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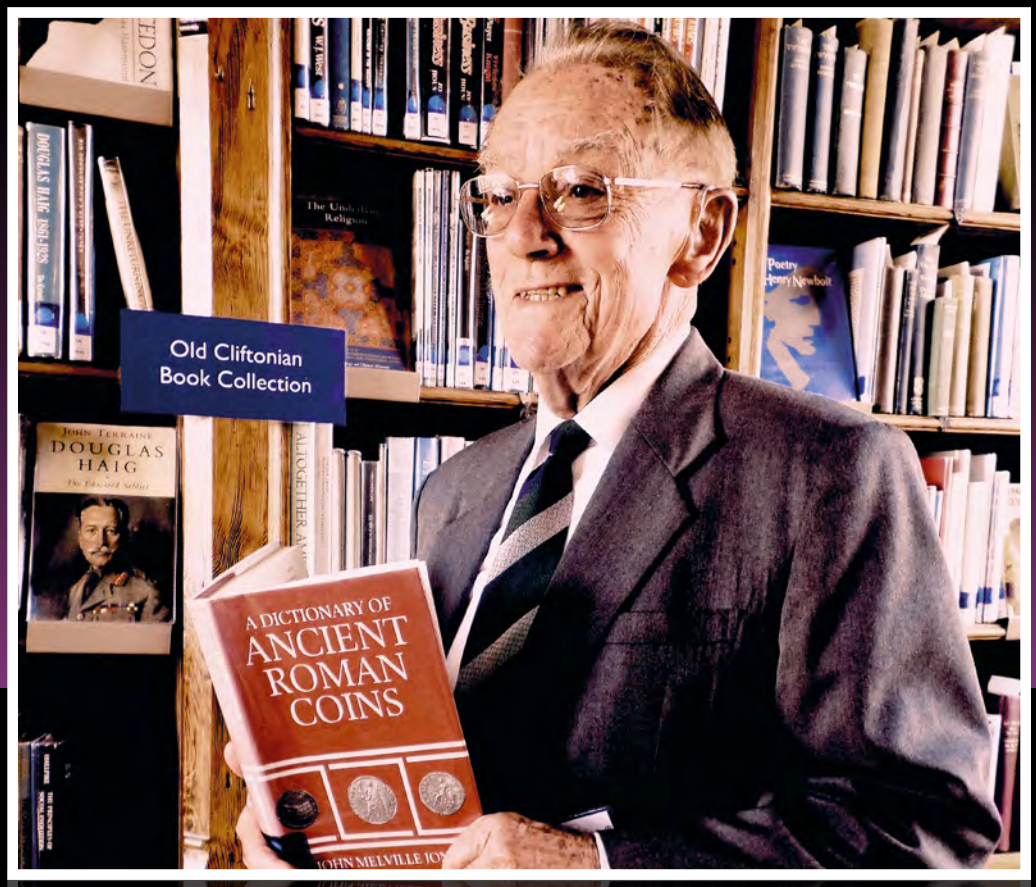

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President's Report

With COVID-19 in its second year, the NAA is looking to rebadge itself to adapt to the rapidly changing environment. Together with this special issue of the Journal we have already embarked on a new approach to increase our online presence; our website is in the process of being revamped and there will be a return to annual publication of the Association's journal (mainly online). We will publish the standard range of articles every even year, and every other year produce a special volume of which this is the first. We will replace the face-to-face biennial conference by online webinars in the first instance (and then progress to more conference-like activities) and hold the Annual General Meeting and Council/Executive meetings online.

I am grateful to Distinguished Professor Lee Brice of Western Illinois University for co-editing with Dr Gil Davis this special volume on numismatics in the education context. It has been a pleasure having Professor Brice working with the NAA to produce a volume of international importance. It goes to the standing of our Association and Australian numismatics that we can attract such high-profile numismatists from around the world to contribute as they have.

Our next volume will be part of the standard cycle for which we take submissions at any time, and already have some under consideration. If you have an interesting piece that you would like to see published, either new material or an original observation on existing work, then please submit your article which will then be placed into the reviewing process.

Following the AGM (held online last October) the centre of gravity of the NAA Executive has moved from Perth to Victoria, with Jonathan Cohen and Lyn Bloom stepping down as Secretary and Treasurer respectively, replaced by Darren Burgess and Philip Richards. I continue as President, Richard O'Hair as Vice President and Gil Davis as Managing Editor.

The Executive are having regular ZOOM meetings to jump-start the NAA's plunge into the new world. As an easy step towards online conferences we are looking to mount webinars mid-year with topics that should have wide appeal, one on the preservation and conservation of coins, a second on grading Australian coins both for the novice and for the more experienced collector looking to submit items to Grading Authorities.

We continue to enjoy sponsorship at a sustainable level, with Noble Numismatics (Gold), Coinworks and Downies (Silver), Drake Sterling, Mowbray Collectables, Sterling & Currency and Vintage Coins & Banknotes (Bronze) all contributing to ensure the Association's continued success. Membership is being maintained, and with the contribution by sponsors and members, the Association is able to function in these difficult times.

I am appreciative of the support of Council and other NAA members, and in particular our Secretary, Darren Burgess, and Treasurer, Philip Richards, who are pivotal in the running of the Association, and our Managing Editor, Gil Davis, for his ongoing work with the journal. On behalf of the NAA I thank both Jonathan Cohen and Lyn Bloom for their excellent contribution to the Association, and our auditor Mona Loo who has worked through the financial statements and associated material in forensic detail.

