



JĀMĀSP I. REIGN

Jāmāsp or Zāmāsp (Middle Persian *y'm'sp*, *z'm'sp*; Greek *Zamásphēs*; Arabic *Jāmāsb*, *Zāmāsb*, *Zāmāsf*; New Persian *Jāmāsp*, *Zāmāsp*) ascended to the Sasanian throne in 496 (or possibly early 497) when his brother, the king of kings Kawād I, was deposed. Jāmāsp, like Kawād, was a son of the Sasanian ruler Pērōz (r. 459-84). Jāmāsp's name associated this short-reigned Sasanian king with the legendary seer Jāmāspa (q.v.), who supposedly served the Kayanian Vištāspa (Kay Vištāsp). On his coinage, the name is inscribed as Jām (Mid. Pers. *g'm*) perhaps also linking him with the mythical Pishdadian monarch Jam or Jamsēd (Av. *Yima Xšāeta*).

The period just prior to Jāmāsp's reign witnessed waxing influence of Mazdakism, raids by Arab tribes in the province of Asuristan (see [ĀSŌRISTĀN](#)) to the southwest and along the border with Arabia, rebellion by Armenians in Armin to the northwest, deteriorating relations with the Byzantines in the west, and an uprising by members of the Iranian nobility and clergy angered by socioeconomic and religious changes. The rebellion by feudal nobles and magi resulted in Kawād's ouster, trial, and imprisonment, and produced Jāmāsp's elevation as *šāhān šāh* "king of kings." Kawād escaped from captivity in Khuzestan, fled eastward, and found safe haven with the Hephthalites (q.v.), among whom he had been raised. After having gathered forces under his command, Kawād fought back for the throne with the assistance of those Hephthalite troops. Famine caused much hardship across the Sasanian empire, adding to the social, political, and religious tumult of that period (see overview in [SASANIAN DYNASTY](#) at [iranica.com](#)). Jāmāsp, probably realizing



he lacked support to retain the monarchy, chose not to confront Kawād in battle. Thereby, rule of Iran was relinquished back to Kawād I in late 498 or early 499.

Limited details of Jāmāsp’s reign can be gleaned from historical records. Jāmāsp’s reign marked the standardization of regnal year notation on the reverses of Sasanian coinage. However no gold coinage or *dēnārs* are attributable to the king’s brief reign, perhaps due to the scarcity of bullion in that economically challenged time. Christian documents, such as *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* (sections 23-24) composed in Syriac in 507, briefly mentioned Jāmāsp’s royal rise and fall within the context of Kawād I’s reigns. So did later Muslim writers like Tāabarī (d. 923) (*Ta’rīḳ al-rosol wa’l-moluk* I, pp. 886-87), who mistakenly recorded the reign as six years (I, p. 887). Kawād’s life and times obscure Jāmāsp’s in Ferdowsi’s *Šāh-nāma* as well. The Byzantine historian Agathias (ca. 536-82) recorded that Jāmāsp was selected for the throne because of his calm and fair disposition but that he chose to abdicate, after four years in power, upon Kawād’s return to Iran rather than confront his brother and so was pardoned to a life of obscurity (*History*, sections 268b-270b). Dinawari (d. ca. 894-903) (*Ketāb al-aḳbār al-ṭewāl*, p. 66) noted a similar set of events. However, Elias the Nestorian Metropolitan of Nisibis (d. ca. 1049) claimed that Jāmāsp was executed by Kawād, perhaps confusing Kawād’s punishment of the rebellious nobles and magi with the fate allotted to his submissive brother.

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