



KUST

KUST, literally “direction, side” (MacKenzie, p. 52), in Middle Persian epigraphic sources has two well-differentiated technical uses in the administrative geography of the late Sasanian Empire and is correlated to the administrative reforms of Kōsrow I (q.v., r. 531-79).

The term is used on two distinct levels: (1) *Kust* is a quarter of the empire defined according to the cardinal points; and (2) *Kust* is an associated term in the name of a province.

1. *As a quarter of the empire.* Kōsrow I abolished the function of the unique *Ērān-spāhbed*, literally “the commander of the army of the Iranians” (see [SPĀHBED](#)) and replaced it with four *Ērān-spāhbeds*, to each of whom was assigned a territory defined by the four cardinal points: *Kust-ī xwarāsān* ‘side of the East’ (Figures 1-2); *Kust-ī-nēmrōz* ‘side of the South’ (Figures 3-7); *Kust-ī xwarōfrān / xwarārān* ‘side of the West’ (Figures 8-9); and *Kust-ī Ādurbādagān* ‘side of Ādurbādagān’ (i.e., the North; Figures 10-12). Twelve official seals of *Ērān-spāhbed* are now known. Note: The figures for this article use the following symbols: [...] Reliable reconstruction; [...?] Less reliable reconstruction; (...) Doubtful reading; <...>; Addition; {...} Deletion; (?) Interpretation uncertain.

However, the term *Kust-ī-Ādurbādagān* is also used on an administrative seal that provides some specifications as to its northern limit. Since *Kust-ī-Ādurbādagān* belongs, without a doubt, to *Ērānšahr* (see [ĒRĀN](#), [ĒRĀNŠAHR](#)), “the country of the Iranians,” the other geographical names mentioned on the

seal—Šahr-ī-Mūgān, Bāzāhā (?), Armen—are territories belonging to *An-Ērānšahr* ‘the country of non-Iranians’ (Figure 13).

Unfortunately, no primary source has emerged that would have known the geographical limits of each *kust*, so we must continue to rely on post-Sasanian textual sources. Traditionally, two texts have been used to determine the area of each *kust*. The *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* (q.v.), “The Provincial Capitals of Iran,” is a small treatise in Middle Persian that lists the provincial capitals of each of the four *kust*. The redaction we know dates from the third quarter of the 8th century. One may assume that this division into four *kust* had not remained fixed since the time of Kōsrow I and that their composition had evolved over time, which has been reflected by slight modifications made by the successive copyists. Another source, perhaps from the same period, is *The Geography of Ananias of Širak* (q.v.) in Armenian, previously attributed to pseudo Movsēs Xorenac’i (q.v.). As the author was Armenian, he also counts for the “side of the North” *An-Ērānšahr* ‘the country of non-Iranians’, which includes many South Caucasian regions, as Armen. These two textual sources have recently been compared with each other and also confronted with data from primary sources, mainly sigillographic (Gyselen, pp. 127-39). The result is a map of the four *kust*, the division of which, however, remains partly hypothetical (Map 1).

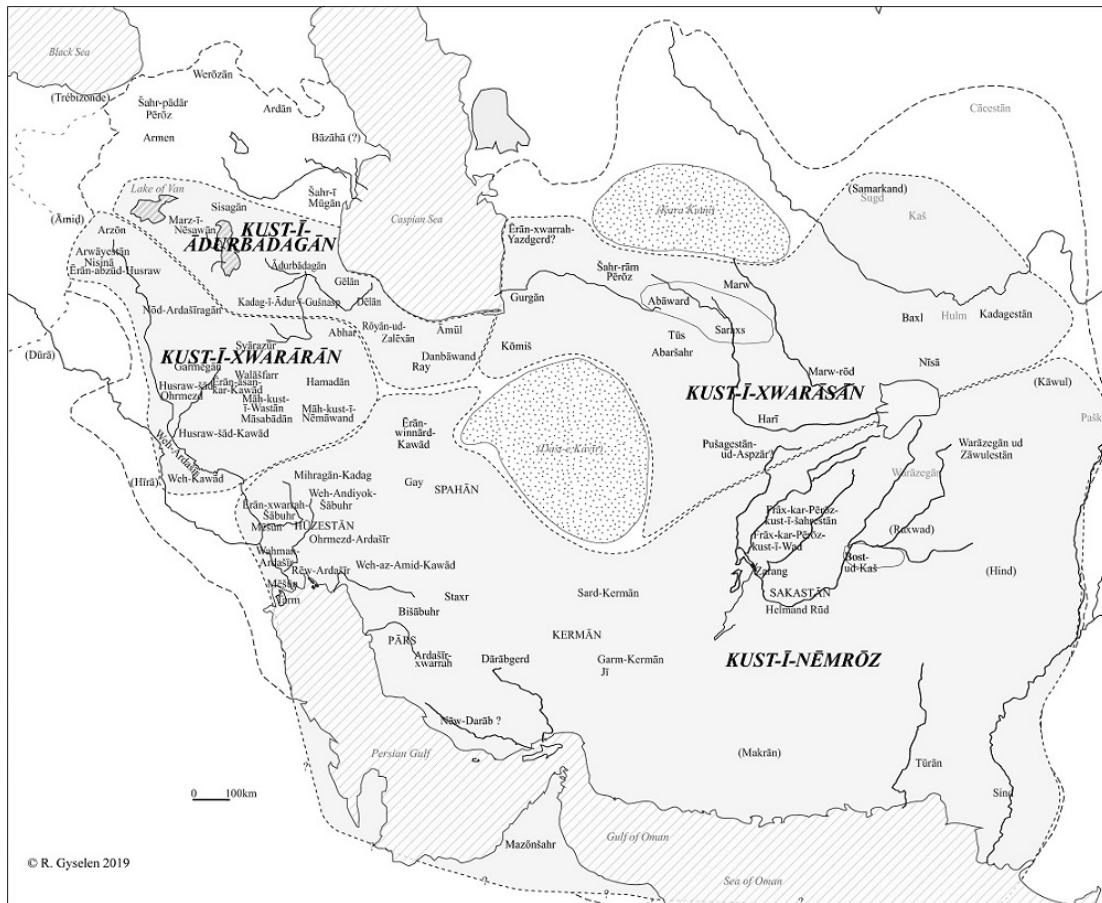
2. *As a term in the name of a province.* Implying an entirely different territorial dimension, the term *kust* appears in a very specific formulation of certain province names: Frāx-kar-Pērōz-kust-ī-šahrestān (Figure 14); Frāx-kar-Pērōz-kust-ī-Wad (Figure 15); Hamadān-kust-ī-Abhar (Figure 16); Hamadān kust-ī-šahrestān (Figure 18); Māh-kust-ī-Nēmāwand (Figure 20); Māh-kust-ī-Wastān (Figure 21).