Professor Walter R. Bloom
President, NAA
www.numismatics.org.au
9th April 2021

About the Numismatic Association of Australia Inc

The Numismatic Association of Australia was founded in the early 1980s and incorporated in Victoria (A0024703Z) in 1992. It is the peak body for numismatics in Australia with seven sponsoring societies around Australia and New Zealand and a direct (individual) membership both national and international. The Association has four main functions:

- Promote the interests of numismatics in Australia. It brings together collectors, hobbyists and academic scholars in a shared love of anything to do with coins, banknotes, medals, tokens and numismatic paraphernalia.
- Biennial conference. This major event rotates through different States. Papers are presented by invited keynote speakers and others with sessions on ancient through to modern numismatics.
- Journal. The annual publication of the Association features a range of articles, approximately half on Australian and New Zealand topics, and the remainder from elsewhere, but especially on the ancient world. The journal has an esteemed editorial board and submissions are double-blind peer reviewed. It is published in hardcopy and online with open access and has a wide international readership. Every second year, it will be publishing a special edition on a specific topic.
- Website – https://numismatics.org.au/. This is the public forum of the Association hosting numismatic news, events, awards, conference details and the journal.

How you can help

- **Become a member**. If you are interested in numismatics in Australia and want to see it survive into the future and prosper, then support your national Association. It cannot function without members and you will be part of a community that shares your passion. The cost is only $25 per year.
- **Be involved**. The Association runs on a voluntary basis. Anything you can do to help would be greatly appreciated and there is a range of roles and tasks.
- **Make a donation**. If you really want to help secure the future of numismatics in Australia, donate to the Association; small or large, every bit helps.
- **Support the advertisers**. The advertisers do their best to help us and, in these precarious times, where would we be without them?

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Contact Darren Burgess, secretary@numismatics.org.au, for any further information.

History from the edge: teaching early Islamic history from sub-Sasanian coins

Khodadad Rezakhani

Abstract

The history of the fall of the Sasanian Empire (224-651 CE) as a result of the Muslim conquests has been told mainly through the evidence of later Muslim historians such as al-Tabari and al-Baladhuri. These histories, meant to be universal histories of Islam or internal accounts of the rise of Islam, often normalise events and obscure details of the events. These narratives can be dominated by a centralising effort, showing the march of the Islamic system toward a centralised caliphate dominating an empire stretching from Afghanistan to Portugal.

Non-narrative sources, including coins, can provide a useful corrective to this normalised narrative, shedding light on details of the events and bringing to light many unknown characters. By relying on the latest research into coinage of the late Sasanian and early Islami Ērānšahr, this paper provides examples of the stories that coins can tell us. From sub-Sasanian rulers to those issuing coins on the peripheries of the Islamic empire, the coins show a fascinating picture of the levels of authority in the region and the growth of power in the lands of the eastern caliphate.

Keywords

[Sasanian Empire] [Islamic Empire] [Iran] [Iraq] [Arab-Sasanian Coins] [Islamic Conquest]

The events of the middle of the seventh century in the Near East are some of the most recognisable watersheds in world history.[1] The rise of a new power in Arabia, that of the Islamic Caliphate, and its ascent to imperial status controlling territories between the Pamirs in the east and the Pyrenees in the west, is phenomenal and fascinating. Historians attempting to answer questions of why and how the Muslim administration and military were so successful have arguably failed to offer convincing answers.[2] Apart from the complicated nature of the events themselves, a great part of the difficulty in

1 For their help in the course of writing the present short essay, I would like to thank Hodge Mehdi Malek and Nikolaus Schindel for their help with citations and some of the discussions, and Dan Sheffield and Shervin Farridnejad for their assistance in locating PDFs – the saviour of scholarship in the age of Covid-19. Also, thanks to Lee L. Brice for his help and guidance in the process, and for his extreme patience.

2 For an outline of the events under consideration, see Donner 1981. In turn, Hoyland 2014 provides a different narrative and re-contextualises many of the events. Malek 2019, 1-33, provides a convenient summary of the events as they concern Ērānšahr (the former Sasanian territories), under discussion here.

explaining them, or even understanding their sequence, has been the nature of the historical sources. Mostly basing themselves on narrative accounts historians have grappled with questions of structural weakness in the Sasanian and Byzantine empires resulting from continued wars when explaining the failure of these ancient states to withstand the Islamic assault.[3] But considering the late date of many of these narrative sources, their testimony in explaining details must be treated with much caution.[4] At the same time, alternative sources commonly not used by historians, must be brought into consideration and evaluated for what they can contribute to the historiographical understanding of the early Islamic history. In this contribution I would like to bring attention to the numismatic material from the middle to late seventh century to understand the process of waning Sasanian control over their imperial territories.[5] In particular, I will concentrate on the coins issued in the Sasanian *kust* of South (Nēmrōz) and the information contained therein about the late Sasanian and early Islamic period.[6] These examples will demonstrate the way coins can be used in order to teach historical events in a narrative form, something that we usually expect only from chronicles and histories.

Specifically, the coins of the local authorities in southern Iran in the second half of the seventh century and following the death of the last Sasanian emperor, Yazdgerd III, might convey a different story from the standard tale of the establishment of the caliphate in the former Sasanian territories. These coins, here dubbed "coins from the edge", are unusual issues borrowing their iconography from previous Sasanian issues and occasionally even Byzantine coins current in Syria, as well as many innovations. By considering their evidence, they can be used to teach the history of the period of transition away from the vision of a quickly centralising system exerting power from Medina, Kufa, or Damascus. Indeed, these issues suggest the fragmentation of authority from the local rulers to provincial governors and eventually to the person of the caliph. Similarly, their iconography, often placing them outside the standard issues of the Arab-Sasanian governors like ʿUbaidallah b. Ziyād, provides examples of layers of compromise and power negotiations that prevailed in the early Islamic period, and is often missed in the available literary sources.

3 Howard-Johnston 2004, among others, for the Sasanian case; Kaegi 1995 for the Byzantine case.

4 Such caution was the root cause of Crone & Cook's 1977 venture. Ever since, many contemporary sources, although never as complete as later Islamic narratives, have been made available and studied by scholars, many of which are gathered in Hoyland 1997. See Howard-Johnston 2006 for a specific case study.

5 Album 2011 provides an easy to access overview of most of the coins discussed here. For a deeper consideration of Arab-Sasanian coins, see Gyselen 2000 (for copper) and Malek 2019 for detailed studies, frequently referenced in the current paper.

