

FAROHAR/FRAVAHAR MOTIF

K. E. Eduljee



Farohar / Fravahar motif at Persepolis, Iran. Image: Narges Vafi.

FAROHAR/FRAVAHAR MOTIF
WHAT DOES IT REPRESENT?
USE OF ICONS & SYMBOLS IN ZOROASTRIANISM
(ABRIDGED)

K. E. Eduljee

Zoroastrian Heritage Monographs

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*Dedicated to the memory of my mother Katayun Eduljee
on whose birthday, September 29, this edition was completed.*

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TIPS USING ADOBE READER

Using Read Mode

Task	Using the Drop Down Menu & Mouse	Using Keys (PC) Press
Start Read Mode	View > Read Mode	Ctrl and H
Change pages	Mouse over centre-bottom of screen to reveal control bar	PgDn PgUp
Change and zoom pages	Mouse over centre-bottom of screen to reveal control bar	Enlarge: Ctrl and + Shrink: Ctrl and -
Go to first page		Ctrl and Home
Go to last page		Ctrl and End
Exit Read Mode	View > Read Mode	Esc

Using Full Screen Mode

Task	Using the Drop Down Menu & Mouse	Using Keys (PC) Press
Start Full Screen Reading	View > Full Screen Mode	Ctrl and L
Next page	Left click mouse or advance scroll wheel	PgDn
Previous page	Right click mouse or retreat scroll wheel	PgUp
Enlarge page	Ctrl and advance scroll wheel	Ctrl and +
Shrink page	Ctrl and retreat scroll wheel	Ctrl and -
Exit Read Mode	View > Read Mode	Esc

PART I

WHAT DOES THE FAROHAR/FRAVAHAR MOTIF REPRESENT?



Farohar motif at Persepolis (Iran), capital of the Persian Achaemenid kings.

What does the winged motif called the farohar/fravahar represent? The answers go beyond clarifying the motif's past use to the heart of present-day Zoroastrian beliefs – they define Zoroastrianism.

The farohar/fravahar motif of the type shown here usually accompanies the portrait of a monarch depicted on Persian Achaemenid inscriptions, tomb façades and artifacts – all royal settings. The Achaemenid dynasty ruled Persia and Greater Aryana (also see I.4) from around the 8th or 7th century BCE to 330 BCE.

A similar, older motif has been found on a tomb in an area once part of Persia's sister nation, Media (see III.2.C). When Achaemenid rule ended, so did the use of the winged motif – until, that is, about say two hundred years ago – when the farohar motif began to be adopted as a Zoroastrian symbol to symbolize the faith.



Farohar motif at the purported tomb of Cyaxares I (dated to between the late 7th to early 6th century BCE) in Qyzqapan, Iraqi Kurdistan and once a part of Media, Persia's sister kingdom. Image: Wikimedia.

We have not found any record of an intervening use of the farohar between the end of the Achaemenid era and its modern adoption as a common Zoroastrian symbol. The use of the farohar as a symbol of Zoroastrianism is therefore relatively modern.

We know of no direct statement that explains what the winged motif shown in the image above represents. Nevertheless, nowadays we read of three principal theories about the motif's symbolism, namely, that it represents:

1. God, Ahuramazda (Ahura Mazda);
2. A monarch's farohar (also called fravahar/fravashi), and
3. A monarch's khvarenah (also called farr).

To determine which of these three theories comes closest to what the farohar may have represented, we will examine the concepts behind the theories. We begin with a review of the Zoroastrian concept of God, Ahura Mazda.

1. Zoroastrian Concept of God, Ahura Mazda, in Scripture & Texts

In addition to references throughout the Zoroastrian scriptures, the *Avesta*, including the Hormuzd Yasht (an Avestan chapter devoted to the concept of Ahura Mazda), the Zoroastrian concept of Ahura Mazda, God, is found concisely stated in the *Avesta's* Sad-o-Yak Nam-e Khoda (Hundred-and-One Names of the Lord). We list here a few relevant attributes:

- An-aiyafah – Incomprehensible (understanding the true nature of Ahura Mazda, God, is beyond human comprehension). The 17th century work, *The Dabistan*, 'The School', describes this concept of God by stating that except God, who can comprehend God? Entity, unity, identity are inseparable properties of this original essence.
- An-ainah – Without form.
- Mino-tum – Spirit-like (invisible). While the eye cannot behold Ahura Mazda, God, and while the mind cannot conceive God, Ahura Mazda is nearer to us than our own corporeal selves.

Zoroastrian texts talk about the concept of a metaphorical pure eternal spiritual 'light' that brooks no 'darkness' and thereby casts no 'shadow'.

A. The Farohar Motif as a Winged Bird-Like Ahura Mazda

We have found no references in Zoroastrian texts that Ahura Mazda is bird-like or can be represented as part bird.

2. Fravashi/Farohar



Farohar of the façade of the Yazd Atash Bahram (Fire Temple). Image: Terry Feuerborn at Flickr.

The Avestan word ‘fravashi’ has evolved to the modern farvard, faravahar/fravahar and farohar. The *Avesta* and Zoroastrian texts speak about the fravashi in two ways.

The first is as a spiritual component of all creation including human beings where it is a companion of the soul. The second is as a spiritual entity that survives the passing of a righteous person to the after-life. Here, it has the ability to become a beneficent spirit – a guardian angel if you will. Both instances are explained in the Farvardin Yasht (hereafter Yt. 13).

In the first instance, the soul is a personal spiritual component while the fravashi is a universal component. The soul becomes good or bad depending on the choices made by its corporeal owner. The fravashi, however, carries *asha*, the laws of God, and is incorruptible. The soul can seek the assistance of the fravashi (perhaps through introspection).

While goodness is innate within us, associating with it is a matter of free will – of choice. Wisdom is the soul’s path to uniting with the fravashi and it is in an *ashavan*, a righteous person, where the two are in harmony. Such an individual is divinely blest.

With this endowed faculty embedded within us, we do not need to seek divine assistance from without – we need to look deep within. Grace is theirs who choose the right path.

In the second instance, Yasht 13 extols and memorializes the farohars/fravashis of the righteous, the *ashavan*, who have passed away. In this aspect, the fravashi and soul are seldom mentioned as separate entities.

It appears that once united with the personal soul, the universal fravashi becomes personal.

A. The Farohar Motif as a Winged Bird-Like External Fravashi

The united soul-fravashis of the departed can function as beneficent helpers i.e. as guardian angels. In Yt. 13.70 we have, “They, the asha-abiding fravashis, come to assist those who are beneficent and not hurtful or offensive. To them, the fravashis will assuredly come flying like birds well-winged (meregh hu-parena i.e. Huparena Murgh).”

Thinking of the fravashi as winged like a bird, allows the fravashi to be represented as an external winged entity, thereby making the farohar motif a strong candidate for representing the winged fravashi.

What may work against this conclusion is that in Yt. 13.70, the external fravashi as a “well-winged bird”, i.e. angel-like, may not refer to the internal fravashi of a living person but rather that of someone who has died and passed on to the spiritual realm. However, the Achaemenid reliefs show the person in the external farohar closely resembling the (living) king beneath.

One can postulate that this is a farohar of an ancestor. Alternatively, the image could seek to convey that the king being righteous, his soul and fravashi have reached, or will reach, this status upon passing away. In other words, the fravashi portrayed externally could represent that the king rules in accordance with the fravashi and therefore the king is an ashavan living and ruling in accordance with the laws and will of God, Ahura Mazda.

3. Khvarenah/Farr

There is yet another spiritual component that resides within us – the khvarenah (Avestan) or farr (New Persian).

It is difficult to find one English word that encapsulates the vast concept of the khvarenah. At one level, the khvarenah is the archetype of the person one can grow to become if allowed to grow to the limit of her or his capacity in grace, that is, in keeping with the fravashi and thereby in keeping with one’s higher calling.

As with the fravashi, the khvarenah is also a companion of the soul. In the righteous – the ashavan – all three work in concert as they did with Zarathushtra.

In addition, if through choice and free will, a person utilizes her or his talents fully, that person can grow to her or his greatest potential. Since the khvarenah is Mazda-datem, God-given, when a person works in concert with

her or his higher calling, the closest English equivalent is to say that person is living in grace.

A. The Farohar Motif as a Winged Bird-Like External Khvarenah

In addition to the internal khvarenah possessed by all, there is an external khvarenah, which comes to a person who is most deserving of that special (for the lack of better words) aura or charisma.

