

Sassanian Succession Struggles: An Analysis of the Legitimisation Practices of Early Seventh Century Sassanian Rulers in Comparison with their Predecessors

by
Carel Stephanus Vollgraaff

*Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch
University*



Supervisor: Dr Gideon Rudolph Kotzé

Octej "2015

Declaration

By submitting this thesis/dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: 16 October 2014

Abstract

From 628 CE to 632 CE, in the late Sassanian period, there were possibly eleven royal successors to the Sassanian throne. This indicates instability and that the Sassanian dynasty was politically weakened. A succession crisis had developed. This study presents an attempt to understand one aspect of the political milieu of the succession crisis period, namely the legitimisation practices of the late Sassanian rulers. Therefore, the tools that were used for legitimisation by the Sassanian monarchs from the succession crisis period, and how they were used, are investigated. To better understand how the legitimisation tools available to Sassanian monarchs developed the political techniques used by the succession crisis monarchs will be compared with the early Sassanian monarchs of 224 CE to 302 CE (Ardashir I, Shapur I, Hormizd I, Wahram I, Wahram II, Wahram III and Narseh). The comparison contributes to an improved understanding of the 7th century Sassanian succession struggles by tracking the changes in the techniques and practices Sassanian rulers utilised in the Empire to legitimise their rule. Such changes are rooted in the wider politico-historical contexts within which the Sassanian monarchs exercised their authority. The study will open with an investigation of the major political events of the 7th century CE that had an effect on the succession struggles and political events in the Sassanian Empire. One of the primary sources that are used is *The History of Prophets and Kings* by the 10th century CE Arabic historian Jarīr al-Tabari. Physical evidence of the Sassanian monarchs like coinage, rock reliefs and silver bowls will also be used as primary sources and analysed to better understand the propaganda used by the Sassanian monarchs. The material propaganda techniques used by Sassanian monarchs from the early period and late period changed. The reasons behind the changes are highlighted and these reasons are furthermore explained. The study concludes that the Sassanian monarchs from the succession crisis period had a shrinking pool of legitimisation resources and that they had to legitimise their rule in a short period of time in view of internal opposition. As a result, the Sassanian monarchs from the period focused on legitimisation techniques that were not a drain on resources and could quickly influence the perception of people. The political legitimisation of the last Sassanian monarchs ultimately failed though as the Sassanian dynasty only continued to reign for another 23 years after 628 CE. The failure of the legitimisation of the Sassanian dynasty

could be largely attributed to the internal opposition and the damaging war against the Byzantine Empire.

Opsomming

In die tydperk tussen 628 tot 632 n.C. was daar na bewering elf troonopvolgers in die Sassaniede Ryk. Dit illustreer die politieke onstabiliteit in die Sassaniede Ryk op daardie tydperk, 'n troonopvolgingskrisis het ontwikkel. In die studie word 'n poging van stapel gestuur om een aspek van die politieke milieu van die tydperk te verstaan, die legitimasiëpraktike van die laat Sassaniede heersers. Die hulpbronne tot die beskikking van die Sassaniede konings wat ingespan is om hulle regerings populariteit te gee word daarom ondersoek. Om die ontwikkeling van die legitimeringspraktike beter te verstaan word die praktike van die troonopvolgingskrisis konings vergelyk met die tegnieke van die vroeë Sassaniede konings van die tydperk 224 n.C. tot 302 n.C. (Ardashir I, Shapur I, Hormizd I, Wahram I, Wahram II, Wahram III and Narseh). Die vergelyking dien as 'n beginpunt om die Sassanied troonopvolgingskrisis beter te verstaan en om die veranderings van die legitimeringspraktike te identifiseer. Sulke veranderings is gegrond in die wyer politiek-historiese konteks waarin die Sassanied konings hul mag uitgeoefen het. Die studie ondersoek eerstens die belangrike politieke gebeure van die 7de eeu n.C. wat 'n effek op die troonopvolgingskrisis en politieke aspekte van die Sassaniede Ryk gehad het. Een van die primêre bronne waarvan die studie gebruik maak, is *The History of Prophets and Kings* van die 10de eeuse n.C. Arabiese geskiedkundige Jarīr al-Tabari. Ander primêre bronne wat gebruik word, sluit in muntstukke, rotsreliëfs en silwer bakke wat analiseer word om beter te verstaan hoe die produkte gebruik is as propaganda. Die legitimeringspraktike en propaganda het 'n verandering ondergaan van die vroeë tydperk tot die laat tydperk. Die redes vir die verandering word identifiseer en 'n verduideliking vir die redes word aangebied. Die studie maak die gevolgtrekking dat die Sassaniede konings van die troonopvolgingskrisis tydperk minder hulpbronne tot hul beskikking gehad het en dat hulle hul blitsig moes regverdig vanweë interne teenkants. As gevolg van hierdie faktore het die Sassaniede konings propaganda verkies wat nie te veel van hul hulpbronne gebruik het nie en ook mense baie min beïnvloed het. Die politieke programme van die laat Sassaniede het uiteindelik misluk. Die Sassanidiese dinastie het net vir nog 23 jaar na 628 n.C. geheers. Die uiteindelijke mislukking van die politieke regverdigings programme van die laat Sassaniede kan grootliks verbind word aan die sterk interne teenstand en die effek wat die oorlog teen die Bisantynse Ryk gehad het.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor Gideon Rudolph Kotzé, the Ancient Studies Department of Stellenbosch University and the editor Diana Henning.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	6-9
Chapter 2: The context of seventh century CE Sassanian politics	
2.1 Political landscape and imagery	10-18
2.2 Religious landscape	18-25
Chapter 3: Sassanian Kings of 628-632 CE and their legitimisation practices	
3.1: Kavad II	26-33
3.2 Ardashir III	33-35
3.3 Shahrbaraz	35-39
3.4 Buran	40-45
3.5 Jushnas Dih	45-46
3.6 Azarmigduxt	46-49
3.7 Khosrow III	50-52
3.8 Khurrazādh Khusraw	52-53
3.9 Peroz II	53-56
3.10 Farrukzādh Khusraw	56-58
3.11 Hormizd IV	58-59
3.12 Yazdgird III	59-62
3.13 Summary	62

Chapter 4: Legitimation of the kings between 628-632 CE compared to previous monarchs (224-302CE)	63-66
4.1 Use of art between to time periods	66-80
4.2 Coinage's role in legitimisation	80-86
4.3 The role played by nobility during two time periods	87-93
4.4 The role played by genealogy in two time periods	93-96
4.5 The role played by priesthood in legitimisation	96-105
4.6 The role of construction projects as legitimisation	106-111
4.7 Political strategies and actions used to legitimise rule	111-117
4.8 Summary	117-118
 Chapter 5: Reasons why legitimisation failed in the Sassanian state between 628-632 CE	 119-123
 Chapter 6: Conclusion	 124-125
 Illustrations	 126-145
 Bibliography	 146-151

List of figures

Fig. 1	Coinage from Ardashir I to Wahram I	126
Fig. 2	Coinage from Wahram II to Shapur II	127
Fig. 3	Coinage from Ardashir II to Yazdgird II	128
Fig. 4	Coinage from Peroz to Hormizd IV	129
Fig. 5	Coinage from Wahram VI to Khosrow II	130
Fig. 6	Coinage from Kavād II to Azarmiduxt	131
Fig. 7	Coinage from Hormizd VI/Hormizd V to Yazdgird III	132
Fig. 8	Silver plate (4 th century CE) from Touroucheva	133
Fig. 9	Shapur I's victory scene on Bishapur II relief	134
Fig. 10	The relief of Shapur I at Naqsh-e Rostam	135
Fig. 11	Deities facing Wahram II on his relief at Naqsh-e Rostam	136
Fig. 12	Rock portrait of Kirdir at Naqsh-e Rostam	137
Fig. 13	A silver plate from Krasnoya Polyana	138
Fig. 14	A silver cup from Sargveshi (Georgia)	139
Fig. 15	An investiture rock relief of Narseh at Naqsh-e Rostam	140
Fig. 16	Silver drachm of Hormizd I	141
Fig. 17	Silver drachm of Wahram II with his queen facing a youth	142
Fig. 18	Silver drachm of Wahram II depicted with his queen	143
Fig. 19	Silver drachm of Wahram II with queen facing a figure	144
Fig. 20	Gold double dinar of Shapur I with Philip	145

Fig. 21	Ardashir I's investiture rock relief at Naqsh-e Rostam	146
Fig. 22	Heracles depicted on a Sassanian silver plate	147
Fig. 23	The different approximate reigns of each monarch	148
Fig. 24	Map of Sassanian Iran and important locations	149

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Sassanian Dynasty became the dominant force in the ancient Near East after Ardashir I defeated the last Parthian monarch in 224 CE because there was a need for organisational and political reform in the Near East of the 3rd century CE (Litvinsky & Guang-Da 1996:24). From 628 CE to 632 CE there were eleven royal successors¹ to the Sassanian throne (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1046-1067). Brosius (2006:158) mentions the political infighting after the dethronement of Khosrow II in 628 CE: “But this palace coup signalled the beginning of the end of the Sassanian dynasty, and reigns of Sassanian monarchs followed in quick succession”. The reason why the coup of Khosrow II is seen as the beginning of the end for the Sassanian dynasty is because after the coup a period of political strife followed where even people that were not of the Sassanian royal family (like General Shahrbaraz) could reign as a Sassanian monarch (*The Historical Geography of the Sasanids* 1988:58-59).² This shows that the royal power was weakening and there was more chaos which would have been especially negative for the Sassanians because an important part of Sassanian kingship and the Zoroastrian religion was order and hierarchy (Daryaei 1998:437). The Sassanian dynasty ultimately lasted only another 23 years after the coup in 628 CE when the last Sassanian king, Yazdgerd III, was killed in 651 CE after the conquest of much of the Persian Empire by the Islamic Arabs (Canepa 2010:324).

The “quick succession” of Sassanian rulers after the death of Khosrow II in 628 CE (fig. 23) raises the question of the manner in which the rulers legitimised their rule in their fleeting periods as the incumbent monarch (Howard-Johnston 2010:128). Were the efforts to legitimise themselves in the eyes of the public and others in power distinct from preceding,

¹ The eleven royal successors: Kavad II (628 CE), Ardashir III (628 CE-629 CE), Shahrbaraz (629 CE or 629 CE-630 CE), Buran (630 CE-631 CE), Jushnas Dih (c. 631 CE), Azarmigduxt (631 CE-632 CE), Khosrow III (between 630 CE and 632 CE), Khurrazādh Khosrow (between 631 CE and 637 CE), Peroz II (was active between 631 CE-637 CE), Farrukzādh Khosrow (active between 631 CE and 637 CE), Hormizd V (between 630 CE and 632 CE) (Bosworth 1999:xxv; Daryaei 2009:36).

² The work that is referred to is Hamza al-Isfahani's *Sinī Mulūk al-'arḍ w' al-anbīyā* also known as *The Historical Geography of the Sasanids*. The English translation by Pourshariati (2007) utilised the Arabic 1961 Beirut edition of Yusuf Ya'qub Maskuni and the Persian 1988 edition of Ja'far Shi'ar (Pourshariati 2007:111 n. 2).

more stable eras, in Sassanian history (Daryaee 2009:34)? To find answers to the aforementioned questions it is proposed that a study of the tools of legitimisation that the Sassanian monarchs from 628 CE to 632 CE used, be initiated. The study will be executed in the style of a comparative historical study. Through the study a better understanding of the governments of the Sassanians of the 7th century CE can be gained. The study's aim is to arrive at a better understanding of the succession struggle of the Sassanian rulers of the 7th century CE (628-632 CE) by examining how these specific rulers legitimised their rule, that is their legitimisation practices, and by comparing it with the practices of early Sassanian kings. The analysis in the study will especially focus on the differences between the rulers from the succession struggles and the Sassanian rulers from the period of 224 CE until 302 CE (Ardashir I, Shapur I, Hormizd I, Bahram I, Bahram II, Bahram III and Narseh). The analysis will serve as a catalyst to gain an improved understanding of the 7th century Sassanian succession struggles by identifying the changes in the legitimisation techniques and practices which Sassanian rulers utilised during different periods of the Empire.

Changes in political dogma were rooted to the wider politico-historical and religious contexts within which the Sassanian monarchs exercised their authority. Therefore the study will open in chapter 2 with an investigation of the major political events of the 7th CE that had an effect on the succession struggles and political events in the Sassanian Empire. With the politico-historical context serving as a background, the study will secondly analyse (in chapter 3) the legitimisation techniques that each individual Sassanian ruler of the period of strife instituted as represented in *The History of Prophets and Kings*. The ancient sources that provide information on the late Sassanian sources can be divided into three different types: physical evidence of the Sassanian Empire, contemporary written sources and lastly Arabic written sources. Sassanian royal power visually manifested itself in art, coinage and architecture and as a result these are good visual indicators to study legitimisation practices. The secondary sources available on the Sassanians are Latin sources (examples include Dio Cassius and Herodian), Greek sources (Agathias of Myrina), Manichaean sources (Cologne Mani Codex) and Armenian sources (Agathangelos) (Wiesehöfer 2001:155-157). The Arabic sources are classified as tertiary sources because they used late Sassanian sources (Wiesehöfer 2001:159). The late Sassanian sources which the Arabic historians relied on had also revised and edited a lot of the information which they had gathered from earlier Sassanian sources (Wiesehöfer 2001:159). The main written source of the study is “The History of Prophets and

Kings” (*Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa’l-mulūk*) of Abū Ja’far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (Bosworth 1999:v). The reason why the Islamic source of al-Tabari’s *The History of Prophets and Kings* has been chosen as the main source in the study is because al-Tabari very often quotes his sources verbatim and traces the chain of transmission (Bosworth 1999:vi). In *The History of Prophets and Kings*, the ancient history of nations, is explored, with special emphasis on the factual and legendary history of Iran and the life of the Prophet Muhammad (Bosworth 1999:v). The book, *The History of Prophets and Kings*, was written in the early 10th century CE as the book deals with history that happened only up to 915 CE as the author, Jarir al-Tabari, died in 923 CE (Bosworth 1999:v). A translation from the Leiden edition³ of the Arabic text is used in the study, this edition being the first time it has been translated in its entirety into English (Bosworth 1999:v). With the dearth of textual sources it falls chiefly on rock reliefs, inscriptions, coins and other objects obtained from archaeology and field work to be the only unquestionable authentic primary sources (Canepa 2013:857). With the study of rock reliefs the aim is to analyse the imagery used that would have been easily recognisable to a citizen of the Sassanian Empire and as such, many of the themes recur in rock reliefs of the Sassanian Empire (Canepa 2013:862). Divine investiture and triumph were the two most common themes in Sassanian rock reliefs that were intended to increase the legitimacy of the Sassanian monarch (Canepa 2013:862). Coins in ancient times were not just a means of exchange but also symbols of power (Afram 2010:17). The imagery on the coinage were identity markers for the empire and the incumbent monarch (Afram 2010:17). As a result of the fact that the late Sassanian monarchs did not commission rock reliefs, the coinage of these monarchs as a legitimisation influence, would be analysed. The imagery on the coinage can be a supplement to the information contained in a written source such as *The History of Prophets and Kings*. The study will subsequently launch an investigation into the legitimisation practices of the Sassanian monarchs specifically from the period of 628-632 CE supported by evidence from *The History of Prophets and Kings* and the appropriate coinage. The analysis of how the rulers’ legitimisation manifested itself in the important primary sources will focus on the kinds of techniques the Sassanian rulers employed to legitimise their rule, but also on possible reasons why these attempts at legitimisation did not succeed. This analysis will also yield crucial data for the comparison between the

³ The Leiden edition covered the whole period except for Lacuna 878-899. The Leiden edition appeared in installments between 1879 and 1898 under the general editorship of the Dutch scholar M.J. De Goeje (Fishbein 1992:xix).

legitimation techniques employed by the late Sassanian rulers and of the earlier Sassanian monarchs (dealt with in chapter 4). The comparison will focus on the ways which the aristocracy, priesthood, genealogy, art, coinage, construction projects and political strategies legitimised a Sassanian regime from the early period and the period of the succession struggles as presented in *The History of Prophets and Kings*. Relevant physical evidence of legitimisation like coins and reliefs will also be identified and analysed to supplement the evidence from the written sources. An example of tangible evidence that will be used is the Sassanian rock reliefs that certain Sassanian monarchs, especially early Sassanian monarchs like Ardashir I, Shapur I and Narseh, utilised to expound their ideology (Soudavar 2012:30). A recent reassessment of Sassanian rock reliefs by Soudavar (2012) for example, claims that new light can be shed on Sassanian legitimisation. Sassanian coinage can give one an idea of the extent of the political control which a Sassanian exercised. An unsuccessful pretender to the throne would have few or no mints under his control and as a result the power would be reflected in the amount of genuine coins found of a monarch (Schindel 2013:816). The portrait on the coinage can also illustrate how Sassanian monarchs tried to legitimise their rule. By referring to important physical evidence in such a manner, valuable information could be added to the study regarding how Sassanians used physical objects to portray their political power. The analysis identifies the legitimisation practices so that they can be compared in a separate chapter (chapter 4) devoted to comparing the political techniques of the monarchs from the two time periods. Following the analysis of the legitimisation practices of the 7th century CE Sassanian monarchs and the comparison of their practices with that of their predecessors in the 3rd-4th century CE, the study will identify the reasons why the legitimisation attempts of the late Sassanian monarchs failed (in chapter 5). With an overview of the political and historical context of the 7th century CE, an analysis of the legitimisation techniques employed by the Sassanian rulers of this period and a comparison between their techniques and those of their predecessors, the study will aim to provide a window on the rulers' succession struggles during the final decades of the Sassanian Empire.

Chapter 2: The context of seventh century CE Sassanian politics

2.1 Political landscape and imagery

The reforms by Khosrow I during his reign (531 CE until 579 CE) had the effect that the court of the Sassanian monarch became a place where “good breeding” was of utmost importance (Wiesehöfer 2001:220). Qualities like obedience, good manners and cultured demeanour were expected of members of the Sassanian court in the 6th- and 7th century CE (Wiesehöfer 2001:220). Old Persian courtly virtues like being proficient in hunting, warfare and Zoroastrian religious matters were still desirable but the “new courtly ideals” were added to the traits that were deemed to be desirable by the Sassanian monarch. Great importance was attached to the king’s very visible display of luxury such as the sizeable crown of Khosrow II which reportedly impressed the Arabs and the huge carpet that was situated in the Sassanian winter residence at Mada’in (Wiesehöfer 2001:221). The conspicuous consumption by the Sassanian king was done so as to impress and cow potential opponents of the Sassanian monarch because of the amount of resources needed to maintain such opulence. The *Khwadaynamag* (Book of Lords) describes domestic politics as being the domain of the court set against a background of assemblies and feasts (Howard-Johnston 2010:122). For all the wealth and etiquette at the Sassanian court the inferior rivals and conquered enemies were frequently treated with brutality. Wiesehöfer (2001:221) quotes an example of such brutality as recorded by al-Tabari (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062): “[When Shahrbaraz rose against Ardashir III, the gates of the city of Ctesiphon were opened to the usurper by treason.] He then entered, captured a number of the potentates, killed them, carried off their belongings and raped their women”. Such incidents epitomise the time of instability in the Sassanian period (628-632 CE). The brutality was especially prevalent among the contesters for the Sassanian throne.