6 See Gyselen 2001 for an explanation of these major, sixth century divisions of the Sasanian Empire.

Islamic conquests, Arab conquests, and 'the fall of the Sasanians'

Before embarking on questions of historical events and ideas, I shall first clarify what I mean by the events of the middle of the seventh century. The series of military, political, economic, and social changes that happened between ca. 635-695 CE are variably called 'Islamic Conquests', 'Arab Conquests' from one side and 'Fall of the Sasanians' and 'Loss of Byzantine Near East' from the different historical vantage points.[7] These are the events, known mainly through later Conquest (Ar. *Futūh*) narratives, written by Muslim historians such as al-Tabari and al-Baladhuri, as well as many others.[8] These later narratives, which form the basis of our understanding of events – for both Sasanian and Byzantine contemporary accounts are curiously poor in this regard – have to be scrutinised in order to render answers to the questions we ask about the period. Among these questions are: who was responsible for the conquests, who in fact carried out the conquests, and what events contributed to changes in political settings in the conquered territories? Closer scrutiny of sources, more accurate questioning, as well as use of alternative sources, have resulted not in more accurate answers to the above questions, but at least in our increased consciousness of the existence of such issues.

While the Arabic sources, as well as later Greek/Byzantine ones, have often driven the bulk of our inquiries into these questions, an understanding of other sources has created a different approach to the issue at hand. In particular, Syriac and Armenian sources, as well as Coptic and occasionally Ge'ez ones, have increased our awareness of different narratives for the period of conquest and the establishment of the early Caliphate.[9] It is perhaps surprising that the same attention is not afforded to Iranian sources in Middle Persian, New Persian, or Bactrian and Sogdian. The result of this latter neglect is that even newer narratives of conquest show more deference to the events in Egypt and Syria – former Byzantine territories – than to Iraq and Iran, the domains of Ērānšahr, the Sasanian Empire.[10]

Perhaps as a result of this lack of attention to Iranian sources, we still see an inaccurate understanding of the process of conquest in the Sasanian territories, the roles of different actors in the process, and even the basic question of who was involved in it. I have previously argued that we must see the process of the 'fall of the Sasanian dynasty' separately from the 'end of Sasanian rule' over these territories.[11] Furthermore, the conquest of Iraq – Sasanian *Asūrestān* with its capital of Ctesiphon – must be considered

7 Hoyland 2014, 1-6 for a discussion of the intricacies of these differences. All dates are CE.

8 For a by now outdated, but in a sense classical, summary of these sources and their narrative of the events, see Zarrinkoub 1975.

9 Hoyland 1997.

10 Material sources, in the form of archaeology, are not evenly available for the period, with the bulk of work done on former Byzantine territories in Egypt, Syria-Palestine, and Anatolia. Works such as Walmsley 2007 are simply missing for the Sasanian domains; Morony 2013.

11 Rezakhani 2019.

distinctly from the conquest of the Iranian plateau and the east.[12] If these proposals are heeded, we will also arrive at an understanding that calling the conquests 'Islamic conquests' or 'Arab conquests' can be both accurate and inaccurate, depending on the situation and event in question. But as a whole I have preferred to discuss the period, here and elsewhere, as one of 'the End of Sasanian rule' and the 'Rise of the Islamic Caliphate' in the Sasanian territories.[13] This, perhaps influenced by my training as a late antique historian and a willingness to see institutional transformation instead of collapse and sudden change, is part of how I wish to describe the period under consideration here and the transition from the late Sasanian to the early Islamic periods in the Sasanian territories of Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia.

The waning of Sasanian power: the death of Khosrow II

The extensive wars between the Sasanians and the Byzantines following the murder of Emperor Maurice by Phocas, essentially changed the face of the Near East in the early seventh century. The campaigns of Khosrow II, starting around 603 and continuing until 619, resulted in the Sasanian conquest of Anatolia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. These territories stayed securely in Sasanian hands for another decade or so, while from 625-626, the Byzantine emperor Heraclius undertook a series of counter attacks aimed at removing Khosrow II from power. These counter attacks, and the political intrigues that went hand in hand with them, resulted in the removal of Khosrow from power in February 628 and his execution shortly after. This, essentially, was the end of effective Sasanian rule over their territories, including the newly conquered territories on the eastern Mediterranean.[14] Henceforth, the control of the successors of Khosrow II over territories, particularly those outside Iraq, was indeed nominal.

12 For the conquest of Iraq, see Morony 1982. For the conquests of the plateau, see Zarrinkoub 1975 and the many correctives offered by Daryaee 2003 and 2010; Pourshariati 2008; and Rezakhani 2017.

13 Rezakhani 2019 and elsewhere.

14 For a more detailed discussion of these events, as well as their larger global context, see Howard-Johnston 1999 & 2004; for a summary, see Rezakhani 2020, 254-58.