The external khvarenah is more in keeping with the notion of the farr in classical poets Daqiqi and Ferdowsi's *Shahnamehs*. The royal Kava Khvarenah is one such unique external khvarenah with bird-like mobility while a person is still alive.

The Zamyad Yasht has an enigmatic passage at Yt. 19.26 that can be read to mean the Kava Khvarenah either settled for the first time over righteous King Hushang or that it formed a strong attachment to him. However, when a monarch uses his or her talents to achieve base ambitions rather than his or her higher calling, the Kava Khvarenah can fly away like a bird.

The Zamyad Yasht at Yt. 19.34-35 tells us, "When he (King Jamsheed) began to find delight in words of falsehood and untruth, the (Kava) khvarenah was seen to flee away from him in the shape of a Vareghna bird (identification not known)" to Mithra, guardian of the sun. In doing so, the (Kava) khvarenah became the Akhvareta Khvarenah – a non-personal khvarenah.

The Yasht strongly implies that kingship and the mantle of leadership of the Aryan people must be deserved. It stays over a monarch provided he or she rules in grace, but flies away when a monarch violates a covenant embedded in Aryan history to rule as an ashavan. This is the exclusive heritage of the Aryan people from the time when kingship was first conferred on Hushang (or on his grandfather Gayomard/Kaiumars according to Ferdowsi).

We see that the *Avesta* figuratively describes both the external fravashi and the khvarenah as birds. Of the two, the exclusive bird-like external royal khvarenah has mobility while the person it patronizes is still alive. Its presence indicates a monarch is ruling in grace.

This feature makes it particularly suited to be represented as the motif we now call the farohar.

I.2-4. Farohar/Fravahar Motif – What Does it Represent?

There are two principal types of winged motifs depicted on Achaemenid structures, one with a person within a central disk and another without a person.

For our purposes, we call the former a personal and the latter an impersonal farohar. The first could be the attached Kava Khvarenah and the other the unattached Akhvareta Khvarenah.



Personal or attached farohar. A bas relief at Persepolis. Note the unusual position of the person placed above the impersonal farohar with a vacant circle. Usually, the figure of the person rises from within the circle. This motif also has an unusual combination of stylized 'feet' emerging from the waist of the person and wavy-pronged 'feet' emerging from the circle.



Impersonal or unattached farohar depicted on glazed tile work from Palace of Darius I, the Great (r. 522-486 BCE), at Susa, now at the Iranian National Museum, Tehran.

We suspect that different Zoroastrian-Aryan regimes would have had their own graphic representation of the khvarenah/farr. A ram or stag with bird wings is a Sassanian-era possibility. Popular artists' impressions of Zarathushtra have him portrayed with his khvarenah/farr as a halo – as the radiance of the sun (khvar/khor) emanating from his head (likely influenced by the Sassanian rock carving shown at III.1.B).

B. Birds in Zoroastrianism

As we have noted, the *Avesta* compares the fravashi to a Huparena (well-winged) bird and the Kava Khvarenah to the Vareghna bird.

In addition, we find that in the *Bundahishn*, the largest of all birds is called the three-toed Sen-murgh or Saena-bird.

The Sen-murgh likely evolved into the Simorgh so central to Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*.

The *Shahnameh* also mentions a farr-e Homai and a heavenly Homai (bird) that spreads its wings casting a shadow (over a king).

We do not know if these birds were modelled after existing birds when the texts were written and if the birds still exist or have become extinct.

What is of interest to this discussion is that some depictions of the bird-like farohar motif show it with three-toed feet.

The Saena bird – the largest of all birds in Zoroastrian texts – is also stated to have three toes. However, three-toed flying birds are relatively rare.

This author notes that nowadays, one of the heaviest creatures that can fly is the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*). A variety of the bird is native to Greater Aryana (see below).



Artist's impression of a Simorgh in the Walter's manuscript of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*.



The head of a bird commonly said to be the Homa/Homai bird. Rock sculpture at Persepolis.
Image: youngrobv at Flickr.



Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*)

The species is endangered and its numbers are diminishing rapidly (a popular and controversial sport amongst the wealthy Arabs in the Gulf States is to hunt Bustards using Falcons). The male Bustard is typically a metre tall (three feet) with an average wingspan just under three metres (about eight feet). The Bustard has long feet that at times project beyond its body in flight – and it has three toes.

4. Greater Aryana

This author has proposed use of the name ‘Greater Aryana’ to mean greater ancient Iran or Iran-shahr. Greater Aryana includes the sixteen nations listed in the *Avesta’s* Vendidad (1.1-19) plus lands added after the Avestan canon was closed. In our estimation, Greater Aryana stretched from the Tigris and Cappadocia in the west to Kashgaria and the Indus River in the east; from the Caspian and Aral seas in the north to the Persian Gulf and the Makran coast in the south. cf. Extent of Greater Aryana at page 104 of *The Immortal Cypress – Companion* by K. E. Eduljee (www.immortalcypress.com).



PART II

FAROHAR/FRAVAHAR MOTIF – USE OF ICONS IN WORSHIP

1. Name of the Religion

‘Zoroastrian’ & ‘Zoroastrianism’ are modern English words. They are not found in ancient texts. If so, by what name was the religion known previously?

Internal name: The *Avesta* calls the religion ‘Mazdayasna’ and ‘Mazdayasna Zarathushtrish’. Some modern writers use the word ‘Mazdean’.

External name: Classical European writers called Zoroastrianism the religion of the Magi, ‘Magiæ’ or ‘Magian’ if you will. To this day Arabs call Zoroastrians ‘Majus’ (i.e. Magian). Islamic writers called Zoroastrian lands ‘Mughistan’ (from ‘Mugh / Magha’).

In *Alcibiades I*, Greek philosopher, Plato cites the Magism of Zoroaster (Zarathushtra). Plato’s disciple, Hermodorus, said Zoroaster was the first Magian i.e. founder of the Magi’s doctrine (cf. *Agathias’ Histories*).

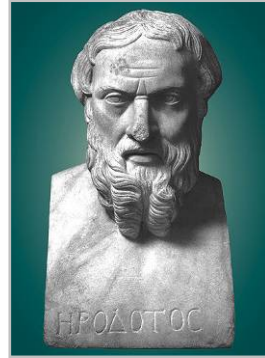
Herodotus and Strabo knew of only one Persian religion. Albert de Jong in *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* states, “There is no trace of a plurality among the Iranians. On the contrary, in the (Greek and Latin) Classical texts, only one religion is recognized: the religion of the Persians. This religion is often connected with the name Zoroaster, who enjoyed a wide reputation in the ancient world as the founder of the order of the magi, and by extension as the founder of the wisdom and religion of the Persians.”

2. Ancient Historians on Achaemenid Era Zoroastrian Worship Practice

Since surviving records of ancient Persian belief systems are found in the works of Classical Greek and Latin authors, their records can help us determine what the farohar motif could have represented during Achaemenid times. The earliest extant work is that of Greek author Herodotus (c. 485-420 BCE) who lived during Achaemenid times.

A. No Temples or Images of Deities – Persians Consider Image Use a Folly

Herodotus: “They (the Achaemenid era Persians) have **no images of the gods, no temples** and no altars – **and consider their use a sign of folly**. This comes, I think, from their not believing the gods (sic) to have the same nature with men, as the Greeks imagine. Their wont, however, is to ascend the summits of the loftiest mountains, and there to making offerings to Zeus (Mary Boyce: “Ahuramazda’s name was regularly ‘translated’ as Zeus by Greeks”), which is the name they give to the whole circuit of the firmament. They likewise offer to the sun and moon, to the earth, to fire, to water, and to the winds. These are the only deities (sic) **whose worship has come down to them from ancient times.**” Further, during offerings, a magus “chants a hymn, which they say recounts the origin of the cosmos.”



Herodotus

The farohar motif was in use during Herodotus’ time. If it had represented God, Herodotus would have been constrained to make the statement “they have no images of the gods....”



Strabo

First century CE Greek writer Strabo, confirms that “the **Persians do not erect statues or altars**, but ‘offer sacrifice’ (i.e. worship) on a high place. **They regard the heavens as Zeus (Ahura Mazda)** and also worship (revere or extol) Heliuss (Greek god of the sun), whom they call Mithras... and fire and earth and winds and water.”

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 CE), a Greek Christian theologian and Church Father, wrote in *Exhortation to the Heathen*, that the magi, “(Dino tells us,) worship beneath the open sky, regarding fire and water as the only images of the gods (sic).

