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In terms of iconographic representation, there is perhaps no more dominant a theme than *farr* in pre-Islamic imagery. Farr not only portended auspiciousness, but was also perceived as a necessary source of power, and ultimately a source of authority. In a court culture, which placed a high premium on adulation, well wishers naturally wanted to project a maximum of farr for the object of their praise. The desire to maximize farr—termed *farrah afzun* (may farr be increased)—was iconographically achieved through multiplicity and repetition: the greater the number of the symbols of farr, the more powerful became the projection of auspiciousness and power. Numerous symbols and devices were thus created for this purpose.

Main theme. The core myth that reveals the characteristics of farr, and its function, is the myth of Jamšid as reflected in the Avesta (*Yt.* 19:31-53). Empowered by his farr, Jamšid rules the world, but loses it when he strays from the righteous path. After two preliminary encounters, his farr is taken by a falcon, *vareγna*, to Apąm Napāt who hides it for safekeeping in the waters of lake Vouroukaša. The myth underlines three important aspects of farr: a) that it is not permanent and can be lost, b) when non-active it is kept underwater

in a dormant state, c) for one to possess it, farr must come out of water first.

A glazed brick panel from Persepolis admirably reflects this myth in respect to the various states of farr (Bundahišn recognizes the sunflower (*hamišeh-bahār*) as the symbol of Mithra, the penultimate purveyor of farr in the Avesta, and the lotus as the symbol of aquatic deities (*Ābān*), among whom Apąm Napāt was paramount until he was gradually supplanted by Anāhitā (see ANĀHĪD). Consequently, the sunflower and lotus were both perceived as symbols of farr (Soudavar, 2003, pp. 56-59). In addition, brick panels from Susa confirm the aquatic nature of the spherical capsules, or pearls, by showing them engulfed in whirling sea waves; by extension, the pearl too became a symbol of farr (ibid, pp. 98-101).

Origins. At its inception, the *xᵛarənah* seems to have been a tribal concept, variants of which existed among many tribal societies of the steppes (Gnoli; Soudavar, 2006, pp. 170-73). Its very association with the myth of Jamšid suggests that it was first elaborated for kingly ideology, before its appropriation by Zoroastrianism.

Median and Achaemenid periods. Farr's earliest symbolism in Iran can be traced back to late seventh century BCE, at a time when the Medes had annihilated the Assyrians, subjugated Urartu, and ruled over a sizeable empire. As befits such an empire, a kingly ideology was developed to convey its grandeur. According to *Yt*. 13.95, it was based on the dual support of Mithra and Apąm Napāt, the former as the deity presiding over daytime, and the latter over night-time (Boyce; Soudavar, 2003, pp. 52-53, 87-88; Idem, 2010, pp. 126-28). Since one was a solar and the other an aquatic deity, it made sense to attribute to them the sunflower and the lotus, two Egyptian symbols long associated with water and sun that had entered Median iconography by way of Assyria and Mesopotamia. But in choosing them, their symbolism was adapted to Iranian mythology, in which these two flowers could be regarded as two states of the *xᵛarənah*, the active and the dormant. Objects from this period suddenly manifest an otherwise inexplicable strong linkage between these two symbols. It continues well into Cyrus's reign, as his tomb displays a gigantic combination of lotus and sunflower (Stronach, p. 157).

The advent of Darius, and the rise of Ahura Mazdā to supremacy at the expense of other deities, required a major shift in kingly iconography. Darius' new super-deity had to be portrayed as both omnipresent and omnipotent. To project the first, he chose a symbol of Ahura Mazdā modeled after that of the

Assyrian god Ašur: a bearded man within a flying ring (Figure 2). It was a symbol readily understood within his empire because Babylonians, Urartians, Elamites, and Hittites had used similar ones for their deities. And to project the second, he chose a modified version of the Egyptian "winged-disk" (actually a winged sphere) to convey the presence of the *xᵛarənah*.