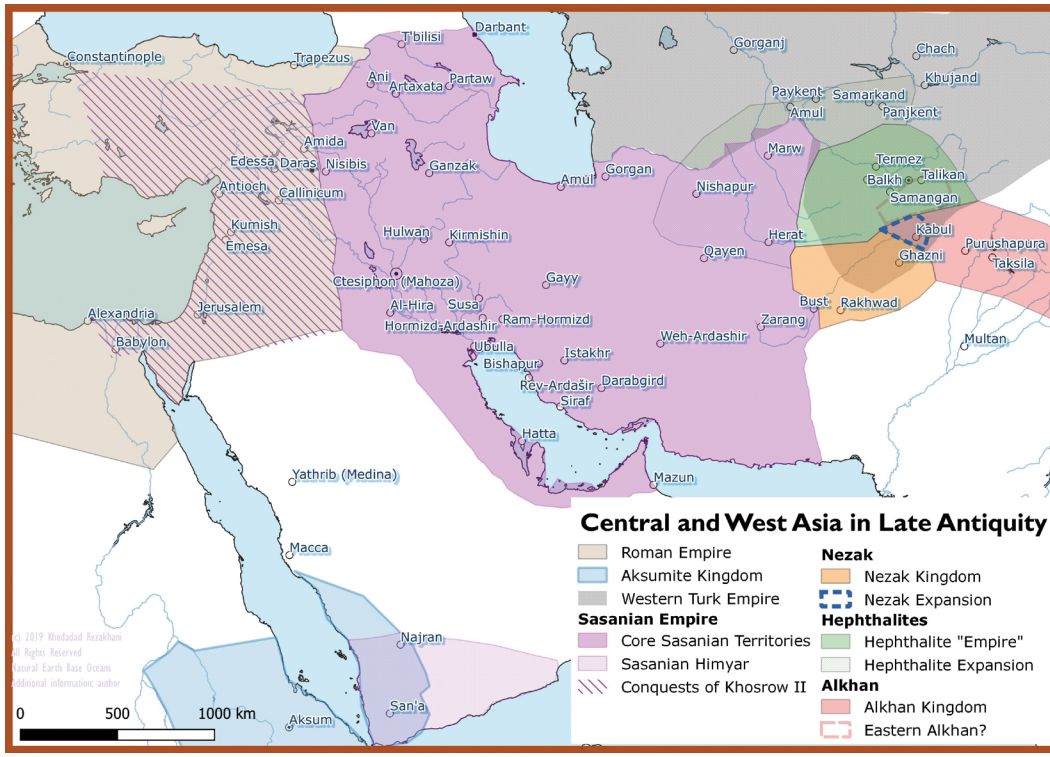

Figure 1: the Sasanian empire and its neighbours in the early seventh century. Map by the author.

The confused state of affairs following Khosrow's death was essentially the cauldron in which the subsequent events, including the early Islamic conquests, brewed. While Heraclius' counterattack seems to have been successful in making inroads into Sasanian holdings in the Caucasus, as well as routing Sasanian forces in Azerbaijan and eastern Anatolia, it appears not to have been permanent. Following the death of Khosrow II, Heraclius took the quickest route back to Constantinople, and subsequently appears to have regained control in Anatolia and perhaps northern Syria. But there is little evidence for the re-establishment of Byzantine control in lower Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. There territories appear to have continued under the control of Sasanian generals (by now, 'war-lords') like Shahrbaraz and then passed directly to the hand of the Muslims who started their campaigns in the region from around 632-33.[15]

The history of the period – from the end of Sasanian control in 628 to the proper establishment of the Islamic Caliphate in the region following the Second Fitna in 692 – is a confusing and poorly documented time span.[16] Later Muslim historians often provide a normalised and highly edited version of events presenting it as a purposeful march

15 The role of Shahrbaraz in re-establishment of peace and regaining of Byzantine control might be gazed through his secret meeting with Heraclius; see Kaegi and Cobb 2008.

16 For a possible vision of the place of Ērānšahr in this context, see Daryaee 2016.

of progress. The few contemporary sources that we have, including Syriac chronicles, focus on details that either cannot be reconciled with the later narrative sources, or are too community specific to have a bearing on the greater political history. Even when these sources are of some use for the region of Syria and upper Mesopotamia (Islamic period *Jazeera*), they contain little information about the events further east, the former Sasanian territories, and important regions like Jibal, Fars, Sistan, or Khurasan.

It is here that taking our gaze away from narrative sources and seeking information from numismatic material might prove more useful. While coins do not provide answers to all of our questions, reading them separately from the literary sources can provide an alternative narrative of events which can then be adjusted when corroborated by other sources and information. This provides a useful teaching tool that can effectively involve students in the process of research, allowing for a first-hand introduction to the historian's craft and source evaluation.

Late Sasanian coins and history

Khosrow II was the most prolific authority issuing coins amongst the Sasanian monarchs. Mints of Khosrow were located over the entire Sasanian territories. He centralised coin production and used new mints, expanding the monetary economy.[17] The coins of Khosrow II are remarkably uniform and except for ceremonial and special issues which included rare gold issues, use a uniform iconography and production method (Fig.2).[18]

Figure 2: A late silver issue of Khosrow II, mint WYH, year 626 (RY[19] 36)
(Ira and Larry Goldberg Coins, auction 120, lot 1081)

The issues of the immediate successors of Khosrow II, his son Kavad II and grandson Ardashir III, continued the progression of Sasanian coinage, displaying new crowns identifying each ruler, and preserving the star and crescent sign on the margins that

17 In the late Sasanian period, dies were cut at a central workshop and sent to different mints for coin production. Vondrovec 2014, 532.

18 See Göbl 1971, table 12.

19 RY= Regnal Year.

had become a standard on the issues of Khosrow II. The coins of Ardashir III show a youthful face, without beard, which corroborate the narrative of al-Tabari and other Muslim historians that he was a child when he ascended the throne.[20]

In 629/630, Ardashir III was removed from the throne through a *coup d'état* instigated by general Shahrbarāz who then crowned himself as king, the third non-Sasanian person who had dared to do so. No coins of Shahrbarāz are known, but rare coins of a beardless authority also named Khosrow (III/IV?) show the chaotic state of affair in the Sasanian domains.[21] Khosrow III was most likely making a claim from Khurasan (the eastern province), although his third-year coins bear the mint mark of WYHC, usually associated with the area of Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sasanians in Asurestan/Mesopotamia (Fig.3).[22] The continuation of coins under this authority might show a limited area of influence allowing for longer control and minting of coins.

Figure 3: Silver coin of Khosrow III/IV, mint WYHC, year 636-637
(CNG, auction Triton XXIV, lot 877)

Perhaps contemporary to Khosrow III, Bōrān, a daughter of Khosrow II, issued coins for nearly three years.[23] It is significant that the coins of Bōrān depict the Queen in female garb with braided hair, clearly presenting her as a woman, despite later interpretations of the succession of a woman as a sign of weakness (Fig. 4).[24] The extent of Bōrān's control, as demonstrated by the number of mints where her coins were issued, from Abarshahr in Khurasan to Ctesiphon in Asurestan, shows the relative stability of her rule compared with those of Kavad II and Ardashir III, as well as the chaos that was to ensue following her early death.[25]

20 Heidemann 2013; 2014.
21 Malek 2019, 10.
22 Malek 2019, 10.
23 Malek & Sarkhosh Curtis 1998, 120, table 1.
24 For example, see Malek and Sarkhosh Curtis 2018, 115; or Malek 2019, 10 n. 43; for a more in-depth study of the reign of Bōrān, see Emrani 2009.
25 Malek & Sarkhosh Curtis 1998, 119-22.