So far, the sigillographic evidence is favoring the idea that in this precise context the term *kust*, followed by the term *šahrestān* ‘side of the provincial capital’ or a place name, designates half of Māh, Frāx-kar-Pērōz, and Hamadān. In this last case, the introduction of the term *kust* results certainly from a territorial administrative reform of Kōsrow I. Indeed, in the 6th century, the provinces Abhar (Figure 17) and Hamadān (Figure 19) have also administrative seals under their name only. Moreover, the province Hamadān attested in the 6th century perpetuates the existence of this province already mentioned in the 3rd century under Šāpur I (q.v., r. 239-70; ŠKZ §48, Huysse, I, p. 60). It could be that the administrative reform that changed Hamadān’s name to Hamadān-kust-ī-šahrestān took place at the same time as a monetary

reform that led to the change of the monetary acronym AH of Hamadān to AHM around the year 540 CE.

A similar evolution can be traced for Hamadān-kust-ī-Abhar, formerly known as Abhar, but no other source allows formulating hypotheses for the other four provinces that contain the term *kust*.

See also [SPĀHBED](#).



Map 1. Map of the four kust of Ērānšahr, after Gyselen, 2019, pp. 276-77, map 5a-b. (All illustrations for this article reproduced by permission of the author.)



Figure 1. Official seal of Cihr-Burzēn, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the East (under Kōsrow I). Transliteration: At 4 o'clock, on the outer line: čtl bwlcyny ZY (...)pty W hwjtk hwslwdy [LBA]. At 4 o'clock, on a second line: 'yl'n kwsty ZY hwl's'n sp'hpty. Transcription: cihr-burzēn ī ... bed ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-xwarāsān spāhbed. Translation: Cihr-Burzēn, ...bed and well-omened (is) Kōsrow, grandee, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the East.



Figure 2. Official seal of Dād-burz-Mihr, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the East (under Hormozd IV). Transliteration: At 5 o'clock, on the outer line: d't bwlcmty ZY '[s]ppty ZY p'hlwby W hwjtk 'whlmzdy LB[A]. At 4 o'clock, on a second line: 'yl'n ...] ZY hwls's'n sp'hpty. At 11 o'clock, on a third line: 'pzwn' (?). Transcription: dād-burz-mihr aspbed-ī-pahlaw ud hujadag-ohrmazd wuzurg ērān kust-ī-xwarāsān spāhbed. Translation: Dād-burz-Mihr aspbed-ī-pahlaw and well-omened (is) Ohrmazd, grandee, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the East.



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Figure 3. Official seal of Pīrag, Commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the South (under Kōsrow I). Transliteration: At 4 o'clock, on the outer line: pylky ZY štlwl'c W hwjtk hwslwdy LBAy 'yl'n kwsty [ZY]. At 3 o'clock, on a second line: nymlwcy sp'hpty. Transcription: pīrag ī šahr-warāz ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-nēm-rōz spāhbed. Translation: Pīrag, boar of the empire, well-omened (is) Kōsrow, grandee, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the South.