These two symbols have been the subject of many controversies. In the past, scholars had considered them as symbols of Ahura Mazdā, while the Parsis saw them as *frawahr*s or *fravašis*. More recently, Shapur Shahbazi proposed that the first was a symbol of the Kayanid (*kauuaēm) xᵛarənah*, adorning royal scenes, and the second, a symbol of the Iranian (*airiianəm*) *xᵛarənah*, for commoners and warriors (Shahbazi, 1980). In refutation, Pierre Lecoq demonstrated that there were many examples that contradicted Shahbazi's argument, and that the Parsi interpretations lacked solid grounding (Lecoq, passim). One can readily observe, for instance, that contrary to Shahbazi's *xᵛarənah* dichotomy, both symbols appear on a door jamb at Persepolis in which the king is enthroned (Figure 3). More generally, it would be implausible to envisage the *xᵛarənah* in human form, especially in scenes where the king and the bearded man greet each other with a mutual gesture of the hand (e.g. tombs of Darius and Xerxes), since the *xᵛarənah* is never said to converse with man, while Ahura Mazdā frequently does so, especially in the Avesta. On the other hand, the iconographical analysis of Achaemenid brick-panels shows clearly that the central element of the bird-like winged-disk is in the shape of the encapsulated *xᵛarənah* (compare Figure 1 and In Bisotun, Darius envisioned a unified world under Ahura Mazdā, one no longer divided into the two realms of night and day. He boasted that, as deputy of Ahura Mazdā on earth, his orders were carried "by day and by night" (DB§7). Because lions symbolized the sun and bulls represented the moon, the depiction of winged-disks on two rows of Darius' canopy in Figure 3 translated Darius' boast into image: that *xᵛarənah* empowered him "by day" and "by night" (Soudavar, 2010, pp. 125-27).

There is, however, another reason why Darius chose this particular emblem to represent *xᵛarənah*. The omnipotence of Ahura Mazdā required control over, or association with, farr, especially when surrounded by his Iranian constituency, as in Persepolis. Since Mithra and Apąm Napāt were commonly perceived to be the donor and the guardian of farr, the stratagem was to declare Ahura Mazdā as the originator of farr. To convey this notion, it sufficed to have a symbol of farr, fairly similar in shape to the winged-ring on

which sat Ahura Mazdā as a bearded man. We thus see a shift in symbolism for Ahura Mazdā itself, from Bisotun where he has squared Mesopotamian wing tips (Figure 2), to Persepolis where he has rounded Egyptian wing tips (Figure 3). The visual pairing of the wings was to convey that *x^{v}arənah* actually emanated from Ahura Mazdā. There was otherwise no reason for Darius to modify the Bisotun symbol of the one god he so praised and aggrandized (Soudavar, 2010, pp. 120-23).

Darius' trial and error approach for developing his political propaganda is also evident in one other important area: the projection of solar radiance. Since time immemorial, solar radiance was a central element in the mapping of kingly power. In a first attempt, Darius tried to imbue his Ahura Mazdā with solar power. He thus planted the well-known symbol of the Babylonian solar deity Šamaš, a disk with pointed rays, on the tiara of Ahura Mazdā in Bisotun. It must have come as an afterthought, for the emblem is inset, but in relief, within an area previously flattened out (Figure 2). Nevertheless, the scheme must have been deemed a failure, because this is the only occasion in which we see Ahura Mazdā adorned with such an emblem. Instead, he decided to make the *x^{v}arənah* radiant; solar power was then projected through the bias of the king's *x^{v}arənah*. It is not clear whether the radiance of *x^{v}arənah* came as a result of an already established sound association with *x^{v}ar* (sun) (Elfenbine, p. 492), or by political necessity, or both, but the fact is that Darius' *x^{v}arənah* brick panels are fully surrounded by triangular light rays (Figure 1, Figure 5). Concurrently, Darius made use of an alternative terminology for *x^{v}arənah*, one that stressed its radiance. He claimed, in his inscriptions, to be the possessor of Iranian radiance (*Ariya čiça*) instead of Iranian *x^{v}arənah.* Traditionally, where Darius' qualifies himself as *"Ariya, Ariya čiça,"* philologists have seen a double emphasis on tribal affiliation ("Aryan" *and* "of Aryan origin"), rather than a claim of *x^{v}arənah* possession. But once Darius proclaimed he was an Aryan, he said it all; there was no need to reemphasize that he was from "Aryan origin." A Kurd would never say that he is a Kurd *and* of Kurdish stock (Soudavar, 2010, pp. 128-29; Soudavar, 2006, pp. 170-77). As it happens, the Sasanian use of a progeny of the same word for their political motto (MP *čihr*—NP *čehr*—in lieu of OP *čiça*; see below) demonstrates the lasting effect of the switch in terminology adopted by Darius.