Figure 4: Silver coin of Queen Bōrān, mint APL, 630 (RY 1)
(The New York Sale, auction 37, lot 655)

Upon her death in 630/31,[26] a few other authorities, most likely competing pretenders to the throne, followed Bōrān onto the throne. All of these authorities issued coins in the style of Khosrow II, occasionally even re-using his remaining dies. Chief among these is Azarmidoxt, a sister of Bōrān, who issued coins on which the queen is depicted as a bearded man, resembling that of Khosrow himself, with a similar winged crown topped with a star and crescent.[27] The confused state of coinage, from authorities sometimes not even known from written sources, is indicative of the disintegrating Sasanian state.

It was probably during this time that another pretender to the throne, Yazdgerd III, appeared in Istakhr, the traditional seat of the Sasanians in their homeland of Fars. From later evidence, including the Yazdgerdi Era dated from his coronation year 632, we know the date of his accession (Fig. 5).[28] The distribution of Yazdgerd's mints in the south, almost all of them from the Sasanian *kust* of Nēmrōz (South) indicates the limited extent of Yazdgerd's control and the fact that his power lay mostly in Fars and Sistan, as well as Khuzistan.[29] The coins of Yazdgerd III show the king of kings in two stages, one series as a beardless youth and the other one as a mature bearded man. The most prolific mint for Yazdgerd was SK which has been identified as Sistan, on the eastern side of Nēmrōz.

26 Malek & Sarkhosh Curtis 1998, 116.
27 Daryaee 2004; Malek 2019, 11.
28 See Kholdani 2013 for a historical consideration of the time reckoning. Malek 2019, 687-89 provides a useful guide and charts.
29 Rezakhani 2021.

Figure 5: Silver issue of Yazdgerd III, mint SK, year 17 (648-49), with a control mark (CNG electronic auction 486, lot 310)

Whatever power Yazdgerd III might have possessed in Asurestan/Mesopotamia was rendered ineffective with the conquest of the region between 636 and 637 when Ctesiphon, the imperial capital, fell to the conquering Muslim armies. Coins of Yazdgerd continued to be issued in Khuzistan, Fars, and Kerman. In 642, a last stand in Nihawand, spearheaded by Yazdgerd's government in Istakhr and involving a wide array of allies from all around Ērānšahr, was unexpectedly defeated by the Muslim armies. Yazdgerd's power fell apart and the king appears to have sought help from allies further east, while still issuing coins in Fars and Sistan.

With Yazdgerd's death in 651 in Merv (Marv, Margiana) in the southeast of Erānšahr, while he was on his way to seek reinforcements, the official Sasanian coinage issues came to an end. His year 20 issues from Sakistan, however, continued to be issued, probably by various claimants, including his elder son Pērōz, who appears to have sought a restoration of the crown to himself with the help of Tang forces.[30] These coins then became the basis of later coin issues in the region, including the coinage of Phrom Kesar which will be discussed below.[31]

In the East (Sasanian *kust* of Khurasan and further east in Bactria/Tokharistan and beyond), outside the direct influence of the Sasanians, coins were issued in the style of Sasanian king Hormizd IV, as well as imitations of the coins of Wahram VI Chobin, an early 590's non-Sasanian rival of Khosrow II.[32] The later coinage of Bactria, issues of the early Islamic rulers of the mountainous areas of western Hindukush, are almost exclusively based on types issued by Khosrow II.[33] These coins, as well as those of Khurasan, most likely issued to the south of the Hindukush and in the regions of Kabul and Zabulistan, appear to be imitating the Arab-Sasanian issues of Fars and 'Iraq/

30 Daryaee 2006-2007.
31 Tyler-Smith 2000.
32 Vondrovec 2014, 525; Tyler Smith 2007.
33 Vondrovec 2014, 527-36.

Asurestān.[34] Many stylistic details, including the use of the portrait of Khosrow II and reverse borders, point to the influence of these early Islamic coins on the east, and this is where we shall turn now.

Arab-Sasanian coins: Sasanian governors to Muslim amīrs

The earliest Muslim rulers of the former Sasanian territories, including caliphs ʿUmar, ʿUthman, and ʿAli, did not issue any coins of their own. Instead, the earliest coins of the nascent Islamic state in Ērānšahr were issued by local governors of the early Umayyad Caliphs, namely that of Muʾawiyya, and the coinage of authorities like ʿAbd-allah b. ʿĀmir, Ziyād b. Abīhī and the latter's son, Ubaydallay b. Ziyād. These coins, essentially local issues in Basra, Kufa, and other Muslim garrison towns, as well as some older mints in the Sasanian 'South' (Nēmrōz), are essentially continuations of late Sasanian issues of Khosrow II and Yazdgerd III.

Coins of Yazdgerd III, particularly his year 20 (651 CE) from SK (Sakistan mint), continued to be issued after the king's death in 651 (Fig. 6). While the coins minted during Yazdgerd's time were dated, in the established Sasanian convention, by the king's regnal dates (Yazdgerdi Era, YE, starting at 632), the king's death in 651 gave birth to a new reckoning. This is called the Post Yazdgerdi Era (PYE) by which various coins in the east of Ērānšahr, as well as the north, the area of Tabaristan, are dated. As such, the early post-Sasanian and early Islamic coins could have been dated by either Hijri (year one: 622 CE), Yazdgerdi (starting in 632) or Post Yazdgerdi (year 1 at 652) eras.[35]

Figure 6: Early Arab-Sasanian issue with the bust and name of Khosrow II, with a marginal crude, Pahlavi style *bismillah* on obverse 3, mint ŠY/ŠB (?), year 29 YE (661)
(Leu Numismatik AG, Web auction 14, lot 1773)

