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ASB I. IN PRE-ISLAMIC IRAN

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From the dawn of history the Iranians have celebrated the horse in their art and in their literature.

There were horses closely related to (and also the progenitors of) present-day domesticated horses living in temperate Eurasia in the Pleistocene (F. Haņčar, *Das Pferd in prähistorischer und früher historischer Zeit*, Vienna, 1956). In Iran, skeletal remains of a native breed of small size, used evidently as food, have been discovered in prehistoric sites: in a cave at Behistun (Bīsotūn), 48 km east of Kermānšāh, and in Tamtama, a mountainous area west of Lake Urmia (C. S. Coon, *Cave Excavations in Iran, 1949*, Museum Monographs, Philadelphia, 1951, pp. 42f.); in Tel-i Iblis, south-central Iran; and in Godin Tepe, central Zagros (M. A. Littauer and J. H. Crouwel, *Wheeled Vehicles and Ridden Animals in the Ancient Near East*, Leiden and Cologne, 1979, pp. 24f. with references). This breed has tentatively been considered as the origin of "the Caspian miniature horse" now occasionally found in Māzandarān (L. L. Firouz, *The Caspian Miniature Horse of Iran*, Miami, 1972, pp. 1-8, 24-27; Idem, "Osteological and Historical Implications of the Caspian Miniature Horse to Early Horse Domestication in Iran," in J. Matolcsi, ed., *Domestikationsforschung und Geschichte der Haustiere*, Budapest, 1973, pp. 309-15). However, horse remains associated with prehistoric archeological finds may represent not the domestic horse, but a closely related species not

necessarily ancestral to the domestic horse (cf. S. Bökönyi, in Firouz, *The Caspian Miniature Horse*, pp. 12ff.). The still prevailing view is that Indo-Europeans domesticated the horse and introduced it to other territories ("the earliest indisputable evidence of horse domestication is from the Neolithic Sredni Stog Culture in the Dnieper and Don basins," Littauer and Crouwel, op. cit., p. 25), a view supported by the linguistic evidence: All the main Indo-European languages have preserved the IE. word for "horse" (IE. **ek'u̯o-*, see J. Pokorny, ed., *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bern, 1956, I, pp. 301-02; for Iranian see H. W. Bailey, *Dictionary of Khotan Saka*, Cambridge, 1977, p. 11).

The antique horses were smaller than modern breeds and were primarily used for drawing chariots of war and transport (see especially Haṇčar, op. cit., pp. 472ff.; W. Nagel, *Der mesopotamische Streitwagen und seine Entwicklung im ostmediterranen Bereich*, Berlin, 1964; Littauer and Crouwell, op. cit., chaps. VIIff.). The Indo-Europeans highly esteemed the horse (Julius v. Negelein, *Das Pferd im arischen Altertume*, Königsburg, 1903, is still useful on this topic), especially the white horse, which was particular to the sun god (W. Geiger, *Ostiranische Kultur im Altertum*, Erlangen, 1882, p. 351), and when the Mesopotamians received the domesticated horse from the Aryans, they also accepted the notion of the holiness of the white horse (E. F. Weidner, "Weisse Pferde im alten Orient," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 9, 1952, pp. 157-59). Already in the second millennium B.C. there existed Hittite texts (such as the Kikkuli treatises) on the breeding, grooming, and use of the horse (Haṇčar, op. cit., pp. 478ff.; A. Kammenhuber, *Hippologia hethitica*, Wiesbaden, 1961, passim).

The horse in the Avesta. Avestan hymns, especially the older *Yašt*s, abound with praises of the horse (Geiger, op. cit., pp. 350ff.; E. Pūr-e Dāwūd, *Farhang-e Īrān-e bāstān* I, Tehran, 1326 Š./1947, pp. 243ff.). Swift horses were among the most desired boons bestowed by Aši, the deity of prosperity (*Yašt* 17.12). The gods themselves possessed fine horses: "four speedy (horses) of one color, white, undying, reared on supernatural food, the forehooves shod with gold but their hindhooves with silver" drew the chariot of Mithra (*Yašt* 10.125); four white horses also drew the chariot of Sraoša (*Yasna* 57.27f.). The patron deity of horses was called Druvāspā "possessing sound horses," while Vərəθraγna (Bahrām) and Tištriya, the divinity of the fluctuating clouds, could appear in the form of a bright red horse (*Yast* 149; 8.18).