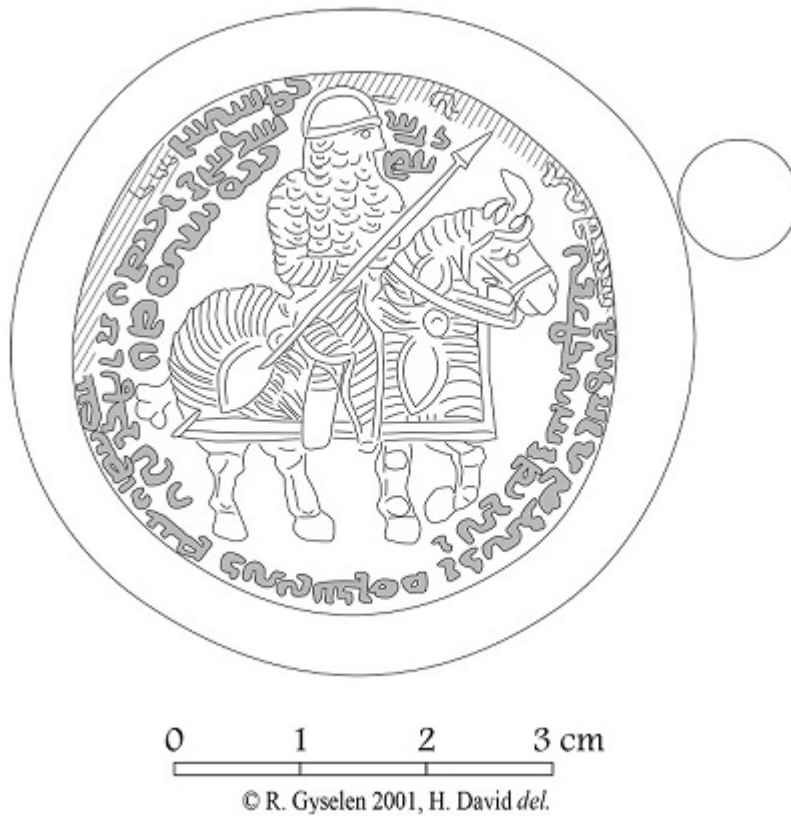
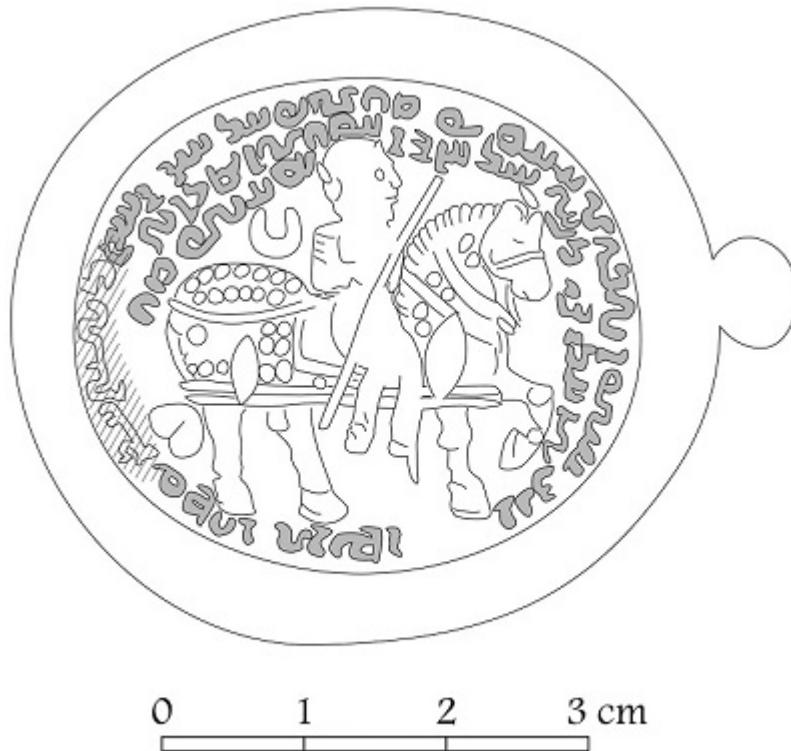


Figure 4. Official seal of Pīrag, Mihrān, Commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the South (under Kōsrow I). Transliteration: At 4 o'clock, on the outer line: pylky ZY štlwl'c W hwjtk hwslwdy LBAy 'yl'n kwsty [ZY]. At 3 o'clock, on a second line: nymlwcy sp'hpty. At 11 o'clock, on a third line: mtr'n. Transcription: pīrag ī šahr-warāz ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-nēm-rōz spāhbed mihrān. Translation: Pīrag, boar of the empire, well-omened (is) Kōsrow, grandee, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the South, (of the) Mihrān (family).



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Figure 5. Official seal of Wēh-Šābuhr, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the South (under Ḳosrow I). Transliteration: At 5 o'clock, on the outer line: wyd šhpwhly ZY 'sppty ZY p'lsyk k štl(?)...pty W hwjtk. At 4 o'clock, on a second line: hwslwdy LBAy 'yl'n kwsty ZY nymlwc. At 11 o'clock, on a third line: sp'hpty. Transcription: weh-šabuhr ī aspbed-ī-parsīg (ud šahr-hazārbed?) ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-nēmrōz spāhbed. Translation: Wēh-Šābuhr, Parthian aspbed and šahr-...-bed and well-omened [is] Ḳosrow, grandee, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the South.