Dino is likely Greek historian and chronicler, Dinon (c. 360-340 BCE), a contemporary of Alexander and the author of a lost book called *Persica*.

B. Heavens: Ahura Mazda’s Cloak

What Classical writers saw through their anthropomorphic (human-like) polytheistic frame of reference is that Achaemenid era Persians viewed the entire cosmos i.e. the heavens as a way to illustrate Ahura Mazda’s nature. Perhaps we can allude to the heavens as the cloak of Ahura Mazda who is nevertheless unseen and spirit-like.

3. Unseen & Seen Deities. Aniconic & Iconic Worship

A. Chatterji: Asuras & Devas

In his *The Hymns of Atharvan Zarathushtra*, Jatindra Mohan Chatterji, a scholar of Vedic and Avestan texts, finds that the schism between the Iranian and Indian branches of the Aryan family took place over their theological systems.

“The difference,” he states, “seems to have started over the use of icons in worship. ...Deva came to mean a visible God (God represented by an idol) and Asura, an invisible (formless) God. Some people preferred the use of an icon – they were the Deva-Yasna. Others interdicted [prohibited] its use – [they were] known as Ahura-tkesa in the beginning and Mazda-yasna later on.” “...the Deva-Asura war [was] a clash between the ideals of iconic and aniconic worship.” “There can be no compromise between iconism and aniconism.”

4. An Austere Worship Practice

A. The Austere Worship Practice of Ancient Zoroastrians

Reading the oldest records, we see that the Achaemenid Zoroastrians were remarkably austere in their use of religious contrivances – so austere that they didn’t even have temples.

All the rock engravings on the tombs depict the monarchs worshipping before the fire with the moon or sun in the sky – that is, in the open air with the earth as their temple and the heavens as its roof.

About 450 years after Herodotus made his observation that the Persians had no temples but worshipped in the open, Strabo noted that the magi of Cappadocia (now in Turkey) had “...Pyraetheia (fire-houses), noteworthy enclosures; and in the midst of these there is a fire holder on which there is a large quantity of ashes where the magi keep the fire ever burning. And there, entering daily, they make incantations for about an hour, holding before the fire their bundles of rods (barsom) and wearing round their heads high turbans of felt, which reach down over their cheeks far enough to cover their lips.”



Plinths for possible outdoor worship at Pasargadae, Pars, Iran - capital of Cyrus the Great. The far plinth could have supported the fire stand and the king or others could have stood on the other.

II.1-4. Farohar/Fravahar Motif – Use of Icons in Zoroastrian Worship

Thus, we read that the magi had fire-houses (Persian atash-gah) in order to maintain an ever-burning fire in their role as keepers of the ever-burning flame (fire-keepers, athravans) and for their worship rituals. There is no indication that the community at that time joined the magi in rituals at the fire-houses (atash-gahs) i.e. the atash-gahs were not public temples. It appears the community continued to worship in the open.

Nevertheless, atash-gahs eventually became larger fire temples where people could congregate within and not have to brave the elements or climb a hill (institutionalized exercise).

The earliest surviving atash-gahs are from the Parthian and Sassanian eras (from c. 250 BCE to c. 650 CE). They are austere hillside structures called chahar-taqi(s) meaning four directions.



Sassanian chahar-taqi at Niasar near Kashan, Esfahan (Isfahan).

No symbols adorn the temples. The only object in the temples would have been a fire holder or urn.

5. Pure Worship Practice

A. Ammianus Marcellinus: the Purest Worship of Divine Beings

Fourth century CE, Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus in *Rerum gestarum libri* adds, “Plato, that most learned deliverer of wise opinions, teaches us that the Magian (religion) is (known) by a mystic name Machagistian,* that is to say, the purest worship of divine beings; of which knowledge in olden times the Bactrian Zoroaster derived much from the secret rites of the Chaldaeans.”



Plato

[*Note: Machagistian could be a corruption of Mazistha (greatest) or Mazdayasni. If a corruption of Mazdayasni, then this is one of the few Western references to this name.]

Jatindra Mohan Chatterjee, author of *The Hymns of Atharvan Zarathushtra*, also uses the term “pure religion” when referring to the religion of Zarathushtra.

B. Pak-e Yazdan

In his *Shahnameh*, Ferdowsi states “*Mapandar ka atash parastaan boodand. Parastandey Pak Yazdan boodand*” which this author translates as, “Do not think that they were fire-worshippers. They were worshippers of a pure Divinity (Pak-e Yazdan)”. The Middle Persian text, the *Shayest Na-Shayest*, also states, “Of a pure law (dad) are we of the good religion.”



Ferdowsi

C. Pak-e Mazdayasna

The simplicity of ancient Zoroastrian worship practice, a profound philosophy, and the lack of religious contrivances or images could have been why Plato saw Zoroastrianism/Magism as, “The purest worship of divine beings” – a concept we might wish to reaffirm today – the pak (pure) yasna (worship) of Mazda (God).



PART III USE OF SYMBOLS IN ZOROASTRIANISM

1. Historical Use of Identifiers and Symbols

While several items can identify the wearer or carrier as a Zoroastrian, we have no record of Zoroastrians traditionally using a symbol as a personal adornment. Perhaps as indicated by Herodotus, ancient Zoroastrians shunned religious images and symbols. If correct, then the use of a symbol as a personal and structural adornment in Zoroastrianism is a modern development.

A. Fire & the Stepped Fire Stand

Historically, the only object Zoroastrians used during worship has been fire (or a light source).

It is the stepped top and base fire stand or holder* that provides a lasting testimony to the depth (in time) and breath (across Aryana) of Zoroastrianism's practice. (*We hesitate to call the fire stand an 'altar' since an 'altar' of the Classical Greek variety likely meant something quite different for Herodotus who stated the Persians did not use altars.)



Parthian-Sassanian era stepped fire stand found at Kuh-e Khajeh near Zabol in Sistan.

Fire burning in a stepped fire-stand has been a consistent Zoroastrian 'symbol' for about a thousand years – from Median-Achaemenid royal carvings to the coins of Sassanian era Zoroastrian sovereigns; from Anatolia (Central Turkey today) in the west, to Kyrgyzstan in the east and Sistan in the south.



Coin of Sassanian King Shapur II ? (304-379 CE). While the Achaemenid style of the stepped fire stand persisted for nearly a thousand years, the winged motif called the 'farohar' ceased to be used as a Persian-Zoroastrian symbol after the end of the Achaemenid era.



Stepped fire stand on an ossuary discovered at Navaket (present day Krasnaya Rechka) in Kyrgyzstan. Note the shape of the flame and compare with the flame portrayed on Xerxes' tomb at III.2.C. Also note the tassels on the waist cords (kushti?) shown in detail in the image to the left and the padam over the priests' mouths.



III.1. Farohar/Fravahar Motif – Use of Symbols in Zoroastrianism



Stepped fire stand on a ceramic ossuary dated to the 7th-8th century CE found in the Samarkand-Sugd region of Central Asia. Note the priests wearing the padam over their mouths so as not to defile the fire. Also, note the design at the very top of the ossuary – the apparent sun within a crescent moon (cf. sun in Median motif at III.2.B). The arches over the fire and the priests could depict a worship area similar to a chahar-taqi atash-gah / fire-house or temple.

Many of the fire stands and artifacts displayed on these pages have come to light in relatively modern times. We can only imagine what remains hidden and grieve for those objects that may never be found.

The consistency with which the stepped fire stand has been depicted across Aryana over a period of at least a thousand years is closely followed by depictions of the barsom.

B. Barsom

The barsom (the bundle of sticks used in haoma/hom preparation during the Yasna ceremony) indentified the person carrying the barsom bundle as a Magian-Zoroastrian.

The barsom has been depicted in rock carvings and artifacts from Anatolia (Central Turkey today) to Central Asia.



Investiture of Sassanian King Ardashir II (r. 379-383 CE). Rock relief at Taq-e Bostan, Kermanshah, Iran. The figure in the centre is commonly identified as Ardashir II. Identification of the other two figures has spawned an industry and we will not contribute to the speculation. The image of the left figure including his clothing has become a model for Zarathushtra's modern portraits. Our interest is in the barsom bundle held by this individual and the sun-shine (khur-sheed)-like farr emanating from his head. Base image: Alieh Saadatpour at Flickr.



A gold sheet with an engraved image of a man carrying a barsom (perhaps a magus). Part of the Oxus Treasures now located at the Victoria & Albert, as also the British Museums, England. Image: Wikipedia.



