



ḲOSROW I III. COINAGE

The reign of Ḳosrow I is generally regarded as constituting the heyday of the Sasanian Empire. His coinage, rather to the contrary, marks the nadir of Sasanian coin art. The appalling quality of Ḳosrow's coins are caused, to some extent, by serious production problems, since the flans were too thin for the impression of the dies, with the result that many parts of the coin image remain obscure (so-called "dead" or "blind spot"). Even worse are the artistic insufficiencies as the average portraits look more like caricatures than the dignified depictions of the King of Kings of Iran. Even if Ḳosrow I introduced some new typological features, in general there is much more numismatic continuity between him and his father Kawād I than one would expect by following the written sources.

Typology. While the reverse typology of Ḳosrow I is to some extent innovative, his obverses are conservative. With only minor variations, the last obverse type of Ḳosrow's predecessor Kawād I is used for the entire reign. The crown also fully corresponds to his father's; thus, the normal type shows Ḳosrow's right-facing bust wearing a crown consisting of a crescent above the forehead and two mural elements (type SN [Göbl, 1971] I, II; see [PLATE 1. a-d, g](#)). On both shoulders, a crescent is depicted, and in the left and right field one star respectively; both features were introduced by Kawād I. The main alterations of Ḳosrow I, compared to his father's coinage, is the less prominent depiction of the upper ribbons, and the replacement of the star/crescent combination at 3h, 6h, and 9h, outside the rim by just a crescent. It seems very likely that this had propagandist reasons, since Hormozd IV, who like Kawād I had a hostile



attitude towards the nobility, returned to this king's astral symbols, while Wahrām VI, who rebelled against Hormozd IV, employed the crescents following the pattern of Ḳosrow I. On rare gold dinars, a special obverse type showing Ḳosrow's frontal bust is attested, a direct takeover from Kawād I (type SN III, [PLATE 1. e, f](#)). Ḳosrow's obverse legends in the first five years of rule simply cite the royal name, following the patterns of the early issues of Kawād I. In regnal year 5, the acclamation *'pzwny* "may he prosper" is added—another parallel to Kawād. Two spelling variants of Ḳosrow's name exist: the more common one reads *hwslwb* ([PLATE 1. b-e](#)), and the earlier and more rare reads *hwslwdy* ([PLATE 1. a, f](#)).

The most noteworthy features of Ḳosrow's coinage are his innovations in reverse typology. The first type (type SN 1, [PLATE 1. a](#)), struck from regnal year 1 to 5, has two major differences compared to the reverses of the period from Pērōz until Kawād. Firstly, the assistant figures are shown frontally, a totally new depiction in the repertoire of Sasanian typology. Secondly, they hold what appears to be a spear, an attribute encountered previously under Wahrām II (276-93). It is, in the context of this so to speak "archaic" depiction, no mere coincidence that during Ḳosrow's early years one can observe attempts aimed at a naturalistic rendering of the reverse figures in the fashion of 3rd-century issues. The attendants' bodies are shown much finer and more detailed than under Kawād, and, very rarely, quite elaborate depictions of the crowns can be found (see [PLATE 1. a](#)). The quality, however, quickly depreciates. Another typological modification of the early years is the treatment of the altar shaft that is formed by a thin vertical line crossed in the center by three horizontal strokes without the usual altar ribbons. From regnal year 5 to 48, Ḳosrow employed another reverse type that was to become—with minor modifications under Ḳosrow II—canonical until the end of Sasanian-style coinage (type SN 2; [PLATE 1. b-d, g](#)). It features both assistant figures, frontal, leaning on a sword. Also, the treatment of the fire altar is modified compared to type SN 1, with the altar ribbons again depicted and—for the first time in Sasanian typology—showing with ends upwards instead of hanging downwards. The gold dinars from Ḳosrow's regnal years 21 and 44 (the latter ones formerly incorrectly believed to refer to what was supposed to be the last regnal year of Kawād I) show the standing figure of Ḳosrow holding a diadem wreath to the right (type SN 3, [PLATE 1. e](#)), once again a direct takeover from Kawād I. Also, a dinar dated regnal year 13 showing on the reverse the frontal figure of the king leaning on a sword belongs to Ḳosrow I, rather than to Ḳosrow II, because of style and flan size (Schindel, 2006) (type 4, not in Göbl, 1971; [PLATE 1. f](#)).



Minor typological modifications of the basic type SN 2 occur on copper coins, but most specimens are too badly preserved to allow a conclusive typological attribution. The gold dinars with reverse types 3 and 4 feature special legends, respectively *gyh'npr'knyt* “who bestows splendor on the world” and *gyh'n'pybym krt'l* “who frees the world from fear.” Apart from these, all other coins display the mint signature at 3h, and the date at 9h, save for some copper coins, on which due to lack of space or careless engraving this administrative information is missing. Sometimes, additional marks outside the rim occur on the drachm reverses, such as the letters *hw* (most likely for “good”) in regnal year 8, as well as various combinations of dots (cf. [PLATE 1. d](#)).

Denominations. The narrowing of the denominational spectrum already came to an end under Kawād I. Thus, under Ḳosrow I—as well as under all his successors—only three different denominations exist: gold dinars, silver drachms, and small copper coins. The dinars ([PLATE 1. e, f](#)) are extremely rare: only five genuine specimens are known. All employ special types on both sides. The authenticity of gold coins which feature regular drachm typology and bear the mint signature AT is questionable; in any case, they are not fully official products. Drachms of Ḳosrow I ([PLATE 1. a-d](#)) are very common, even if not as abundant as those of Ḳosrow II. No silver fractions exist. Copper coins ([PLATE 1. g](#)) are very scarce, with most specimens being not well enough preserved for a full attribution by mint and date.

Mints. At the present state of research, about 45 different mints are attested (see [SASANIAN COINAGE](#)). Most were in existence already under Kawād I (Schindel, 2004, pp. 470-71), but some mints are additions of Ḳosrow I. The most important among these are HWC (Xūzistān), LAM (Rām-Hormozd in Xūzistān) and NAL/WAL (uncertain). The mint signature AS (Āsūristān), one of the most common signatures from Wahrām IV onwards, is last attested in regnal year 22 of Ḳosrow I. In regnal year 23, WYHC (Weh-az-āntiyok-Xusro) starts operating on a large scale, which proves that both signatures refer to the same location, i.e., Ctesiphon. Some mints that were founded by Kawād I, but which were rather insignificant during his reign, become increasingly important under Ḳosrow I, the most prominent examples being AYLAN and WYH. Perhaps this is to be connected with the taxation reform begun by Kawād and brought to completion by Ḳosrow. In any case, the Sasanian mint organization was always flexible. Seen as a whole, the most common mints are AY (Erān-xwarrah-Šāpur), AYLAN (uncertain), LD (Ray) and BYŠ (Bišāpur) as



well as Ctesiphon if one adds AS and WHYC. Detailed mint statistics can be found in Schindel (forthcoming). In general, the patterns of coin production show an organic development based on the system of Kawād I, as no drastic alterations of Ḳosrow I are recognizable. The dies were produced centrally for the entire Sasanian realm.

(image in this article: [Plate 1](#))

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