

YAZDEGARD III (CE 16th June 632-641)

Grandson of Khusru II

Coin of Boy King

Silver Drachm. This coin is extensively 'clipped' obviously for personal gain. Note that the clipping stops short of the Rim of the coin. A damaged Rim would make the coin worthless)



Obverse: *'YeZDKaRT AFZUT'* (*Yazdegard, the bestower of prosperity*). The **bust** shows a beardless boy-king (aged 16). The crown is that of Khusru II modified by an added turret to the tiara in front. The **Tiara** has a double layer of pearls and a jewel clip at the back. There is emerging short curly hair at first, followed by locks of shoulder length curled hair. The **Star and Crescent motif** is in front of Crown and Star only behind the Crown. The **Earrings** have a large ring suspending an enormous gemstone. The **Necklace** is heavy with a double layer of pearls. In front the rich **Pendant** is made up of a large gemstone, surrounded by a ring of pearls with 3 loosely suspended enormous gemstones, similar to those of the earrings. The edges of the **Cape** are richly embroidered with pearls. A Star and Crescent motif is embroidered on the wing of the Cape over right shoulder and Crescent motif only over left shoulder. Outside the **Rim** are 3 Star and Crescent motifs.

Reverse: Crescent is to the right and Star to the left of the Fire. The **Altar shaft** is narrow, cylindrical with the decorative ribbons upturned. The base and Fire plates are heavy. The **Fire attendants** are Priests, facing

forwards with their hands resting on scabbard of sword in front. There are 4 Star and Crescent motifs outside the **Rim**, which has three rings.
Mint is 'AH' (*Ahmatana*) and **Regnal Year** is 'TaLIN' (*Two*).

Coin of Adult King

(Silver Drachm)



Obverse: 'YeZDKaRT AFZUT' (*Yazdegard, the bestower of prosperity*). The **bust** shows a bearded adult king (aged 26). The remaining features of the coin are as in Coin A with a few exceptions. The **Necklace** has a single layer of pearls with a smaller **Pendant** of 3 gemstones. The **Earrings** too have the same 3 gemstones. The **Rim** has two rings.

Reverse: All the features are the same as in Coin A.

Mint is 'SK' (*Sakastan*) and **Regnal Year** is 'DAH' (*Ten*). The 10th Regnal year suggests the Battle of Nihavand was probably fought after NoRuz 16th June CE 641. Also, Yazdegard III's coins were minted in distant cities of the east after he lost the throne in CE 641 (until Regnal Year 20 ('VISTI') CE 651). The **Rim** has three rings.

The crowning of Yazdegard III:

It was difficult to find a Royal prince after the assassination of Khusru V. Somehow, word spread that the murdered *Shahriyar* (son of Khusru II. Shahriyar was among 25 brothers and step-brothers murdered by a decree signed by their eldest brother Qobad II in CE June 629)), had a son named *Yazdegard*, who had been brought up in obscurity in Istakhr by his grandmother. The grandmother had hid him in the basement of her house as the

soldiers came to fetch him. Frightened, the ignorant 16 year-old boy was hurriedly taken to the Great Fire Temple in Istakhr. He was quite baffled by the proceedings as he was crowned amid pomp and ceremony and placed on the throne in Ctesiphon on **16th June 632**. Young Yazdegard was inexperienced and untrained in the art of warfare or the diplomacy of a reigning monarch. Still, the Nobles were elated that the '*Khvaar Kayaanik*' was present.

On the fall of the Sassanian Empire

Little is acknowledged about the ruthless deceit, manipulation and incitement *Heraclius* enacted to force the progressive decline of the Sassanian Empire during his long Byzantine rule of 31 years. He has been even credited as being the first crusader.

Whereas, previously, Sassanian Emperors commonly outlived several Roman Emperors Heraclius turned the tide. He managed to survive 14 Sassanian Rulers (not to mention the 25 brothers and stepbrothers Qobad II had assassinated, by a decree he was made to sign) - Khusru II CE 590-628, Qobad II (son of Khusru II) CE 25 Feb 628-6 Sept 628, Ardeshir III (grandson of Qobad II) 6 Sept 628-27 April CE 629, Sharbaraz (army commander and usurper of the throne) CE 27 April-9 June 629, Purandukht (daughter of Khusru II) CE 9 June 629-mid Oct 630, Khusru III CE mid Oct-early Nov 630 (son of Hormazd IV), Gushnasp Bandeh early Nov-mid Dec CE 630 (son of Hormazd IV), Azarmidukht mid Dec 630-mid March CE 631 (daughter of Khursu II), Khurrazad mid March-mid April CE 631 (grandson of Khusru II), Farrokhzad mid April-mid May CE 631 (grandson of Khusru II), Hormazd V mid May 631-early Jan CE 632 (grandson of Khusru II), Khusru IV early Jan-mid March CE 632 (grandson of Khusru II), Piruz II mid March to mid April CE 632 (grandson of Khusru II), Khusru V mid April-mid June CE 632 (only surviving son of Khusru II).