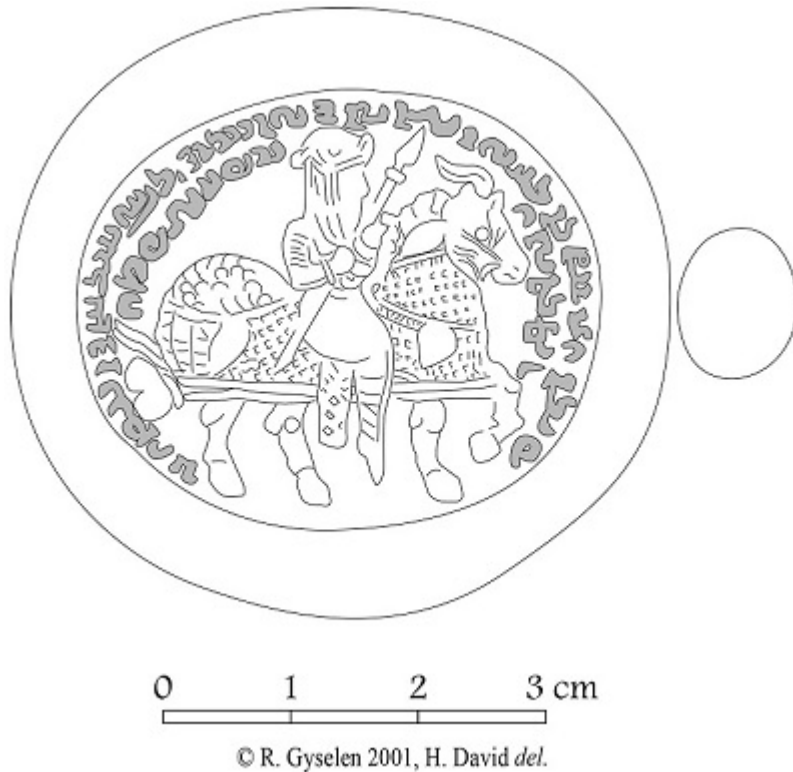


Figure 6. Official seal of Wahrām, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the South (under Kōsrow I). Transliteration: At 5 o'clock, on the outer line: wlhl'n ZY n'm hw[']st hwslwdy 'twlm'h'n (nyw'n?)pt W š'pstn W hwjt. At 5 o'clock, on a second line: n hwslwdy LBA 'yl'n kwst' ZY nymlwc'. At 11 o'clock, on a third line: sp'hpt'. Transcription: wahrām ī nām-xwāst-husraw ādurmāhān [nēwān]bed ud šābestan ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-nēmrōz spāhbed. Translation: Wahrām, (whose) name (is) wanted by Kōsrow, Ādurmāhān, commander of the braves (?) and eunuch and well-omened [is] Kōsrow, grandee, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the South.

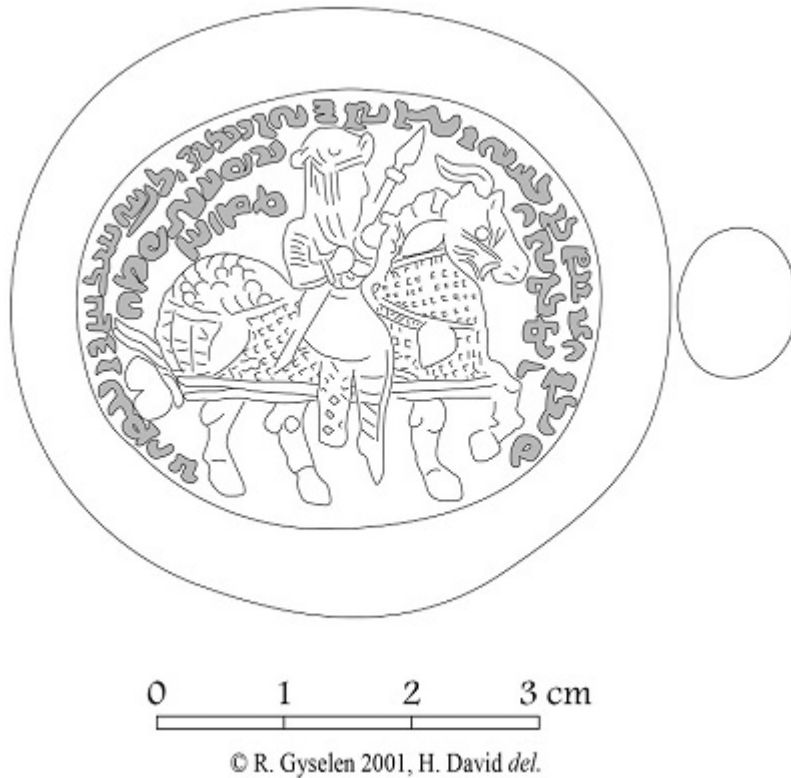


Figure 7. Official seal of Wahrām, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the South (under Hormozd IV). Transliteration: At 5 o'clock, on the outer line: w^hl'n ZY n'mhw[[']st hw](slw^{dy}) [[']twr]m'h'n ...pty [š][']pstny štl hc'lwpt. At 5 o'clock, on a second line: W hwjtk `whlmzdy LBAY 'yl'n kwsty ZY nym^lwcy. At 1 o'clock, on a third line: `t sp'hpty. Transcription: wahrām ī nām-xwāst-husraw ādur^māhān (nēwān?)bed ud šābestan šahr-hazārbed ud hujadag-ohrmazd wuzurg ērān kust-ī-nēm^rōz spāhbed. Translation: Wahrām, (whose) name (is) wanted by Kōsrow, Ādur^māhān, commander of the braves (?), eunuch, hazār^uft and well-omened (is) Hormozd, grandee, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the South. (The letters `t = AT represent an abbreviation of the name Ādur^māhān.).