Rock carving housed at the Museum for Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara. Note the cloak. For this author, this style of clothing identifies a possible magus here depicted carrying a barsom bundle and what may be a haoma cup.

The magi are at times depicted carrying weapons. Several inner sanctums of fires temples also have old style weapons. While not warriors, Zoroastrian priests appear to have been prepared to defend themselves and the temples.

C. Sudreh and Kusti

The sudreh and kusti – the white vest and waist cord – if worn externally can identify the wearer as a Zoroastrian. While they carry symbolic meaning, the sudreh and kusti are not iconic symbols.

D. Identifiers & ‘Symbols’ – Zoroastrianism in Aryana

This writer proposes that images – identifiers or ‘symbols’ if you will – of the stepped fire stand, the sun or moon depicted overhead in a worship scene, the barsom, and the clothing of the magi all come together as corroborating evidence of Zoroastrianism’s practice within Greater Aryana. New discoveries will continually redefine the extent of widespread Zoroastrian practice and even that of Greater Aryana. The east and north of Greater Aryana are still relatively unexplored.

2. Development of the Farohar Motif

A. Hittite Motif

The Hittites were the people who ruled Hatti, a central Anatolian (Turkey today) kingdom, from c. 1900 to 700 BCE.

Together with their southern neighbours, the Mitanni, the Hittites acknowledged Aryan (Indo-Iranian) deities such as Mitra, Varuna, Indra and used names with Aryan roots. The Hittites formed the earliest known Anatolian civilization and employed an advanced system of government based on a legal doctrine.

The land of the Hittites was called Katpatuka (Cappadocia) during Persian Achaemenian times (c. 675 to 330 BCE). Strabo in the first century CE noted that the magi of Cappadocia “...have Pyraetheia (fire-houses), noteworthy enclosures...” the first record of Zoroastrian fire temples. The Hittite lands of Hatti



Hittite farohar-like bas-reliefs.

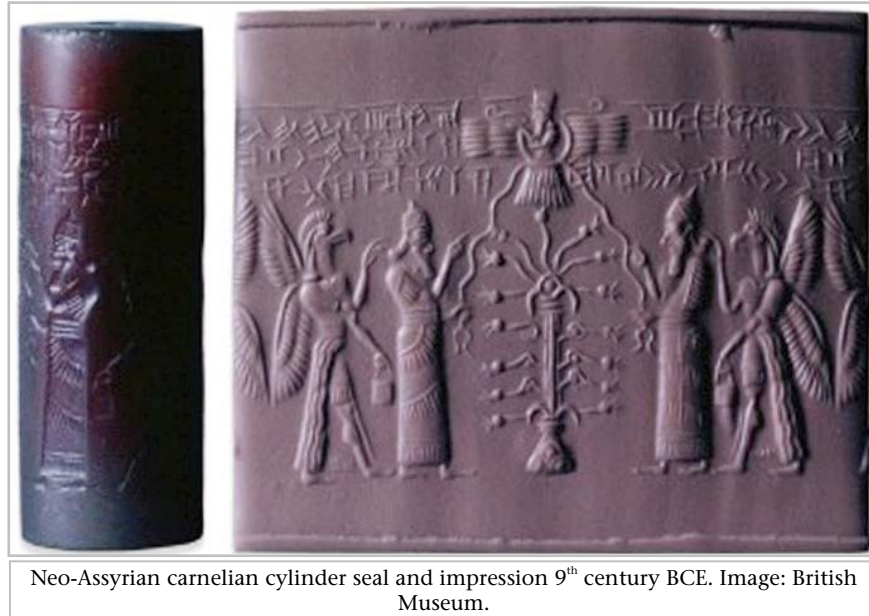


c. 750 BCE bas-relief found at Sakça-Gözü/Coba Höyük, S. Turkey. Compare with Darius hunting seal at p. 25.

could have formed the western extent of Ranghaya, the sixteenth and last Aryan land in the Vendidad – the last land mentioned before the Avestan canon was closed.

If Hatti was indeed a part of Greater Aryana, the Hittites may have employed one of the earliest known/surviving farohar-like motifs in Greater Aryana – or for that matter in the region. These motifs accompany royalty in much the same way as in Achaemenid bas-reliefs. The Hittite farohar-like motifs are primarily of the impersonal/unattached (see III.2.F) variety.

B. Symbols Similar to the Farohar Used by Other Cultures



Neo-Assyrian carnelian cylinder seal and impression 9th century BCE. Image: British Museum.

Much has been made of farohar-like motifs used by other neighbouring ancient cultures such as the Assyrians, Sumerians and Egyptians (all to the west of ancient Aryana). While the symbols have similar features and while the artisans who developed them may have borrowed design features from one another (or could have done so by royal command), the concepts they represented may have been entirely different. In the absence of any corroborating information on their representing similar concepts, a further discussion is only speculative and conjectural.

The cylinder seal shown here was found in Sherif Khan (Tarbisu), northern Iraq. The inscription reads “Seal of Mushezib-Ninurta, governor... son of Samanuha-shar-ilani.” In 883 BCE, Samanuha-shar-ilani was a ruler of Shadikanni (Arban in eastern Syria) as an Assyrian vassal. On their web-page, the British Museum claims without substantiation that the farohar-like figure is one of the Assyrian gods.

While there is a close similarity between the image above and some Achaemenid farohar designs, it is pointless to speculate on who borrowed what from whom since our present information is based on surviving artifacts made on materials that can last (such as clay or stone – commonly used Assyrian substrates). We do not know if ancient Aryan artifacts on perishable materials such as parchment have been destroyed for all time. The Assyrians had close contact with the Aryans and at one time ruled over Aryan lands. Assyria might have been the home of the legendary Dahak/Zahhak and the *Avesta* states he sought in vain to claim the khvarenah.

C. Median Motif

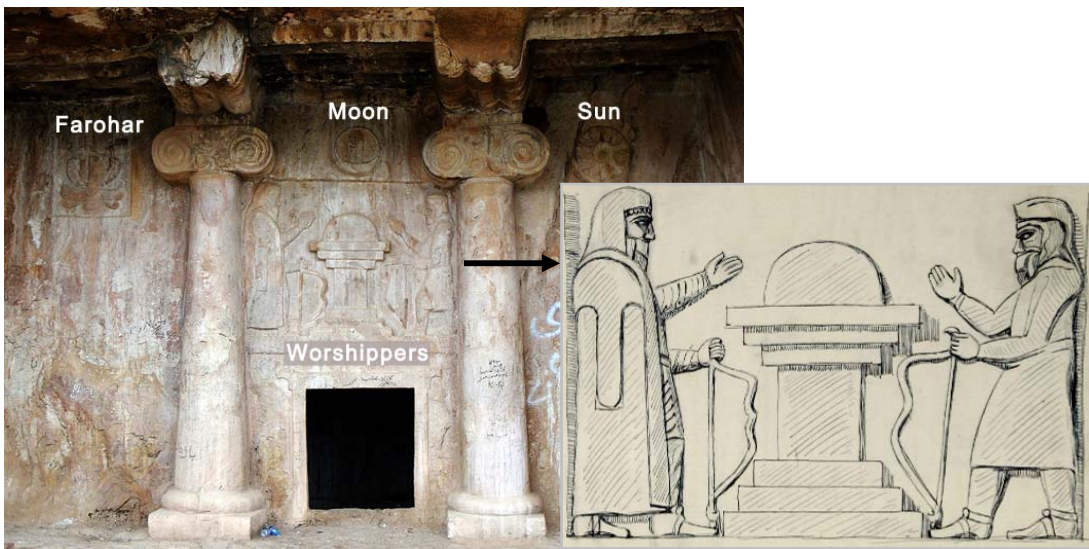
A farohar-like motif has been found on a tomb presently in Iraqi Kurdistan – an area that once came under the jurisdiction of Media, Persia’s sister nation that lay to its north. The tomb, which was carved into a high rock face, is dated to between the late seventh to early sixth century BCE. It could have been a model for the later Achaemenid tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam in Pars, Iran dated to fifth century BCE.

The tomb is located at Qyzqapan (also Qizqapan/Kizkapan) about 50 km northwest of Sulaymanieh near the village of Zarzi and is about a thousand kilometres northwest of Naqsh-e Rostam.

The principle rock carving above the entrance to the inner tomb is that of two individuals praying before the very familiar stepped (top and bottom) Zoroastrian fire stand. The individual on the left is dressed as a magus. Igor Diakonov in *The Cambridge History of*



Recessed antechamber/ façade of Qyzqapan tomb Sulaymaniyah, Iraqi Kurdistan. Image top at Wikimedia taken on Mar 21 2001 by Ara Qadir. Image bottom taken on June 29 2008 by Trudy Tunistra.