The horse was primarily used for drawing war chariots, but its gradual employment as a riding animal is also attested in the Avesta, according to

which some heroes entered into battle fields or places of sacrifice “upon horseback (e.g., *Yašt* 5.51; 10.11; *Yasna* 11.2). Horses were also offered to gods, and the Ābān Yašt celebrates many Iranian kings and heroes who sacrificed one hundred horses, one thousand oxen, and ten thousand sheep to Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā, asking her for special boons. The formula well indicates the value of the horse, and indeed, an Avestan passage records that an excellent (*aγṛγo.təmō*) horse was worth eight pregnant cows (*Farhang-e Oīm* 3h, see *AirWb*., col. 217). The Iranian society was divided into four classes: the priests, the pasturers, the artisans, and the chariot-riders (*raθaēštar*, i.e., the warriors, see Artēštār) (*Yasna* 19.17). Chariot racing and horse racing were evidently practiced by the Avestan people, who called the race course *čarətā* (*AirWb*., col. 582). A day-long ride of a man upon a good horse was a measure of length used by those people (*Yašt*5.4).

The qualities of a good horse were: swiftness, fleetness, endurance, and sharp eyesight. Of colors, white was the most praised, then came dun, redbrown, dark brown, and black (Geiger, op. cit., p. 351). Strict rules were prescribed by the Avesta concerning the breeding, grooming, training, and feeding of horses, and guarding them from diseases and harm (see, e.g. *Duzd-sar-nizad Nask as summarized in *Dēnkard*8.24ff. and *Nikātum* in *Nask*, ibid., 8.19, 40). The honored position of the horse in the Avestan period is underlined by the fact that many notable Iranians—including Zoroaster’s forebears—bore names compounded with *aspa–* (Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 486; M. Mayrhofer, ed., *Iranisches Personen-namenbuch* I/1, Vienna, 1977, p. 22; I/3, 1979, p. 4 [indices]).

The horse in western Iran in the early first millennium B.C. From the late second millennium B.C., horses were increasingly used throughout the Middle East as chariot animals, evidently as a consequence of the arrival of fresh waves of Indo-Europeans. Also, breeding, grooming, and equipment improved: Selective breeding and better forage produced larger types; horses of ill temper were castrated; harness and metal bridle pieces developed substantially, and rudimentary saddles (made of quilted felt or woven rug) facilitated easier riding. By the first half of the first millennium, the armies of the Hittites, Egyptians, Assyrians, Elamites, and Indo-Europeans included strong cavalry units (R. Ghirshman, *Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest*, 1954, pp. 73ff.; P. R. S. Moorey, *Catalogue of the Ancient Persian Bronzes in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford, 1971, pp. 102-03 with references; Littauer and Crouwel, op. cit., chaps. VIII and IX).

In Iran, we have late second-millennium archeological evidence from Mārlīk (objects made of horse teeth, see E. Negahbān, *Mārlīk*, Tehran, 1964, p. 15) and early first-millennium skeletal remains from Gīān, Tepe Sīalk, Čoḡā Zanbīl and Susa (Moorey, op. cit., p. 103 with references). Tepe Sīalk also bore witness to the Aryan association of the horse with the sun (Ghirshman, op. cit., p.80). Bābā-Jān (east Lorestān) and Ḥasanlū (Azarbaijan) revealed remains of horses together with their bronze bits. From Ḥasanlū we also have a fine silver beaker ornamented with the representation of a biga mounted by an archer and a driver (Moorey, loc. cit.; E. Porada, *The Art of Ancient Iran*, 1965, pl. XXVIII). All these indicate the increasing use of the horse by cavalry nations among the newly arrived Aryans. It is from this period that large quantities of "Luristan Bronzes" have been discovered, and among them are many harness bits and bridle pieces as well as items for decorating horses' heads and chests, of the types which are depicted on Assyrian palace reliefs (Moorey, op. cit., pp. 103, 106ff.). The pasturelands of western Iran were targets of Assyrian invasions for the purpose of securing booty, primarily horses. But the hit and-run tactics of the west Iranian settlers gave the Assyrians difficulties they could not surmount with traditional arms; and so they too began organizing mobile cavalry units. With these they penetrated deep into Iran, Asia Minor, and even reached Egypt; everywhere their mounted forces caused destruction, captured inhabitants, and plundered their possessions of herds and metal utensils (I. M. D'yakonov, *Istoria Midii*, tr. K. Kešāvarz, *Tārīḵ-e Mād*, Tehran, 1345 Š./1966, pp. 194ff.; Ghirshman, *Iran*, pp. 84ff.).

