāpūr III, Armenia was partitioned between the Iranian and the Eastern Roman empires (the main source is Faustus of Armenia V. 34-38, well used and explained by Rawlinson, op. cit., pp. 255-59).

Ardašīr's coins show that he adopted the dome-shaped crown of [Ardašīr I](#); the reverse depicts the usual fire altar flanked by two adorers, but on some coins the king's bust also emerges from the fire (possibly a representation of the royal, *farrah* "fortune," see A. Sh. Shahbazi, *AMI* 13, 1981, pp. 131f.); the legend is normally "Ardašīr, king of kings of the Iranians;" rarely also "and of non-Iranians" (F. D. J. Paruck, *Sasanian Coins*, Bombay, 1924, pp. 92f., 352f.; R. Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics*, Braunschweig, 1971, p. 74). In the so-called "picture book" of the Sasanian kings, Ardašīr was depicted as standing, holding a spear in the right hand and a sword in the left; his crown was green, his embroidered tunic was blue adorned with golden circlets (*modannar*, lit. "with gold coins"), and his trousers were red (Ḥamza, p. 53 whence *Mojmal*, pp. 34-35).

Ardašīr's predecessors had immortalized their investiture or triumphs on reliefs in Fārs province; he himself transferred the site for royal memorials to Ṭāq-e Bostān near Kermānšāh, a region rich in ancient rock sculptures. His monument is a representation sculptured in the sober but lifeless official style. Set in a rectangular bay (ca. 4.5 by 2 m), it shows Ardašīr flanked by two male figures; all are standing and wear full regalia. The king receives the diadem



from a male figure who used to be identified as Ahura Mazdā/Ohrmazd but whose crenellated crown is that of Šāpūr II, who did indeed invest Ardašīr with the crown (P. Calmeyer, *AMI* 10, 1977, pp. 187-88 with bibliography). Both kings stand upon the slain body of an enemy, evidently a Roman, whose diadem marks him as an emperor. Behind Ardašīr stands another figure; he holds the *barsom* bundle, and wears a crown adorned with twelve rays of the sun. His identification as Zoroaster (e.g., Sir R. Ker Porter, *Travels*, London, II, 1822, p. 193) or Vərəθraϥna/Bahrām (Sir J. G. Coyajee, “The Supposed Sculpture of Zoroaster at the Tāk-i Bostān,” *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, N.S. 22/6, 1926, pp. 391-409) or even Ādur, the god Fire (Dastur M. N. Dhalla, “The Nimbus-Crowned Figure at Tāk-i Bostān,” *Modi Memorial Volume*, ed. D. P. Sanjana, Bombay, 1930, pp. 62-67) are all to be rejected in favor of Mithra (first suggested by F. Justi, in *Avesta, Pahlavi and Ancient Persian Studies in Honour of Peshotanji Sanjana*, Strassburg, 1904, p. 157), who already on the Nemrūd Dāg stele wears the same crown. He stands on a large lotus flower, the exact connotation of which can not be determined (F. Sarre and E. Herzfeld, *Iranische Felsreliefs*, Berlin, 1910, pp. 198-99; E. Herzfeld, *Am Tor von Asien*, Berlin, 1920, pp. 59ff.; K. Erdmann, *Die Kunst Irans zur Zeit der Sasaniden*, repr. Mainz, 1969, pp. 67-68).

The Roman emperor beneath Ardašīr’s feet has plausibly been identified as Julian the Apostate (Von Schönebeck, apud Erdmann, op. cit., p. 138), who invaded Persia in 363 and was vanquished west of Ctesiphon. Since Ardašīr’s own reign saw no war with the Romans and Julian’s expedition occurred when Ardašīr was king of Adiabene, it may safely be concluded that he took part in the defense of the empire so actively that, after Šāpūr II, he could claim a substantial share of the Persian victory over the Romans and commemorate this in a rock-relief which symbolically depicted his investiture by Šāpūr II as well as their joint triumph over Julian (Calmeyer, loc. cit). Mithra stands here as the god of contract to judge the deeds of the parties to this pact (perhaps referring to Šāpūr’s condition that Ardašīr leave the crown to the former’s son, prince Šāpūr, see above; a different view is taken by G. Azarpay, *Iranica Antiqua* 17, 1982, pp. 181ff.). Clearly, Ardašīr’s career kept him in western Iran. Hence it is difficult to accept the view that he was a son of Šāpūr Sagānšāh, and ruled first as king of Kūšānšahr, where he vanquished the last king of Kūšān—whose portrait is shown prostrate under Ardašīr’s feet at Țāq-e Bostān, and that he on ascending to the imperial Iranian throne, appointed his son Hormozd as his successor in the east (e.g. V. G. Lukonin, *Kul’tura sasanidskogo Irana*, Moscow, 1969, pp. 147-48). Indeed, Sasanian traditions



know nothing of such family relationships.

A beautiful silver dish found near Sārī in Māzandarān shows a mounted king who shoots at lions while turned in the saddle of a galloping charger (‘Alī Ḥākemī, “Bošqāb-e noqra-ye monḥaṣer be-fard-e sāsānī makšūfa dar ḥawālī-e Sārī” [A unique Sasanian silver dish found near Sārī], *Gozārešhā-ye bāstānšenāsī*, Tehran, 1334 Š./1955, pp. 329ff.; R. Ghirshman, *Persian Art: Parthian and Sassanian Dynasties*, New York, 1962, figs. 258-61. Cf. also the alabaster plaque published by D. G. Shepherd, “Sasanian Art in Cleveland,” *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 51/4, April, 1964, pp. 66ff.). The crown of the king on this dish resembles that of Ardašīr II, and the treatment of the drapery on it parallels the “new linear form which expresses itself in a series of curved lines developing at times into circles or semicircles” which is used in the Ardašīr relief at Ṭāq-e Bostān (Shepherd, op. cit., pp. 72-73); thus the identification of the king on the Sārī dish as Ardašīr seems justified.

Šāpūr’s act in selecting Ardašīr as his successor, and Ardašīr’s choice of Ṭāq-e Bostān, which reflects a desire to link the Sasanians with earlier dynasties who left memorials in western Iran, suggest that Ardašīr was a strong personality. The harsh way in which he is said to have treated the nobles (Nöldeke, op. cit., p. 70; Ṭa‘ālebī, op. cit., p. 533; Ebn al-Balkī, p. 73) probably stems from his attempt to follow Šāpūr II in curbing the power of ambitious aristocrats who sought independence whenever a ruler showed weakness (cf. Nöldeke, p. 70 n. 2). If so, the tradition which described him as a wise, generous, and faithful ruler worthy of the title Beneficent (*nīkūkār*) (Ferdowsī, p. 258; *Dārāb Hormazyār’s Rivāyat* [Riwāyāt-e Dārāb Hormazdyār], ed. M. R. Unvala, Bombay, 1922, II, p. 437; cf. Bīrūnī, *Chronology*, p. 123), may not have been unfounded.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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