The Iranian Empire was at its zenith under Khusru II (CE 590-628). All of Asia west of Gandhara to Asia minor and Egypt was under his sway. The whole of Cappadocia as far as *Constantinople* was in sight. The Byzantine Emperor Phocas was unable to handle Khusru's relentless advance. With no provisions to hold on to when Khusru was about to lay siege on Constantinople. Heraclius saw this as an opportunity. A Roman Commander in North Africa he gave up his campaigns and sailed to Constantinople. On his arrival at a port off Constantinople in CE 610 he

advanced to Constantinople, captured Constantinople unopposed and appointed himself Emperor. He took advantage of the, then, Byzantine Emperor Phocas' weakness. Not reinforced in time by Rome and deserted by his supporters in Byzantine, Phocas was seized and brought before Heraclius. After cursing the shackled Phocas Heraclius, in a rage, kicked Phocas and had him beheaded on the spot. He ordered Phocas's right arm and hand be then cut off and his corpse disembowelled and burnt. Thus, followed 31 years of calculated manoeuvrings against and interference with the Iranian Empire.

When Khusru II's army besieged Constantinople he sent agents with forged letters showing Sharbaraz, Khusru's army commander of his largest division, that Khusru was planning the commander's execution. Suspicious of Khusru's intentions Sharbaraz remained non-committal and aloof during the expedition to conquer Constantinople and did not assist Khusru in other campaigns against Heraclius.

To Khusru's ill luck the other army commander Shahen, loyal to him and who had conquered the Caucasus region and entire Anatolia from the Romans fell ill and died. At the same time Heraclius formed an alliance with the Khazars, sailed along the Black Sea to enter Iran from the north-east through Armenia. He won several devastating victories over Khusru's fledgeling divisions without Sharbaraz's assistance.

Heraclius ordered the forced conversion of all Jews in his empire and renewed the Hadrian and Constantine codes that barred Jews refusing conversion from staying in Jerusalem.

He was successful in getting Shahrbarz to grab the Iranian throne (CE 27 April 629 - 9 June 629). Shahrbaraz, in return agreed on principle to secede Egypt, Palestine and the whole of Cappadocia to the Byzantine Empire. He had however not signed a treaty, which his daughter, Purandokht (CE 9 June 629 - mid Oct 630) signed after his death.

After winning the decisive Battle of Niniveh he marched through Mesopotamia where he heard Khusru II (CE 628) had been himself assassinated. Soon this assassination was followed by his son, Qobad II signing a decree for the assassination of his 25 brothers and step-brothers.

Among these unfortunate victims there happened to be a large number of dedicated and talented Commanders. Qobad himself died within 7 months. His death was followed by a series of 14 rulers who were assassinated within a few months to a few weeks. The Sassanian Empire had run out of

capable Commanders and rulers. There was no time to recover fully from this calamity.

The Empire was further weakened by economic decline, which imposed heavy taxation. Heraclius increased the pressure by instigating religious unrest. His agents and instigators had several Fire Temples burnt down.

Further incursions continued. From the north these came from Christian Armenia and in the South west from the Arab tribes whom he empowered with arms and soldiers and a mindset to maintain a holy war. He took the landholders into his confidence and encouraged them to wrest increasing power from the crown in return for food and provisions for the army.

Shirin, the Christian wife of Khusru after having had her husband eliminated plotted against the nation with the help of Heraclius's agents to overthrow the Zarathushti regime and install her Christian son, **Mardanshah** to take over the country through Roman reinforcements from Armenia. Khusru's eldest son, Siruzeh put an end to her aspirations. He managed to have Khusru imprisoned by the Council of Lords and had him assassinated. Siruzeh was crowned with the title, Qobad II (CE 25 Feb 628).

Crucial Battles against the Arabs:

Such continuing developments gave further impetus to, at first, minor incursions by the Arabs who were increasingly becoming belligerent.

They were busy consolidating their forces in the huge peninsula of **Arabiya**.

They had added the Satrapy of **Yemen** to their territory and were amassing on the borders. Now and then they would cross the Tigris River and venture into Iranian territory, pillaging the neighbouring villages.