The Median Period. Bronze and iron harness and bridle pieces have been discovered at Median sites, also Assyrian annals record and reliefs depict campaigns in Media and Median tribute consisting primarily of horses (cf. R. Ghirshman, "Un Mède sur les bas-reliefs de Nimrud," *Iraq* 36, 1974, pp. 37f.). Especially praised were the horses of Nīšāya (NisāyaNesā, south of Hamadān, see below) (D'yakonov, op. cit., pp. 245ff.; Moorey, op. cit., pp. 115f.). Median levels at Nūš-e Jān near Hamadān have produced remains of horses of varied sizes "from ponies or miniature horses that stood 1.05-1.10 m to horses standing over 1.50 m at the withers, with the majority standing 1.35-1.37m, and variation from light to heavy types" (Littauer and Crouwel, op. cit., p. 111 with references). Finally, Cyaxares organized a highly trained and well-equipped cavalry force and overthrew the Assyrians (Herodotus 1.103f.). The riding costume, consisting of a long-sleeved robe, a leathern tunic (jacket), tight-fitting trousers which terminated in socks used as half boots, and headgear with neckguard and cheek pieces (the tiara), were originally Median

(cf. Herodotus 1.135, 7. 61-62). At Persepolis the members of the Median delegation depicted on the Apadāna stairways are shown in this costume and their "tribute" also include items of the same dressing (E. F. Schmidt., *Persepolis* I, Chicago, 1953, p. 85 with pl. 27). On the northern stairway of the Apadāna, the Medes' "tribute" includes a fine stallion with knotted tail and decorated mane (ibid.). Other nations related to the Medes—Armenians, Cappadocians, Sakas, and Sagartians—also wear the Median costume (save for different headgears) and bring horses (ibid., with pls. 29, 35, 37, 42). With the Median horses, the "horse-food" (*aspa.asta* = lucerne) was brought into Mesopotamia, where it received the name *aspasti* (hence Syr. *ʾspstʾ*, Ar. *al-feṣfeṣa*, Eng. alfalfa) (B. Meissner, "Babylonische Pflanzennamen," *ZA* 6, 1981, pp. 216-96, esp. p. 296).

The Achaemenid Period. Darius the Great tells us that his country was "possessed of good horses and of good people" (Kent, *Old Persian*, p. 136), Herodotus (1.136) testifies that the Persians carefully instructed their sons "to ride, to draw the bow, and to speak the truth," and Strabo confirms and elaborates this evidence (*Geography*15.3.18). The finest horses were bred in the Median plains, and those of the royal stable were picked from them (Polybius 10.70). Most prized was the Nisaean breed, celebrated for its beauty, large size, and speed (Herodotus 3,106, 7,40; Aristotle, *History of Animals* 9.50.30; other references in Hanslik, Pauly-Wissowa, XVII/1, cols. 712f., s.v. *Nisaion pedion*). The plain is to be sought at the site of Hārūnābād (Šāhābād), in the Kermānšāh region, on the road between Ḥolwān and Hamadān (J. Marquart, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte von Eran*, Leipzig, 1905, II, pp. 158ff.). This area contained 160,000 horses in the Persian period, but the number was reduced to 60,000 in the reign of Alexander (Diodorus Siculus 17.110). Strabo noted that both Media and Armenia were adapted for breeding fine horses: "There is a meadow tract . . . on the way from Persia and Babylonia to the Caspian Gates: here, it is said, fifty thousand mares were pastured in the time of the Persians, and were the king's stud. The Nisaean horses, the best and largest in the king's provinces, were of this breed, according to some writers, but according to others they came from Armenia. Their shape is peculiar, as is that of the Parthian horses, compared with those of Greece and others in our country" (*Geography* 11.13.7). He again states (11.14.9) that the Nisaean type was bred in Armenia also, adding: "the satrap of Armenia used to send annually to the king of Persia 20,000 foals at the time of the festival of Mithracina [Miθrakāna Mehrgān]". He further remarks (11.13.8) that "Cappadocia paid to the Persians yearly, in addition to a tribute

in silver, 1500 horses, 2000 mules, 50,000 sheep, and the Medes contributed nearly twice this amount." Other horse-rich pasturelands were in the Upper Babylonia (the satrap of Babylonia possessed, besides war horses, 800 stallions and 16,000 mares in Herodotus' time; 1.192); Cilicia (which gave the Persians a yearly tribute of 360 white horses: Herodotus 3.90), and East Iranian provinces—Chorasmia, Bactria, Sogdiana, Saka lands, and other neighboring regions—which furnished the Persian empire with fine cavalry units of large proportion (cf. C. Hignett, *Xerxes' Invasion of Greece*, Oxford, 1963, pp. 44f.; Littauer and Crouwel, op. cit., pp. 157f.). It was during the Achaemenid period that the lucerne was introduced by the Persians into Greece, where it received the name "Median [i.e., Iranian] grass (*Medicago sativa*: V. Hehn, *Kulturpflanzen und Haustiere*, 8th ed., Berlin, 1911, pp. 412ff.).