The late Sassanian period should, however, not merely be considered as a time of decline. For example the period is actually considered a time of literary flowering (Wiesehöfer 2001:219). Khosrow I and his successors (fig. 4) are credited with promoting the importance of scientific literature in Sassanian society as numerous compilations of Zoroastrian texts and treatises attest (Wiesehöfer 2001:219). Egypt was also conquered by Khosrow II and occupied for ten years (619-629 CE) and the Sassanian Empire actually extended farthest in the early 7th

century CE (Howard-Johnston 2010:118). The Sassanian monarch in the late Sassanian period could have at his disposal a large professional fighting force funded from taxation, paid in cash and kind (Howard-Johnston 2010:124). Two Sassanian texts from the 6th century CE, *Letter of Tansar* and the *Testament of Ardashir*, stress the importance of a stable and deferential social order with the Sassanian king in supreme control (Howard-Johnston 2010:125). The guiding principles in the ideal Sassanian social order were hierarchy and heredity and, as a result, everyone reportedly had a designated place in the society as, e.g. clergy, soldiers and artisans (Howard-Johnston 2010:125). Very little is known of the Sassanian aristocracy outside of the court but what gave the Sassanian state its resilience was the fact that the elite was involved in all levels of government (Howard-Johnston 2010:128). As long as the Sassanian king's prestige remained intact the monarch would not have any problem in retaining his authority (Howard-Johnston 2010:128). Sassanian rules of succession restricted succession to members of the royal family and were patrilineal. These rules were difficult to circumvent, even in times of crisis (Wiesehöfer 2010:136). Sassanian rulers were not bound to specific religious and social identities since a Christian like Shahrbaraz could ascend the throne in c. 630 CE (Wiesehöfer 2010:136).

The first period of Sassanian politics that shaped the Sassanian Empire has been defined by scholars as being the age of political realism in the Sassanian Empire (Shayegan 2013:806). Political ideology in the first period of the Sassanian Empire was shaped by the taxing wars against the Roman Empire (Shayegan 2013:806). This initial period in the Sassanian Empire can be further divided into two subperiods; namely the period of the military campaigns of the first two Sassanian monarchs (Ardashir I [224 CE-240 CE], Shapur I [240 CE-272 CE]) and the period of the wars conducted by Shapur II (309 CE-379 CE) (Shayegan 2013:806). Important political developments occurred in the first political subperiod of Ardashir I's and Shapur I's reign (Shyegan 2013:806). An example of an important political development in the Sassanian Empire that originated in Shapur I's reign and would stay relevant throughout the lifetime of the Sassanian Empire were the concepts of *Ērān* and *An-ērān*⁴ (Shayegan 2013:806). The reason for the development of these concepts: "Indeed, it can probably be assumed that the concept of *Ērān* and *An-ērān* was meant to be understood as an ideological

⁴ The term *Ērān* in the Sassanian context was one that denoted the territory that the Sassanian Empire ruled over (Daryaee 2009:5). The term *An-ērān* was used to refer to non-Iranian lands and could be used in a derogatory manner similar to the Greek concept of *barbaroi* (Daryaee 2009:5).

riposte to Rome's view of the Roman Empire as an *imperium sine fines*" (Shayegan 2013:806). The concept of *Ērān* was an enduring political concept that is very present in Khosrow II's Tāq-e Bostān rock reliefs which depict *Ērān* in the centre and *An-ērān* in the side registers (Soudavar 2012:48). This significant concept originated because of Roman imperial ideology loudly declaring its superiority (Shayegan 2013:806).

The feudal class system was highly formalised in the Sassanian Empire and was a way in which the monarchy could legitimise and create a stable situation for its rule. The Sassanian society was divided into four estates: "1) *āsrōnān* "priests"; 2) *artēštārān*, "warriors"; 3) *wāstaryōšān*, "husbandmen"; and 4) *hutuxšān*, "artisans" (Daryaee 1998:444). Different colours represented different classes⁵ and there were also different fire temples for each specific class (Daryaee 1998:444). The class system was rigid and a person could only move from one class to another under special circumstances (Daryaee 1998:444). The nobility, that gained more power in the late Sassanian period, were also divided into four subdivisions; namely vassal kings, princes of royal blood, grandees and gentry (Daryaee 1998:444). The gentry were the landed gentry that formed the backbone of the Sassanian Empire for most of its history (Daryaee 1998:444). The vassal kings were the autonomous rulers who pledged loyalty to the Sassanian monarch; the princes of royal blood were Sassanian princes who frequently ruled regions of the Empire in preparation for when they rose to the throne (Daryaee 1998:444). The grandee class was the class of high nobility who were frequently involved in court politics in the succession crisis period. The Zoroastrian scriptures (*Tansar-nāma* for instance) upheld the class division by referring to an "ideal class division", although this Zoroastrian class division was most probably not realised fully in the Sassanian Empire. It was an example of a Zoroastrian ideal situation (Daryaee 1998:444). The rigid class system was challenged by particular individuals from the nobility who wanted to garner more political power and some like the general Shahrbaraz who became the monarch himself (Wiesehöfer 2001:174). The organisational capability of the Sassanian state is well attested in the remains that have been found in the infrastructure of what was then Mesopotamia (Howard-Johnston 2010:124). One example of this infrastructure development was the extensive construction of canals on the Mesopotamian alluvial plain (Howard-Johnston

⁵ The garments of the priests were traditionally white, warriors' gold and those of the husbandmen were dark-blue for instance (Shaki 2011:5).

2010:124). The monarchy gave its support to the existing social hierarchy in which case the aristocracy reciprocated by accepting the Sassanian dynasty's hereditary right to rule (Howard-Johnston 2010:126).

The rebellion of Bahram Chubin, a member of a leading family, against Hormizd IV in 588-589 CE, demonstrates that aristocratic families were becoming more influential and powerful in the late Sassanian period (Howard-Johnston 2010:128). The precedent was that in times of crisis a rival candidate from the Sassanian family could be put forward but not a person from another aristocratic family. The growing influence of the aristocratic families over who ascended the Sassanian throne reached its apogee in the time of the succession crisis in 628-632 CE. The institution of kingship was shaken in the time of crisis and the competing nobility and generals directly influenced who was enthroned as the king (Daryaee 2009:36). This is coupled with the fact that from 590-591 CE the general Bahram Chubin was the first non-monarch to ever mint coins in the Sassanian Empire – this would set a trend for the late Sassanian Empire as the monarch's power was continuously challenged (Daryaee 2009:33). The Sassanian Empire was beginning to resemble a feudal state in the period of the succession crisis as local officials and aristocrats held the most power. Rulers and governors could not hold on to power securely (Daryaee 2009:36). In the period of 631-637 CE, different areas of the Sassanian Empire were actually ruled by different rulers. The list of contending kings includes Hormizd V, Khosrow III, Peroz II, Khosrow IV and Yazdgerd III (Daryaee 2009:36). The growing power of the aristocrats in the late 6th century CE and early 7th century CE Sassanian Empire had the effect of destabilising the monopoly that the Sassanian royal family had on the executive power in the Sassanian Empire. The erosion of the royal family's power had the effect that in a seemingly prosperous time for the Sassanian Empire under the veneer of geographic and economic expansion the Sassanian royal family was losing power to the aristocrats.

The reign of Khusrow II (590-628 CE) was the period that immediately preceded the time of the succession crisis. The information that provides essential background on Khusrow II's reign could also be useful for understanding the succession crisis period (Chegini 1996:80). Khosrow II ascended the Sassanian throne in turbulent circumstances as a result of the fact that his father Hormizd IV lost the support of the nobility and Khosrow II was in effect filling

the office that his father was forced to vacate (Brosius 2006:157). Khosrow II's ascension to the throne is more evidence of the growing influence of the nobility in the Sassanian late period – a Sassanian monarch was forced out of office by the nobility and his successor was also chosen by them (Brosius 2006:157). When Khosrow II ascended the throne in 590 CE, there was a rival for the throne, the Sassanian general, Bahram Chubin. Bahram Chubin's opposition forced Khosrow II to seek help from the Byzantine emperor Maurice (Brosius 2006:157). Bahram Chubin rebelled because of several reasons. Firstly, Khosrow I's social and economic reforms (the formation of a new social class of small landowners, the *dehkānān*, and exact taxation) could have sown seeds of dissent between succeeding kings and their subjects (Shayegan 2013:810). Secondly, the establishment of a uniform military nobility created a force only accountable to the Sassanian monarch. However it stood in the way of the traditional bonds between the nobility and the king. This led to a deterioration of the relationship (Shayegan 2013:811). The creation of the military class did not have the desired effect: "the military class originally created as a bulwark against the aspirations of the high nobility may have, *nolens volens*, contributed to the erosion of royal power due to its increasing affinity with the selfsame nobility" (Shayegan 2013:811). With Maurice's help, Khosrow II defeated Bahram Chubin in a battle near the River Blarathos and Maurice's policy of support for Khosrow II ensured that a period of peace between the Byzantine Empire and the Sassanian Empire ensued (Brosius 2006:157). Byzantine help for Khosrow II in return for Sassanian territorial concessions may have damaged the credibility of the Sassanian royal house in the eyes of many in the Near East (Shayegan 2013:811). Khosrow II's overthrow of his father and participation in the assassination of his father also damaged the reputation of the Sassanian house (Shayegan 2013:811).

Peace between the Sassanid Empire and the Byzantine Empire did not last though. After the death of Emperor Maurice, Phocas proclaimed himself emperor in 602 CE and Byzantium fell into political turmoil (Brosius 2006:158). When Heraclius overthrew Phocas in 610 CE, the Sassanians resumed their war against the Byzantine Empire (Brosius 2006:158). The subsequent policy of expansion instituted by Khosrow II could have in part been done so as to improve the Sassanian dynastic fortunes and change the perception that the nobility had of the Sassanian royal house (Shayegan 2013:811). By adding much of the Byzantine eastern possessions to the Sassanian Empire, it was hoped that the Sassanian house could be invested with a new sense of legitimacy and that an empire could be created to rival the Achaemenids

(Shayegan 2013:812). The legend of Khosrow II's coins (fig. 5) reads as follows: "Xosrow, he has increased the royal splendour" (Shayegan 2013:812). The aim of Khosrow II's regime was to increase the prestige of the Sassanian house. This is evident from the propaganda, which the legend on the coin is an example of. Khosrow II built new fire temples to further strengthen the impression that the Sassanian royal house was the custodians of the Zoroastrian religion and strengthen the bond between the Sassanian state and the Zoroastrian religious institutions (*The Historical Geography of the Sasanids* 1988:74). Khosrow II was preoccupied with his public image and the image of his house. However when disaster befell him then reality became radically different to the propaganda and it created tension and conflict within the Sassanian Empire (*The Historical Geography of the Sasanids* 1988:74).

Khosrow II's policy of expansion was initially successful with his armies taking Antioch (611 CE), Damascus (613 CE), Jerusalem (614 CE) and Egypt (619 CE) (Brosius 2006:158). After 622 CE Heraclius was ready to go to war against the Sassanians because he had gathered enough financial support by that time and had made peace with the Avars (Brosius 2006:158). In 627 CE Heraclius' army confronted Khosrow's near Nineveh and the result was a decisive victory for the Byzantines which forced Khosrow and his family to flee to Ctesiphon (Brosius 2006:158). Khosrow II was able to halt Heraclius at Ctesiphon (fig. 24) though: "At this point Khosrow lost control over his own ranks, and he was killed in a palace coup. His son Shiroe succeeded to the throne as Kavad II" (Brosius 2006:158). According to scholars, the coup of Khosrow II signalled the end of the Sassanian Empire although the Sassanian Empire officially ended in 651 CE (Brosius 2006:158). Symptoms of the erosion of Sassanian power were evident from the end of the reign of Hormizd IV when the nobility ousted him from power and chose their own candidate, Khosrow II, to succeed him. The Sassanian monarchy had alienated certain sectors of the nobility through the conduct of the kings like Hormizd IV and Khosrow II who were absolute monarchs. The reforms they instituted and the lack of trust for the late Sassanian monarchs partly contributed to the succession crisis of 628-632 CE (Daryaee 2009:34).

The Sassanian Empire in late antiquity was part of a world where the empires, the Byzantines and Sui-Tang China, were politically and economically connected and each empire consciously promoted themselves as global empires (Canepa 2010:121). The late Sassanian

era (late 6th century CE until early 7th century CE) was a brief period wherein the three big empires were interlocked, continuously stretching over large areas of the Eurasian continent (Canepa 2010:121). The interlocking nature created competitive interaction between the empires as they tried to control trade and important areas at the expense of each other (Canepa 2010:121). The number of embassies of exchanges between the Sassanians and the Chinese actually reached its peak in the 7th century CE. The large number of embassy exchanges illustrates the increasing interconnectedness that became prevalent in this era (Canepa 2010:122). The Sassanian Empire was in the middle of an increasingly close relationship between the empires; the Sassanian Empire's interaction was both with the big Western empire and the big far Eastern empire. The Sassanian Empire's role as middle man had the effect that the Iranian empire could become rich by exploiting the trade routes from East to West and vice versa. The Sassanian Empire was also open to attack from a number of areas because of its geographical location. Therefore the factors which made the Sassanian Empire a viable state economically also made the Sassanian Empire open to attack from various areas. Many Sassanian monarchs were aware of the fact that the Sassanian Empire was surrounded by potential enemies because they invested heavily in military infrastructure (Howard-Johnston 2010:124). Khosrow II was one monarch that was extremely aware of the Sassanian Empire's precarious position and reportedly said:

“Know, O ignorant one, that, after God, it is only wealth and troops(sic) that can uphold the royal authority of monarchs, this being especially the case with the kingdom of Persia, whose lands are surrounded by enemies with gaping mouths ready to gulp down what the kingdom possesses” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1056).

The Sassanians fortified and garrisoned cities that were situated on strategic routes that led from the frontier into the interior. These fortified cities were to act as a deterrence to the enemies “with gaping mouths” (as described in the quote), that sought to invade Sassanian territory (Howard-Johnston 2010:124). The alleged maxim of Khosrow I: “The kingdom relies on the army, and the army on money, and money on the *harāḡ*⁶ and on farming, and farming on justice, and justice on the integrity of officials, and the integrity of officials on the loyalty of the viziers, and at the top of it all is the watchfulness of the king...” (Mas'udi as quoted by Wieshöfer 2001:191). The maxim gives an indication of the ethos that the government in the late Sassanian period had and all the sectors of society that supported the

⁶ The *harāḡ* in the quote is the rural tax that supplied the Sassanians with a lot of their funds.

army (Wiesehöfer 2001:191). Defending the Sassanian Empire was an essential component of ensuring legitimacy for a Sassanian monarch and defence of the Sassanian Empire was something that became increasingly difficult in the succession crisis.

An especially prevalent symbol of Sassanian kingship was the lion that adorned many pieces of art ranging from silver plates to textiles (Feltham 2010:4). The lion was portrayed in different scenes (fig. 8) that communicated different motifs. “(T)he lion is found depicted as both a dangerous wild animal whose death confers kingship, and as the protector and guardian of gods and men” (Feltham 2010:25). The different ways in which the lion was equated to a king tells one something of what was expected of the Sassanian kings (Feltham 2010:4). The Sassanian king was expected to be the protector of the kingdom and be able to act assertively for the benefit of the people in the Sassanian Empire. When the lion was depicted as being killed by a Sassanian monarch, the implied meaning was that the monarch would be the guardian of men because he could accomplish the feat of killing one of the most dangerous animals (Feltham 2010:25). The art with lion imagery that the Sassanian artisans produced became so popular that the imagery and general concepts were copied in places as far afield as Japan, China and Western Europe (Feltham 2010:18). Sassanian textiles and silks used traditional Persian imagery and symbols that dated as early as the 5th century BCE and incorporated them into the art that was traded and copied all along the silk route (Feltham 2010:47). The popularity of Sassanian imagery shows the reach and influence that the Iranian empire had in late antiquity. The Sassanian imagery and art that portrayed the ideals of kingship created a visual representation of the expectations of the king. He at least had to seem to make an effort to meet these expectations. The Sassanian monarch was the figurehead and ruler of the empire and the Sassanian royal family that claimed descent from the Achaemenids and stating these claims certainly created expectations (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 814). To increase the effectiveness of the royal propaganda the Sassanian monarch had to be successful in most of his endeavours as a unsuccessful king who was not close to meeting expectations, could be overthrown and killed. Khosrow II is an example of such a king who failed in his endeavours.

Initially the Romans and Sassanians portrayed each other as “barbarians” or upstarts (Canepa 2010:123). After 293 CE, with the enactment of Diocletian’s reforms, a fraternal and

enduring relationship developed between the two empires (Canepa 2010:123). Nevertheless conflict did punctuate their relationship (Canepa 2010:123). In contrast to the Achaemenid, Hellenistic and early Roman eras the period of the Sassanians was a period of relative parity between the two big empires: the Byzantine/Romans and the Sassanians (Canepa 2010: 123). By the age of Khosrow I (c. 531-579 CE) the Byzantine and Sassanian courts considered the equilibrium as divinely ordained and as being important to the world (Canepa 2010:123). Sassanian rulers in the late Sassanian period had to contend with this set, nuanced and sophisticated diplomacy that had developed (Canepa 2010:123). In 602 CE king Khosrow II launched his initially successful campaign against the Byzantines to gain more territory for the Sassanian Empire, with the intentions of the Sassanians ruling over these newly gained territories indefinitely (Foss 2003:151). The quarrel between the Sassanian Empire and the Byzantine Empire over the lands (Syria, Levant and Egypt) that the Sassanians had conquered from the Byzantine, caused a breakdown in the relationship between the empires (Foss 2003:151). The dispute over the lands in the Near East continued until 630 CE when Heraclius conquered the lands that were formerly lost (Foss 2003:151). The fact that the Byzantine Empire and Sassanian Empire were locked in a state of total war between 602-630 CE did contribute to the emergence of a succession crisis in 628 CE (Foss 2003:151). The ultimate defeat was a shock to the Persians because Heraclius' campaigns penetrated to the heart of the Sassanian Empire (Foss 2003:151). Sassanian propaganda frequently proclaimed the power of the Sassanian king but with defeat looming for the Sassanians, reality was clearly and harshly contradicting the propaganda. The Byzantines' victory over the Sassanians might have given other nations like the Arabs hope of defeating the Sassanian Empire, many of whom who were part of the Sassanian Empire. While the war between 602 and 630 CE was undoubtedly an exertion for the Sassanian military and economy, the war also created political instability as most of the monarchs after the end of the war had short lived and bloody reigns (Daryaee 2009:36).

2.2 Religious landscape

As the political landscape changed in the Sassanian period, the religious landscape also changed. Prior to the Sassanian era, the Iranian religious community was what could be characterized as an eclectic mix of spiritual beliefs and inclinations (Pourshariati 2008:321). In the late Sassanian period the orthodox Zoroastrian religious establishment established

themselves firmly in Sassanian society and its relationship with the state became closer (Pourshariati 2008:324). The orthodox Zoroastrian priesthood was iconoclastic with statues of indigenous Iranian sects being actively destroyed and fire altars being founded in their stead (Pourshariati 2008:328). The orthodox Zoroastrian priesthood also sought to emphasise the importance of Ahura Mazda over the other gods, Mithra and Anahita (Pourshariati 2008:331). It was furthermore believed by orthodox Zoroastrians that mankind has free will whereas heterodox Zoroastrian sects like the Zurvanites believed that man's role is predestined (Pourshariati 2008:339 n. 1943).