From Alexander to the end of the Sasanians. During the Hellenistic and Parthian period, while farr influenced the development of similar concepts by Greeks and Romans (Gnoli; Lecoq, p. 302), its iconography benefited in return

from their mythological imagery. The image of the winged-child Eros, for instance, was a perfect fit for Apąm Napāt, the Grandson of Waters, and was adopted as such by Iranians. Therefore, when the time came for Shapur I (Šāpur) to celebrate his victories over three Roman emperors (Arsacids. The hand-delivered ribbon was termed *dast-ār* (victory giver), in tune with a composition that played on the word *dast* (hand, victory) by depicting Shapur holding the wrist of Valerian (*dastgir;* Soudavar, 2003, pp. 13-16; idem, 2009, p. 426). The fact that in Pahlavi, farr and *dast* were represented by the same ideogram (McKenzie, p. 202) further facilitated this particular symbolism of the *dastār*. Moreover, *Yt.* 18.2 specifies that victory over non-Iranian nations (*an-Ērān*) was only due to the Iranian *xᵛarənah*, whose companion was the Strong Wind; and because Shapur now claimed to be the king over Ērān and an-Ērān, he had to project possession of not any *xᵛarənah*, but the Iranian *xᵛarənah*. To illustrate this, he was depicted with windblown ribbons tied under his crown. The ribbon, handed out by Apąm Napāt, was accompanied by the Strong Wind, and was therefore depicted as a symbol of the Iranian *xᵛarənah*. Ribbons were so widely used afterwards, in the first half of the 10th century CE, when Masʿudi wanted to describe the figure of a ram with a ribbon around his neck (as in Figure 10), he referred to it as *ḵarrah va ḡorm* (farr and ram) (Masʿudi, I, p. 243; reinterpreted in Soudavar, 2006, p. 174): by then, the *dastār* had become synonymous with farr. The initial choice of a long ribbon headband though, may have come in reaction to the fashion sported by the last of the Arsacids, Artabanus IV, who wore a double diadem (Frendo, p. 27), and as part of general changes implemented by Ardašir I (Ardashir) to mark the advent of a new dynasty.

Following Achaemenid traditions, the Sasanians introduced a political slogan that made use of the radiance of farr rather than farr itself: the king was characterized by the ubiquitous idiom *ke čehr az yazadān* (lit. whose radiance comes from the gods) to convey the idea that he reflected the gods in their power and glory. For years, the word *čehr* (*čihr*) therein has been misinterpreted as “seed” or “origin,” and lately as “image” (Skjaervo et al., pp. 30-37). By the former, the Sasanians claimed divine descent, and by the latter the king was to be regarded as made in the image of the gods. But neither suits Iranian kingly ideology. A reexamination of the documents, when studied in their original context, reveals that in the religious and political realm, *čehr* usually meant radiance, and was perceived as the manifestation of farr (Soudavar, 2009, pp. 444-50). The use of *čehr* was therefore interchangeable with farr, and radiance simply projected farr. The hunt scene at Tāq-e Bostān

offers a revealing example (Figure 7): by virtue of a successful hunt (left), the king acquires a radiant nimbus as a sign of his acquired farr (right). In the same vein, symbols evoking luminous celestial entities were added to Sasanian coinage to show the various sources of kingly radiance. The Moon, for instance, figures on the reverse of many coins as a crescent, but also appears in the likeness of a cow-head (Figure 8) to evoke its Avestan epithet, *gao-čiθra* (brilliant as *gao*). While *gao* usually meant cow, in this context it refers to the milky color of milk itself (for *gao*'s translation as milk, see Lubotsky, p. 485; Soudavar, 2009, p. 449). The Moon was thus perceived radiant as milk, and cow-like. Tištriia (Sirius) too was represented by multiple signs: a single star as symbol of night-time's brightest star; and a three-droplet sign to evoke its name ("who belongs to the (constellation) of the three stars," (Panaino), as well as its Avestan epithet *afš-čiθra* (scintillating as raindrops) (Figure 8). As radiant celestial bodies, the Moon and Tištriia naturally abounded with farr, and were recognized as such by the Avesta (*Yts* 7:3,6, 8:1). A two-legged Ankh-cross (Figure 8), mimicking the body of a child, was a visual pointer to Apąm Napāt, who bestowed farr and who, as Lord of the Night, caused celestial bodies to be radiant (*Yt*. 8:4) (Soudavar, 2009, pp. 427-31). Fire too was radiant and portended farr; at times, farr even resided in fire or took its form (*Zādspram* 5.1, 8.8; Gnoli). While the fire altar of Sasanian coinage may have evoked the king's piety, it was also a reflection of his farr.