Historical representations of the horse and riders abound in Achaemenid art, especially on Greco-Persian gems and monuments. In Persepolis, the reliefs depict many horses and some horse-drawn chariots but no horsemen (Littauer and Crouwel, op. cit., chap. X with ample literature). These representations have been used to determine the types and sizes of the Achaemenid horses (e.g., Firouz, *The Caspian Miniature Horse*, pp. 26f.), but the criteria are made unsafe by artistic conventions of these depictions. Thus, on the famous cylinder seal of Darius the Great (now in the British Museum), the king is shown hunting two lions from a biga; one lion is already killed, the other stands on its hind legs to meet his arrows. The one on the ground appears ten times smaller than its rampant mate because it is the latter which is meant to be the focal point of the scene, being at the same line as Darius and thus furnishing the symmetry to his figure; the horses drawing the king's chariot occupy the lower part of the scene, which needed no emphasis, and they are accordingly shown unrealistically diminutive in form. There are, nevertheless, certain indications—such as the shape of the head, slenderness or thickness of legs—which permit a rough classification of the horses depicted on Persepolitan reliefs (G. Walser, *Die Völkerschaften auf den Reliefs von Persepolis*, Berlin, 1966, pp. 104f.). Of the twenty-three delegations appearing on the Apadāna stairways, seven present horses as part of their gifts: the Medes (on the northern stairway: Schmidt, *Persepolis* I, p. 85 with pl. 27), Armenians, Cappadocians, Pointed-hat Sakas, Sagartians, Hauma-worshipping Sakas, and Thracians. The Syrians and Libyans bring horse-drawn chariots. In addition, the horses of the Great King's two chariots as well as his personal mounts are depicted. The latter group are shown "as long-bodied, big-boned and ram-headed, with short thick necks and heavy crests" (Littauer and

Crouwel, op. cit., p. 148). The saddle-horses of the king are slightly smaller, but the "tribute" chariot-horses "are pony-sized,... lighter in type, shorter-bodied, with more elegant heads and even a suggestion of a concave profile" (ibid.). In another small type, which appears on the seal of Darius and coins of Sidon, the ram-headedness is emphasized and the ears are depicted in a peculiar vertical position (ibid., pp. 148-49). The "tribute" horses also very in type: Median, Armenian, and Cappadocian breeds are—like those of the royal stable—large and powerfully built. They are probably representatives of the Nisaean breed of Media and Armenia (see above). Saka horses are stockier and slightly shorter which may indicate more endurance; they are of the "Turanian" breed of Central Asia, which could carry armored riders. Sagartian and Thracian horses are slender and light. The Libyan and Syrian horses are fine, small, and fleet, like their modern descendants, the "Arab breed" (Walser, op. cit., pp. 104f.). These representations belong to the earlier Achaemenid period. Careful grooming, selective breeding, and better fodder gradually produced larger yet fleeter horses, of the type shown under Iranian warriors on the so-called Alexander Mosaic (B. Andreae, *Das Alexandermosaik aus Pompeji*, Berlin, 1977) and the "Alexander Sarcophagus" from Sidon (Volkmar von Graeve, *Der Alexander-Sarkophag und seine Werkstatt*, Berlin, 1970, pp. 95ff.).

In the Achaemenid period, the role of the chariot as a war machine diminished rapidly while mounted troops gained increasing importance (Littauer and Crouwel, op. cit., pp. 152ff.). The heavy, large horses—mostly of the Nisaean breed—were used primarily by the royalty and privileged groups; ordinary troopers, especially on rocky and arid terrain, used the lighter types (ibid., pp. 155f.). The horse shoe was as yet unknown. For a saddle one used a rug, or a cloth made of felt usually patterned and with fringed edges. Such a rug was found in a grave at Pazyrik (5th-4th centuries B.C.): It is ornamented with figures of riding horses (S. I. Rudenko, *Frozen Tombs of Siberia: The Pazyrik Burials of Iron-Age Horsemen*, tr. M. W. Thompson, London, 1970, pls. 174f.). A rudimentary saddle closer to the later one was used, at least among North Iranians: It was composed of hair-cushions, faced at back and front with wooden or bone plaques (ibid., pp. 129ff. with figs. 66f.; Littauer and Crouwel, op. cit., p. 156 n. 56). Occasionally, Iranian cavalrymen of the elite units wore armor: helmet, corselet, and "thigh-pieces" (Av. *rānapān*; Gk. *parameridia*: Herodotus 7.84, 86; Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.8.3, 8.6-9) which consisted of quilted felt pieces hung from the "saddle" to protect not only the rider's thighs but also the horse's sides (Xenophon, *Peri hippikēs* [The art of horsemanship] 12.9). On rare occasions, the chest and head of the horse were protected with chamfrein