Left. Qyzqapan tomb antechamber. Base image: Farouq Kirkuki (taken February 2013). Right. 1905 drawing of worshippers above the entrance to the inner tomb by Ernst Herzfeld (1879-1948). The figure to the left is dressed as a magus. Image: Smithsonian.

III.2. Farohar/Fravahar Motif – Use of Symbols in Zoroastrianism

Iran suggests that the tomb was that of Median King Cyaxares I.

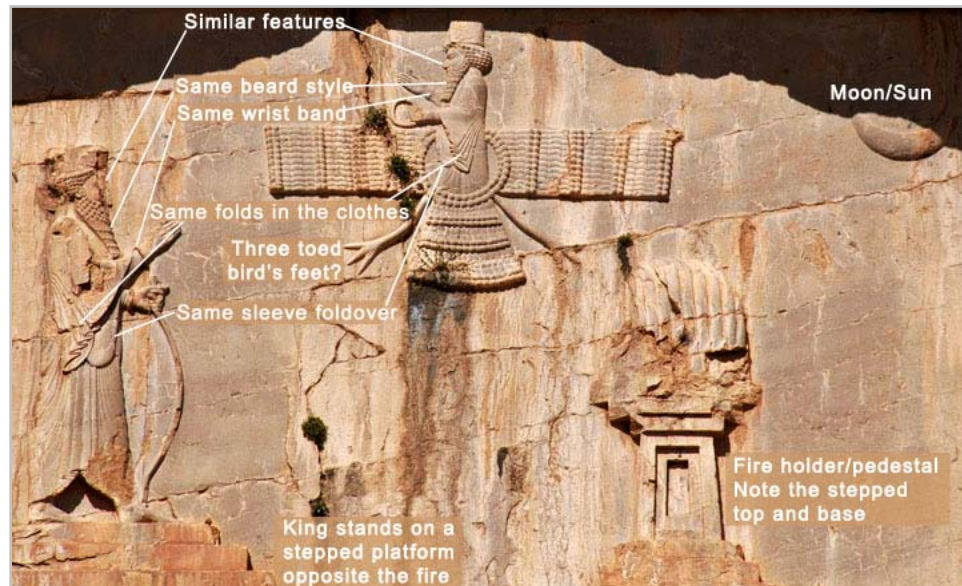
A small farohar motif is seen not directly beside one of these figures but on the other side of the left column.

If this farohar were a representation of God, Ahura Mazda, it has been assigned to a rather small and inconspicuous location compared to the two individuals before the fire.



Farohar motif at the purported tomb of Cyaxares I in Qyzqapan. Note the double winged design of the motif.
Image: Wikimedia.

D. The Achaemenid Motif – a Closer Examination



Rock carving above the tomb of Achaemenid Persian King Xerxes I (486-466 BCE) (?) at Naqsh-e Rostam, Pars, Iran. Does this image depict Xerxes worshipping (note piety) outdoors before the fire in grace (i.e. in keeping with his khvarenah/fravashi), or is he worshipping the “winged god” Ahuramazda “hovering” above him?

E. Piety of the Persian Achaemenid Kings

By all accounts, most Achaemenid kings were pious. Xenophon informs us about the piety of King Cyrus while several Classical writers inform us about the public display of orthodox piety by Xerxes (accompanied by the head magus Ostanes) and other Achaemenid kings. Several kings (as Xerxes in the image above) are shown worshipping before the sacred fire.

F. Unattached or Impersonal Farohar Motif

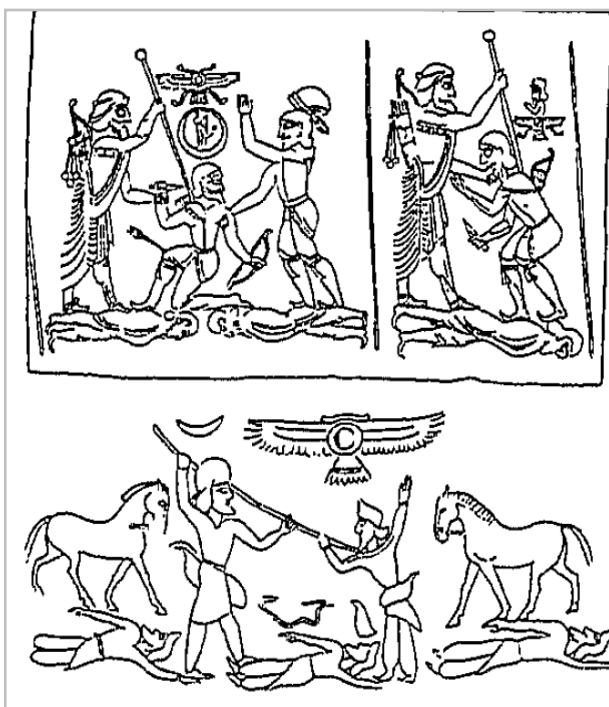


Unattached or impersonal farohar depicted on glazed tile work from Palace of Darius I, the Great (r. 522-486 BCE), at Susa, now at the Iranian National Museum, Tehran.

We often find an unattached or impersonal (without a person) farohar motif depicted near an attached or personal (with a person within) farohar motif. The attached or personal farohar motif can be thought of as consisting of two graphic elements: the first, an unattached farohar motif, and the second, the torso of a person, say a king (at times portrayed close by).

The unattached farohar motif resembles the lower part of a bird (wings, tail and feet – often stylized) joined to a circle. We find a circle where we would otherwise find a bird's body and head. In an attached/personal farohar motif, a person's torso emerges from the circle.

While the circle of the unattached farohar motif has variously been described as a sun, soul or ring of royalty, it could represent the unattached khvarenah – a khvarenah that has the mobility of a bird. The unattached khvarenah is in turn associated with Mithra and through Mithra, the sun, khvar.



6th-5th century BCE seals. Top: Seal from Oxus Treasures. Note unattached (with person/king within a circle/sun/moon beneath) & attached farohars. Bottom: Seal of Arsama satrap of Egypt. Image: *Achaemenid History X* (Leiden, 1996), p.228, by Pierre Briant.

3. Sassanian Era Motifs

In 330 BCE, the rule of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty ended with the defeat of Darius III by Alexander of Macedonia.

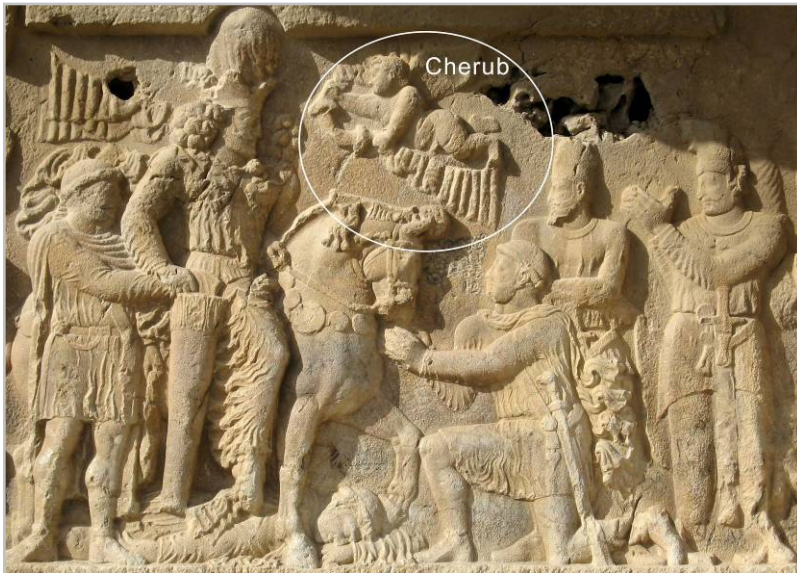
Following Alexander's death in 323 BCE, his generals divided the rule of the conquered lands between them and a general Seleucus and his heirs – the Seleucid dynasty – came to govern the Aryan lands. From around 246 BCE, the Parthians (allied with the Bactrians and other Aryan nations) began to liberate Aryana from Seleucid



Angel possibly carrying a royal ring/band. Sassanian era rock carving at Taq-e Bostan. Image: Adam Jones at Flickr.

domination. The Parthian Arsacids became the king-of-kings of liberated Aryan lands and ruled until around 224 CE – when Arsacid King Ardaban (Artabanus) IV or V was deposed by the Sassanian Ardashir-e Papakan. The Sassanians ruled Aryana – now called Iran-shahr – until their overthrow by the Arabs around 649 CE.