In the Paikuli inscriptions, Narseh and his forefathers are said to have received farr and "rulership" from the gods (Humbach and Skjaervo, pp. 52, 65). The king's legitimacy depended on both; investiture provided rulership, and farr gave the power for its continued exercise. Most investiture scenes allude to a general conveyance of farr, but victory over the Romans offered the opportunity to claim the Iranian farr. That explains why, in the relief of Shapur II at Tāq-e Bostān (Figure 9), in addition to Ahura Mazdā conferring investiture, Mithra stands behind him on top of an enormous lotus. It specifies that victory over Julian the Apostate, lying underneath, was due to the Iranian farr, brought to surface by the lotus (as symbol of Apąm Napāt), and bestowed by Mithra. Shahbazi's interpretation of the same as the commemoration of Ardašir II's succession pact with his brother Shapur II (Shahbazi, 1985) misses this essential point, and suffers from other misconceptions, including the identification of the giver of the investiture ring as Ardašir, in lieu of Ahura Mazdā (Soudavar, 2003, pp. 49-56). Had Ardašir ordered this relief, by convention, his supposed effigy would be the tallest, which it is not.

A recurrent symbol of Sasanian iconography is the pair of wings. Some have interpreted it as the symbol of the deity Bahrām (Göbl, p. 325; see BAHRĀM [Vərəθraγna]), and others have seen it as reference to *vareγna* (Gnoli). It is the latter interpretation that is valid, for the wings convey on the one hand that farr has not departed, and on the other, they symbolize farr because *vareγna* feathers reputedly possessed much farr (*Yt* 14:34-35). As for the image of the ram, the *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān* explicitly refers to it as a symbol of farr (Gnoli; Grenet, 2003, p. 42). Consequently, the combination of the ram, ribbons, and a pearl necklace with 4 clasps on the textile in Figure 10 is an association of auspicious symbols that projects the notion of *farrah afzun*. The repetitive pattern of the motif enhances that notion even more.

The same idea was expressed in a more explicit fashion through the introduction of hybrid syntax, combining words and symbols. Indeed, the stucco tile in Figure 11 displays the monogram *afzun*, in combination with a pair of wings and a pearl roundel, all symbolizing farr. The tile, therefore, expressed the wish of *farrah afzun*. The same type of hybrid syntax was also used with the word *afzud* (in the past tense) to express increased farr through the actions of somebody: on the coinage of Kawād I it was complemented with graduated rings, symbol of the radiance of farr, and on seals it was usually preceded by small roundels evoking pearls as symbols of farr (Soudavar, 2009, pp. 437-38).

Another hybrid syntax combined farr symbols with number signs produced with fingers. Its most popular combination depicts a lotus flower with its stem held between the extended thumb and index, representing the number 10000. Whether the lotus was held by Anāhitā or by a grandee of Shapur (Figure 12), it expressed the wish of ten thousand farr for its recipient (Soudavar, pp. 2003, 59-62).

Bactria and Sogdia. In Bactria, under Demetrius and circa 180 BCE, the head of Heracles was already adorned with what seems to be a radiating nimbus of Mithraic aspiration (Staviskij, p. 217). Under the Kushan dynasty, farr radiance was either projected through a full circular nimbus that adorned the head of deities and kings, or through shoulder-flames (Gnoli; Staviskij, pl. XVI). In 6-8th century Sogdia, perhaps as an extension of Kushan practices, both the nimbus and shoulder-flames were used for the king/hero's farr, while deities were marked by a flaming nimbus (Azarpay, pp. 112-15). In mural frescoes from Panjikant a series of flying entities approach the heroes to evoke their farr (Azarpay, p. 31). A winged Eros presenting a pearl necklace with a ribbon may

represent Apąm Napāt (Azarpay, pls. 6-7); but one is at a loss to find a Zoroastrian explanation for the winged chimera, with a lion's head and a siren's tail (Figure 13), even though some have recognized it as a symbol of the Senmurv (Grenet, 2008, p. 7). However, the fact that it carries a flying ribbon militates in favor of it as a purveyor of farr, coming perhaps from an eastern tradition unrelated to Zoroastrianism.