and breast pieces (Xenophon, op. cit., 12.8; idem, *Anabasis* 1.8.6). Under the Parthians, these defensive items developed into full horse armor. That Iranian horsemanship influenced the Greeks is evident from Xenophon's *Peri hippikēs* and *Hipparchicus* (Cavalry commander 1.17), written when the stirrup was as yet not known. To mount, one took hold of the rein or harness and jumped upon the back of the horse; to dismount, one simply jumped down. Only the elderly were occasionally helped by "giving a leg" in mounting or dismounting. This manner was known even in Greece as "the Persian way" (ibid.).

The horse played a significant part in Achaemenid ritual and beliefs. The kings were traditionally mounted on horse-drawn chariots, always using the Nisaean breed for the purpose (Herodotus 7.40; Arrian, *Anabasis* 2.11, 3.15). Ahura Mazdā and the sun had similar chariots (Herodotus, ibid.; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.3.12; Aphian, *Mithridatius*70). But the saddle horse was now more favored. The best gift to a Persian was considered to be a fine horse (Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.2.27). This was also true of divinities: White horses were sacrificed to the sun (Herodotus, 1.216 [by the Massagetae]; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.3.12 [by the Magi]; *Anabasis* 4.5.35 [by the Armenians]; Pausanias 3.20.4 [by the Persians]) and to the waters (Herodotus 7.113; cf. J. Markwart, *Wehrot und Arang*, Leiden, 1938, p. 88). Cyrus the Great gained so elevated a position that every month a horse was sacrificed to his soul (Arrian, *Anabasis* 6.29.7).

Horses were often matched against each other in race fields (Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*8.3.25). "In Thessaly, Xerxes matched his own horses against the Thessalians', which he heard were the best in Greece; the Greek coursers were left far behind in the race" (Herodotus 7.196). A friend in life, the horse played a part in the ceremonies held at a hero's death. Thus, when a notable died, his steed, with its mane shaven off, was brought in the procession of the mourners (Herodotus 9.24; Quintus Curtius 10.5.17; cf. the illustration of this rite on a stele from Memphis dating from about 400 B.C.: F. W. v. Bissing, "Totenstele eines persischen Grossen aus Memphis," *ZDMG* 84, 1930, pp. 226-38). Finally, the importance of the horse among the Iranian nobility is evidenced by the fact that many of them bore names compounded with *aspa* (Justi, *Namenbuch*p. 486; W. Hinz, *Altiranisches Sprachgut der Nebenüberlieferungen*, Wiesbaden, 1975, pp. 42ff., 289).

The Parthian Period. Proud of the beauty of their horses (Aelian 3.2), the Parthians taught their children and servants the arts of archery and

horsemanship (Justin 41.2). “They ride on horseback at all times; on horseback they go to feasts, attend to public and personal business, march out, stand still, and converse . . . . This is the difference between the freemen and the slaves: the latter go on foot, the former on horseback” (ibid., 41.3). The Parthians obtained horses from the pasturelands known in the Achaemenid period (Strabo, *Geography* 11.13.7; 14.9). At one time, 50,000 Parthian horsemen were brought into the field against Marc Antony (Justin 41.2).

Documentary evidence for Parthian horses comes from various sites, mainly in the form of pictorial representations. They include depictions on seal-impressions from Nīsā-Miθradātakarta (now Ashkhabad), on the walls of Dura Europos, on the rocks of Tang-e Sarvak in Fārs, on the triumphal relief of Ardašīr at Fīrūzābād, and in the frescoes of the Kūh-e Ḵᵛāǰa in Sīstān (R. Ghirshman, *Iran: The Parthian and Sasanian Dynasties*, London, 1962, figs. 39, 55, 62, 63, 163). East Iranian horses are shown on Indo-Scythian coins (e.g., the tetradrachm of Spalirises, ca. 80 B.C.: A. D. H. Bivar, “Cavalry Equipment and Tactics on the Euphrates Frontier,” *Dumbarton Oaks Paper* 26, 1972, p. 273 with fig. 1a) and on Khwarezmian artifacts (R. Ghirshman, “La selle en Iran,” *Iranica Antiqua* 10, 1973, pp. 94ff., fig. 4). These illustrations indicate that Parthian horses were fairly large, ram-headed, and thickly set. They were essentially war horses, and in 116 B.C., a small herd of them, together with the “horsefood” (**aspā/ăsti*, cf. Hinz, op. cit., p. 45) were brought into China as gifts to the emperor Wu Ti of Han. The “blood sweating horse of Farghana” acquired the title of “Heavenly race” (*Ṭʿien-ma*), propagated rapidly, and furnished the Chinese with a heavy cavalry force which became instrumental in China’s westward expansion and her victory over northern nomads (the literature on the subject is very extensive, see, e.g., H. H. Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty by Pan Ku*, II, Baltimore, 1944, pp. 132ff.; Mamio Egami, “The Kʿuaiṭʿi, the Ṭʿao-yu, and Tan-hsi, the Strange Domestic Animals of the Hsiung-nu,” *Memoires of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, 13, 1951, pp. 87-123 esp. pp. 94ff.; A. Waley, “The Heavenly Horses of Ferghana: A New View,” *History Today* 5, 1955, pp. 95-103).