The coins of Muslim governors of Ērānšahr, mostly governors of Kufa and Basra with various levels of authority in Khuzistan, Fars, and further east in Kerman and Sistan,

34 Vondrovec 2014, 527-44.
35 Malek 2019, 687-89.

reflect a period of struggle for authority in the region.[36] The earliest of these are coins issued in the name of the Sasanian king of kings, Khosrow II, which cover a wide range of mints and years, and are most likely the result of a re-use of old dies from the mints that slowly fell into the hands of the Muslims. These coins are normally only identifiable as Arab-Sasanian because of the inclusion of various Islamic formulae, including *bismillah* 'in the name of God,' normally on their margins.[37] The earliest coins issued are by the governor of Basra (mint mark BACLA) 'Abdallah b. 'Āmīr. The coins of 'Abdallah mostly bear the date in Yazdgerdi Era, following the Sasanian conventions,[38] and carry the name of the governor in the Pahlavi script, either as 'pdwl' or occasionally, even "translated" into Middle Persian as 'pdwl' y 'amwl'n.[39]

The most prolific issuers of Arab-Sasanian coins, however, are a father and son pair who dominated the rule of the Muslim-controlled parts of Ērānšahr during the rule of the Sufyanid caliphs (661-684). Ziyad b. Abīhī (or ibn Abu-Sufyān) and his son 'Ubaidallah were governors of Basra and often Kufa from 665 to 684, helping organise the former Sasanian domains under the new government. Ziyad b. Abīhī[40] a newcomer with little connection to the higher echelons of power, was adopted by the caliph Mu'awiyah I as his brother, evidently the result of an affair of Abu Sufyān with a prostitute, perhaps of Iranian background.[41] Ziyad, as governor of 'Iraq based in Basra, struck coins early on, but became prolific after 670. Early coins were issues in Basra, as well as places further east in Fars, including Bishapur (BYŠ) and Dārābgird (DA/DAP).[42]

In 674, after the death of his father and a brief interregnum of other governors, 'Ubaidallah b. Ziyād succeeded his father as the governor of 'Iraq and the rest of the former Sasanian territories.[43] 'Ubaidallah was an energetic governor with prolific issues covering many of the known Sasanian mints, as well as new mints such as Basra (BCLA) and Kufa (AKWLA) (Fig. 7).[44] Among these, Basra, the most prominent centre of Muslim control in the former Sasanian territories, dominates issues in range of years and in total production.[45] Coins of 'Ubaidallah use Yazdgerdi, Post Yazdgerdi and Hijri eras depending on the place of issue and year. Limited issues of copper from mints

36 For a general survey, now see Malek 2019, 25-33.
37 Malek 2019, 288-98 (sec. 9.32); Gyselen 2000, 70 for the limited copper issues.
38 Malek 2019, 251-54.
39 Malek 2019, type 251.
40 Malek 2019, 329-33.
41 Hasson 2002; Malek 2019, 25-26.
42 Malek 2019, 26.
43 Robinson 2000.
44 Malek 2019, 315-20. Although 'Ubaidallah issued coins in Khurasan as well, many of the coins from Khurasan during his governorship are issued by his brother and sub-governor in Khurasan, Salm b. Ziyād (Malek 2019, 311-313).
45 Malek 2019, 318.

of Ardashīr-Khurra/Gūr (ART) and Stakhr (ST) in Fars[46] also exist for ʿUbaidallah, although usually copper issues appear to have been left to local governors and rulers.

Figure 7: Silver coin of ʿUbaidallah b. Ziyād, mint DA, year 43 (PYE = 674 CE)
(Leu Numismatik AG, web auction 15, lot 2583)

In 683, and with the death of Yazid I, Basra and the rest of lower ʿIraq (Ar. as-Sawād), fell into the hands of Mus'ab b. Zubayr, the brother of Abdallah b. Zubayr, a claimant to the caliphal position.[47] The Revolt of Ibn Zubayr in Mecca had started after the disputed succession of Yazid I. After Yazid's death in 683, the legitimacy of Ibn Zubayr, strengthened by the military success of his brother Mus'ab, started what is called the Second Fitna in Islamic history.[48] Lasting until 692 and only crushed by the famous al-Hajjaj b. Yusef al-Thaqafi on behalf of the Umayyad caliph Abdulmalik b. Marwan, the claim of Ibn Zubayr found much reception in former Sasanian territories. Various governors sent by Ibn Zubayr issued coins in Kerman, Fars, Khuzistan, and as-Sawad.[49] The name of Ibn Zubayr, written as 'pdwl' y zubyl'n or a variant, appears on coins issued in major mints such as Bishapur (BYŠ), Ardashir-Khurra (ART) and a prodigious number of mints in the Kirman region.[50] These coins were issued mostly by the local governors sent by Mus'ab to rule over these regions. Mus'ab's own coins, issued from a number of mints including Basra and possibly as east as Nishabuhr (NYŠ) in Khurasan.[51]

46 Gyselen 2000, type 1.
47 Bahramian & Lahouti, 2008.
48 Madelung 1981.
49 Malek 2019, 30-31.
50 Malek 2019, 259-62.
51 Malek 2019, 305-306.