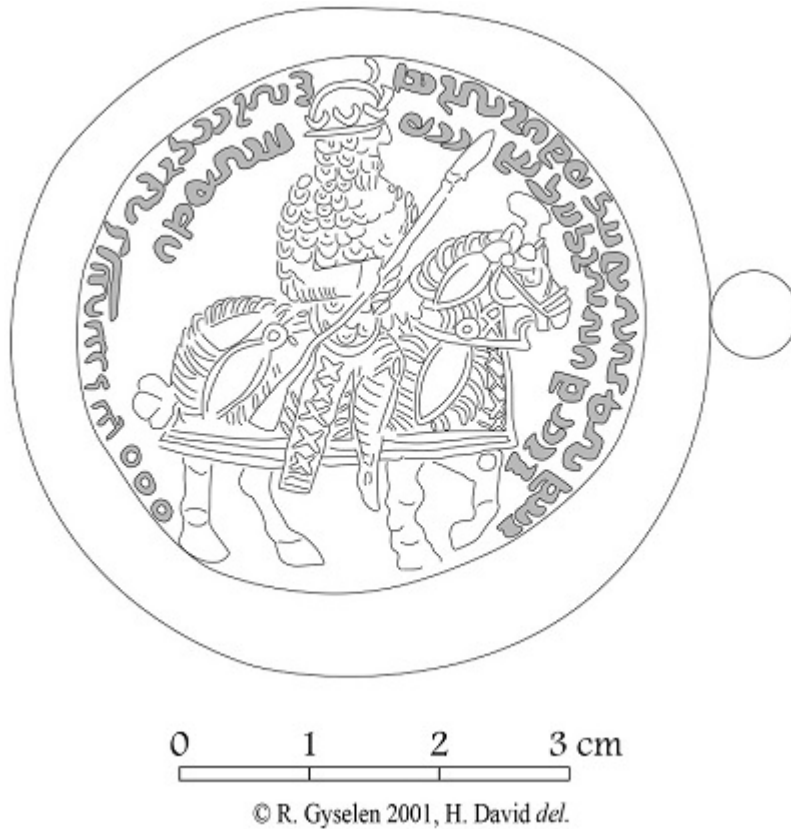


Figure 8. Official seal of Wistaxm, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the West (under Kōsrow I). Transliteration: At 5 o'clock, on the outer line: wsthm ZY hc'lpty W hwjtk hwslwdy LBAy 'yl'n. At 4 o'clock, on a second line: kwsty ZY hwl'l'n sp'hpty. Transcription: wistaxm ī hazārbed ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-xwarārān spāhbed. Translation: Wistaxm, hazārbed, well-omened (is) Kōsrow, grandee, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the West.



Figure 9. Official seal of Wistaxm, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the West (under Hormozd IV). Transliteration: At 5 o'clock, on the outer line: [ws]thm [ZY] hc'lpty ... W hwjtk 'whlm[zdy]. At 4 o'clock, on a second line: LBAy 'yl'n kwsty ZY hwlp'n sp'hpty. At 10 o'clock, on a third line: plhw'. Transcription: wistaxm ī hazārbed ... ud hujadag-ohrmazd wuzurg ērān kust-ī-xwarārān spāhbed farrox. Translation: Wistaxm, hazārbed, ..., well-omened (is) Hormozd, grandee, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the West; blessed.