As selective breeding and skillful grooming continued, the strength and adaptability of Iranian horses increased. They now carried fully armored lancers—the elite riders of Parthia—and were themselves protected by “a strong coat, made of little plates in the form of feathers” (Justin 41.2). This lamellar horse armor became known in Persian as *bargostvān*. According to Plutarch, they carried long “spear with steel, and often had impetus enough to

pierce through two men at once" *Crassus* 27.2). The horse shoe came into use, and a saddle with two humps (in front and back) was added to the older rug or cloth (Ghirshman, ibid.). The finest examples of the fully armored Parthian lancers are shown at Tang-e Sarvak and on a Dura Europos graffito (Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthian and Sasanian Dynasties*, figs. 69. 63c). An actual horse armor, made of leather covered by metal scales, was discovered at Dura Europos (M. I. Rostovtzeff, *The Excavations at Dura Europos: Perliminary Report of the Second Season*, New Haven, 1931, pp. 194ff.). It fitted a light Arab horse, which gives an indication of the size of the average Parthian mount (N. C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia*, Chicago, 1938, p. 86 n. 52). Chain armor was introduced in the late Parthian period and rapidly spread to the West and to the Far East (Bivar, op. cit., pp. 275ff.). The fleetness of the Parthian horsemen was proverbial; in particular, their ability to shoot backward while the horse galloped away (Justin 41.2)—the so-called "Parthian shot"—was a dread to their Roman adversaries (M. I. Rostovtzeff, "The Parthian Shot," *American Journal of Archaeology* 57, 1943, pp. 174ff.).

The majority of the Parthians rode bare-back, and had little defensive armor (G. Rawlinson, *The Sixth Great Oriental Monarchy*, London, 1873, pp. 160, 405). Ordinarily, however, a small simple rug served as the saddle (Ghirshman, ibid., fig. 119). The Parthian period saw the beginning of "the Age of Chivalry" with its heraldry associations (G. Wiedengren in H. Temporini and W. Haase, ed., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II/9, pt. 1, Berlin, 1979, pp. 253ff.) Thus, the very word "Parthian" (*Parθavapahlav*) acquired the meaning "knight, hero," while the term "horse borne/rider" (*asabārasavār*) came to signify "noble, knight" in contrast to "foot soldier" (*payāda*) which became synonymous with "common people." Also, the branding of horses and equipment with family insignia (*nišān*) gained currency. Thus, the Parthian royal *nišān*—a circle upon a base—ornaments the horse of the last Parthian king, Ardavān, as depicted in the rock relief at Fīrūzābād representing the Battle of Hormozdagān (Bivar, op. cit., p. 245; clearly visible on pl. 52 in W. Hinz, *Altiranische Funde und Forschungen*, Berlin, 1969). Traditional Iranian rites connected with the horse were still observed. Thus, the white horse was still considered by the Parthian king to be a favored offering to the sun (*Philostratus, The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 1.31).

The Sasanian Period. The Sasanians regarded the white colored horse—especially if shining of hair golden at ears and slim of limbs—as the best of all horses (*Mēnōg ī xrad*, purs. 60.9, p. 162; *Bundahišn*, p. 120.12-13). In