In the 5th century CE other religions such as Christianity became increasingly popular in the Sassanian Empire and Zoroastrianism became increasingly formalised in response to the changing religious landscape. In the late Sassanian period, the image that was promoted by the monarchs was that the monarchy and religion were the two pillars of the state and that these pillars were essential to the survival of the state (Pourshariati 2008:325). The reference to the essential nature of the monarchy and religion implies that the Sassanian monarchy and the Zoroastrian religion upheld the social hierarchy of the Sassanian state. The Sassanian monarchy wanted to instil a sense of dependence in the general populace so that they and the Zoroastrian priesthood could remain powerful in the Sassanian Empire. The Sassanian propaganda aims to create a picture of harmonious cooperation between the monarchy and the religious establishment (Pourshariati 2008:325). However, this was not always the case (Pourshariati 2008:325). The alliance between the priests and the king as represented in the propaganda as part of the Sassanian national ideology was the required ideal (Pourshariati 2008:325). The hierarchical organisation of the Zoroastrian religious establishment only dates to the 5th century CE though (Pourshariati 2008:326). This means that the abovementioned political arrangement involving the “two pillars of society” could not have occurred before this period (Pourshariati 2008:326). The early Sassanian monarchs also had to contend with Zoroastrian religious authorities, although these were decentralised. The Sassanian monarchy's changing relationship with religious minorities, such as the Christians and Jews, attests to the fact that its attitude to religious matters was often one of doing what is most politically expedient at the time (Pourshariati 2008: 325).⁷ The Sassanian monarchy's

⁷ In Ardashir's reign the Jews were repressed. After the first Sassanian monarch's reign the Jews were granted more freedom and the Jews could be generally counted on to be compliant (Wiesehöfer 2001: 215). The Christians were sporadically persecuted by the Sassanians until the late 5th century CE. The eastern Christians

relationship with the Zoroastrian “church” was in actual fact a volatile one (Pourshariati 2008:325). The evidence for a volatile relationship between religion and king can be seen in the conduct of certain kings towards the Zoroastrian establishment and towards religious revolts. Shapur I had an accommodating attitude towards Mani, Kavad I, temporarily supported Mazdak and Hormizd IV, and reportedly had a confrontational relationship with the Zoroastrian priesthood (Pourshariati 2008:326). Kavad I had tried to use the Mazdakites to undermine the power of the nobles (Pourshariati 2008:326). These three examples illustrate that the variable relationship between the Sassanian monarchy and the Zoroastrian establishment was not always amicable (Shaked 2010:105). The Sassanian monarchy and Zoroastrian establishment continued to work cooperatively, because it was beneficial for both parties. The Zoroastrians gained royal approval and support and the Sassanian monarchs received the approval from the Zoroastrian gods. It appears to have been a symbiotic relationship (Shaked 2010:105).

The succession crisis in the Sassanian Empire and the subsequent destruction of the empire would have made certain religious Sassanian people point to the apocalyptic texts of Zoroastrianism (Boyce 1984:67). The apocalyptic tradition in Persia came about as a result of transmission of ideas from the Jews to the Persians in the Hellenistic period (Boyce 1984:67). An ancient period prophecy from the *Yašt* 19 describes that there is only one world saviour, Astvatərəta, who will in the end destroy the “Evil Spirit” (Angra Mainyu) (Boyce 1984:67). In ancient literature there is no distinction between prophecy in the modern sense and declarations of knowledge applicable to the present or past (Boyce 1984:67). According to Boyce (1984:57), apocalypse “is only another word for ‘revelation’, and apocalypticist for ‘revealer’”. The hero Astvatərəta was yet unborn in the Zoroastrian tradition but he would also be aided by Zoroastrian heroes of previous ages to help the Iranian people at the end of time (Boyce 1984:59). The development of the tales involved adapting the tales to match the political climate (Boyce 1984:59). From stories dealing with tribal battles between Iranians, the stories were adapted to cater to an imperial people when the Iranians were matched against foreign foes like the Greeks, Romans, Turks and ultimately the Arabs (Boyce 1984:59). Through the process of adapting the stories the originally cosmic apocalyptic

had separated from the western Christians by that time and seemingly did not pose a threat to the monarchy (Wiesehöfer 2001:213)

stories came to take on a patriotic character that was used as political prophecy (Boyce 1984:59).

As the political landscape in the time of the succession crisis was in chaos so the religious landscape was also in disarray (Pourshariati 2008: 340). Many religious currents were at play from the beginning of Khosrow II's reign (591-628 CE) and overwhelmed orthodox Zoroastrianism (Pourshariati 2008: 340). Heterodox Zoroastrian sects like the Zurvanite sect gained popularity in the time of crisis and the growing popularity of this sect undermined the orthodox Zoroastrian stance which the Sassanian royal house allegedly followed and promoted (Pourshariati 2008:340). The political position of the Sassanians could have been weakened by the decreasing influence of the orthodox Zoroastrian religious institutions in the 6th century CE and this could have contributed to the instability that was characteristic of the succession crisis (Pourshariati 2008:340). One of the aspects that set Zurvanism apart from orthodox Zoroastrianism was that the Zurvanite creation myth postulated that a single eternal being (the Mainyu of Time) created both Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu and that this single being created both evil and good (Pourshariati 2008:339). Zoroastrian thought in the Sassanian period was fluid though and religious dogmas and myths could be included in orthodox Zoroastrianism or be regarded as heresy in different times (Pourshariati 2008:340). There was also a clear distinction between the dogmas of learned, theological Zoroastrianism and the popular versions of the faith as practised by the majority of people in the Sassanian Empire (Pourshariati 2008:341). The disparity between the learned Zoroastrianism and the popular Zoroastrianism could shrink when the Sassanian monarchy and the orthodox Zoroastrian establishment it supported had more influence and political will to enforce the learned Zoroastrian dogma.

When the influence of the Sassanian monarch or Zoroastrian establishment waned because of internal crisis, it gave the chance for other unofficial interpretations of the Zoroastrian faith to proliferate in the Sassanian Empire (Shaked 2010:104). To protect itself from outbursts of heresy, the learned, theological Zoroastrian faith limited access to the official Zoroastrian religious texts (like the Avesta) and as a result limited the amount of interpretations of the Zoroastrian texts that did not corroborate with the official Zoroastrian interpretation (Pourshariati 2008:341). The Avesta describes two types of heretics: "first, those who are

unobservant of ceremonies and are ignorant, and secondly those who have ‘secret doctrines’” (Daryaee 1998:442). The founder of the Mazdakite movement, Mazdak, was branded as the supreme heretic by orthodox Zoroastrians because Mazdak was able to subvert a number of the Zoroastrian priests (Daryaee 1998: 442). The example of another heretic, Sen, proves that in the late Sassanian period heresy could (and did) rise from the more important priestly circles as Sen’s name is mentioned in Pahlavi texts with the names of other influential religious leaders (Daryaee 1998:442). In order to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the populace, Sassanian leaders had to be able to manage the religion. In the late Sassanian period, the management of religion became all the more problematic for Sassanian monarchs because of the changing religious landscape and the sudden outbursts of heresy that threatened the legitimacy of the Sassanian monarchy. It is at this background of religious change that the succession crisis started.

Kingship in Sassanian Iran was both a political and religious office, as the king occupied the political royal position but was also perceived as being the protector of the divine order on earth (Emrani 2009: 1). An important political concept in the Sassanian period was that only descendants of the house of Sassan could become a monarch and could be considered legitimate holders of the divine kingship (Emrani 2009:2). The belief was that the gods had bestowed kingship specifically on the descendants of the royal house and the belief was clearly very strong because there was only one incident when a non-Sassanian ascended the throne and that was the brief reign of Shahrbaraz (Emrani 2009:2). The king was sanctioned by the gods if he was of the Sassanian royal house but normally he was not deemed to be divine (Emrani 2009:2). The ubiquitous Sassanian slogan “*cihr az yazatān*”, was formerly understood by scholars as the monarch was the “seed/origin” of the gods (Soudavar 2012:30). Now many scholars are of the opinion that the word *chir* can be translated as “image” (Soudavar 2012:30). Sassanian monarchs possibly did not view themselves as being related to the gods at all but just that the monarch “resembled” a god (Soudavar 2012:30). The ideology of Sassanian kingship took on different forms in different periods and as such it was a dynamic concept that could change depending on the political climate (Emrani 2009:2). For example when Ardashir I in 224 CE defeated the last Arsacid king he had to accommodate the prevalent Hellenised ideology and imagery into his own royal ideology so as to gain legitimacy for his usurpation of the throne (Emrani 2009:2). Another instance of change of ideology is found in the reign of Shapur II (309-379 CE) when the Zoroastrian priests were

powerful enough to force the monarch to drop the formula “whose origin/seed/image is from the gods” from the coinage (Emrani 2009:3). The drop of the legitimising formula left the Sassanians with the conundrum of finding other legitimising ideologies. The Sassanians adopted the tale of being related to the mythical Keyanid kings as their new legitimising ideology (Emrani 2009:3). By depicting the family of Sassan as having descended from the Keyanids and inheriting kingship from the mythical monarchs, it gave legitimacy to the Sassanians (Emrani 2009:3). The Sassanians were intimately linked with the Zoroastrian faith and the monarchs were seen as mediators between the gods and men in the late Sassanian period (Daryaee 2010:67). The populace of the Sassanian Empire were well aware of the fact that the Sassanian monarchs claimed to be mediators between gods and men because of propaganda and the fact that the propaganda could even be seen on the Sassanian coinage (Daryaee 2010:67). From the 4th century CE onwards the Zoroastrian religious authorities and the Sassanian monarchy worked together to create Zoroastrian religious fervour among the Sassanian Empire’s populace (Daryaee 2010:67). Religious fervour was needed because the Sassanian king faced a threat from Christianity internally, as many of his subjects converted to Christianity and from the Christian Roman Empire (Daryaee 2010:67).

The religious institutions also aided in legitimising the Sassanian monarchy and limited any opposition from outside of the Sassanian royal family (Emrani 2009:3). Certain qualified Zoroastrian priests were also tasked with preserving traditions in the religious literature (Wiesenhöfer 2001:158). As a result Zoroastrian priests were also one of the constant sources of literacy in Sassanian society and the bulk of surviving Sassanian literature is religious texts (Wiesenhöfer 2001:158). The literature composed by the priests could also serve as propaganda for the Sassanian kings (Boyce 1984:72). The Avestan tale of the seven metallic ages⁸ is an example of a tale tailored to favour Sassanian interests (Boyce 1984:72). Most of the metallic ages were assigned to different Sassanian priests or kings (Boyce 1984:72). For instance the copper age was assigned to Ardashir I. Copper was, after gold, the most sought after metal (Boyce 1984:72). Assigning Ardashir I the copper age shows that the tale was tailored to suit the political propaganda of the Sassanians (Boyce 1984:72). The apocalyptic tales were transmitted orally and then written down in the Sassanian period (Boyce 1984:72).

⁸ This tale of the metallic ages can also be found in *Zarātūšt Nāme*, Persian Text, 77; transl. 78 (Boyce 1984:70 n. 91).

As it is only the Persian line of transmission that survives, Sassanian interests predominate (Boyce 1984:72). There is only one reference to the Parthian period with the Parthian king “Valaxš” being assigned the lesser bronze age (Boyce 1984:72). The importance of the Zoroastrian priests in legitimisation could be ascertained by how the priests were treated and the privileges that were granted to the priests. High priests were sent to foreign rulers and important priests could rule cities (Emrani 2009:3). The authority of the priests increased over time and the late Sassanian period was the point in time where the priests’ power was at its apogee (Emrani 2009:3). As Agathias indicates in the 6th century CE:

“The magi are the objects of extreme awe and veneration, all public business being conducted at their discretion and in accordance with their prognostications, and no litigant or party to a private dispute fails to come under their jurisdiction. Indeed nothing receives the stamp of legality in the eyes of the Persians unless it is ratified by one of the Magi.” (*The Histories* Chapters 2.23-2.32 as quoted by Emrani 2009:3-4).

Although the account may have been the slightly exaggerated interpretation of an outsider of the Sassanian society, it still gives one an idea of the visibility of the authority of the Zoroastrian priests in the late Sassanian period that found its way into the description of Agathias. The rise of the priests’ political authority in the late period limited the power of the king and spread more of the responsibility for the preservation of the kingship to the nobles and religious authorities who all had different interests (Emrani 2009:4). From the 4th century CE there seems to have formed a more rigid regionalisation of offices in the Zoroastrian priesthood as the office of “priest of province” was well defined by the period (Wiesenhöfer 2001:176). In the religious sphere, as in most spheres of Sassanian society, the tendency to hierarchise created clearly defined power structures (Wiesenhöfer 2001:176). Zoroastrianism did not dictate the politics of the Sassanian kings though but in the late Sassanian period, from the 6th century CE onwards, individual priests could influence who was invested on the Sassanian throne (Brosius 2006:191).

The parts of society that were traditionally relied on by the Sassanian monarchs to uphold his authority, like the nobles and priests, were beginning to impinge on the powers of the Sassanian king in the late Sassanian period. Because of the growing political power of the nobility and the priesthood these two classes were more able to influence the choice of who succeeded to the Sassanian throne. Because of the increased decentralisation of power the

Sassanian monarchs of the late Sassanian period had to embark on legitimisation projects. For example after the 4th century CE, the custom of the carving of rock reliefs, which had ceased until the reign of Khosrow II (590-628 CE), was revived in his reign (Canepa 2013:870). The revival of early Sassanian legitimisation practices like rock carving shows that for the late Sassanian monarchs there was a need for supplementary propaganda techniques because of the period (Canepa 2013:870). In the next chapter the techniques of the succession crisis period monarchs whose reigns followed that of Khosrow II will be analysed.

Chapter 3: Sassanian Kings of 628-632 CE and their legitimisation practices

Chapter 2 described the political and religious context of the 7th century CE Sassanian kings. The efforts of every Sassanian king to use and shape the religious and political sphere for the benefit of their own rule will be outlined. In this chapter the reigns and legitimisation practices of the Sassanian kings who ruled during the succession crisis (628-632 CE), will be described. The book *The History of Prophets and Kings*, will be the main source used in the description of the Sassanian kings. As the monarchs from the succession crisis period did not commission rock carvings, coinage will be an important primary source of monarchs from the period. The Sassanian kings will be analysed individually in chronological order. By focusing on the Sassanian monarch's actions of each monarch will be clearer and the chronological development of legitimisation practices during this period, will be more easily definable.

3.1 Kavād II

After the long reigning monarch Khosrow II was deposed in a palace coup in 628 CE his immediate successor was his son Shiroe, who was enthroned as Kavād II (Brosius 2006:158). The nobles seemingly had a lot of power over Kavād II as *The History of Prophets and Kings* seems to indicate. The great men of state said to Kavād II: "It is not fitting that we should have two kings: either you kill Kisrā [i.e. Khosrow], and we will be your faithful and obedient servants, or we shall depose you and give our obedience to him just as we always did before you secured the royal power" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1046)⁹. This gives a strong indication of the power which the nobility and priests had accrued by 628 CE in the Sassanian Empire and the importance of securing legitimacy for Sassanian kings during this period. The "great men of state" could dictate terms by the period and could enthrone the candidate that was the most acquiescent to their demands (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1046). The important men of state wanted to have Khosrow II killed because the former Sassanian king was a potential political opponent to Kavād II and Khosrow II had attempted, during his reign, to limit the power of the nobles. If the account of *The History of Prophet and Kings* is true then the account is also indicative of the popularity

⁹ The reference refers, as in the rest of the study, to the Leiden edition of the Arabic text.

of the Sassanian royals in 628 CE. Kavad II was reportedly devastated by the ultimatum of the nobles and clergy to kill his father (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1046). Kavad II needed time to think about the matter of his father and as a result Khosrow II was transported away from the palace government to a house so that the former king could be out of harm's way for the while (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1046). The Sassanians had recently lost a long and taxing war to its archrival, the Byzantine Empire, and in the eyes of the populace Khosrow II would certainly have seemed responsible. Sassanian kings frequently proclaimed in propaganda that they were the recipients of the god's favour but with the damaging loss of such a war, reality would have seemed in direct contradiction with the propaganda (Soudavar 2012:36). It would have seemed that Khosrow II no longer had the favour of the gods after the loss of the war and he would have lost legitimacy (Soudavar 2012:36). Victory in war was an important part of legitimacy for Sassanian monarchs depicted their victories through propaganda (Soudavar 2012:36). Although Khosrow II was initially a successful monarch the fact that he lost a very important conflict, which he initiated, would have been damaging to his legitimacy.

The deposing of Khosrow II and the proceeding succession of him by Kavad II was brought about by a collective conspiracy of very influential dynastic families (Pourshariati 2008:173). Most of the families involved in the coup against Khosrow II were Parthian families which indicate disenchantment with Khosrow II's rule (Pourshariati 2008:173). Because of a monarchical bias among sources the short lived successors of Khosrow II have regularly been depicted as still having considerable power (Pourshariati 2008:174). It is evident though that the dynastic families had gained considerable power in the succession crisis period (Pourshariati 2008:174). Ferdowsī on Kavad II: "depicts him as being frightened and inexperienced (*tarsandih o khām*)."(Pourshariati 2008:174)¹⁰. Ferdowsī goes on to state that Kavad II was acting like a slave and was fearful of disobeying the noble's orders (Pourshariati 2008:175). The factions that brought down Khosrow II continued to take charge of affairs during Kavad II's rule (Pourshariati 2008:175). At this point, the Iranian forces had also broken up into three distinct armies: the army of Azerbaijan under Farrukh Hormozd, the occupation army led by Shahrbaraz and the army of Persia and the East commanded by

¹⁰ The passage is a quotation from Ferdowsī's *Shāhnāma* Vol. IX, 1971 Moscow translation. The quotation features on page 280 of the specific translation.

Mihr Hormozd (Pourshariati 2008:173). Various forces at work resulted in the erosion of Kavad II's political power (Pourshariati 2008:173).

Kavad II sent an envoy, the head of the royal secretaries, to the house of Khosrow II to describe to him all the bad decisions that he had made in his time of power that landed him in his situation of captivity (*The Histories of Prophets and Kings*, 1046). The envoy was sent to deflect blame for Khosrow's incarceration and possible execution away from Kavad II and the people. Kavad also claims that Khosrow II has been condemned by Ahura Mazda. He puts the blame for Khosrow's predicament on the former king's reportedly inept leadership and management (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1046). The envoy was furthermore instructed to tell Khosrow II:

“Off you go to our father the king and tell him in our name that we have not been the cause of the unhappy state into which he has fallen, nor is any member of the subject population responsible, but God has condemned you to His divine retribution in return for your evil conduct.” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1046).

In this way, the new king justifies his action of deposing the outgoing monarch as well as gaining legitimacy. Even though the deposed monarch had lost legitimacy by losing the war he was still a member of the Sassanian royal family. Therefore, a reason had to be given as to why Khosrow II was toppled in a coup. Legitimacy of a Sassanian monarch was intimately tied up with the Zoroastrian gods and it would not have been abnormal for Kavad II to claim that his actions were sanctioned by the gods. Claiming that the Zoroastrian gods favoured one candidate for the royal throne over another was, as a result, a method that was used from the beginning of the Sassanian era. For example, in the Paikuli inscriptions (paragraph 19) the Sassanian monarch Narseh ascribes his victory over his nephew to the fact that Ahura Mazda and all the other Zoroastrian deities favoured him and not his nephew (Humbach & Skjærvø 1983:14).