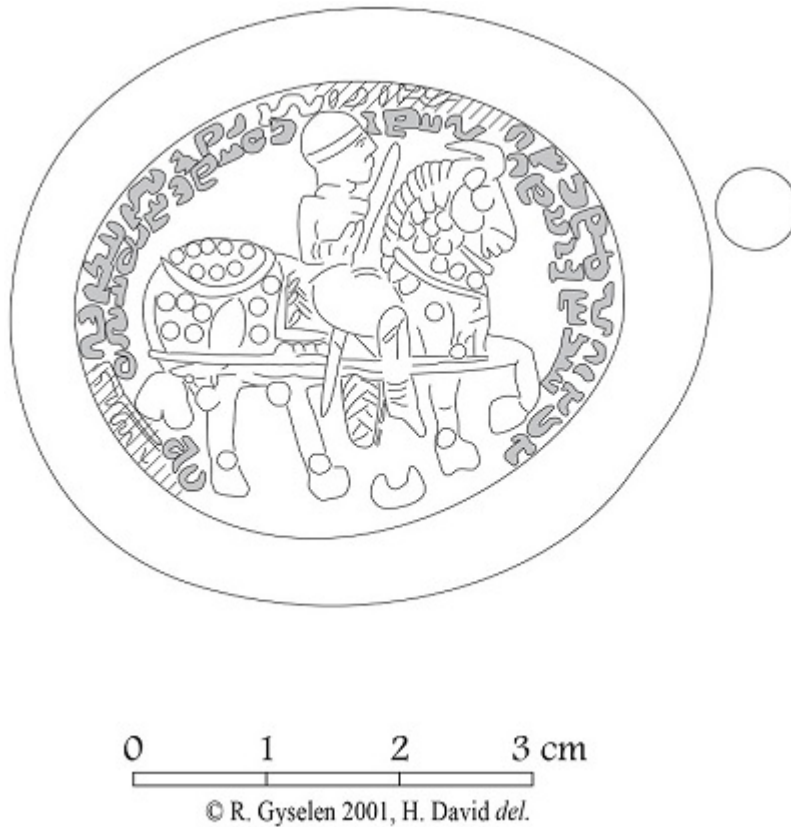


Figure 10. Official seal of Gōrgōn/Gulgōn, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the North (under Kōsrow I). Transliteration: At 5 o'clock, on the outer line: gwlgwny ZY mtl'ny ... W hwjtk hwslwdy L[BA]. At 4 o'clock, on a second line: 'yl'n kwsty ZY 'twlp'tk'n sp'hpty. Transcription: gōrgōn ī mihrān ...ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-ādurbādagān spāhbed. Translation: Gōrgōn/Gulgōn, (of the) Mihrān (family), ... and well-omened (is) Kōsrow, grandee, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the North.

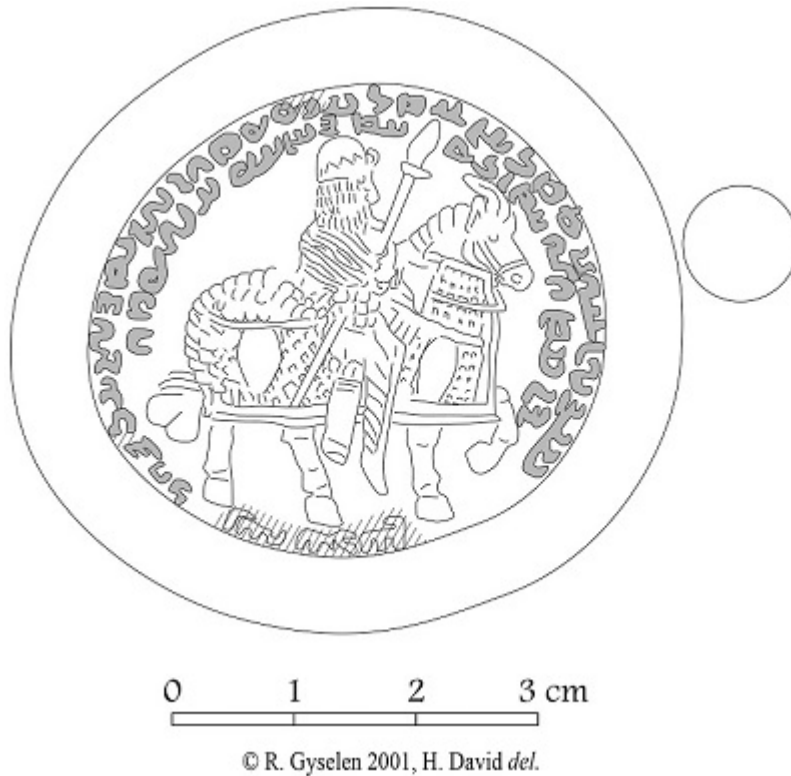


Figure 11. Official seal of Sēd-ōš, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the North (under Ƙosrow I). Transliteration: At 4 o'clock, on the outer line: sydhwšy ZY mtl'n štl '[s]ppty W hwjtk hwslwdy L[BA 'y]l'n]. At 4 o'clock, on a second line: kwsty ZY 'twlp'tk'n sp'hpty. Transcription: sēd-ōš ī mihrān šahr-aspbed ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-ādurbādagān spāhbed. Translation: Sēd-ōš, (of the) Mihrān (family), šahr-aspbed and well-omened (is) Ƙosrow, grandee, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the North.



Figure 12. Official seal of ...-Kosrow, commander of the army of the Iranians of the side of the North (under Hormozd IV). Transliteration: At 4 o'clock, on the outer line: ...'p[...]hwsldw ... (štl)...[st]'n ..? W hwjtk'whlmzdy LBA 'yl'n. At 4 o'clock, on a second line: kwsty ZY 'twlp't