the third century, a war horse was, as the Dura Europos armor evidenced, as large as a middle-sized Arabian horse of the present day, but subsequently, large coursers appeared which easily carried heavily armed and fully armored cavalry in addition to their own armor. A fine example of such a horse was Šabdēz, the favorite of Ḵosrow II, which according to E. Herzfeld is immortalized in the representation carved at Tāq-e Bostān and in early Islamic poetry (E. Herzfeld, "Khusrau Parwēz und der Tāq-i Vastān," *AMI* 9, 1938, pp. 91ff.). Still the Nisaean breed was the most famous of all (Ammianus Marcellinus 13.6.30). Selective breeding, strict regulations, and careful feeding were observed in the raising of horses, and customs developed regarding the grooming, training, leading, and riding of them on various occasions (at ceremonies, at battles, in the chase). The backbone of the army was its cavalry, which was composed of the sons of the nobility and had a high official as *stōr-bizišk* (veterinarian). The Sasanian Avesta contained a special chapter (Artēštārestān) devoted to the art of war and the grooming, feeding, training, breaking, and use of the horses (Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 215ff.). Although the stirrup was invented in this period (probably in or near China) and was used by the Sarmatians and some other nomadic riders, it seems not to have been known in Iran till the Arab conquest (A. D. H. Bivar, "The Stirrup and Its Origins," *Oriental Art* 1/2, 1955, pp. 3-7; R. Grousset, *The Empires of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia*, tr. N. Walford, New Jersey, 1970, p. 546 n. 12 to ch. I). The lack of stirrups was partially compensated for by better saddle equipment, for the seat of the mounted warrior was now provided with two guard clamps, presumably integral parts of the saddle and made of metal and padded with leather or the like; one was a knoblike device curving outward in front of the saddle as a thick band coiling across the top of the rider's thigh, and the other was a high cantle at the back, usually covered beneath the tail of the long armored coat of the equestrian. "Essentially, this saddle had the same safety devices as the medieval war saddle" (Schmidt, *Persepolis* III, Chicago, 1970, p. 135).

A large number of rock-reliefs, metal objects, gems, and stucco ornaments give us a variety of representations of the horse and rider in Sasanian art. However, as with the Achaemenid period, traditional conventions—such as the desire to depict royal figures larger than life—forced the artists not to adhere strictly to the rules of realism. Hence, it is unsafe to use these representations to ascertain the sizes and types of the Sasanian horses. The point is well illustrated by the famous cameo in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris (Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthian and Sasanian Dynasties*, fig. 195), which

shows Šāpūr I on horseback in combat against a mounted Roman Caesar, evidently Valerian. Both emperors are riding pony-sized horses with short legs, thick necks, and ram-heads, familiar in Achaemenid and Sasanian representations, though one would expect Valerian's horse to have been of the large-bodied European type known from Roman depictions. Furthermore, there are marked differences in size between the mounts of Šāpūr at Dārābgerd (Hinz, *Altiranische Funde und Forschungen*, Berlin, 1969, pls. 77, 91) and Ardašīr at Naqš-e Rostam (ibid., pl. 60; Ghirshman, op. cit., fig. 168); the former is large, with long legs, slenderish neck, and fairly small head, but the latter is the traditional small horse of the Persian representations. At Dārābgerd, Western influence has allowed the carver of the relief to depict the horse more naturally, i.e., large-bodied, as also on several other representations where the artists have followed a more naturalistic approach: One is engraved on an intaglio now in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris (F. Sarre, *Die Kunst des alten Persien*, Berlin, 1923, pl. 142 no. 7); another is the horse of Bahrām I at Bīšāpūr (Ghirshman, op. cit., fig. 211); a third is the Šabdēz of Ḵosrow II, already mentioned. On the whole, two breeds seem to have been favored: the large Nisaean breed, and the small traditional one. The former acquired fame outside Iranian borders, and Chinese emperors sought them eagerly (E. H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963, pp. 58ff.).

Under the Sasanians, horse equipment become more elaborate and ornamental. Royal saddles were placed on very finely woven carpets, the designs of which are clearly visible on the reliefs and metal works; huge tassles and ribbons hung from magnificent caparisons; and the family or individual *nišān* was branded on the animal and marked on its trappings (thus, the royal Sasanian *nišān*, a bi-ribboned diadem appears on the horses of Ardašīr at Fīrūzābād [Hinz, op. cit., pls. 51, 52] and, four centuries later, on the Šabdēz of at Tāq-e Bostān [Ghirshman, op. cit., fig. 235]).

The state and great nobles owned large numbers of domestic animals including horses (K. Hori, "A Chinese Account of Persia in the Sixth Century A.D.," *Spiegel Memorial Volume*, Bombay, 1908, pp. 246-50 esp. p. 247). A senior official, *āxwarbed* "Master of the stable," supervised the state mounts and another, **āxwar-āmār-dibīr* "secretary of the stable" (Ar. *āhor-hamār-dafira* in al-Ḵᵛārazmī, *Ketāb mafātīḥ al-ʿolūm*, ed. G. v. Vloten, [Leiden, 1895], p. 118) kept records of them and their expenditure (Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 135, 395, 396). The Pahlavi *Vendidad* testifies (6.2) that while a sheep was valued at 3

stater (= 12 drachms) a horse was priced at 30 stater (= 120 drachms). The horse-food (lucerne) was also highly priced (Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 244 with n. 1).