The specific “evil conduct” that Khosrow II was accused of is listed further in the speech that the envoy had to deliver (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1046). The first crime that is mentioned and which is attributed to Khosrow II is the deposing and killing of his father, Hormizd IV. The crime is mentioned first because it would enjoy primacy in the Sassanian

society. Killing a Sassanian monarch who, according to the propaganda, is favoured by the gods, without a reason would have been seen as a very serious offence against society and the gods. The second crime that Khosrow II was accused of by Kavād II was a more personal offence. Kavād II alleges that he and his brothers were treated badly by their father and isolated from the world (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1046). The third accusation was that Khosrow II treated prisoners very harshly, the fourth that he showed a lack of consideration towards the women he took for himself and the fifth that he treated his subjects with contempt and violence (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1046). The speech goes on to mention two more accusations. Khosrow II apparently amassed great amounts of wealth and stationed soldiers on frontiers for excessively long periods (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1046). The accusation of amassing great wealth does not seem to be groundless because the Arabs were reportedly very impressed by Khosrow II's huge crown and the carpet in his palace (Wiesehöfer 2001:221). The eighth and last accusation was that Khosrow II acted treacherously towards the Byzantine monarch, Maurice, who had offered him sanctuary when Bahram Chubin had threatened him. Khosrow II also failed to return the True Cross¹¹ to Maurice (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1047). The various listed accusations against Khosrow II give one a clue of what was viewed as repugnant characteristics in a late Sassanian monarch. If the passage from *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1046-1047, is genuine, the ideal Sassanian monarch would have respect for his relatives in the house of Sassan, treat prisoners and women fairly and would not flaunt the great amount of wealth he had gathered (especially in a time of hardship for many people). The ideal Sassanian monarch would also be considerate of the plight of the soldiers and would not act treacherously in international politics, especially towards those that helped him and acted courteously towards him (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1047).

The source of the resentment that Kavād II carried can maybe be explained by the fact that Khosrow II had crowned his younger son, Mardānšāh, as heir (Daryaee 2009:35). The fact that the coins of Kavād II (fig. 6) reverted to the style of Khosrow I might be evidence that he did not want to be associated with his father (Daryaee 2009:35). If a Sassanian monarch admired a predecessor the style of the coinage frequently followed that of the admired predecessor (Daryaee 2009:35). The typology of Sassanian coinage roughly follows the

¹¹ The True Cross was the relic upon which it was believed Jesus was crucified (Pourshariati 2008:176 n. 960).

basics set down by Hellenistic coinage. The obverse contained the bust of the ruler and the reverse the religious symbols (Schindel 2013:829). The images on the Sassanian coins did, however, evolve over time during the Sassanian period. The *korymbos*, the bundle of hair above the head of the monarch, was done in different styles by each successive monarch (fig.3) and this is reflected on the portraits of the kings on the coins (Schindel 2013:833). In the portraits on the coins of Khosrow II and his successors a crown with wings is seen but that had not been widely in use prior to the reign of Khosrow II (Schindel 2013:833). Kavad II did use the crown with wings on his portrait like his father but the style is definitely more reminiscent of Khosrow I (Schindel 2013:822). The style of beard that Kavad II (fig. 6) sports on his coinage portrait is identical to Khosrow I's (Schindel 2013:821). Kavad II's crown depicted on the coinage portraiture is, notwithstanding the wings, very similar to Khosrow I's crown (Schindel 2013:822). On the reverse of the coins of Kavad II the religious symbolism is a fire altar flanked by two attendants - this was prevalent on the reverse of most Sassanian coins from every era (Schindel 2013:834).¹² The Sassanians understood the importance of religion in gaining legitimacy for a dynasty and this reflected in the largely uniform religious symbolism on the reverse of Sassanian coinage (Schindel 2013:834). Kavad II, like many previous Sassanian monarchs put the fire altar scene on the reverse of his coinage so that he could be associated with Zoroastrianism (Schindel 2013:835).

Khosrow II lived as a captive for a time and even sent his own speech to Kavad II as he deliberated over what course of action to take regarding his captive father (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1058). The "great men of state" would not let up their pressure on Kavad II though as they reiterated their demands for killing Khosrow II when they learned that Khosrow II was still alive (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1058). According to *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1058, the second confrontation with the men of state scared Kavad II into action. Kavad II ordered the execution of Khosrow II in order to please the nobility so that he could gain legitimacy with them.

¹² The fire altar scene on the reverse originated with *fratarakā* coinage which originated in Persis when the province was briefly independent in the second century BCE before it became part of the Parthian Empire (Schindel 2013:834). The originator of the Sassanian dynasty in 205-206 CE, Pabag the father of Ardashir I, was reportedly a priest at the fire temple of Anahita in the city of Istakhr in the province of Persis (Daryaei 2009:3).

Two years before Khosrow II was deposed the diviners and astrologers reportedly foretold that Khosrow II's death would come from the direction of Nīmrūz (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1059). The Sassanians were fascinated with predicting the future through astrology and much effort was expended on translating Indian texts on astrology that allegedly predicted the future and described natural phenomena (Tafazzoli & Khromov 1996:95). The books on natural phenomena usually described the flight of birds and the cries of animals as either a good or a bad omen (Tafazzoli & Khromov 1996:95). Indian sages did visit the Sassanian court (Tafazzoli & Khromov 1996:95). They advised the monarch on future events by interpreting the position of the planets, the signs of the zodiac and the configuration of the stars (Tafazzoli & Khromov 1996:95). The predictions of sages were taken very seriously by the Sassanian court and predictions were duly written down, conveyed to the monarch and written copies were stored in archives (Tafazzoli & Khromov 1996:95). Consulting sages was an extension of the Sassanian monarch's search for an advantage over his competitors. The prediction that allegedly Khosrow II heard two years before he was deposed stated that his death would come from Nīmrūz (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1058). Khosrow II therefore grew suspicious of Mardānshāh, a valued member of his court (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1058). Mardānshāh was executed after a prolonged period of intrigue but, according to the tale, he was not to be the killer that Kavad II used (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1060). The eventual killer of Khosrow II was Mihr Hurmuz, the son of Mardānshāh, who was bent on vengeance (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1060).

After Khosrow II was killed, Kavad II, made sure to make his grief conspicuous although he was the one that eventually ordered that the former monarch be killed (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1060). Kavad II reportedly tore the front of his robe and wept copiously when he heard that his father was killed (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1060). Kavad II ordered as a result that the corpse of Khosrow II was to be given a great state burial (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1060). All the great men of state and many aristocrats accompanied the body of Khosrow II to the place of burial which showed that Kavad II wanted to make the burial an occasion (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1061). Kavad II also killed the assassin Mihr Hurmuz (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1061).

The respect with which Khosrow II was treated did not extend to other political opponents of Kavad II. These men were not Sassanian kings. What Kavad II did after the burial of Khosrow II was to commit fratricide, specifically killing almost every male that were eligible for kingship in the Sassanian family (Daryaee 2009:35). *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1061, describes the fratricide: “Shīrūyah killed seventeen of his brothers, men of good education, bravery, and manly virtues, on the advice of his minister Fayrūz and at the urging of one of the sons of Yazdīn, who was the official in charge of the [collection of the] land tax”. The murders were especially damaging because, if the quote is to be believed, then seventeen eligible Sassanian royal candidates would have been killed. This act that Kavad II committed contributed to the development of the succession crisis and instability that was to be characteristic of the period between 628 CE-632/ 633 CE (Daryaee 2009:35). This is evidenced by the fact that two Sassanian queens and even a Sassanian general who was not of the royal Sassanian family ascended to the throne during the royal succession crisis (Brosius 2006:203). Kavad II’s actions in eliminating his political rivals were again heavily influenced by his ministers and officials (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1060). Kavad II’s case was symptomatic of the growing decentralisation of power in the Sassanian Empire.

Kavad II did reportedly return the True Cross to the Byzantine Empire (Khosrow II did take the True Cross after his capture of Jerusalem in 614 CE) so as to return to a more cordial relationship with the Christian empire (Bosworth 1999:405 n. 998). The late Sassanian monarch was increasingly influenced by the men of state and became a conduit of power for certain politically influential people in the Sassanian Empire. The people that were influencing Kavad II could not directly take power because of the reverence that people still had for the house of Sassan, even during the late Sassanian period. In the nuclear court, where the monarch typically reigned from, the nobility risked losing their political weight if the monarch was too weak a ruler (Wiesehöfer 2010:143). The nobility of the nuclear court strongly contrasted with the ambitious, powerful nobles that rarely visited the court and whose political power was more independent of the monarch (Wiesehöfer 2010:143). Kavad II’s tenure in royal power was reportedly only eight months notwithstanding his efforts to appease the nobility and priesthood with his actions (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1061). Kavad II was reportedly called by Persians “the tyrannical one” but for Christians in the Sassanians Empire his reign was peaceful (Bosworth 1999:399 n. 982). Kavad II in actual fact did not have the legitimacy to alienate population groups like the Christians, who were

growing in importance. His reign was probably an era relatively free of persecution. The precise nature of Kavad II's death in 628 CE is shrouded in mystery. The Byzantine historian Theophanes claims that Kavad II's stepmother, Shīrīn, poisoned him (Bosworth 1999:399 n. 984). According to Daryaee (2009:35), Kavad II was assassinated in the same manner as his brothers. In *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1061, the cause of Kavad II's death is described as a plague that spread during his reign. What is certain is that Kavad II's reign was a brief and very eventful one, only lasting six or eight months in the year 628 CE (Bosworth 1999:399 n. 985).

3.2 Ardashir III

The person that succeeded Kavad II in 628 CE was his son Ardashir III who was only seven years old at his ascension to the Sassanian throne (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1061). On Ardashir III's coinage (fig. 6) he is clearly depicted as a child (Pourshariati 2008:178). There was no effort made in Sassanian propaganda to disguise his youthfulness and the young Ardashir's appointment as monarch was only a symbolic act meant to ensure that there was a Sassanian on the throne (Pourshariati 2008:178). The second reason for the seven year old Ardashir ascending the throne was allegedly because there was no experienced adult from the royal house of Sassan left after Kavad II's fratricides (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1061). The effect of these murders on the Sassanian royal house was felt even immediately after Kavad's death. The young Ardashir's actual power lay in the hands of the dominant political factions at the court. These were the same political factions that had brought Kavad II to power and had influenced his policies (Pourshariati 2008:178). Prominent members of these political cliques were the Prince of the Medes, Farrukh Hormozd, and Fayrūz, the former minister of Kavad II (Pourshariati 2008:179). During Ardashir III's brief reign, there was no time for the monarch to commission rock reliefs, but the coinage of Ardashir III betrays something of the young king's political inclinations. In the second year of Ardashir III, the coinage reverted to the style of his grandfather Khosrow II. This shows that the boy king did not harbour the same sort of hatred for Khosrow II as his father did (Daryaee 1998:437). In the increasingly turbulent times, the negative aspects of Khosrow II's reign and his military defeat became relegated to the background. The focus shifted to the overall stability and power that was prevalent during most of his reign (Daryaee 1998:437). The monarchs of the succession crisis yearned for such stability and power (Daryaee 1998:437).

Ardashir III was the first monarch in the succession crisis that attempted to connect himself with Khosrow II and he created a trend that many subsequent succession crisis monarchs would follow (Daryaee 1998:437).

The man who held the office of high steward of the table, Mih Ādar Jushnas, was responsible for Ardashir III's upbringing and the daily administration of the kingdom (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1061). *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1061, describes in glowing terms how the steward went about his task: "He carried on the administration of the kingdom in an excellent fashion, and his firm conduct of it reached such a point that where no one would have been aware of Ardashīr's youthfulness". Ardashir III was a seven year old boy but the administration of the kingdom was in the hands of the more experienced nobility and priests. The arrangement apparently worked well, maybe because the experienced officials could carry on administering the kingdom without the attentions of a volatile personality like Kavad II to influence their decisions. With Ardashir III on the throne, the Sassanian state still had a symbolic figurehead for the people to focus on, while the officials could continue to administer the Sassanian Empire unhindered. However the men of state did not bear in mind that there were power centres that were outside their political factions at court (Pourshariati 2008: 179).

One powerful person that was outside the court was the general Shahrbaraz who was on the Byzantine frontier and who had achieved great success in the war of 604-629 CE (Daryaee 2009:33). Ardashir III did not give control over the army to this general; it was rather given to Fayrūz, the minister of Kavad II who urged the king to commit fratricide (Pourshariati 2008:179). Ardashir III, or his advisors, probably hoped that a measure of continuity in government officials would secure a political power base and that the young king would have legitimacy among experience officials like Fayrūz. The appointment of Fayrūz as the supreme authority in the army would have alienated Shahrbaraz. The general enjoyed a good relationship with Khosrow II and possibly claimed to be an avenger of the murdered king (Bosworth 1999: 400 n. 988). The Sassanians were still technically at war with the Byzantines when Ardashir III ascended to the throne in 628 CE although there was no serious fighting at that point. The responsibility fell on Shahrbaraz to make peace with the emperor

Heraclius in Anatolia and he did this in July 629 CE at Arabissos (Bosworth 1999:400 n. 988).

3.3. *Shahrbaraz*

Shahrbaraz was a famous general that had gained his notoriety by ravaging the Byzantine Empire in the 7th century CE (Daryaee 1998:438). Shahrbaraz had legitimacy because of the military feats he achieved whereas the Sassanian kings of the late Sassanian period, in contrast to the early Sassanian kings, were less directly involved in warfare (Canepa 2010:138). Generals like Shahrbaraz rose to prominence because more military responsibilities were delegated to them. Notwithstanding the antagonism in the past between Shahrbaraz and Heraclius, there was a meeting between the two in 629 CE, to discuss peace (Daryaee 1998:437). The peace treaty was agreed upon but Shahrbaraz and Heraclius also discussed the state of the Sassanian monarchy at the meeting. In the discussion Heraclius promised Shahrbaraz support if the Sassanian general were to undertake a coup because Heraclius thought it would be easier to develop a line of communication with the Sassanian Empire, if the general was at the head of the Sassanian Empire (Daryaee 1998:437). The Byzantine emperor also promised support for Shahrbaraz's descendants, if he seized the throne. This suggests that the Byzantines could have preferred a non-Sassanian dynasty as the monarchs of the Persian Empire. A non-Sassanian dynasty would not have the cumulative legitimacy that was accrued over centuries by predecessors. Their legitimacy would also be affected by the fact that their rise to power would not be totally of their own making but would have owed much to a foreign power, the Byzantines. The fact that such a plan culminated in a challenge to the Sassanian throne shows the weakened state of the Iranian monarchy in the late Sassanian period (Daryaee 1998:437). After the death of Khosrow II in 628 CE, the kingship became the tool of various factions of aristocrats to gain power indirectly through a king under their control (Wiesehöfer 2010:139). However, Shahrbaraz did not want to control a king; he wanted to become the Sassanian king himself, although he was not of the royal Sassanian family. Furthermore general Shahrbaraz was purportedly a Christian whereas the Sassanian royal structures were dependent on cooperation with the Zoroastrian religious authorities (Wiesehöfer 2010:136). Political legitimacy would be very important for the general's claim to the throne and he did receive that in part by being recognised by the Byzantine Empire.

The war in the 7th century CE against the Byzantines was one that ended ultimately in disappointment and failure for the Sassanians in 629 CE (Howard-Johnston 2010:128). No one was more disappointed than the general Shahrbaraz (Howard-Johnston 2010:128). This, coupled with the fact that the great men of state did not consult with him on important matters (specifically Ardashir III's ascension), further alienated Shahrbaraz from Ardashir III's government (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062). Moreover, Shahrbaraz did not see Ardashir III as being a capable monarch, because of his youth (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062). Thus the general treated the young king with contempt and "acted arrogantly towards the great men of state" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062). In the royal palace of Ctesiphon the kings displayed the suits of armour and weapons of subject sovereigns and defeated usurpers but Ardashir III, still a child king, would not have been able to contribute much to the symbolic weapons store because military defeat against the Byzantines was looming large (Canepa 2010:132). Shahrbaraz reportedly decided to convene a meeting of the ruling classes of the people so as to discuss the matter of the royal power at that point in time (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062). Shahrbaraz probably did this to seek out like minded nobles who were concerned over the state of the Sassanian monarchy.

It would seem that Ardashir III's government was aware of Shahrbaraz's planned coup and the steward, Mihr Ādar Jushnas, strengthened the walls and gates of the city of Ctesiphon (*History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062). Ardashir III, all the remaining members of the royal house and the treasury of Ardashir were transferred to Ctesiphon so that everything would be behind the strengthened defences in time of attack (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062). Shahrbaraz needed to break the alliance that Ardashir III had with some of the more powerful nobles if he was to be successful (Pourshariati 2008:180). The general approached the Nīmrūzīs and formed an alliance with them so as to strengthen his forces and weaken those of Ardashir III (Pourshariati 2008:180).

After he reached an agreement with the Nīmrūzīs, "Shahrbarāz's troops, with whom he now approached, numbered six thousand men from the Persian army on the Byzantine frontiers" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062). It gives an indication of how weakened the Sassanian state was in 630 CE that a modest force of 6000 men could threaten the capital city (Bosworth 1999:401 n. 989). When the Sassanian state was stable the size of the army could

be expected to be 50 000 to 80 000, strong but the Sassanian state and army was clearly functioning with diminished capacity in 630 CE (Brosius 2006:186). Since Shahrbaraz's army was relatively small he could not take Ctesiphon directly by force though and had to devise a stratagem to take the capital city (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062). The Sassanian general as a result took up position near Ctesiphon to besiege the city with ballistas (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062). Shahrbaraz then devised the following: "He kept on inciting a man named Nīw Khusraw, who was the commander of Ardashīr's guard, and Nāmdār Jushnas, son of Ādhar Jushnas, the Isbabadh of Nīmrūz, to treachery, until the two of them opened the gates of the city to Shahbarāz" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062).

When the gates to Ctesiphon were opened because of treachery, Shahrbaraz seized the city (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062). Shahrbaraz's first act upon entering the city betrays something of the reason why he instigated the war against Ardashir III. Shahrbaraz reportedly seized many of the leading men, killed them and appropriated their wealth for himself (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062). The fact that Shahrbaraz was not consulted on Ardashir III's ascension to the throne may have been the reason behind the violence perpetrated against the important men (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062). By killing the cadre of officials though, the Sassanian state lost able officials, and as a result the Sassanian government was further weakened. Shahrbaraz ordered a group of men to kill Ardashir III in his palace and they accomplished their task (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062). Ardashir III's killing is reminiscent of Kavād II's conduct in killing Khosrow II. In both instances the pretenders to the throne distanced themselves from the assassination of the Sassanian monarchs because it was religiously repugnant to kill the person that was reportedly the link between the gods and mortals (Shaked 2010:105). Ardashir III had held royal power for one year and six or seven months before he was killed by Shahrbaraz (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1062).

Many themes in Sassanian art were linked to military prowess. The very popular hunting scene was an example of such a theme (Feltham 2010:27). Another example is the Persian king portrayed in the image of Heracles (fig. 22) on Sassanian silverware (Feltham 2010:25). As a pretender to the throne, a general such as Shahrbaraz would be able to exploit this

propaganda fully (Feltham 2010:25).¹³ Shahrbaraz did embody all the qualities that were expected of a Sassanian monarch except one: he was not of the Sassanian royal family (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063). This was an important point that prevented Shahrbaraz from having legitimacy in the eyes of many of the Persian nobility (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063). An anecdotal story in *The History of Prophets and Kings* describes Shahrbaraz sitting on the Sassanian throne for the first time and having stomach cramps and as such he was forced to pass water in a bowl while sitting on the throne (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063). The story was intended to illustrate the fact that Shahrbaraz sitting on the throne was an act of enormous temerity and sacrilege for certain nobles (Bosworth 1999: 402 n. 991). The feeling that the office of monarch should not pass to someone outside of the royal family would have the effect that, in the time of strife, the Sassanian state's fortunes were linked with the flagging fortunes of the house of Sassan (Bosworth 1999: 402 n.991).

There are no extant coins from Shahrbaraz's reign. Without any coinage, it would have been difficult for Shahrbaraz to gain legitimacy for his claim to the kingship (Schindel 2013:815). Coinage was an important resource for Sassanian monarchs to spread their political, religious and propagandistic identities throughout the Sassanian Empire (Schindel 2013:814). Monarchs from the late Sassanian period often did not have the resources, stability or time to instigate other propagandistic programs like rock reliefs and elaborate silver vessels (Schindel 2013:814). It seems that Shahrbaraz could not even use numismatic propaganda to gain legitimacy which would have weakened the general's claim further as a non-Sassanian on the throne (Schindel 2013:814).