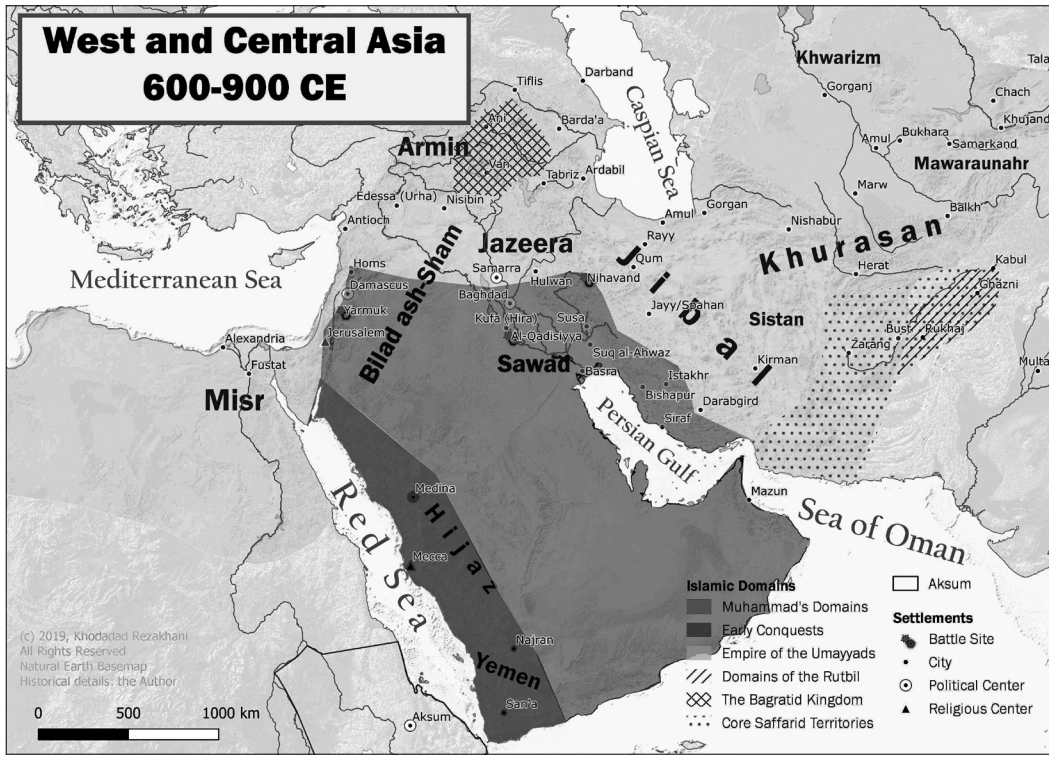

Figure 8: Early Islamic West Asia. Map by the author.

The reversal of the Zubayrid fortunes in 692 resulted in the final establishment of the Marwanid ʻUmayyad power. Al-Hajjaj b. Yusef who had defeated and executed Ibn Zubayr in 692 was appointed to the governorship of ʻIraq and the east. Hajjaj's coin issues include fewer mints, but appear to have a wider range of designs, creating great variations on their Sasanian models.[52] They also mention the names of local governors whose identity we know from copper issues, including a certain Mansūr.[53] While the coin reforms of the caliph Abdulmalik, first introduced by gold issues from Syria in 696,[54] eventually became the dominant form of currency in the Muslim world, Arab-Sasanian coins issued by al-Hajjaj and others continued at least until 700. These coins were also issued from peripheral regions of the empire at least for another century, marking the independence of rulers in Tabaristan, Bactria, Kabul, and Zabulistan long after their ceasing in the centre of the caliphate.

52 Malek 2019, 277-83.
53 Malek 2019, 281; Gyselen 2000, types 20 & 22.
54 Treadwell 2009.

Coins from the edge

In reconstructing the history of the early Islamic rule over former Sasanian territories, the testimony of later historians such as al-Tabari are regularly taken as primary.[55] In these narratives, the role of the central government – whether in Medina, Kufa, or Damascus – is assumed to be primary. However, considering that these histories are products of many centuries after the events,[56] it is useful, and perhaps necessary, to make use of contemporary sources. While the textual sources such as Armenian and Syriac testimonies have been used in this way,[57] the evidence of the coins is less considered for what it can teach us about the period.

The coins issued by the governors (Amīrs) of the new caliphal system, such as Ziyād and his son ʿUbaidallah, provide a glimpse into the spread of caliphal power into the Sasanian territories. However, they also convey the image that the governors were in fact in effective charge of the newly conquered or capitulated territories, without much resistance.

An example of how coins can bring forth an image different from the centralising narrative can be gleaned by considering local issues of southern Iran. These are a group of coins, mostly localised in the areas of Fars and Khuzistan, minted in parallel with the early Arab-Sasanian coins of the Muslim governors such as ʿUbaidallah. The coins, almost exclusively issued in copper,[58] are generally listed as part of the Arab-Sasanian series, partly because of the appearance of the name of a few of their authorities on contemporary Arab-Sasanian coins.[59] Stylistically, however, they should probably be called a Byzantine-Sasanian series, as they are often influenced by both Byzantine and Sasanian coins.[60] They occasionally include a double portrait of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius and his son Constantine III and even carry the cross signs on the crowns and in the field between the two portraits. Some coins also bear the Byzantine reverse legend of a capital M or a cross on the pedestal on their reverse, replacing the normal Sasanian reverse of the fire altar with attendants.[61] These issues sometimes bear the names of local Iranian officials such as a certain Yanbūd/Gyānbūd, the reverse of whose coins in fact bears neither a fire altar nor a cross and is rather dominated by Pahlavi legends (Fig. 9).[62]

55 For a detailed study, with a concentration on al-Baladhuri's Futuh al-Buldan, see Lynch 2019, particularly chapter 3.

56 Donner 1998, 174-82.

57 Hoyland 1997 for a comprehensive study, as well as Palmer 1993, Thomason's translation of Sebeos 1999, as well as Hoyland 2011.

58 Some of the authorities, including Farrokhzad (Malek 2019, 356; Gyselen 2000, Type 2), Mansūr (Malek 2019, 357) and Gyānbūd (358) are also mentioned on silver coins of Muslim governors.

59 See Gyselen 2000, 60-68 (and table 15c for different types) and Malek 2019, 358-360 for some examples and studies of these coins.