A great deal of data regarding the horse and horsemanship of the Sasanian, if indeed not earlier, period can be gathered from the *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsī; P. Horn has collected them in an article the summary of which is as follows ("Ross und Reiter im Šāhnāme," *ZDMG* 61, 1907, pp. 837-49): The Iranian noble was inseparable from his mount; to go on foot, even for a short distance, was disrespectful. The choice breeds were the pride of great families, who branded their heraldic signs (*nišān*) on the thighs of the animals. In mild seasons, the packs stayed in pasturelands. Every year they would be brought together into a well-watered meadow, where some could be captured with lasso. "Colt riders" (*korra-tāzān*) occupied a significant place among the grooms. The selection of a personal mount was a memorable event in every knight's life. Usually the choice fell on a stallion. Fully armored, a *savār* could not fight or move about on foot, and sometimes found it necessary to share a companion's courser, which was strong enough to carry both. The most suitable age for a war-horse was the age of four. A proverb said that one had to "seek a horse on the basis of its pedigree and color." The most celebrated of all horses, Rostam's Raḵš, came from Kabul, i.e. the realm of the Kūšāns. Warriors favored dappled, white, sorrel, and black. Rose-colored (*golgūn*), golden-brown (*būr*), and white (*čarma*) were also desired. When a hero died, or was killed, his horses' tails and manes were shaven off, the saddles were turned around and left hanging down from the sides while his arms and armor were piled on his favorite mount which led the funeral cortege. Occasionally, a dead hero's partisans killed his horses to prevent his vanquishers from obtaining them. In the case of Raḵš of Rostam only, a horse burial is attested (he was after all a Saka, cf. below on horses among the Scythians). While the peasants consumed horse meat regularly, only under extreme necessity did a rider eat his horse to survive. Correct horsemanship was an art as well as a privilege; an unpleasant punishment for a guilty soldier was to mount him upon his horse backward and, with feet tied together beneath the horse's belly, lead him in a mock procession. Horse equipment evidenced the wealth of the owner, and bore fancy and valuable decorations; the caparisons were elaborate, and on festive occasions, the mane and tail of the horses were arrayed with precious ornaments.

The Sasanians kept the older religious traditions regarding the horse: Many

representations of the horses of the sun/Mitθra are known, by this time fully winged. The throne of Ḵosrow I Anōšīravān rested on the figures of such horses, and the iconography rapidly spread to the west and far east (Ghirshman, op. cit., pp. 318ff. with pls. 244, 245, 260, 278, 298, 427, 444; Schafer, op. cit., pp. 59ff., 295 n. 17). Names compounded with *asp* were still favored by the nobility, and the most celebrated fire temple in the empire was at Šēz (Taḵt-e Solaymān in Azarbaijan), which was assigned to Ādur Gušnasp "Fire of the Stallion," evidently because the deity could appear in the from of a stallion.

Iranian traditions abound with stories of famous horses and their significant roles in heroic and historical events; Rostam's Raḵš, Sīāvoš's Šabrang, and Darius' stallion are but a few of them. More historical are Pasacas, so untamable a horse that only Cyrus the Younger could bring him under the saddle—obviously the prototype of Alexander's story (Plutarch, *Artaxerxes* 9), and the Šabdēz of Ḵosrow II Parvēz; the king loved the courser so deeply that he had vowed to deprive of life whoever brought him the news of its death, and so when it died, no one dared to reveal it to Ḵosrow, and Bārbad, the chief musician and minstrel, devised a trick and averted the king's wrath (Christensen, *Iran Sass*., pp. 462f.).

It was in the Sasanian period that the northern Arabs started horse riding and acquired a breed which ultimately derives from the antique Libyan horses. With the Arab conquest, this "Arab horse" spread into Iran and Central Asia and mixing with native horses, produced many hybrid types. However, the early Muslims were dependent for information on horses and veterinary matters on Iranian sources, as Ebn al-Nadīm (*Fehrest*, tr. Dodge, II, pp. 737-38) testifies. The best Arabic treatise on the horse was *al-Ḵayl* by Abū ʿObayda Moʿammar b. Moṯannā, written in 209/823-24, which he based, as he specifies at the very beginning of the book (ed. Hyderabad, Deccan, 1358/1929), on the accounts of two Iranians: Sahl b. Moḥammad of Sīstān and Abū Yūsof of Isfahan. Similarly, Persian sources such as *Qābūs-nāma* and *Nowrūz-nāma*, which have special chapters on horses, their colors, breeds, and diseases, reflect older Sasanian traditions and can be used to supplement our earlier records.

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See also *Camb. Hist. Iran*. I-III, s.v. horses; and A. Azzaroli, *An Early History of Horsemanship*, Leiden, 1985.