A certain man of Istakhr named Fus Farrūkh and his two brothers felt such revulsion and anger at Shahrbaraz's seizure of royal power that they swore mutually to kill the former Sassanian general (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063). As part of the king's personal guard, they had access to Shahrbaraz (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063). The three conspirators had to find an opportunity to assassinate Shahrbaraz. The conspirators chose the

¹³ A child king would not have embodied these military qualities quite as effectively as an adult (Feltham 2010:27).

inspection of the king's personal guard as the right moment (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063).

“It was [at the time] the custom that, when the king rode, his personal guard stood in two lines, with their mailed coats, helmets, shields, and swords, and with spears in their hands; then when the king came up level with one of them, each of them laid his shield on the wooden forepart (*qarabūs*, i.e., pommel) of the king's saddle and placed his forehead on it, as if he were prostrating himself on the ground” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063).

The inspection of the guard was a way for the monarch to let the soldiers reinforce their loyalty personally to the king by going through the custom with each soldier. Each soldier had to individually prostrate themselves before the monarch which would have been a powerful symbolic message (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063).

When Shahrbaraz rode forth a few days after becoming king to inspect the personal guard the three conspirators struck Shahrbaraz with their spears (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063). Shahrbaraz died and fell off his horse after the attack but the three brothers tied the monarch's body to a rope and dragged him around the parade ground so that everyone could see what had happened to the monarch that was illegitimate in their eyes (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063). The three brothers were reportedly assisted by certain key men of state and individuals like Māhyāy, the instructor of the cavalry men, who ensured that the conspirators were themselves not attacked when they killed Shahrbaraz (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063). Shahrbaraz had been the Sassanian monarch for approximately forty days (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063).

There were only three examples of non-Sassanians claiming the throne: “:Bahrām-i Chūbīn from the Mihrān, Vistāhm from the Ispahbudhān, and Shahrvarāz from the Mihrān” (Pourshariati 2008:182). All three non-Sassanian dynasties are from 590 CE to 630 CE, a period where there was instability in the Sassanian Empire (Pourshariati 2008: 182). After the killing of Shahrbaraz the conspirators decided to kill every person that was involved in killing Ardashir III and also some nobles that had not been involved but who they wanted to get rid of (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063).

3.4 Buran

The Sassanian queen Buran was raised to the throne by the group that killed Shahrbaraz and as far as can be ascertained, the first female Sassanian ruler (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064). Buran was the daughter of Khosrow II (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064). This gave her legitimacy to ascend the throne in 630 CE (*The History of Prophet and Kings*, 1064). Noblewomen always had a special position in Sassanian society, but changes in social norms and an abnormal political environment facilitated the rise of princess Buran to the Sassanian throne (Emrani 2009:4). Sassanian reliefs and coins of the 3rd century CE indicate that female members of the royal family received respect and attention from the monarch and the nobility (Emrani 2009:4). Buran had to justify her rule though as the monarch by referring to the female Kayanid ruler, Hūmāy, and Anāhīd the “patron-saint” of the dynasty (Emrani 2009:5). Buran also tried to strengthen the connotation between her rule and her father’s (Khosrow II) by imitating the design of her father’s coins and crowns (Emrani 2009:5). On the coinage of both Khosrow II (fig. 5) and Buran (fig. 6) the symbol of the martial deity Wahrām is present (Emrani 2009:5). Buran would not have been expected to personally participate in military campaigns and be victorious in campaigns so the symbol of Wahrām was purely to reinforce a connection with her father (Emrani 2009:5).

Buran’s coins used specific legends and symbols on her coins to reinforce her claim to the throne (Emrani 2009:5). On the obverse of the coinage the bust of Buran is shown with her costume decorated with a star and crescent with astral signs on the margins of the coins (fig. 6) (Emrani 2009:4). The astral signs, like the crescent moon and stars on the coinage of Buran reinforce the claim of the divine sanction of the Sassanian ruler (Emrani 2009:6). Buran was first and foremost a descendant of Sassan which counted in her favour, because non-Sassanians never fully gained the trust of the religious leaders and nobles as seen in the case of Shahrbaraz (Emrani 2009:6). Buran’s personal depiction was an attempt to defuse the possible controversy surrounding her gender (Emrani 2009:6). The Sassanian queen wanted to depict herself in the same manner as the previous male monarchs (Emrani 2009:6). “Bōrān was shown wearing the same type of clothing as the Sassanian kings, including a green tunic in a special pattern over sky-blue pants, a sky-blue crown, and sitting on the throne while holding a tabarzīn, or a battle-axe.” (Emrani 2009:6). Respected noble women did not wear pants and handle weapons (Emrani 2009:6). Buran wanted to take on masculine elements so

that she increased her legitimacy in a patriarchal society (Emrani 2009:6). Queen Buran's portrait on her coinage is the only one found of a Sassanian queen thus far (Chegini 1996: 49). The fact that a woman could attain supreme power in the Sassanian Empire could point to a shift in attitudes among the nobility and religious authorities (Gignoux & Litvinsky 1996:399). Residual influence of the Mazdakite movement might have resulted in the shift in attitudes during the late Sassanian Period (Gignoux & Litvinsky 1996:399). The Mazdakite religious movement, which was supported by Kavad I (488-531 CE), emphasised the importance of solidarity in a community and held everything in common (Gignoux & Litvinsky 1996:399). This would, in turn, create a more matrilineal community (Gignoux & Litvinsky 1996:399). The more matrilineal community of the Mazdakites in the 6th century CE could have made the Sassanian nobility more ready to accept the idea of a female Sassanian ruler (Gignoux & Litvinsky 1996:399).

Buran went so far as to depict herself with the same crown as her father on her coinage so as to minimise the dissention around the fact that she was not a legitimate successor (Emrani 2009:7). With the ascension of Buran to the Sassanian throne, the adjustment of existing parameters in propaganda and ideology was needed to support the central objective of the nobility and the priests: to preserve the Sassanian imperial ideology and monarchy (Emrani 2009:7). The ascension of Buran to the Sassanian throne, it could be argued, was not a revolution then but a subtle shift to accommodate the objectives of the ruling classes (Emrani 2009:7). The ceremonial gold coins that Buran minted in her reign reflect the ideology that she was the restorer of the Sassanian lineage after rule by a non-Sassanian (Daryaee 2009:35). The legend on the gold coins was: "Buran, restorer of the race of Gods" (Daryaee 2009:36). The legend on the coins is reminiscent of early Sassanian propaganda that emphasised that the Sassanian lineage was a race of the gods (Daryaee 2009:35). By using the early Sassanian propaganda Buran sought to increase her legitimacy by glorifying the Sassanian dynasty that she was a part of (Daryaee 2009:35). Since Buran could not directly take part in martial pursuits like previous Sassanian monarchs she would have to gain legitimacy indirectly by attaching her political legitimacy to the Sassanian dynasty (Daryaee 2009:36).

An important aspect of Sassanian kingship was the monarch's relationship with his subjects as their protector, as well as the protector of the religion of the land (Emrani 2009:7). The key requirement for kingship was *xwarrah*, divine glory of kingship, be bestowed on the monarch. This doctrine was not gender specific (Emrani 2009:7). Since kings were frequently depicted in propaganda involved in what was viewed as manly pursuits like hunting and war, it would appear as though the Iranian conception of a king was that of a male. The Sassanian monarch was also viewed as the chief priest of the Zoroastrian religious establishment which was exclusively male (Emrani 2009:7). Changing attitudes in the late Sassanian period and the fact that Buran used symbols in propaganda to circumvent the problem of her gender allowed her to be viewed as a Sassanian monarch (Emrani 2009:7). Buran did not want to be viewed as a queen, but as a king with all the benefits it would entail for her reign (Emrani 2009:7). She did not only have to appease the Zoroastrian religious authorities, but also the relatively large late Sassanian Christian population, as well as the Christian Byzantine Empire (Pourshariati 2007:126). Buran's genealogical descent could have eased relations with the Byzantine Empire (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064). Buran was reportedly a child of Khosrow II and his Byzantine princess wife, Maryam (Bosworth 1999:404 n. 996). Buran would thus have been a granddaughter of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius. This would have made her ascent to the throne acceptable to the Sassanian nobles and the Byzantine Emperor (Bosworth 1999:404 n. 996). To gain further favour with the Byzantines she sent a Christian delegation to northern Syria headed by Īshō'yahb II of Gadāla, the bishop of Balad (northern Mesopotamia), to negotiate with the Byzantine Empire for peace (Pourshariati 2007:126). The aim of sending the delegation of several Nestorian bishops from the Persian Empire to the Byzantine Empire was in effect to show to the other empire that the Christians in the Persian Empire were treated respectfully. The Sassanian Empire could not afford another conflict with the Byzantine Empire along with the internal troubles that the Persians were experiencing. Therefore every effort was expended to maintain peaceful relations with the Byzantines.

As the period after Khosrow II's reign was a period of upheaval the specific time was also a time of religious change that the Sassanian monarchs would have to navigate. The last century of the Sassanian Empire saw a definite increase in Christian converts within the Empire as bishoprics expanded east (Frye 1984:338). The richest part of the Sassanian Empire, the Tigris-Euphrates lowlands, was in actual fact predominantly Christian in the late

Sassanian era (Frye 1984:338). The state religion, Zoroastrianism, was still supported by the Sassanian monarchy in the late period (Frye 1984:338). The building of new fire temples by late Sassanian monarchs like Buran and Azarmigduxt shows that Zoroastrianism was still an important part of the Sassanian monarchy's legitimacy (Bosworth 1999:404 n. 997). Zoroastrianism was at a disadvantage in one regard, that it was not a religion that actively sought out new converts. Its fortune was also closely bound to that of the Sassanian state (Frye 1984:338). In the late Sassanian period, the Sassanian state dominated the Zoroastrian priesthood whereas in the west in the Byzantine Empire at the time, the church was very influential on the state (Frye 1984:338). According to royal Sassanian ideology the king still had to protect the Zoroastrian faith though, notwithstanding the growth of the minority religions (Frye 1984:338).

As Buran represented herself as the restorer of the fortunes of the Sassanian Empire, her actions had to reflect, in part at least, the aims that her propaganda expounded. As a result she undertook a program of minting silver coins for circulation and repairing masonry bridges (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064). She settled the debt of people who owed the government land tax and in doing so tried to gain the favour of the ordinary citizen (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064). Buran built a fire temple at Istīniyā to show her dedication to the Zoroastrian faith and demonstrate to her detractors that could have possibly criticised her for her Christian links and sympathies (Bosworth 1999: 404 n. 997). Buran wanted to keep the lines of communication open with her subjects so she wrote open letters to them detailing the policies that she intended to enact (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064). In the open letters Buran mentioned the topic of the Sassanian monarchs who had perished, showing again that the Sassanian dynasty which she was a part of was important to her and reminding everyone that she was descended from the Sassanian family (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064). Furthermore: "she expressed the hope that God would show them, through solicitude for their welfare and firm policies deriving from her elevated position, what would let them realize that lands subdued through the strength and energy of men, that military camps were not laid open to plunder through their martial valor, and that victory was not gained through men's stratagems and hatreds extinguished, but all that comes from God" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064).

Buran clearly diminishes the importance of military accomplishments, which were denied to her because of her gender and the current difficult political climate. Instead, she emphasised aspects, like piety and faith, which she could embody as a monarch. It was the religious dimension of the Sassanian monarchy that Buran chose to emphasise so as to legitimise her rule as a woman (Emrani 2009:7). The Sassanian kings followed the mainstream Zoroastrian cult because of a political calculation on their part and not necessarily because of religious zeal and this was the case for most of the nobles at court (Shaked 2010:104). Most of the nobles wanted to advance their political career by, at least superficially, following the customs and traditions of mainstream Zoroastrianism (Shaked 2010:104).

Buran's main efforts were directed at consolidating and rebuilding the Sassanian Empire (Daryaee 2009:35). The overextension of the empire by Buran's father, Khosrow II, was partly to blame for the political instability that plagued the Sassanian Empire in the succession crisis (Daryaee 2009:36). Buran clearly wanted to avoid making the same mistake (Daryaee 2009:36). Although Buran aimed for political stability, in propaganda, she did not conform to the norms of the late Sassanian period. For instance, on all the Sassanian rulers' coinage after Bahram IV, the mural elements on the coins referred to the supreme Zoroastrian deity, Ahura Mazda, except for Buran's coinage (Schindel 2013:829). Buran's mural elements refer to the divine aspects of the Sassanian monarch's rule (Emrani 2009:5). The crescent on the monarch's crown, so prevalent on crowns from Yazdgerd I's reign onwards, is absent on Buran's crown (Schindel 2013:829). The precise significance of the crescent is not known, but the absence of it on Buran's crown shows a break from usual practice (Schindel 2013:829). Buran was the only successor of Khosrow II to issue gold coinage, while for several of Khosrow II's successors no coins have been found (Schindel 2013:826). Buran also issued special coins that departed from the norm by showing the monarch on both the obverse and reverse sides of the coins (Schindel 2013:835). The minting of the coin is an indication that Buran's reign was one of the more stable reigns in the succession crisis where there was an effort to return to the *status quo* (Schindel 2013:826).

The political turmoil that Kavad II's fratricides instigated and the challenge to the throne that Shahrbaraz posed were problems that were so drastic that drastic measures were needed to ensure the survival of the hereditary monarchy (Emrani 2009:8). The nobility and priests,

who were traditionally seen as the two pillars of the Sassanian monarchy, had to react to ensure the survival of the Sassanian dynasty by enthroning Buran (Emrani 2009:8). The placement of Buran on the Sassanian throne did ensure the dynastic continuity for a while (Emrani 2009:8). The most important factor to take into consideration in the dire political circumstances was the lineage of the monarch, not the gender of the person (Emrani 2009:8). Buran was from the Sassanian royal blood line so her genealogy satisfied the main requirements for sacral kingship (Emrani 2009:8). Sassanian aristocrats and religious leaders made it possible to preserve sacral kingship and the powerful position of the Mazdean institution for a period by disregarding the importance of gender and placing Buran on the Sassanian throne (Emrani 2009:8). Buran not only attempted to win the favour of the ordinary citizens and nobility, she also tried to repair the damaged relations with the Byzantine emperor Heraclius and sent a Christian delegation to visit him (Darayee 2009:36). One section of society she did not attempt to please was the military, especially the generals (Darayee 2009:36). In her letters to her people she in fact tries to diminish the importance of martial valour and instead tries to emphasise piety (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064). According to the *Chronicle of Se'ert*, a Nestorian source dating from the tenth century CE, general Fīrūz, caused her death by strangulation in 631 CE (Bosworth 1999: 405 n. 999). To summarise: Buran tried to please the common people by relieving the tax load, the aristocrats by referencing her storied lineage continuously and the religious leaders by building a fire temple and saying pious things (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064). Buran's reign was in total one year and four months (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064).

3.5 Jushnas Dih

Very little is known of the transitional ruler Jushnas Dih (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064). There is no numismatic evidence of his reign and different ancient sources give contradicting descriptions of the person (Schindel 2013:815). One element that a number of the sources agree on is that Jushnas Dih was the offspring of Khosrow II's paternal uncle and that could have been one of the main reasons why he was chosen to ascend the throne (Bosworth 1999: 405 n. 1000). Like Buran, the fact that Jushnas Dih was from the Sassanian royal family and linked to Khosrow II, lent him credibility (Bosworth 1999:405 n. 1000). To have a king from the Sassanian dynasty was clearly very important to many nobles in the late

Sassanian period, even under the dire political circumstances (Huff 2010:39). On the rock relief of Khosrow II at Taq-I Bustan the king is represented as slightly larger than Ahura Mazda and the monarch does not even face the god (Huff 2010:39). The propaganda emphasised the importance of the Sassanian dynasty in the late Sassanian period and was reinforced by the king as the head Zoroastrian priest (Huff 2010:39). That is why a candidate like Jushnas Dih ascended the Sassanian throne. Although he was not necessarily the most desirable candidate to ascend the throne, the fact that he was from the house of Sassan (however remote that connection may be) gave him enough credibility and importance (Huff 2010:39). The importance attached to the Sassanian name was maybe enough to let one ascend the throne, but the candidate had to have more than the name to stay in power. Jushnas Dih's reign purportedly lasted less than a month (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064).

3.6 Azarmigduxt

Azarmigduxt was Buran's sister and the second female to become a Sassanian monarch (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). It is not surprising then that her ideology is very similar to Buran's. Upon ascending the Sassanian throne Azarmigduxt said: "Our way of conduct will be that of our father Kisrā, the victorious one, and if anyone rebels against us, we will shed his blood" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). Although Azarmigduxt's message is more antagonistic than the pious message of Buran, the same core principle is present, namely, that the example of Khosrow II will be followed. The translation of the regal name Azarmigduxt also gives a clue to the monarch's inclinations. Possible translations of the Middle Persian name Azarmigduxt are "noble maiden" or "daughter of the honoured one", whereby "honoured one" refers to Khosrow II (Bosworth 1999: 406 n. 1001). It seems that Khosrow II's two daughters had a positive view of their father, at least as a king, and they used their connection to the last successful Sassanian monarch as political capital.

Azarmigduxt's propaganda differed from Buran's in certain aspects. In Azarmigduxt's portrait from the now lost book *suwar-i muluk-i bani-sasan*, she wore red, sky blue and green garments as opposed to Buran's sky blue and green garments (Emrani 2009:7). Red was the special royal colour and, while Buran was hesitant and did not use the colour, her sister

Azarmigduxt tried to show by using the colour that she was the equal of any male monarch (Emrani 2009:7). Azarmigduxt wanted to further reinforce the idea that she was not a queen but a king through her portrait on her coinage (Emrani 2009:7). On Azarmigduxt's coinage (fig. 6) she is shown with a beard. In this way, she attempted to make her gender irrelevant (Emrani 2009:7). The bearded portrait of Azarmigduxt was modelled after the father she revered, Khosrow II (Schindel 2013:816). The fact that the bearded portrait of her was modelled on Khosrow II was another effort to further strengthen the connotation between her and her father in the public consciousness by putting it in circulation throughout the empire (Schindel 2013:816). On the coinage of Azarmigduxt, the wings attached to her crown allude to Verethragana, the god of victory, to whom the falcon was sacred (Schindel 2013:829). Where Buran downplays the military aspect of kingship, Azarmigduxt used the army against her foes in her speeches and her crown's symbols allude to martial valour (Schindel 2013:829).

Azarmigduxt was apparently a very attractive woman. *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065, makes the claim that: "she was one of the most beautiful of the women of the Persians". She received a number of suitors, because of her beauty. One of these suitors was Farrukh Hurmuz, Isbahbadh of Khurāsān (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). Azarmigduxt was clearly not ready to marry, not even to a powerful aristocrat like Farrukh Hurmuz (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). The Sassanian queen sent a message to Farrukh Hurmuz to inform him that marriage to a queen was not permissible but that they could meet on a certain night to have an illicit affair (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). Azarmigduxt was not planning on having an affair with the Isbahbadh. She ordered the commander of her guard to lie in wait for him on the night in question (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). The commander of her guard killed Farrukh Hurmuz and at Azarmigduxt's command the corpse was dragged out by his feet and thrown in front of the government palace (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). In the morning, Farrukh Hurmuz's corpse was found by the men of state and Azarmigduxt ordered the corpse to be taken away and concealed from sight (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). Azarmigduxt used her sexuality to lure and eliminate possible political opponents in this incident. This use of Azarmigduxt's sexuality is in direct contrast to the portrayal of her sister Buran as a pious queen in *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1064.