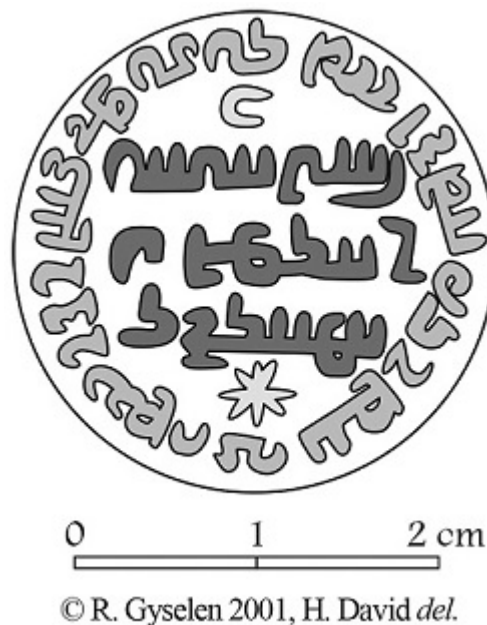


Figure. 13. Administrative seal of an *āmārgar* of Šahr-ī-Mūgān and Kust-ī-Ādurbādagān, Bāzāhā and Armen. Transliteration: In the center, on three lines: 1. b'c'h'y, 2. W 'lmny, 3. 'm'kl. In the margin, at 1 o'clock: štly ZY mwd'n W kwsty ZY 'twlp'tkn. Transcription: šahr-ī-mūgān ud kust-ī-ādurbādagān bāzāha ud armen *āmārgar*. Translation: *Āmārgar* of Šahr-ī-Mūgān and Kust-ī-Ādurbādagān, Bāzāhā, and Armen.

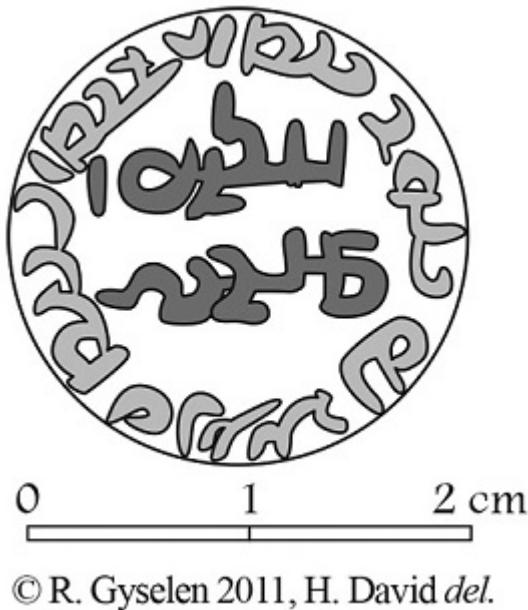


Figure 14. Administrative seal of a *mowūh* of Āluh,

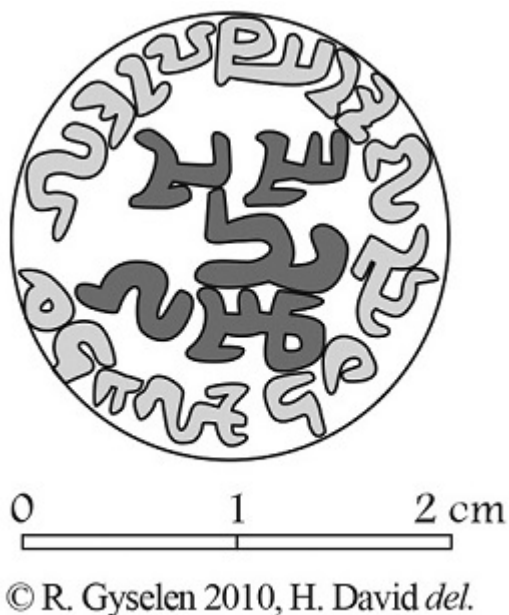
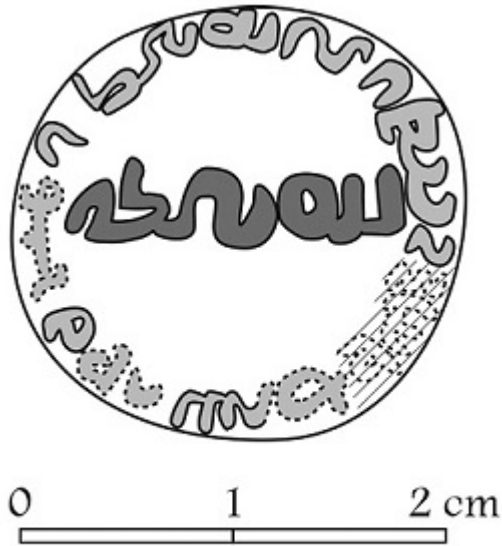
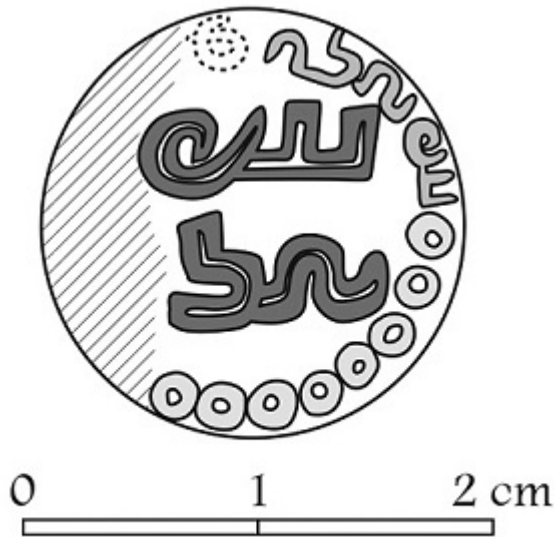