Macedonian domination brought with it Greek influence and the use of



Roman Emperor Valerian surrendering to Sassanian King Shapur I (241-272 CE). Rock relief at Tang-e Chogan, near Bishapur. The cherub holding a royal vestment towards Shapur's head may have served a similar purpose to the depiction of the Achaemenid farohar motif.

Greek religious iconography. The Greeks worshipped anthropomorphic gods who were portrayed as super-humans. If the Median and Achaemenid royals had been influenced by their neighbours to the west in the use of iconography, the Sassanians increased the use of quasi-religious iconography considerably.

Most observers tend to equate Persian royal customs with Zoroastrianism as practiced by the priesthood and the people. There is, however, a significant gulf between what royal Sassanian iconography can represent and what the religious texts from that era state. Further, none of the extremely austere Parthian and Sassanian era *chahar-taqi atash-gahs* (fire temples) show any signs of religious icon or symbol use. There is no record of the Parthians and Sassanian dynasties using the farohar motif. However, the concept of the royal *khvarenah/farr* was still current in Middle Persian literature and it plays a significant role in the story claiming the *farr* came to Sassanian Ardashir-e Papakan just before he acquired the Iranian throne.

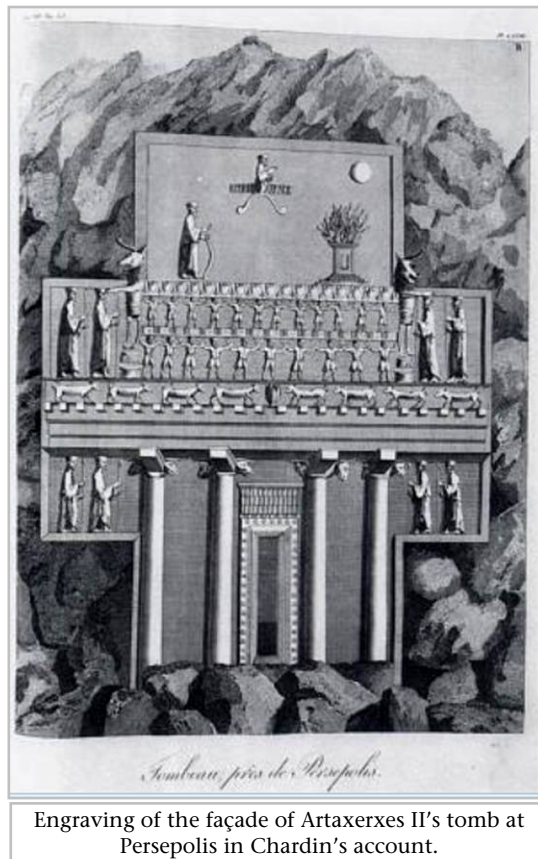
4. Developments leading to the Farohar’s Modern Use

A. Rediscovery of the Farohar Motif

Over the past five hundred years, Western travellers to Iran (then known as Persia) brought the farohar motif to the world’s attention and promptly speculated on what it symbolized.

The earliest of the travellers’ descriptions of the farohar image that is available to this author is that of Jean Chardin (1643–1713). Chardin does, however, note that travellers before him had written descriptions about the farohar and had speculated about its symbolism.

Chardin was a French jeweller turned explorer who adopted British nationality to become Sir John Chardin. He visited Persepolis in 1667, 1673, and 1674 and is one of the first authors to call the site ‘Persepolis’ in his writings.



In his *Voyages de Mr. Le Chevalier Chardin, En Perse, Et Autres Lieux De L'Orient*, Chardin states his conviction that Persepolis was a grand temple and not a palace. He goes on to say (our translation), “The ancients

(Persians) had not developed idols, because they had no other God (sic) than the sun which presented itself daily to their eyes. They therefore had no need to make representations. Moreover, according to the testimony of the elders, their temples had no roof cover because such a covering would shut out the sun which they adored.”

Regarding the farohar motif, Chardin had been contemplating its meaning ever since his first visit to the site. Earlier travellers had “taken this to be a figure of a serpent (the bird legs of the motif?) and they said that these ancient ignicoles [fire-adorers] worshiped fire, the sun and the serpent.” He dismissed the notion of serpents saying, “This error comes from the eyes rather than the mind.”

Modern writers who are wedded to the concept that the farohar represents a god (a form of idol worship according to Chardin), dismiss Chardin’s observations. For instance, Ronald W. Ferrier in *A Journey to Persia: Jean Chardin's Portrait of a Seventeenth-Century Empire* notes, “Chardin had great difficulty in understanding the winged representation of Ahuramazda. He was no less surprised at the sight of the altar and the disc of the sun on the tomb (façades)....”

B: Sacy: Motif Represents Farohar (Fravashi)

In the records this author possesses, the next (chronologically speaking) Western scrutiny of the farohar motif is that by A. I. Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838). His treatise (in *Mémoires sur diverses antiquités de la Perse: et sur les médailles des rois de la dynastie des Sassanides*) on the subject is seminal. He appears to be the first person to associate the motif with the concept of the farohar (which he spells as férouher), basing his conclusions on the beliefs of the Zoroastrian Parsees as recorded by A. H. Anquetil du Perron (1731-1805). Perron had collected information directly from the Zoroastrians of Surat, India.



A. I. Silvestre de Sacy
Image: Wikipedia

Sacy notes that William Francklin (1763-1839, an orientalist employed by the British East India Company) believed the motif “was an emblem of the ancient religion of the Persians.” We see here the beginnings of the idea that the ‘farohar’ motif was a Zoroastrian symbol.

At the end of his treatise, Sacy notes, “in several passages from the books of the Parsees, the farohars are called female beings,” a contradiction to the maleness of many motifs. He tries to overcome this contradiction by stating that some ‘farohar’ motifs had female characteristics. Sacy goes on to say that he “suspects that this (Parsi gender assignment to the farohar) is a more

modern idea.” We too must wonder if gender assignments to otherwise gender-neutral Iranian language nouns are a contrivance influenced perhaps by contact with other language speakers or perhaps through the bias of translators and now, philologists. In any event, a discussion on the farohar’s gender is moot. A personal farohar that unites with a person’s soul becomes a part of that person’s being, be that person male or female.

C. Rhode, Layard & Rawlinson: Motif Represents Ahura Mazda

According to A. S. Shahbazi, (also see III.4.I), the first person to assert that the winged motif represented God, Ahura Mazda, was J. G. Rhode (1762-1827). Rhode rejected the notion that the motif could represent an internal fravashi following a person around externally. He figured it was either an Izad (angel) or an Amesha Spenta (archangel). Then after stating the ring held in the motif figure’s hand was the sun, Rhode concluded that the figure in the motif must be Ahura Mazda, since only Ahura Mazda could hold such a divine object.

Rhode’s argument is indicative of many highly opinionated, contrived and speculative arguments that would follow.

In 1850, Austen Henry Layard (1817-94), through conjecture also determined that the motif represented Ahura Mazda. He stated his conclusion as a fact and not as a hypothesis. Layard went on to propound that a similar motif found on Assyrian artifacts also represented the Assyrian supreme deity and that the Persians had borrowed this notion from the Assyrians.



Agate seal and clay impression of ‘Darius Great King’ in a hunting scene. The seal – said to have been found in a tomb at Thebes near Memphis, Egypt. Egypt was a part of the Persian Empire & Memphis was a seat of the Persian administration. The man in the farohar image bears a likeness to the king. The US Embassy’s web-page promoting the Cyrus Cylinder’s 2013 US tour featured this seal with a caption “winged god Ahuramazda hovering above”.

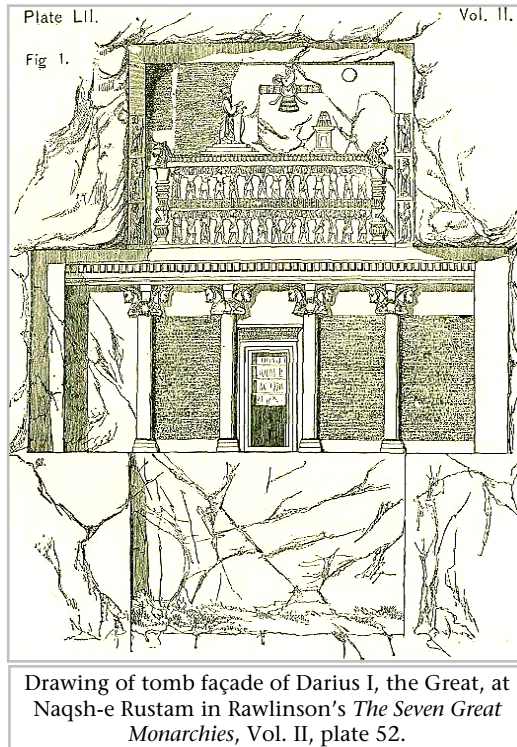
Image: British Museum.