The root of Azarmigduxt's ascension lay in the fact that Sassanian royal women were revered from the beginning of the Sassanian Empire in the 3rd century CE (Wiesehöfer 2001:174). Important deceased Sassanian women were commemorated with fires to ensure their posthumous fame (Wiesehöfer 2001:174). Certain Sassanian noble women bore distinctive titles. For example, Adur-Anahid, a daughter of Shapur I, was called "queen of queens" and was mentioned before the king's sons in an enunciation of people commemorated with sacrifices (Wiesehöfer 2001:174). Preceding Adur-Anahid was Shapur's wife, Khoranzem, who was called "queen of the empire" (Wiesehöfer 2001:174). Other exceedingly visible women of the early empire were Denag, the mother of Pabag, Rodag, the mother of Ardashir I and her sister Denag, who was also called "queen of queens" (Wiesehöfer 2001:174). Rodag and Denag were, like Buran and Azarmigduxt, siblings who were highly regarded and both had the same title. The titles illustrate the importance of women in the early Sassanian period. Their importance stemmed from their noble birth or their marriage to the Sassanian king (Wiesehöfer 2001:175). Azarmigduxt's importance also stemmed from the fact that she was from the Sassanian royal family. She would otherwise not have been able to ascend the throne. There were irregular cases of a non-royal man like Shahrbaraz ascending the Sassanian throne, but there is no case of a non-royal woman ascending the throne. Challengers to the throne like Shahrbaraz had a military following and a long military career to rely on. Women who were not of the Sassan family would not have access to this.

Female members of the Sassanian family were highly visible as their appearance on royal reliefs and coins attests (Wiesehöfer 2001:175). Bahram II, following the example set by Roman propaganda, portrayed himself with the queen and crown princes on coinage (Wiesehöfer 2001:175). Royal women like Ardashir's sister, Denag, were also represented on gems (Wiesehöfer 2001:175). The fact that royal Sassanian women were the most visible and respected women in Sassanian society and that royal propaganda reinforced their importance made it possible for them to ascend the Sassanian throne in the late Sassanian period (Wiesehöfer 2001:175). The fact that there were also no alternative royal male candidates to choose from made it possible for Azarmigduxt and Buran to ascend the throne (Wiesehöfer 2001:175).

During her reign, Azarmigduxt built a fire temple near a village in the region of Abkhāz in western Transcaucasia (Bosworth 1999:406 n. 1002). This construction of a fire temple was a way for the monarch to publicly show that he/she was a pious Zoroastrian and to ensure the loyalty of the Zoroastrian priesthood (Bosworth 1999:406 n. 1002). Zoroastrianism was a religion based on sharp opposing powers, the power of good and the power of evil (Shaked 2010:112). Opponents to official Zoroastrianism inside and outside of the Sassanian Empire were labelled as upholders of an “evil religion” or “bad religion”¹⁴ (Shaked 2010:112). The Sassanian king would want to be seen as the one who establishes “the good religion” by his actions. The building of a fire temple by Azarmigduxt would create this impression (Shaked 2010:110). The Sassanian kings used the term “Un-Iranian” especially to denote inhabitants of countries that were not Iranian (Shaked 2010:112). The Sassanian king had to embody the Iranian ideals as opposed to the opponents who were in dichotomy to the ideals (Shaked 2010:112).

Azarmigduxt had made an important enemy by killing Farrukh Hurmuz. His son Rustam Hurmuz, was left as his father’s deputy in Khurāsān with an army at his disposal (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). Farrukh Hurmuz was apparently a Parthian dynast and governor of Khurāsān. He was therefore an important political figure in the Sassanian Empire (Pourshariati 2008:185). Farrukh Hurmuz was reportedly so confident of his importance that he said to Azarmigduxt: “Today I am the leader of the people and the pillar of the country of Iran.” (Pourshariati 2008:185)¹⁵. When Rustam Hurmuz received the news of his father’s murder he gathered a sizeable army and encamped at al-Madā’in (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). Rustam Hurmuz blinded Azarmigduxt and then killed her (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). Azarmigduxt’s reign had lasted approximately six months, according to *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065.

¹⁴ There is evidence in theological texts (*Dēnkard* 3,227) that Zoroastrian priests subtly criticised Sassanian kings who, they felt, were protectors of the official Zoroastrian doctrine (Shaked 2010:110). “Un-Iranian” was a more serious label to attach to people. This label probably carried a more grave tone of reprimand (Shaked 2010: 112). The label of “Un-Iranian” was not attached to so-called bad Zoroastrians but to non-Iranians and people that followed a religion other than Zoroastrianism (Shaked 2010:112).

¹⁵ Pourshariati quotes the text from Ya’qūbi, Aḥmad b. Abī Ya’qūb. *Ibn Wādih qui Dicitur al-Ya’qūbī, Historiae vol.1*. edited by M.T. Houtsma (Leiden 1969) 197.

3.7 Khosrow III

The period after Buran's death until Yazdgerd III's ascension was a period of extreme factionalism and division within the empire (Daryaee 2009:36). There were a number of "contender-kings" who assumed the throne and were challenged or removed by distant members of the Sassan family (Daryaee 2009:36). After Buran was murdered, the generals were growing in power in the wake of a shaken institution of kingship and competing nobility and Zoroastrian priests (Daryaee 2009:36). There is a list of kings who struck coins and kings who are only known from the literary sources, but the sequence of succession is confusing and different sources give a different sequence of rulers (Daryaee 2009:36). The late Sassanian Empire was beginning to resemble the late Parthian feudal system as power became more localised and fractured in the Sassanian Empire (Daryaee 2009:36). Local officials subsequently became the most powerful elite in the Sassanian Empire (Daryaee 2009:36). In the era of confusion, Hormizd V, Khosrow III, Peroz II and Khosrow IV reportedly ruled different areas of the empire simultaneously from 631- 637 CE according to numismatic evidence (Daryaee 2009:36). According to *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065, the rulers of the period ruled in succession, indicating the confusion in the sources.

The in-fighting between the different Sassanian factions depleted the power and unity of the army and this could have contributed to the rulers' difficulty in establishing stability in their reign (Daryaee 2009:37). The theme of the succession crisis period was that many nobles were unwilling to support the Sassanian throne but they were still generally conservative enough to demand that another Sassanian royal be the next king and not a usurper (Frye 1984:337). Khosrow III ruled the eastern part of the Sassanian Empire in c. 632 CE for a short period (Frye 1984:337). Khosrow III, the son of Mihr Jushnas, was a descendant of Ardashir I and, as such, he was a member of the Sassan family (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). Khosrow III lived in al-Ahwāz before he became the monarch (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). The "great men of state" were again involved in the ascension of a Sassanian monarch. They raised Khosrow III to the throne (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065).

The extant coins (fig. 6) of Khosrow III show that he had control over a mint (Schindel 2013:816). In the late Sassanian period, there were 25 mints operable at any one time and they would have been important centres for any would-be Sassanian monarch. Coinage with a portrait on them gave a candidate legitimacy (Schindel 2013:818). On his portrait, Khosrow III is shown as being beardless (Schindel 2013:816). This most probably points to his youth at the time of his ascension (Schindel 2013:816). The motive for the portrayal of the king as a young, beardless youth might have been to elicit a sympathetic response from the populace and the nobility. There are cases of usurpers who controlled mints that otherwise do not show up in historical sources (Schindel 2013:816). For example, a short-lived usurper named Ōhrmazd controlled the Ctesiphon mint in the 590s CE and struck coins (Schindel 2013:816). However, he failed to gain general acceptance and historical sources did not deem him important enough to mention (Schindel 2013:816). The fact that one of the first actions by usurpers was to gain control of a mint and manufacture coins with their portrait on them shows the importance of the mints in the late Sassanian period (Schindel 2013:816).

The coinage shows Khosrow III wearing the same winged crown as Azarmigduxt (Schindel 2013:829). The wings as a symbol of, the god of victory (Verthraghna), might have made this type of crown popular with kings of the late period, in view of the recent Sassanian defeat by the Byzantines (Schindel 2013:829). A symbol of the god of victory on the crown of a monarch would act as a visual message that this monarch's reign would not be one of defeat but of victory and glory (Schindel 2013:829). The mural elements on the coinage of Khosrow III, like those of most Sassanian monarchs, refer to the supreme Zoroastrian deity, Ahura Mazda (Schindel 2013:829). The allusion to Ahura Mazda on the coinage is an overt show of Khosrow III's faithfulness to the traditional Sassanian religion. Khosrow III's coinage conforms largely to the precedent set by previous Sassanian monarchs except for the portrait showing the monarch as beardless (Schindel 2013:830). The only male Sassanian monarchs to be portrayed on coinage without facial hair were Ardashir III and Khosrow III and both were monarchs in the succession crisis period (Schindel 2013:831). The brief reigns of Ardashir III and Khosrow III were a legacy of Kavad II's fratricide which saw the death of many eligible Sassanian monarchs.

According to *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065: “He assumed the crown and sat down upon the royal throne, but was killed a few days after his accession.” The numismatic evidence shows that Khosrow III had enough time to mint coins with portraits of himself. A reign of “a few days” may be an exaggeration on the part of al-Tabari to emphasise the transient nature of royal power in the succession crisis (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). On Khosrow III’s coinage, his total years of reign are described as being two to three years, although this may have been just an eastern section of the Sassanian Empire (Schindel 2013:815). The period when Khosrow III came to the Sassanian throne was a time of contention between different candidates and this is reflected in the contradictory sources that detail Khosrow III’s reign (Schindel 2013:815).

3.8 *Khurrazādh Khusraw*

There seems to be confusion in *The History of Prophets and Kings* between Khurrazādh Khusraw and Farrukhzādh Khusraw (Bosworth 1999:407 n. 1006). Some sources like Al-Ya’qūbī’s *Tarikh I*, 198, do not even mention Khurrazādh Khusraw (Bosworth 1999:407 n. 1006). The two Khosrows may have been the same person and with the confusion in the sources two separate monarchs may have been created (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). The existence of a Khosrow IV is much less certain than most other monarchs and is not clearly reflected in the numismatic evidence of the Sassanian Empire (Schindel 2013:816). Khurrazādh Khusraw, if he existed at all, was most probably an unsuccessful pretender to the Sassanian throne (Schindel 2013:816).

What is known of Khurrazādh Khusraw is that he could have reigned after Azarmigduxt in the period of extreme unrest when various candidates simultaneously claimed to be the rightful Sassanian monarch (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). Khurrazādh was reportedly one of the numerous offspring of Khosrow II and as a result he had a traditionally legitimate claim to the Sassanian throne (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). Khurrazādh was found in a fortress called the “Stone Fortress” near Nişībīn in southeastern Anatolia (*The Prophets and Kings*, 1066). This fortress is in the far north western reaches of the Sassanian Empire and the choice of this location as a hiding place for a supposed member of the Sassanian royal family could be interpreted as an indication of the dire straits the

Empire was in. Those from the Sassanian royal family still had legitimacy as rulers even though there was factionalism present in the Sassanian Empire (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066).

Enough people believed in Sassanian royal ideology that they remained a fixture of the political landscape, although it was technically the men of state that controlled the Sassanian monarchs from the background, even during the period 628- 632 CE. The Sassanian royals also referred to their predecessors when they wanted to increase their legitimacy, like the eponymous Sassan who was the founder of the dynasty (Wiesehöfer 2010:136). A popular predecessor to refer to in the late Sassanian period was Khosrow II who had been the last Sassanian monarch to have ruled during a stable period (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1063). This was a precedent that was already set in the early Sassanian period with Shapur I referring to his father Ardashir I and grandfather Pabag in his inscriptions (Wiesehöfer 2010: 136). The Sassanians described their predecessors as being their “forebears” or their “ancestors” (Wiesehöfer 2010:136). By taking on the royal name Khosrow, Khurrazādh Khusraw most probably thought that some of the legitimacy of the more illustrious Sassanian Khosrows would be part of his reign (Wiesehöfer 2010:136). Khurrazādh Khusraw’s reign described: “When he reached al-Mada’in, he remained there a few days only before [the people there] rebelled and rose against him in opposition” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). The exact date of the end of the monarch’s reign is not mentioned in *The History of Prophets and Kings* which shows that there is even some confusion regarding the monarch in the early medieval sources. The fact that Khurrazādh Khusraw’s reign was ended by the common people illustrates that even the fact that he was from the House of Sassan and some men of state supported him, was not enough to give him enough legitimacy to rule.

3.9 Peroz II

According to *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066, al-Tabari’s sources claim that Khosrow III, the son of Mihr Jushnas, succeeded after Azarmigduxt, also say that after Khosrow’s death, the “great men of state” in Persia raised Peroz II to throne. Evidence shows that Peroz II was, together with Hormizd V and Khosrow IV, one of the monarchs who ruled an area of the Sassanian Empire from 631-637 CE (Daryaei 2009:36). The meaning of the

name Peroz is “victory” in Middle Persian and it clearly shows the ambition of the new Sassanian monarch (Edwell 2013:843). The military loss to the Byzantine Empire was a sore point in the late Sassanian Empire and Peroz II was, like Azarmigduxt, a ruler that wanted to exploit the feelings of the Sassanian people (Edwell 2013:843). Peroz II was again a Sassanian ruler that rose to the throne because great men of state searched for a candidate from the House of Sassan (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). The particular men of state grew desperate to find a legitimate candidate because they reportedly looked for anyone with Sassanian blood, even if it was through the maternal line (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). The male ancestors were particularly important to Sassanian royals as they referred constantly to their paternal ancestors. The absence of a link to the Sassanian family through the paternal line would have affected a candidate’s legitimacy (Wiesehöfer 2010:136). This desperation for a royal candidate with any link was symptomatic of the succession crisis era.

Bosworth is of the opinion that Peroz II and Jushnas Dih may have been one and the same person though there is some confusion in the sources in relation to these two possible Sassanian monarchs (Bosworth 1999:408 n. 1008). In *The History of Prophets and Kings*, the two rulers are mentioned as separate individuals but there is some confusion regarding Peroz II in three other sources - namely *Ta’rīkh*, *Murūj* and *Kāmil* (Bosworth 1999:408 n. 1008). According to *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066, the great men of state: “raised him to the throne against his will” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). The men of state had grown so bold and powerful in the late Sassanian period that they could seek out a member of the royal Sassanian family (albeit with a tenuous link to the House of Sassan) and force him to ascend the throne (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). A ritualised equilibrium existed in both the Sassanian Empire and the Byzantine Empire which the aristocrats, clergyman and military commanders respected for the most part with the ruler at the top of the hierarchy (Canepa 2010:123). In the succession crisis period that started in 628 CE, the equilibrium was upset and this would represent difficulties for rulers trying to legitimise their regime. This confusion is evident in the sources (Canepa 2010:123).

The men of state found a candidate in Peroz II, a resident of Maysān. Once again the Sassanian candidate was not found in one of the big Sassanian cities as they feared for their

life (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). The adherence to Zoroastrianism and its traditions would have an impact on ending Peroz II's reign (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). "He was the son of Šahārbukht, daughter of Yazdāndād (text, "Yāzdāndār"), son of Kisrā (I) Anūsharwān" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). Peroz II's father is mentioned as Mihrān Jushnas later in his genealogy, but seeing as his patrilineal lineage was not very illustrious, *The History of Prophets and Kings* does not elaborate on it. Peroz II's matrilineal lineage was very illustrious, seeing that his ancestor through this line was Khosrow I, who was a widely respected Sassanian monarch (Daryaee 2009:29). Khosrow I was able to capture the imagination of the people in the Near East, even after the fall of the Sassanians, with many reforms attributed to him by Islamic sources (Daryaee 2009:29). Members of the Sassanian dynasty without direct descent to the ruler were usually called *wispuhrān* and they would for the most part not have had a realistic chance of ascending the Sassanian throne in a stable Sassanian Empire (Wiesehöfer 2010:137). Important aristocrats owed their rank and influence largely to their descent and as a result descent played a large role in legitimisation in the higher echelons of political power in the Sassanian Empire (Wiesehöfer 2010:137). The rank of the nobles, as a result, signified their economic and political position (Wiesehöfer 2010:137). Descent was a key part of legitimisation in the Sassanian Empire as is attested it frequently and prominently in *The History of Prophets and Kings*.

Peroz II may have been a historical figure—notwithstanding the fact that there is confusion in the sources but Peroz II's end as described in *The History of Prophets and Kings*, was as a result of the pious following of Zoroastrian customs and traditions (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). The end of Peroz II's reign allegedly came about as a result of an omen that was interpreted. The reason for Peroz II's brief reign ending is as follows: "He was a man with a large head, and when he was crowned he exclaimed, 'How tight this crown is!' The great men of state drew a bad omen his beginning his reign by speaking of tightness and narrowness," (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). The royal power, that the crown perhaps signified, had to fit the monarch comfortably to signify that the king would be up to the challenge of ruling the Sassanian Empire and that the candidate was the correct choice. The largely Zoroastrian men of state agreed though that the omen was undesirable and deposed Peroz II after he had reigned only a few days (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). The tale of Peroz II's end also illustrates the power which the men of state had and

that, even in a fanciful story, the Sassanian monarch could be deposed on a religious technicality (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066).

3.10 Farrukzādh Khusraw

There was another Khosrow, Farrukzādh Khusraw, who ascended the throne in the period of 631 to 637 CE when a number of Sassanian candidates claimed they were the rightful heirs (Daryaee 2009:36). Like many of the other Sassanian candidates, he was brought to the throne with the assistance of “great men of state” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). A court official brought him from “the Stone Fortress” to the capital (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). Al-Tabari gives the name as Zādhī, but the more likely name would have been Zādhūyah, according to Bosworth (Bosworth 1999:408 n. 1011). He was apparently the Marzbān (provincial ruler) of Sarakhs and he survived the intrigues of the succession crisis to experience the Arab invasion of the Sassanian Empire (Bosworth 1999:408 n. 1011). The aristocrat Zādhūyah allegedly made peace with the Arabs when they arrived in Khurāsān in 651/652 CE (Bosworth 1999:409 n. 1011). The aristocrats of the late Sassanian period built up their own local power bases and as a result their power became increasingly independent from that of the monarch’s and their own interests became increasingly important (Daryaee 2009:37).

The Sassanians regularly left local elites in place even when they killed some family members of these elites (Foss 2003:156). An example of this is when the wife of a leading aristocrat of Edessa insulted Khosrow II when he was in exile in the city (Foss 2003:156). This is what Khusrow II did to the wife: “Consequently, when Edessa came into his power, Chosroes had the woman brought to Persia and thrown into prison where she perished miserably.” (Foss 2003:156). Khosrow II imprisoned the wife after he conquered Edessa but sent Sergius, the son, back to Edessa to inherit the ancestral estates (Foss 2003:156). This incident is indicative of the complex relationship which certain aristocrats had with the Sassanian monarchy in that past grudges would have featured prominently in their decision making (Foss 2003:156). The loyalty of some aristocrats would have been reduced as a result of harsh power displays by Sassanian monarchs in the late period. This could have made self-interest prevalent among aristocrats (Foss 2003:156). The new Sassanian monarchs in the

succession period had to try to navigate the political arena where some aristocrats had long held grudges and others like Zādhūyah who were friendly to Sassanian candidates for their own benefit (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066).