Figure 15. Administrative seal of a mowūh of Ōgōl,



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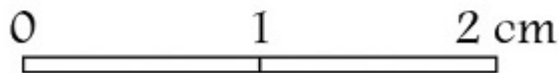
Figure 16. Administrative seal of a mowbed of Hamadān, side of Abhar. Transliteration: In the center: [']phly. In the margin, at 6 o'clock: 'h[m]t[n] (kwst ZY 'phly) mgwpty. Transcription: abhar hamadān-kust-ī-abhar mowbed. Translation: ABHAR mowbed of Hamadān, side of Abhar. (The letters ABHAR represent an abbreviation of Hamadān-kust-ī-Abhar.)



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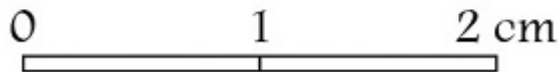
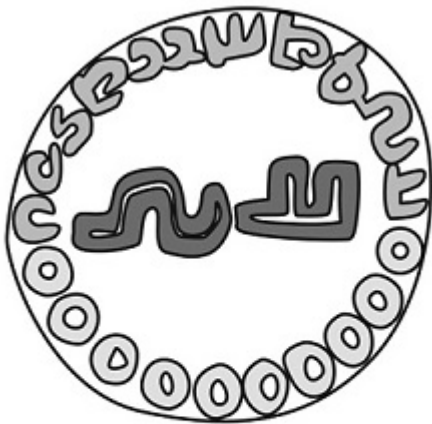


Figure 17. Administrative seal of a mowbed of Abhar. Transliteration: In the center, on two lines: 1. 'p, 2. hl. In the margin, at 3 o'clock: 'phly m[gwpt?]. Transcription: abhar abhar mowbed. Translation: ABH



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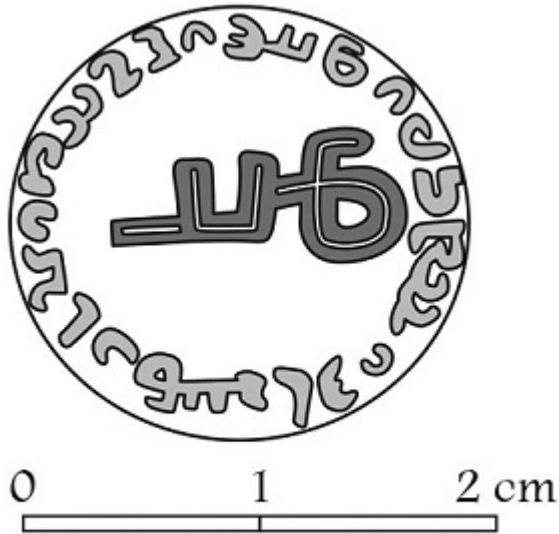
Figure 18. Administrative seal of a mowūh of Hamadān-frāx-kar,



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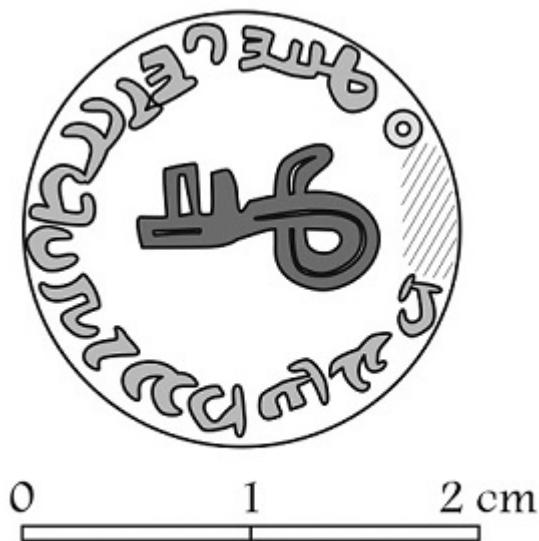
Figure 19. Administrative seal of a šahrab of Hamadān. Transliteration: In the center: 'h. In the margin, at 3 o'clock: 'hmt'n štlpy oooooooooo. Transcription: 'h

(= ha) hamadān šahrab. Translation: AH šahrab of Hamadān. (The letters AH represent an abbreviation of Hamadān.)



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Figure 20. Administrative seal of a šahrab of Māh, side of Nēmāwand. Transliteration: In the center: m'. In the margin, at 7 o'clock: m'dy kwsty ZY nym'wndy štlpy. Transcription: mā mād-kust-ī-nēmāwand šahrab. Translation: MA šahrab of Māh-kust-ī-Nēmāwand. (The letters MA represent an abbreviation of Māh, side of Nēmāwand.)



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Figure 21. Administrative seal of a šahrab of Māh, side of Wastān. Transliteration: In the center: m'. In the margin, at 1 o'clock: m'dy kwsty ZY wst'n št[lpy] o. Transcription: mā mād-kust-ī-wastān šahrab. Translation: MA šahrab of Māh, side of Wastān. (The letters MA represent an abbreviation of Māh-kust-ī-Wastān.)

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