60 Gyselen 2000, 60.

61 Gyselen 2000, 66-68.

62 Malek 2019, 358.

Figure 9: copper issue of Gyanbud, found in Qasr-ī Abu Nasr (Old Shiraz, Fars)
with double Byzantine busts (Heraclius and Constantine?) on the obverse and a single attendant and diminutive altar on the reverse, accompanied by a large Pahlavi inscription
(Stephen Album Rare Coins, auction 39, lot 78)

At the same time, other local copper issues of Fars and Khuzistan carry icons and legends that have references to local Iranian symbols of power and authority, including legendary figures such as Gōpatšāh.[63] Other coins depict the bust of the issuing authority in frontal pose (Fig. 10), rare for Sasanian coins but more common for Byzantine ones.[64] Some coins also bear a mixed iconography of Byzantine, Sasanian, and Islamic ('standing caliph') figures, while their legends include both Arabic and Pahlavi.[65] Some of these coins, bearing mint marks, appear to be local issues made only for local circulation, and benefitting from greater stylistic freedom.[66]

Figure 10: Undated copper issue from the mint BYŠPHR (Bīšāpur, Fars)
The obverse has a full bust with bust and the legends DARAY (Dārāi), while the reverse includes a Gopatshah wearing a late Sasanian (Khosrow II?) crown and bearing the mint mark ABAD BYŠPHR ('Prosperous Bīšāpūr')
(Leu Numismatik AG, web auction 14, lot 1795)

63 Gyselen 2000, 64-65, and types 6-8; Malek 2019, 358.
64 Gyselen 2000, 59 (table 15b).
65 Gyselen 2000, 91-98 for a full range of these legends and formulae.
66 For example, Gyselen 2000, types 37-40 from Susa, where the local scope is specified by Pahl. *Šuš ravāg* "valid/current in Susa." Also type 36 for Rayy.

On the margins of the Sasanian world, and outside the direct control of Muslim governors, various local authorities issued coins in both Sasanian and Arab-Sasanian styles. Chief among these are the authorities in Tabaristan who, despite the late start of their coinage, continued to issue coins in Sasanian style. The earliest authority to issue coins in Tabaristan was a local ruler named Farrukhan who issued silver drachms starting in 711 (Fig. 11).[67] Supposedly a descendant of Gīl Gāvbāra, the governor of the southern Caspian coast region of Padishkhwargar during the rule of Yazdgerd III, Farrukhan's coins show a revival of Sasanian coinage, even after the reforms of the coinage introduced by the caliph Abdulmalik I in 696.[68]

Figure 11: silver issue of Farrukhan, the Dabuyid Ispahbed of Tabarestan, mint Tabaristan, PYE 75 (727 CE) (Stephen Album Rare Coins, auction 39, lot 2115)

Aside from Tabaristan, and contemporary with the early Muslim governors such as Ziyād b. Abīhī and ʿUbaidallah, the authorities in east Iran, including the regions of Bactria/Tukharistan, Ghur, and Zabulistan, were also issuing coins. These coins are continuations of local issues of the "Hunnic" (Nezak, Alkhan, and Hephthalite) dynasties of the region, as well as Sasanian influenced issues.[69] The earliest of these issues, the Sri Shahi group, are devoid of any Arab-Sasanian or Sasanian influences (aside from the older Sasanian influence on silver issues of the East).[70] These cannot be dated with certainty, although it is safe to assume that they were issued before any Muslim campaigns in the east.

The next series of coins from the region, the so-called Later Nezak coins,[71] are similarly devoid of Arab-Sasanian influences. However, at least one copper type that can be

67 See Malek 2004 for a complete treatment of Tabarestan coinage.

68 Treadwell 2009; Malek 2019, 337-45.

69 As Vondrovec (2014, 511) reminds us, it is a good idea to keep in mind that the entire silver issues of the "Iranian Huns" (including issues under the Western Turk dominance) followed the Sasanian monetary system.

70 Vondrovec 2014, 512-15.

71 Vondrovec 2014, 515-18.

attributed to this series, types 217 and 271B, bears the Bactrian legend ζοναδο "Zonado".[72] If correctly attributed, this is the same person as *Zhulad Gōzgān*, known from his sub-Arab-Sasanian coins from approximately 683 (Fig. 12).[73] This and other issues from the east, both Arab-Sasanian (or the so-called Arab-Hephthalite)[74] and local productions continuing Hunnic issues[75] show an independent line of power in the region. In fact, the Arab-Hephthalite influenced coins continued to be struck in the east long after the purely epigraphic reform coins were issued by the caliph Abdulmalik b. Marwan in 696. Among these are the issues of Tegin, "Khurasan Shah" and his successors, including his son Phrom Kesar "the Caesar of Rome."[76] These issues, similar to the coinage of Tabarestan, extended beyond the rule of the Umayyads, both geographically and temporally, as they were minted well into the ʿAbbasid period as well.

Figure 12: silver issue of Zhulad Gozgan, mint ANBYR, year 68 AH (688 CE) (CNG auction 106, lot 926)

Conclusion

The numismatic evidence for the history of the late Sasanian and early Islamic Ērānšahr (the Sasanian domains) provides us with fascinating alternative stories of the rise of Islamic rule in this region. Considering the complex local history of the region in the second half of the seventh century, these coin types reflect the power negotiations between various actors in the period of early conquests. Ranging from the issues of the Sasanian pretenders to the Arab-Sasanian issues, and a bewildering array of local issues, these coins can be used to construct a narrative of the waning of Sasanian power that might provide correctives to the stories given by later historians.

72 Vondrovec 2014, 520.
73 Malek 2019, 334; 403-405.
74 Malek 2019, 399-408
75 Vondrovec 2014, 411-535.
76 Vondrovec 2014, 538-55.

I have elsewhere suggested that the transition from the late Sasanian conquests in the Near East to the early Islamic conquests can be viewed from a different viewpoint.[77] This revolves around the presence of mercenaries and warlords in the southern theatre of war, the Sasanian *kust* (military province) of the South/Nēmrōz. These warlords brought about the first wave of the conquests or reshuffling of control which was later attributed to the early Islamic armies. The numismatic evidence, some of which is laid out in this paper, provides evidence to support this speculation. The presence of Byzantine influenced local copper issues, as well as a wide range of local authorities using various iconographies, tells the story of autonomous actors in this arena. The interactions of these authorities, viewed in the context of the efforts of various Muslim governors of Basra and Kufa to take control of the region, provides a fascinating picture of competition in Khuzestan, Fars, and beyond in the late Sasanian and early Islamic periods.

Author

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77 Rezakhani 2019, 243-44.

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