The Sassanian candidate, Farrukzādh Khusraw, was reportedly found in the western section of the Persian Empire by Zādhūyah (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). The specific place where this Sassanian candidate was found could have been the same place where Khurrazādh Khusraw was found. Both places bore the name al-Hijārah (Stone Fortress), and were located near Nişībīn in southeastern Anatolia (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). The western section of the Sassanian Empire was clearly an option for those members of the Sassanian family living in isolation. By being in the western section of the Sassanian Empire the Sassanian candidate kept the option open of fleeing over the border to the Byzantine Empire like Khosrow II had done (Daryaei 2009:32). The members of the Sassanian family were fearful for their safety in the succession crisis period (628-632 CE). The fear arose because of the particularism of interests among the leading classes in the Sassanian Empire (Wiesehöfer 2001:174). After Khosrow II's death the Sassanian kingship was used by different aristocratic factions vying with each other to gain more political power (Wiesehöfer 2001:174). The volatile political background created a situation where the Sassanian family members were used largely as figureheads by the aristocratic factions (Wiesehöfer 2001:174).

The Sassanian royal family member, Farrukzādh Khusraw, reportedly ran away to Ḥiṣn al-Hijārah (the Stone Fortress) because of Kavad II's killing of Khosrow II's sons (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). Farrukzādh Khusraw's fears were valid because he was one of Khosrow II's sons and his life would have been threatened if he had stayed at the Sassanian court (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). After years of staying in hiding the important man of state Zādhūyah brought Farrukzādh with him to Ctesiphon so that the son of Khosrow II could become the Sassanian monarch (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1066). With regard to the reign of Farrukzādh Khusraw, *The History of Prophets and Kings* 1066, states that: "The people gave him obedience for a short time, but then rebelled and rose in opposition against him. Some sources state they killed him. His period of royal power was six months." His candidacy was based on the fact that he was a son of Khosrow II.

Farrukzādh Khusraw seems to have not survived the successful coup against him after six months of his reign though and there is no extant coinage of his reign (Bosworth 1999:409 n. 1013). What is probable is that Farrukzādh's political patron, Zādhūyah, did survive the political backlash and that he continued to operate in the Sassanian political arena even after the Arab invasion of Iran.

3.11 Hormizd V

Hormizd V and Azarmigduxt ruled simultaneously in 630-631CE for more than a year (Pourshariati 2008:205). The coins of Hormizd V were minted in Stakhr in Fars and Nihāvand in Media (Pourshariati 2008:205). The two places were at the time controlled by Farrukh Hurmuz, the Prince of the Medes (Pourshariati 2008:205). As a result the numismatic evidence points to Hormizd V being Farrukh Hurmuz, the jilted lover of Azarmigduxt (Pourshariati 2008:205). On Hormizd V's coins (fig. 7) the Sassanian monarch is portrayed as the crown with two wings - this alludes to the war god Verethragana (Schindel 2013:830). Hormizd V's coins seem to be more roughly minted than many of the other late Sassanian monarchs with the mint's shape being more irregular (Schindel 2013:821). Farrukh Hurmuz's attempt to co-opt Azarmigduxt to enhance his own legitimacy also follows the long standing tradition of the marriage alliance (Pourshariati 2008:206). Hormizd V was a Parthian dynast who attempted to usurp the Sassanain throne although his attempt to do so would prove fatal (Pourshariati 2008:206). Faced with Hormizd V's incessant pleas to marry him, Azarmigduxt allegedly sought out the assistance of Sīyāvaksh-i Rāzī from the house of Mihran (Pourshariati 2008:206). This is in contrast with the account given by *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065, where Azarmigduxt confronted Farrukh Hurmuz by herself. It would have been in the best interest of the Mihrans to diminish the influence of their Parthian rivals by killing Hormizd V (Pourshariati 2008:206). Sīyāvaksh-i Rāzī did agree to aid Azarmigduxt in killing Hormizd V because of the political reality (Pourshariati 2008:206).

Dreams and omens reportedly also played a part in Farrukh Hurmuz becoming a monarch (Pourshariati 2008:205 n. 1141). During Khosrow II's reign Farrukhan (Farrukh Hurmuz) reportedly said: "I had a dream, and it was as if I saw myself on Kisrā's throne" (*The History*

of *Prophets and Kings*, 1007). An account of Farrukh Hurmuz's dream reportedly reached Khosrow II and he ordered the general Shahrbaraz to kill Farrukh Hurmuz¹⁶ (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1007–1008). Shahrbaraz reportedly refused to kill Farrukh Hurmuz because he was very competent and had a formidable reputation (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1008). Shahrbaraz was Farrukh Hurmuz's brother and they both were successful in the military campaigns of Khosrow II (wars that lasted 604-628 CE) against the Byzantine Empire (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1008). The issue over Farrukh Hurmuz caused the breakdown of the relationship between Shahrbaraz and Khosrow II (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1008). Khosrow II died in approximately 628 CE before Farrukh Hurmuz could be assassinated (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1009). As opposed to other Sassanian monarch's dreams, Farrukh Hurmuz's dream almost played a part in ensuring that he did not become a monarch.

3.12 Yazdgird III

The ascension of Yazdgird III to the throne in 632 CE is traditionally seen as the point where the period of political turbulence (628-632 CE) came to an end (Howard-Johnston 2010:128). The fact that Yazdgird III was crowned at the Anahita fire temple in Istakhr, the traditional homeland of the house of Sassan, is telling (Daryaee 2009:36). This was a symbolic act by reaffirming the traditional ties to the region but Yazdgird III also needed a safe place to conduct the ceremony (Daryaee 2009:36). The fact that the heartland of the Sassanian family was one of the few places where Yazdgird III could feel secure shows how much the legitimacy had suffered by the end of the succession crisis (Daryaee 2009:36). Yazdgird III was forced to move from province to province to demand loyalty and funds in person (Daryaee 2009:37). Yazdgird III's ascension also coincided with the Arabs being a unified force for the first time in their history which complicated matters further for the new Sassanian monarch (Foster & Foster 2009:190). The Arabs had scarcely figured in the

¹⁶ Farrukh and Shahrbaraz may have been the same person seeing as the name Farukhān, meaning "fortunate joyful", was a fairly common Persian name (Bosworth 1999:319 n. 749). Shahrbaraz was also a name, meaning "boar of the land", and not a rank as claimed by al-Tabari (Bosworth 1999:319:749). The facts point to the possibility that al-Tabari might have been confused and split one person into two separate people in *The History of Prophets and Kings*. In the case of Shahrbaraz and Farrukh being the same person then the dream of Farrukh would refer to Shahrbaraz's future government (Bosworth 1999:328 n. 772).

strategic thinking of the Byzantines and Sassanians until then but Yazdgird III would have to devote an ever increasing amount of his resources to combat the threat of the Arabs (Foster & Foster 2009:190).

“When Yazdgird assumed kingship, he was in constant warfare for 16 years” (*The Historical Geography of the Sasanids* 1988:59). Yazdgird III would need legitimisation techniques in the period of warfare and these were generally to be the norm of his reign (*The Historical Geography of the Sasanids* 1988:59). Minting copper coins was important for Sassanian monarchs as attested by the fact that all Sassanian monarchs minted copper coins except some of the short lived successors of Khosrow II (Schindel 2013:828). Yazdgird III is one of the monarchs attested on copper coins (Schindel 2013:828). On Yazdgird III’s coinage portrait (fig. 7) he is shown wearing a necklace with three large pendants in the middle of the breast (Schindel 2013:831). This might be to signify the affluence of the Sassanian royal family and Yazdgird III as the monarch (Schindel 2013:831). The depiction of Yazdgird III on coins was intended to perpetuate the perception of the affluent and powerful Sassanian family although in Yazdgird III’s time the Sassanian’s fortunes had been waning (Schindel 2013:831). Yazdgird III’s coinage design does not deviate from the traditional design instituted by previous Sassanian monarchs (Schindel 2013:829). Yazdgird III was portrayed on coins by the crown with the two wings and the crescent above which many previous Sassanian monarchs used (Schindel 2013:829). These traditional legitimisation markers were used so as to send the message that the *status quo* was still in effect.

This is an example of the control of the nobility: “When the great men of state among the people of Istakhr received the news that the people of al-Madā’in had rebelled against Farukzādh, they brought Yazdajird to a fire temple called ‘Ardashīr’s fire temple’, crowned him there and hailed him as king” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1067). From the evidence of the quote the nobility seems to have actively searched for information on the disposition of the general populace and when the opportunity to upset the *status quo* presented itself, the nobility seized it and enthroned Yazdgird III in 632 CE. The nobility were eager to take the opportunity to dethrone the incumbent monarch because they wanted to have direct influence on the Sassanian throne and by putting the young Yazdgird III on the throne, they believed they would achieve that aim. Yazdgird III was raised to power in Fars

by a faction that was in reality opposed to the faction in Ctesiphon that had raised Farrukzādh to power (Bosworth 1999:409 n. 1014). Yazdgird III's ascension itself showcases the factionalism inherent in the late Sassanian period (Bosworth 1999:409 n. 1014). Yazdgird III's royal power was severely limited in comparison to his Sassanian predecessors and important provinces like Azerbaijan, Mesopotamia and Khurāsān were at first reluctant to acknowledge the young Sassanian candidate (Bosworth 1999:410 n. 1016). Numismatic evidence points to Hormizd V as a challenger for the Sassanian throne whose power base was in Nišībīn in Upper Mesopotamia (Bosworth 1999:410 n. 1016). What helped Yazdgird III's cause was that the Sassanian general Rustam threw his lot in with the young monarch that would have given him legitimacy and more military strength (Bosworth 1999:410 n. 1016).

The reign of Yazdgird III (632-651 CE) was a period where the Sassanian Empire faced increasing opposition from within and outside of its borders (Daryae 2009:36). This increasing pressure did not stop literary and scientific development within the Sassanian Empire though (Tafazzoli & Khromov 1996:98). In the reign of Yazdgird III a collection of tablets for use in mathematical astronomy (originally created in Khosrow I's reign) was re-edited (Tafazzoli & Khromov 1996:98). The *Xwadāynāmag* (Book of Lords) was a semi-official version of Iranian history that was edited for the first time in Khosrow I (Wiesehöfer 2010:144). Khosrow I had manipulated the representation in the Book of Lords to justify his reforms (Daryae 2009:xvii). In Yazdgird III's reign there were also several additions made to the text that probably were done to justify his actions to some degree (Wiesehöfer 2010:144 n. 56). Khosrow I had set the precedent of utilising his patronage of science and literature as a propaganda tool and this practice continued to some degree in Yazdgird III's reign (Tafazzoli & Khromov 1996:98). The literature of the late Sassanian period frequently devoted a lot of space to describing the ideal Sassanian king and as a result extols the ideas propagated by the Sassanian elite (Tafazzoli & Khromov 1996:100). When Yazdgird III ascended the throne he was reportedly 16 years old and a group of dignitaries acted as his guardians (Litvinsky, Jalilov & Kolesnikov 1996:445). Because Yazdgird III was young and facing obstacles to his rule he used legitimisation practices that were successfully used by his predecessors (Litvinsky, Jalilov & Kolesnikov 1996:445).

According to *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1067: “The most illustrious and the shrewdest of his ministers was the Chief of the Servants.” In name Yazdgird III was the ruler of the Sassanian Empire, but the succession crisis had the effect that the “great men of state” grew more powerful (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1067). Yazdgird III was not able to, in his reign, completely centralise power to strip the men of state of the power they had accrued. The power of the Sassanian Empire proper as a result flagged in Yazdgird III’s reign as a lot of the political power became decentralised. The Arabs could begin their probes over the border and into Iraq in approximately 634 CE in part because of the aforementioned factors (Bosworth 1999:410 n. 1017). The Sassanian Empire was weakened by private interests which had the effect that the Sassanian monarch was not in a position to defend the Sassanian Empire and that had a serious effect on the legitimacy of the Sassanian royal house (Wiesehöfer 2001:315). The destabilising aftereffects the four years of the succession crisis (628-632 CE) on the succeeding Sassanian monarch, Yazdgird III, contributed to the nomadic Arabs being able to ultimately destroy the Sassanian Empire in 651 CE (Wiesehöfer 2001:315).

3.13 Summary

What can be gleaned is that in the succession crisis period the monarchs struggled to legitimise their regimes. A popular technique of legitimisation was to refer to successful predecessors. For example Azarmigduxt and Buran referred to Khosrow II in their propaganda and speeches. In the succession crisis period there were no known rock reliefs commissioned and as such the late Sassanian monarchs commissioned literature and smaller pieces like silver plates, goblets and coins (Wiesehöfer 2010:144). These smaller pieces were less labour intensive and could be circulated outside of the borders of the Sassanian Empire (Wiesehöfer 2010:144). The succession crisis monarchs faced internal opposition from the nobility and priests and as a result many of the monarchs probably could not spare a large amount of resources just to create a propagandistic art piece that may not even have been completed during their reign. The reigns of the succession crisis period monarchs rarely lasted more than a year and as a result they relied on legitimisation techniques that were quick to implement and not a drain on their resources (Wiesehöfer 2001:320).

Chapter 4: Legitimisation of the kings between 628-632 CE compared to previous monarchs (224-302CE)

In this chapter the legitimisation practices of the early Sassanians will be described in their various guises. The role which art, coinage, the aristocracy, genealogy, religion, construction projects and political strategies played in the legitimisation of the Sassanian dynasty, will be analysed. The legitimisation practices of the early Sassanian period will be compared to the late Sassanian period and the changes will be analysed. The choice was made to compare specifically the early Sassanians with the late Sassanians so as to see how legitimisation practices were formed and how they had changed by the late Sassanian period. By undertaking this comparison a more holistic picture could be formed of the legitimisation practices of the Sassanian monarchs. The comparison in the study will focus on the rulers of the period of approximately 224 CE to 302 CE: Ardashir I [224 CE to 242 CE], Shapur I [240 CE to 270/272 CE], Hormizd I [270 CE to 271 CE], Wahram I [271 CE to 274 CE], Wahram II [274 CE to 291 CE], Wahram III [292 CE] and Narseh [292 CE to 302 CE] (Bosworth 1999:xxv). The period of Sassanian history was chosen because this was when Sassanian legitimisation techniques were first used and developed into a coherent system.

The early Sassanian government was primarily preoccupied with spearheading a movement (that had popular support) to restore Iranian rule over much of the Near East after several centuries of firstly Seleucid and then Parthian rule (Feltham 2010:2). The early Sassanian period was largely a period of expansion as under the rule of Ardashir I and Shapur I the Sassanian Empire expanded to include most of Central Asia and parts of North India (Feltham 2010:2). It was a period of optimism as opposed to the entropy and paranoia that plagued the aristocracy of the Sassanian Empire during the succession crisis period (Feltham 2010:2). With the advent of the Sassanian era the Persians were ruled by an indigenous dynasty and this solidified popular movement behind the ruling dynasty (Feltham 2010:2). The Sassanian Empire became the most stable, entrepreneurial and powerful state in Eurasia and the Sassanian's luxury goods became some of the most sought after products of the Silk Road (Feltham 2010:2). The rise of the Sassanian Empire coincided with a period of political disunity in many of the other significant powers of the 3rd century CE (Feltham 2010:2).

There was religious and political disunity in China as the Han dynasty fell in 220 CE and in the Roman Empire the Age of Crisis¹⁷ occurred between 235-284 CE (Feltham 2010:3). The disarray of the potential competitors of the Sassanian Empire in the initial phase of its existence allowed the Iranian dynasty to expand its power quickly and to a greater extent than might have otherwise have been possible (Feltham 2010:3).

From their Parthian predecessors the Sassanians inherited more than legitimisation tools, the Sassanians also inherited initiatives in the economic, social and political realms (Wiesehöfer 2001:153). Sassanians did not mention the Parthians: “And the people we displaced from the Roman empire, from Aneran, those we settled in the empire of Eran, in Persis, in Parthia, in Susiana, in Mesopotamia and in all other provinces in which we, our father and our ancestors and forefathers possessed crown domains” (Wiesehöfer 2001:155). In the quoted inscription of Shapur I from Naqsh-e Rostam, Parthia is mentioned as being one of the more important regions but the history attempts to create the impression that the Sassanians and their ancestors always ruled the various parts of “Eran” (Wiesehöfer 2001: 155). The Sassanians took over many of the Parthian initiatives in the early Sassanian period, but they did not credit the Parthians at all. They consciously omitted mention of the previous dynasty in the texts (Wiesehöfer 2001:155). According to the Sassanian view the Achaemenids did rule prior to the Sassanians but Ardashir I claimed he was descended from the Achaemenids (Feltham 2010:2). The Sassanian view as a result, postulated that the Sassanian family rule of Persia stretched back centuries in one line through the Achaemenids to the mythological Kayānid dynasty that allegedly predated it (Canepa 2013:856). The Sassanians claimed the Achaemenid’s achievements as their own and that gave them legitimacy (Feltham 2010: 2).

A tool that early Sassanians used to cement their legitimacy was rock inscriptions that were placed in strategic places. The use of rock reliefs was very popular in the early Sassanian

¹⁷ The Age of Crisis was a period of turbulence within the Roman Empire that was initiated with the assassination of the emperor Severus Alexander in 235 CE. Violent political change ensued after the assassination and in less than fifty years, eighteen emperors successively held power. The period of crisis only came to an end when Diocletian came to power in 284 CE and through reforms brought relative stability to the Roman Empire.

period. The seven rock reliefs that are all attributed to Shapur I attests to this popularity (Canepa 2013:858). The popularity of Sassanian rock reliefs was such that four out of the first five Sassanian monarchs had rock reliefs commissioned (Canepa 2013:858). This popularity is in stark contrast to rock reliefs in the late Sassanian period when only Khosrow II commissioned rock reliefs and there is only one finished example of his rock reliefs which remains intact (Canepa 2013:859). In inscriptions, the legends and idioms are essential to understanding the Sassanian imagery and the correct deciphering of these slogans is integral in understanding these inscriptions (Soudavar 2003:42). Large rock reliefs were intended to convey a message from afar and were regularly placed at strategic places to catch the attention of the people (Soudavar 2003:44). Soudavar mentions an important point in Sassanian rock reliefs: “The pictorial vocabulary of the *image* therefore took precedence over that of the *inscription*” (Soudavar 2003:44). The inscription could not be read from afar as one had to approach it to be able to read the inscription which was written in Middle Persian, Greek, Parthian etc. (Soudavar 2003:44). The Sassanian dynasty ruled over a culturally diverse empire. To make it possible for most of the different literate subjects to read the inscription it had to be translated into the most prevalent languages (Soudavar 2003:42). The pictorial imagery could also convey an image to the illiterate who made up the majority in ancient states (Soudavar 2003:44). Rock reliefs served as permanent reminders of a Sassanian king’s achievements which was an appealing way for early Sassanian kings to immortalise their achievements (Canepa 2013:858). The fact that rock reliefs were not so popular in the late Sassanian period could be attributed to the fact that creating rock reliefs was a time consuming project. It required that a monarch should have a long and stable reign and this was not the case for rulers in the late Sassanian period.

There were decentralising political forces at the inception of the Sassanian Empire. For example, the local kings had their own agendas (Pourshariati 2008:50). It was as a result of the cooperation of the “petty kings” and some of the Parthian feudal families that the Sassanians could become rulers (Pourshariati 2008:50). To win the support of well-established aristocratic families the Sassanian family had to reinforce their legitimacy and one way they attempted to do this was to create legends and myths surrounding their genealogy (Daryaee 1998:433). An early romantic account, present in the text *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pabagān*, states for example that a local ruler Pabag gave his daughter in marriage to Sassan after learning that Sassan was descended from Darius III (Daryaee 1998:433). From

the union of Sassan and Pabag's daughter Ardashir I was reportedly born (Daryaee 1998:433). This account of Ardashir I's origin is an example of a legend being created to increase not only his own legitimacy but also the legitimacy of his dynasty (Daryaee 1998:433). The mythical account of Ardashir's origin cannot be taken as a factual account of Ardashir's origin. It is only an indication of the myths surrounding the Sassanian family, even in the early Sassanian period (Daryaee 1998:433). The sacred historiography was also a Sassanian product. The Avesta, for example, starts with the mythical dynasties of Peshdadians and Kayānids (Daryaee 1998:434). No matter the legend or myth, the Sassanians normally portrayed themselves as the heirs to the Zoroastrian tradition. This increased their legitimacy in Iran (Daryaee 1998:434).