26th Nov CE 634: In the ***Battle of the Bridge*** along the River Tigris unorganized Iranians under the Command of **Rustom Mihran** defeated a massive ingress of Arab Tribes, which had been slowly building up its reserves from early summer. But Rustom's forces did not pursue the fleeing Arabs. A large number escaped by crossing the Euphrates River.

CE 635: This triumph was short lived. Once more, the disciplined armies of **Khalid ibn Walid**, one of the Prophet's trusted leaders returned. When the Roman army, under Heraclius, defeated the defending Iranian forces in Damascus in the ***Battle of Yarmik*** and conquered Syria, which had remained loosely autonomous from Airan, there was a considerable foreboding of events to come.

CE 636: The *Battle at Bow'aib* was lost against the Arabs with the loss of another Commander, the Prince of the Mirhan family.

CE 637: The *Battle of al Qaddisiyah*: Under the **Caliph `Umar ibn al-Khattāb**, the Arab army defeated a major Iranian force in the plains of *al-Qādisiyyah* in CE 637. The most experienced Commander, Rustom Farrokhzad had been chosen to oust the Arabs from Tigris Valley, in which they had regrouped after the previous battles. With ceremony and pomp the sacred Banner of Kava (*'dirafshi kaviyaan'*) was carried into battle, hoping to impress on the warriors the gravity of the undertaking. But the Arabs thoroughly routed the Iranian Army. *Rustom was slain in battle and the Arabs seized the Banner of Kava*. They then, relentlessly, pursued the demoralised retreating army to kill and eliminate every retreating warrior.

CE 638: The Arabs took the *City of Seleucia* in the plains of Babylon. Then, crossed the River Tigris and laid siege to *Ctesiphon*, the Capital of Airan. Yazdegard and many members of the royal family and the Nobles had already fled. Ctesiphon was sacked and destroyed by burning and pillaging. The Great Fire Temple was desecrated, the libraries were burnt and the palaces were looted and burnt down.

CE 640: The *Battle of Jalula* was a comparatively lesser battle, which was won by the Arabs, pushing the remnants of the fleeing Iranian army further east. *Yazdegard's eldest daughter, Shahbanoo was captured and forcibly married to Hassan*. The other members of the family fled but were pursued relentlessly, too.

CE 641: Yazdegard, without support, arms and financial resources fled eastward, leaving behind him most of the Empire's vast treasury.

The final *Battle of Nihavand* destroyed the remnants of the defence of Airan. The Arabs called it *'fath ul fathuh'* (*the victory of all victories*), since, at the end of the battle, no organized resistance was left for them to deal with. Even so, many Cities and Provinces did not yield without tough resistance and many rebellions had to be quashed, especially in Pars, the cradle of the dynasty and the religious tradition.

Had the Empire not been exhausted without an effective administration, at the time of these Arab invasions, the Council of Lords would have defeated them, if summoned at once, and massed as a single army. But the constant infighting resulted in the total force not having been summoned in time.

Events occurred too rapidly, in a relative absence of authority in the Empire. The result was disastrous. Several Sassanian governors rallied around individually or with minor combined forces, too late to throw back the invaders. The Battle of Nihavand was the ultimate rout and the end of the Sassanian Empire. The exiled Yazdegard was given refuge in some cities in the East initially, but as time passed host after host considered him burdensome and he was forced to flee to China.

During his 31 years on the Byzantine throne **Heraclius** had piled considerable havoc on Airan, more through treacherous affiliations with the Arabs than through direct confrontation. He had survived 14 Sassanian Rulers but did not live long enough to witness the consequences of his intrigues. Ironically, he died just before the final Battle of Nihavand. Had he lived he would have obtained the unpleasant opportunity to witness Byzantine become a shadow of its original power. Subsequently, the Arab forces he had helped and instigated confidently swept through Byzantine and on their conquest towards Europe. The Roman Empire ceased to exist in the east and it was not long before the disjointed Romans retreated from Europe, too.

CE 651: Yazdegard returned to Airan, hoping to start an insurrection. His contemporaries shunned him. In *Merv (the present City of Mary in Turkmeniya, once part of greater Iran)*, where he arrived late evening, he was given lodging by a miller. But when the miller witnessed Yazdegard **taking the 'baj'** before having his meal, he contrived with the locals and had him murdered that night. It has been recorded that Christian missionaries from a local monastery retrieved his floating body from the River Dasht.

Roman Emperor



Heraclius CE 610-641