While he did not know which Assyrian god was being represented, Layard nevertheless speculated that it was the god Baal.

Shahbazi laments that Layard’s “interpretation based on an unsupported surmise hardly deserved to win the unwanted enthusiastic adherence of so many scholars for so long a time.”

In his *Seven Great Monarchies*, George Rawlinson (1812-1902) – Professor of Ancient History at Oxford University and Sir H. Rawlinson’s brother – provides a sketch of a farohar motif on the façade of Darius the Great’s tomb at Naqsh-e Rostam (about 7 km north of Persepolis). He describes the relief as being “a very curious sculptured representation of the monarch worshipping Ormazd (Ahura Mazda).”

The statures of Layard and Rawlinson as exceptional explorers, linguists and orientalists may have convinced many to adopt their interpretation that the farohar motif represented Ormazd (Ahura Mazda).



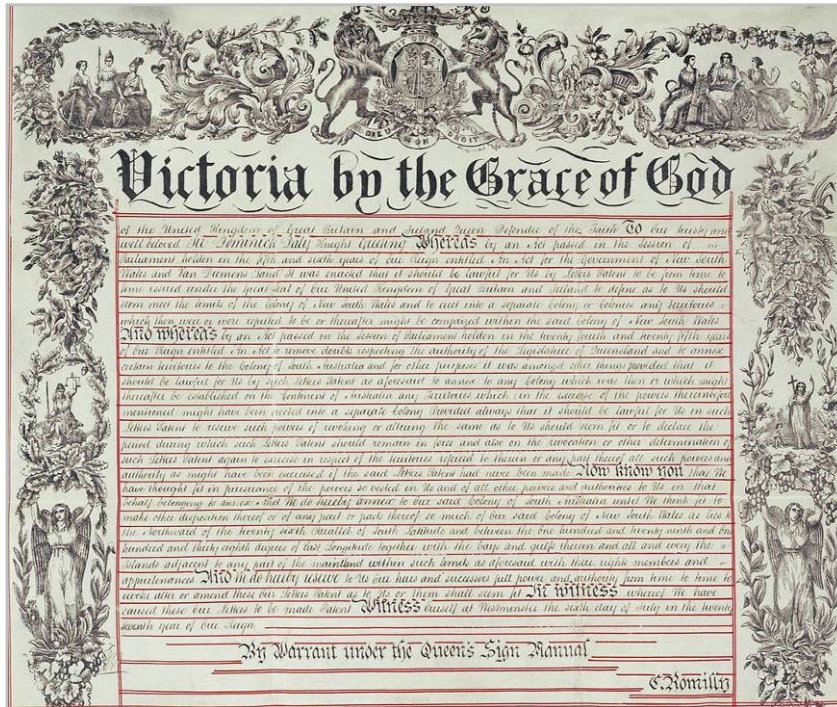
D. Tribute to the Intrepid Explorer-Orientalists

While this author regrets Layard and Rawlinson’s equation of the farohar motif with Ormazd (Ahura Mazda, God) and the subsequent debate that consumes us today, this author nevertheless has the greatest regard for the sheer dedication of Layard, Rawlinson, Chardin, and others like them. Their travels in those uncertain times would have been at great risk to themselves. They were scholars in the true sense of the word for they diligently studied everything available to them. They did not obfuscate their writings with diacritical marks.

A few scholars like Perron and Mary Boyce have gone a step further. They have made every attempt to solicit the views of practicing orthodox Zoroastrians and thereby make their works relevant to the practitioners of a living faith. The legacy these intrepid orientalists have left behind is a testimony that their work was not just for wages – it was a mission.

E. Equating the Farohar Motif with Ahura Mazda

Since there is nothing on any farohar motif to state that it represents Ahura Mazda, the apparent reason why Rhode, Layard, Rawlinson and others made and continue to make this assertion, seems to be that royal Achaemenid inscriptions depicting the motif have the king extolling Ahura Mazda and stating he is king by the grace of Ahura Mazda. If we were to use that criterion, we can describe Queen Victoria’s letters patent shown here by saying, “Letters Patent issued by Queen Victoria showing her god Britannia sitting around with other goddesses.”



Letters Patent issued by Queen Victoria showing her god Britannia sitting around with other goddesses.

A few Parthian and Sassanian monarchs (or nobility) may have used iconography to represent divinity, but exceptions do not make the rule and in any event, royalty do not formulate theology. Any aberrant use by a monarch is limited to that monarch and dies with that monarch. The theology contained in the *Avesta* lives.

F. James Moulton: Motif Represents the Fravashi

In her article *Fravashi* at Encyclopaedia Iranica, Boyce notes that author J. H. Moulton (1863-1917) in his *Early Zoroastrianism*, “rejecting the then prevailing Western interpretation of the Achaemenid winged symbol as that of Ahura Mazda, identified it as the king’s fravashi, and it is still generally regarded as a fravashi symbol by Zoroastrians.”

G. Unvala: Motif Represents the Fravashi

In 1925 and again in 1930, J. M. Unvala, a Parsi scholar, wrote articles identifying the motif as a representation of the fravashi of the king or king's ancestor.

H. Taraporewala: Motif Represents the Khvarenah

Dr. Irach J. S. Taraporewala appears to have been the first person to identify the motif as a representation of the king's khvarenah or farr (in 1928).

In the Foreword his book, *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*, Dr. Taraporewala adds (our words in square brackets []), "...I have always felt that these [Western] renderings have somehow lacked the inspiration that should form their main characteristic. One main reason for this want is that the translators, profound scholars and excellent philologists though they are, possess nevertheless, the double bias of being Europeans and [our words: members of another faith]. Consciously or sub-consciously, they cannot help feeling that any message given so long [ago] and in a far-off Asiatic land, must necessarily be on a lower plane than that of their own faith and their own ideals. They really wonder how such high moral teachings could have been given at that remote period. In short, they look upon Zarathushtra as a great personage who lived in a primitive age, and they have the ineradicable conviction that though sublime enough for his age, the message of the prophet of Iran is, as a matter of course, not to be compared at all with [their religions' founders]."

While being profoundly grateful for all the good work done by others for their research into the Zoroastrian faith and its heritage, Zoroastrians must now take the lead and define their faith for themselves.

I. Shahbazi: Farohar Represents the Farnah (Khvarenah)

In 1974 and 1980, A. Shapour Shahbazi (1942-2006) wrote two articles for the journal *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*. In the first article, *An Achaemenid Symbol (Part) I, A Farewell to Fravahr and Ahuramazda*, Shahbazi noted why he felt the farohar motif could not represent either the farohar/fravahar or Ahura Mazda. In his second article, *An Achaemenid Symbol (Part) II, Farnah (God Given) Fortune Symbolised*, Shahbazi fills the void with his dissertation on why the motif represented the khvarenah/farr which he calls 'farnah' by its Median-Achaemenid era (Old Persian) manifestation. He also translates farnah as God-given fortune.



A. S. Shahbazi
Image: Wikipedia

J. Mary Boyce: No Representations of Ahuramazda. Motif Represents Khvarenah

Prof. Mary Boyce (1920-2006) in *A History of Zoroastrianism: Volume II: Under the Achaemenians* states, “A more convincing interpretation of the symbol is... that it represents Avestan khvarenah, Median farnah, the divine grace sought after by men to bring them long life, power and prosperity.” In her article *Ahura Mazda* at Encyclopaedia Iranica reiterates, “No representations of Ahuramazda are recorded in the early Achaemenid period. The winged symbol with male figure, formerly regarded by European scholars as his (Ahuramazda’s representation), has been shown to represent the royal khvarenah.”



Mary Boyce
Image: Kevin Shepherd

While Taraporewala, Shahbazi and Boyce may have valiantly attempted to change the farohar motif’s interpretation and name to ‘farnah’, the names ‘farohar’ or ‘fravahar’ are now engrained in popular culture.