The spread of farr iconography. The auspiciousness of the concept of farr, its tribal and non-religious origin, and the vast array of signs developed in the Sasanian era, are so many reasons for the spread of Iranian farr symbols to neighboring nations who adhered to non-Iranian religions. Armenia was the first Christian nation to incorporate a farr symbol into its iconographic repertoire. Since *p`aṙk`* was the Armenian equivalent of farr and derived from the same root, Armenians placed a stylized pair of wings under the cross to create a visual analog for the expression *p`aṙk` ǩač* (Glorious Cross; Soudavar, 2003, p. 21). Next was Byzantium: in spite of centuries of warfare, the Byzantines adopted many symbols and customs from the Persian courts, even more so after the demise of the Sasanians. The use of textile patterns, especially pearl roundels similar to Figure 10, is well known. But the most telling example is perhaps the portrait of Basileus Manuel II Palaeologos (1391-1425) in the celebrated *Adoration of the Magi* of circa 1423 by Gentile da Fabriano (Figure 14). His robe is adorned with a Sasanian motif, which combines a pomegranate with a pair of wings and a ribbon, all symbols of farr; his headgear's rolling feathers are reminiscent of the pair of wings on Sasanian crowns; and he has a nimbus behind his head, a direct adaptation of Sasanian kings' radiant nimbus, rather than the Palmyran model of the *Šamaš* nimbus dominated by a star with pointed rays (Soudavar, 2008, pp. 111-16). But, whereas the Sasanian nimbus symbolized a potentially transient trait, the Christian nimbus became the sign of lasting sacredness.

Likewise, images of Buddha as well as Bodhisattvas picked up a number of farr symbols by their passage through the eastern Iranian world. The images of Buddha behind the 6th century Bāmiān statues were adorned with a solar disk and flying ribbons, and replete with Mithra-related signs (Grenet, 1993; *Afghanistan*, pp. 157-58). In its continued advance eastward, Buddhic iconography carried many of these symbols with it. In China, where the male Bodhisattva of Compassion was transformed into the female Guan Yin, it was often depicted holding a lotus in its fingers (Figure 15), in the same way that Anāhitā was portrayed with the 10000-farr gesture. Eventually though, the

lotus flower lost its meaning and was replaced by different decorative flowers and plants.

The Islamic era. Similar to the above, under the Saljuqs the Buddhist nimbus came back to Iran via Central Asia, but devoid of its original connotation, and only as a decorative device to delimit human heads in figurative designs, especially on metalwork.

While numerous allusions to farr and its imagery abound in the *Šāh-nāma,* and provide further justification for the interpretation of many of the above-mentioned symbols (Ṯervatiān; Soudavar, 2003), the use of farr imagery at Perso-Islamic courts was limited and sporadic. If the farr of a ruler needed to be emphasized, it was expressed in riddles and through literary conceits. The poet Suzani Samarqandi, for instance, likened the Arab-type turban of his king to a symbol of farr by referring to it as *dastār*, and by interpreting its two floating ends as emblems of "victory" and "triumph," similar to the function of Shapur's ribbons in Figure 4 (Soudavar 2003, p. 15; Suzani Samarqandi, p. 221).

But the advent of the Mongols, and the implantation of the Il-Khanids in Iran, provided a new opportunity for the revival of ancient kingly concepts such as the farr. Not only did the vizier Rašid-al-Din describe Ḡāzān and Uljāytu as possessors of farr, but illustrations to a copy of the *Šāh-nāma* that he initiated, were all designed to reflect the Il-Khanids' glory by superimposing Mongol events on episodes of the *Šāh-nāma.* Thus, in the illustration to the story of Bahrām-e Gur *Talking to his brother Narsi* (Governor of Khorasan), which evoked Ḡāzān's appointment of his brother Uljāytu to the governorship of the same province (Perhaps, due to religious conservatism, visual references to farr were gradually abandoned. They were revived, however, in Mughal India, when the emperor Akbar's trusted friend and vizier, Abu'l Faẓl ʿAllāmi made the concept of farr the linchpin of Mughal kingly ideology. As a result, a radiating nimbus (*šamsa*) came to illustrate the king's farr (Soudavar, 2003, pp. 7-9). All Mughal kingly figures were afterwards adorned with it. The Rājput rulers also imitated them and adopted it as well. Its use became so widespread in the Indian subcontinent that for a short while during the reign of the Safavid Shah Soleymān, when there was an influx of Indian motifs and artists back into Iran, the Shah was depicted with the same (see *St. Petersburg Muraqqa*, pl.136).

The most noticeable legacy of farr, though, is the symbol of shoulder-flames

used in the representation of saintly Islamic figures. Perhaps because Zoroaster's farr was said to have descended from the Heavens and manifested itself "in the form of fire" (Gnoli), flaming haloes were perceived to underline holiness, and were extended to Islamic saintly figures. The flaming bust on the fire altar of Sasanian coinage, especially on the reverse of some Ḵosrow II (Khosrow) issues, may have provided the prototype for such representation. To this day, flaming-shoulders still mark the images of the Prophet and the Imams.

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