5. The Farohar/Fravahar Motif Today

By calling the Median-Achaemenid era winged motif a ‘farohar’ or ‘fravahar’, the Zoroastrian body politic in India and Iran appears to have initially agreed with Sacy, Unvala and Moulton that the motif represented the fravashi. After these scholars published their opinions on the matter, the farohar motif has come to represent far more than the meaning they ascribed to it. It has become the principal symbol of the Zoroastrian faith and can now be found displayed on the façade of several fire temples. It is also a popular personal adornment and accessory used as a visible Zoroastrian identifier.

In this spirit, perhaps, the motif can now evolve from its past meaning to symbolize the unity of the soul, fravashi and khvarenah/farr as the united fravashi/farohar of those who have lived as ashavans in harmony with their fravashi thus having realized their khvarenah, their farr – their higher purpose in life. In the after-life, the fravashis of these individuals may serve as our guardian angels – ever protecting, ever beneficent, and ever ready to heed the supplications of the worthy. Perhaps the farohar/fravahar motif can also symbolize the highest ideals to which a living person and community can aspire.

The motif can then represent what it means to be a Zoroastrian and embody the rich heritage of Zoroastrians.

Perhaps it already does.



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PART V APPENDIX. IMAGES – MOTIF VARIATIONS

A. Double Winged & Person in the Moon



Images above the door to the late 7th to early 6th cent. BCE tomb at Qyzqapan, Iraqi Kurdistan (also see III.2.C). What appears to be the figure of a man within a circle (the moon?), takes centre place in upper region of this layout with the farohar-like motif to one side.

Image: Smithsonian.



The men in the farohar-like motif and moon(?) appear to match while differing from the worshippers (magi?) below.



Impression sketch of Achaemenid era (6-5th cent. BCE) seal from Oxus Treasures. Note left image where impersonal farohar motif has two sets of 'feet' – above & below – and a person/king within a circle below. The right image includes a personal farohar motif. Image: *Achaemenid History X* by Pierre Briant, p.228.



Achaemenid era earring. Gold with cloisonné style inlays of turquoise, carnelian, and lapis lazuli. Diameter: 5.1 cm (2 in.). Said to have been found in Mesopotamia.

Note the double-winged farohar motif surrounded by men in circles (moons?). As can be expected, the presence of six surrounding men in circles has and will spawn a speculative frenzy. A. S. Shahbazi either responding to or anticipating the interpretation that this is Ahura Mazda surrounded by six Amesha Spentas (archangels) notes that if there is any (later) gender assignment to the Amesha Spentas, it is three male and three female (q.v. *An Achaemenid Symbol, (Part) II*, pp. 122-4.). Instead, Shahbazi's proposes the six men being six Persian nobles who surrounded King Darius the Great. Simple artistic licence for six men in circles is an overlooked possibility and the person in the circle could well be the same person depicted in the farohar motif (as in other motif-circle scenes), or an ancestor, or even the person's fravashi as an archetype – these being among several possible explanations.

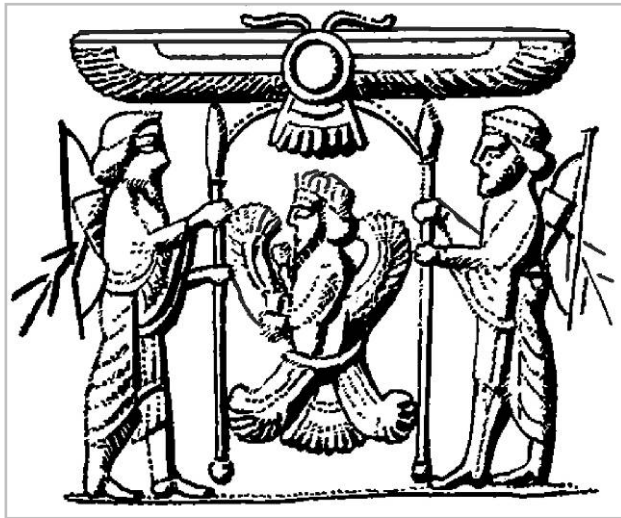
The frequent association of a farohar motif with possibly the same man in a moon/circle awaits further research based on supporting information (void of speculation). In the absence of such objective information, it may be more prudent to say we just do not know what symbolism, if any, is intended.

Image: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

B. Double Winged & Impersonal Khvarenah



Achaemenid era grey-blue chalcedony cylinder seal from Hillah, near Babylon, Iraq. Image: British Museum.



Achaemenid era cylinder seal impression. The scene shows two Persian soldiers facing a double-winged farohar motif wearing a crown. One interpretation of the impersonal farohar motif above them is that it typifies the khvarenah of the soldiers performing their assigned (noble) task of protecting the royal Aryan farr. The 'feet' of the impersonal motif above can be seen on top of the motif's circle rather than below, where we often see them. In the winged torso, note the bottom pair of wings where we would expect to find 'feet'. Image: Drawn by G. Tilia and as reproduced by A. S. Shahbazi in *An Achaemenid Symbol, (Part) II*, p. 123.



Impression made by the cylinder seal above. Here the farohar motif can be seen as a combination of an impersonal motif (the male figure does not emerge from within) and a winged persona (in the style of other double-winged images) behind. The man (king?) to the left is not battling the griffins as shown in other scenes. Rather, his right hand is raised in possible respect. Curiously, the image to the right depicts a creature with a human-like body embracing or squeezing the life out of two antelope-like animals.

This figure stands on the head of two sphinxes. If we were driven to speculation, we might see the sphinx as a person's base (animal) persona and the farr as the higher (angelic) persona. The man (king?) could have the ability to subvert his base persona and tame evil as typified by the lion-like griffins.

Antelopes do not kill other animals. Lions kill and take life. Image: British Museum.

C. Battling the Winged Beast (Evil)

The beast being battled here may be mythical creatures symbolizing evil.



Impression of an Achaemenid era seal showing an impersonal farohar motif above a man (king?) battling a winged griffin-like beast. The griffin slaying scene may depict the king's role as a hero battling and vanquishing evil. Note the sphinx beneath their feet. The man in the circle appears to match the man battling the beast. These types of scenes are sometimes interpreted as hunting scenes. However, given their mythic nature, we wonder if they are an allegorical portrayal of a noble king ruling in grace while protected by the royal farr – and thereby having the ability to vanquish evil. Image: Walter's Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, USA. (Location of the seal's discovery is not stated.)



Impression of an Achaemenid style seal discovered at Gordion, (Cappadocia/Phrygia) Central Turkey (home to King Midas and the Gordian knot) showing a man standing on a sphinx-like beast facing a farohar motif and an apparent mirror image. Note the man in the circle and compare with the image above. The Aramaic inscription reads "Seal of Bn', son of Ztw...." Image: Penn Museum, University of Pennsylvania, USA.



Achaemenid cylinder seal impression once again showing a man (presumably a king with a crown) standing on the head of two sphinxes having subdued two beasts. Here an impersonal farohar motif is shown above a (date?) palm. All the elements in this scene can have allegorical significance proclaiming the king to be a hero who rules in grace and who can subdue evil. The presence of wings may symbolize a spiritual entity.

D. Animal-Head or Body Khvarenah/Farr (Good)

For a discussion of the khvarenah/ khwarr/farr with animal heads, see V.2.D. In usage (as with the soon to become Sassanian King Ardeshir I), the winged animal (ram/stag) sometimes appears at an intermediate stage – just before the khvarenah/farr gets attached to a patron. These mythical creatures are seen as beneficial – good.



Achaemenid era (4th-5th cent. BCE) horned winged ram from Takht-e Kuwad (cf. the name Khwada), Tajikistan. Image: British Museum.



Sassanian era (3rd-7th cent. CE) winged ram in Uni. of Mich. Art Publication. The khvarenah/farr which flew over Sassanian King Ardeshir I is described as an eagle, a winged ram or a winged stag. Image: A. S. Shahbazi.



Silver rhyton c. 700 BCE (a fake?) from Kalmakarra Cave, Elam, Iran. Seized by US from a smuggler and returned to Iran in September 2013.



The Achaemenid era cylinder seal impression. Note the head on the farohar motif. Image: Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

E. Animal Head Khvarenah or Simorgh?

Sassanian Era Silk Twill & Platters



Sassanian era (6th – 7th cent, CE) silk twill.
Image: Victoria and Albert Museum.



6th cent. Sassanian silver platter with creature popularly identified as a simorgh. Image: British Museum.



7th cent. Sassanian silver platter with a creature popularly identified as a simorgh. Image: Smithsonian.



Sassanian era platter with animal head winged creature. Image: Wikipedia.



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