4.1 Use of art between two time periods

Ardashir I was the monarch who initiated the Sassanian rock relief carving that was to become so important in the early Sassanian period (Canepa 2013:857). Scholarship knows of thirty nine rock reliefs that the Sassanians brought to completion, but it is entirely likely that the Sassanians carved even more rock reliefs that have been destroyed (Canepa 2013:857). In late Sassanian propaganda more emphasis is actually placed on the importance of the king than in the early Sassanian period (Huff 2010:39). The rock relief with which Ardashir I celebrated his victory over the Parthians is the largest surviving Sassanian rock relief and is located on a mountainside near his town Ardashir Khurrah (Bosworth 1999:14 n. 56). The brash and large propaganda at the inception of the Sassanian era was intended to catch the attention of the people and make it clear that the members of the Sassanian dynasty were the new legitimate and powerful rulers of the ancient Near East (Bosworth 1999:14 n. 56). On Ardashir I's rock reliefs at Firuzabad the king is shown on an equal footing with Ahura Mazda but with a respectful salute the Sassanian king acknowledges the superiority of the god (Huff 2010:39). The fact that Apam Napāt was represented as being on the horse of Ardashir I in the Firuzabad inscriptions indicated that the deity and monarch were close (Soudavar 2012:40). The rock reliefs of their predecessors inspired Sassanians to create ones of their own: "The early Sassanians' experience of their home province's landscape, marked with the reliefs of their predecessors, likely inspired them to engage new sites within Pārs and shape the wider topography of their empire with rock reliefs" (Canepa 2013:857). The Sassanians were prolific in creating rock reliefs and this art form was quintessentially Iranian

with both the Parthians and Achaemenids having created rock reliefs prior to those of the Sassanians' (Canepa 2013:857). Rock reliefs were for the most part an exclusively royal technique to legitimise rule (Canepa 2013:857). The exception to the rule was Kirdir who was the Zoroastrian high priest of the Sassanian Empire under Bahram II (Canepa 2013:861). Kirdir commissioned rock reliefs adjacent to royal reliefs and he could do this because royal power was weak at this point (Canepa 2013:861). In the succession crisis period royal power was weak to such a degree that the Sassanian monarchs could not commission any rock reliefs.

When Ardashir I established control over Iran and parts of Mesopotamia the immediate concern was the creation of a distinctive set of dynastic images (Harper 2010:71). A dynastic programme was launched to give visible definition to Sassanian authority in coinage, silver vessels and rock reliefs (Harper 2010:71). At the inception of the Sassanian Empire with Ardashir I as king, the most prevalent themes in rock reliefs were the triumph and divine investiture (Canepa 2013:862). An example of an investiture rock relief combined with elements of triumph is Ardashir I's last relief (fig. 21) at Naqsh-e Rostam (Soudavar 2003:33). The relief at Naqsh-e Rostam portrays Ahura Mazda on a horse offering a ring of investiture to Ardashir I, who is a near-perfect mirror image of the chief Zoroastrian deity (Soudavar 2003:33). The mirror image continues with what is depicted under the hooves of the horses with the last Parthian king Ardawan/Artabanus IV under Ardashir I's horse and Ahriman (the evil Zoroastrian deity), under Ahura Mazda's mount (Soudavar 2003:33). The message of the rock reliefs was easily understandable: Parthian rule was illegitimate and Ahrimanic in nature (Soudavar 2003:33). The Sassanian rock reliefs tended to display simple compositions. The Naqsh-e Rostam reliefs are an example of this. Its central point of focus is two immobile equestrian figures that demonstrate in clear terms the interdependent relationship between god and king (Harper 2010:72). According to Overlaet (2013:328) the image on the Naqsh-e Rustam I relief originally represented a Zoroastrian priest that was later changed to represent Ahura Mazda. In the Paikuli inscription Narseh makes it clear though that it was expected of the gods to bestow kingship and glory (*farr*) on a Sassanian candidate (Soudavar 2003:77). The concept of the gods bestowing kingship and glory was a crucial aspect of legitimacy and it would have been politically advantageous to represent these concepts on propaganda (Soudavar 2003:77).

An important part of a Sassanian monarch's legitimacy was hunting and equestrian pursuits which served to showcase skills that would be useful in a war. Ardashir I's grandfather Sassan reportedly set the precedent and was also clearly proficient in these two important pursuits: "He was also a devotee of the chase and of equestrian pursuits" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 814). It is telling of the Sassanian attitude that of the little information that is given of the figure Sassan it is mentioned that Sassan was devoted to hunting and equestrian pursuits above all else. On silks and silverware one of the most prominent themes was the royal hunter slaying the lion (fig. 8). The imagery demonstrated the military prowess of the monarch (Feltham 2010:4). The horse bound hunt was so iconic in Sassanian culture that it frequently featured as the central motif in Sassanian silk art designs and this iconographical ideology spread along the silk route to the West and China (Feltham 2010:17). In silverware art, the most popular heraldic design was also that of the royal hunt (Feltham 2010:24). The prominence of hunting and equestrianism in the literary sources and the physical evidence indicates that it would have been very important, even from the early period, for the Sassanian king to be competent in these skills. Hunting was a favourite activity of the nobility and one in which women also participated in (Daryaee 2009:51). With the art being widely distributed all along the Silk Road the propagandistic message of the king's power would reach a large audience and would possibly influence many citizens of other countries and regions. The hunting theme retained its popularity in the late Sassanian period as evidenced by the c. 5th to 7th century CE plate depicting Heracles who brought the Erymanthean boar to Eurystheus (Feltham 2010:25).

To ensure the continuation of Sassanian rule, King Ardashir I carefully prepared for his son, Shapur I, who succeeded him as the next Sassanian king (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 820). Evidence of preparation by Ardashir I: "When he came to the end of his life, he set forth his testament for his successor" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 820). An internal succession struggle in the Parthian Empire between the Parthians' Ardawan IV and Balash/Vologases VI was one of the reasons why the Arsacids became weakened to such a degree that Ardashir I could defeat them (Daryaee 2009:3). As a result Ardashir I would most probably have been mindful of the devastation that a succession struggle could have on an empire and wanted to ensure a safe and efficient transfer of power from the incumbent monarch to the prince, that would be respected by all parties (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 820). That is why Ardashir I chose to compose a testament in his own lifetime so that

the validity of it could not be called into question. In *The History of Prophets and Kings* it also states: “and he had his son Shābūr crowned within his own lifetime” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 820). There is a possibility that Ardashir I’s successor, Shapur I, was crowned within the first Sassanian monarch’s lifetime and could point to Ardashir I wanting to initiate a controlled transfer of power that he could still oversee.

According to *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 819, the Parthian king, Ardawan, met Ardashir in battle on the plain, Hurmuzjan. Ardawan was allegedly killed personally by Ardashir I and the Sassanian ruler then dismounted and trampled the Parthian king’s head (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 819). The description contained in *The History of Prophets and Kings* of Ardashir I’s victory over Ardawan IV is very reminiscent of how this moment in history was depicted in the Naqsh-e Rostam rock reliefs (Soudavar 2003:33). In the Naqsh-e Rostam rock reliefs Ardashir I is also shown trampling Ardawan IV’s corpse but in the reliefs the Sassanian is shown doing this with a horse (Soudavar 2003:33). The common theme in both depictions is that the vanquished had his body trampled and situated under the victor (Soudavar 2003:33). In the situation depicted in literature and art, the shame of the vanquished is increased and the power that the victor has accrued is emphasised (Soudavar 2003:33). The scene of Ardashir I trampling Ardawan IV’s body may have been fiction but it was still a powerful symbol of the Sassanian victory that was reproduced in art and literature.

One of the factors that clearly distinguishes Ardashir I and Shapur I was the difference in the propaganda of the two respective rulers (Soudavar 2012:31). In Shapur I’s propaganda, like the Bishapur rock reliefs (fig. 9) where there is a winged Eros, there are foreign elements present, specifically Roman elements (Soudavar 2012:31). The Roman elements in Shapur I’s propaganda came about as a result of Shapur I’s military successes against the emperors Gordian III, Philip the Arab and Valerian which gave the Sassanians access to Roman craftsmen (Frye 1984:296-297). The borrowing of foreign elements “is done for the purpose of conveying more *farr*” (Soudavar 2012:31). The *farr* (or *xwarrah*) was the divine grace/god-given royal charisma that was integral to the Sassanians’ perception of their legitimacy as rulers (Wiesehöfer 2010:136). Shapur I’s consecutive victories against a powerful imperial power gave Shapur I the opportunity to claim the highest degree of *farr*, the Aryan *farr* which

was needed to vanquish the non-Iranian people (Soudavar 2012:31). The Roman symbols that were present in some of Shapur I's propaganda not only came about as a result of an influx of Roman craftsmen, but also because of Shapur I's victories over the Roman Empire and the cultural significance these victories had for the Sassanians (Soudavar 2012:31). The successors of Khosrow II in the late Sassanian period did not have the option of claiming the highest degree of *farr*, because there were no military victories over non-Iranians for which they could claim responsibility. Claiming and portraying military victories over non-Iranian groups clearly was an integral mechanism for the Sassanians to increase their legitimacy and the early Sassanian monarchs used their victories in propaganda to legitimise their rule.

An example of a rock relief where Roman elements are present is the Bishapur II relief (Soudavar 2012:32). The reliefs of Bishapur II and Bishapur III were the last of Shapur I's rock reliefs (Canepa 2013:873). Shapur I's early rock reliefs both reflect and depart from the forms of rock reliefs that Ardashir I commissioned (Canepa 2013:873). Ardashir I's reliefs took inspiration from Achaemenid sculptures visible at Persepolis and in the tombs of the Achaemenids and set the tone for the "classical art style" of the early Sassanians (Canepa 2013:873). The reliefs of Bishapur II and Bishapur III show evidence of Roman compositional elements (Canepa 2013:873). The central panel of the Bishapur II relief portrays the Roman emperor Valerian with Shapur I seated on a horse next to him and grabbing the Roman's wrist (Canepa 2013:866). Gordian III was represented as prone and beneath Shapur's horse, while Phillip was portrayed as kneeling in the Bishapur II relief (Canepa 2013:866). All three Roman Emperors are portrayed in various submissive poses with Valerian being captured, Gordian III being captured and Phillip forced into making an embarrassing treaty (Canepa 2013:866). The Roman element in the Bishapur II relief is the winged Eros that is depicted as flying above Shapur I (Soudavar 2012:31). Eros was a representation of the Zoroastrian deity Apam Napāt: "Apām Napāt, 'Scion of the Waters,' deity associated with the fire in the heavenly waters; and others" (Skjærvø 2013:552). According to Zoroastrianism, the highest *farr* was kept underwater by the aquatic Apam Napāt. The deity had to release it for a monarch to receive this *farr* (Soudavar 2012:31). The symbolism of using Eros had an antecedent in the Parthians' use of Hellenistic Nike in images as presenting a victory wreath. Representing Apam Napāt as Eros would have been even more potent because of the Parthian tradition (Soudavar 2012:31). It seems that the Roman influence on Sassanian reliefs continued into the late Sassanian period. The reliefs of

Khosrow II at Taq-e Bustan have several Roman features present (Canepa 2013:873). Two winged victories are present in the space over the relief that corresponds to the spandrel of a late Roman triumphal arch (Canepa 2013:874). Stylistic influences were not limited to only Roman though in the late Sassanian period, the elephants were carved in the contemporary South Asian style on the Taq-e Bustan relief (Canepa 2013:874).

A sharp distinction that could be made between Sassanian monarchs from the late Sassanian period and the early Sassanian period in respect to legitimacy was that the early Sassanians, especially Shapur I, relied on military victories to sustain legitimacy. Shapur I is described in *The History of Prophets and Kings* as being (among other things) virtuous, intelligent and tender towards his subjects (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 826). In this list of positive aspects that are listed to describe Shapur I the fourth aspect to be mentioned is Shapur I's "ardor in battle" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 826). The Sassanian Empire was surrounded by enemies like the Huns and other nomadic groups in the east and the Roman/Byzantine Empire in the west. Military proficiency was therefore an important trait that monarchs had to portray. In the succession crisis period the Sassanian Empire was still recovering from a serious military defeat and the monarchs did not have the opportunity to be seen as military proficient (Canepa 2010:324). The fact that the succession crisis period monarchs did not have access to these legitimisation tools would have been detrimental to their legitimacy. Although military prowess was important the fact is that Sassanian rulers did not traditionally fight on the front line and generals were entrusted with leading the army (Wiesehöfer 2010:137). Shapur I's siege of Nisibis in the 250s CE is described: "a breach was opened up for Sābūr, by means of which he was able to gain entry. He then killed the [defending] soldiers, enslaved the women and children" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 826). The description of Shapur I's actions in the siege is in direct contrast to known historical facts that Sassanian kings usually were not present on the frontline (Wiesehöfer 2010:137). The discrepancy exists because Sassanian monarchs chose to portray themselves in propaganda and Sassanian sources as being personally present in battle as depicted in Shapur I's Dārābgerd relief and Ardashir I's Naqsh-e Rostam rock reliefs (Canepa 2013:864). By portraying themselves as being responsible for the victory the early Sassanian monarchs largely took the glory from generals, who were potential political opponents as the case of Shahrbaraz proves, and used it to strengthen their position as rulers of the Sassanian Empire. The late Sassanian monarchs were not successful in taking the glory from their subjects and

appropriating it for their own use and as a result nobles and generals could become famous and politically influential.

One of the reasons for the political legitimacy was because of the belief that the fate of the Sassanian king was intimately connected to the fate of Iran and the Iranians (Wiesehöfer 2010:137). The death of the king would purportedly bring about chaos and disaster and as a result the Sassanian king did not generally fight on the front lines (Wiesehöfer 2010:137). Individual rulers derived their legitimacy from their royal descent, their bodily intactness and the god-given royal charisma (*xwarrah*) that they constantly referred to in their rock reliefs (Wiesehöfer 2010:136). When the Sassanian kings stated they received the charisma from the divine realm and that they were similar to the divine, they essentially claimed that they derived their life force from the gods (Soudavar 2012:31). On Sassanian rock reliefs the images of the kings are usually juxtaposed with images of the gods and this was done so as to give the impression that the king rivalled the gods in majesty and power (Soudavar 2012:31). The purpose of the Sassanian rock reliefs was to claim divine status for the king (Soudavar 2012:31). The fact that the divine nature of the king was emphasised on the rock reliefs indicate what the Sassanians regarded as important and in part how their legitimacy survived even the political upheaval of the late Sassanian period (Soudavar 2012:31).

Shapur I's attitude towards his father and predecessor was on the whole, at least publicly, positive (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 825). At the coronation of Shapur I, the great men of state: "sent up prayers for his long life and went on at length in mentioning his father and the latter's excellent characteristics. Sābūr informed them that they could not have invoked his benevolence by any means more acceptable to him than by what they said about his father," (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 826). Shapur I's early rock reliefs largely follow and depart from the "classical style" created by Ardashir I (Canepa 2013:873). It was only later in Shapur I's reign, after he had achieved his much vaunted victories over the three Roman emperors and had his own achievements, that he deviated to a degree from the early Sassanian "classical style" (Canepa 2013:873). Shapur I also features prominently in many of Ardashir I's reliefs, appearing as co-ruler in a relief that depicts the investment of local rulers in Salmās (Canepa 2013:865). Shapur I located three of his rock reliefs at the same sites that his father had chosen (Canepa 2013:865). By locating his reliefs near his father's shows the

desire that Shapur I had to connect his rule with that of the first Sassanian monarch (Canepa 2013:865). On a rock relief at Naqsh-e Rostam (which was a site that Ardashir I had also chosen for reliefs) Shapur I emphasised his descent from Ardashir I (Soudavar 2003:43). The Shapur I Naqsh-e Rostam relief (fig.10) states: “I am the Mazdean Lord Shāpur...whose seeds is from the gods, son of the Mazdean Lord Ardashir” (Soudavar 2003:43). In the same sentence, where Shapur I mentions that he is descended from the gods, he also mentions that he is descended from Ardashir I. This also illustrates the importance that Shapur I attached to his patrilineal descent (Soudavar 2003:43). In the early years of Shapur I’s reign he did not have the time to establish himself as a respected ruler in his own right and linked his rule with that of Ardashir I to gain legitimacy at an early stage. This action is very reminiscent of 7th century CE Sassanian rulers who linked their rule to Khosrow II in an attempt to gain legitimacy.

Another way of depicting Sassanian monarchs and circulating this image widely in the Sassanian Empire was through the production of decorative vessels (Harper 2010:78). In the Sassanian Empire the production of vessels was restricted in form, subject and design (Harper 2010:78). In the early Sassanian period the silver bowls and plates only depicted portraits of significant people and elite equestrian hunters (Harper 2010:78). The restriction on what could be depicted on silver vessels allowed the elites to dictate what was shown and circulated and as such controlled the visual propaganda (Harper 2010:78). During Shapur II’s reign (309-379 CE) a central Sassanian court style model was established and rigidly adhered to in the court workshops in Iran (Harper 2010:84). On one silver plate (diameter 28 centimeters) from Abkhazia (fig. 13) it seems that a young Wahram I is depicted, when he was still a prince (Harper 2010:79). Evidence of it being Wahram I depicted on the plate is the fact that on the reverse of the plate the name “Bahram” is inscribed and the style of the plate matches it approximately to Wahram I’s time period (Harper 2010:79). The silver plate depicts an allegedly youthful Wahram I (before he became the Sassanian king) on a horse, lassoing one boar while another boar lies dead (Harper 2010:79). The scene on the plate is intended to show the vigour of Wahram I, possibly to build legitimacy for him when he became the Sassanian monarch.

In *The History of Prophets and Kings* it is mentioned that Wahram was the son of Hormizd I (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 833). In the rock inscriptions of Kirdir at Naqsh-e Rostam though it is stated: “And afterwards, when Bahram [I], the king of kings, the son of Shapur, died” (Wiesehöfer 2001:199). The rock inscription of Kirdir that is the primary source in this instance is more probable of being correct than the *The History of Prophets and Kings* which was written in the 10th century (Bosworth 1999:v). Daryaee (2009:10) is furthermore of the opinion that Wahram I was the eldest son of Shapur I that was bypassed by Hormizd I in the line of succession.

Wahram II was the most prolific patron of rock carving with ten recorded rock reliefs (Canepa 2013:858). Wahram II tended to commission rock reliefs to be carved at sites like Naqsh-e Rostam and Bishapur that had already begun to accumulate a number of reliefs (Canepa 2013:861). When Wahram II chose to carve rock reliefs at new sites, like in Fars, the reliefs were carved close to a natural feature like a spring or river (Canepa 2013:861). By choosing to carve the rock relief near a natural feature the impact that it would have upon a viewer could have been greater (Canepa 2013:861). The most common theme in Wahram II's rock reliefs was that of the Sassanian monarch receiving the respect of his family or courtiers (Canepa 2013:861). Wahram II also sponsored scenes of equestrian duels and the submission of foreign emissaries (Canepa 2013:861). While Achaemenid rock reliefs served as tombs, the early Sassanian rock reliefs simply contained figural imagery although they were often connected to sacred sites (Canepa 2013:861). Sites like Taq-e Bostan and Naqsh-e Rostam were still used for rock reliefs by Khosrow II as in the earlier periods because of the history and reverence attached to the sites.

On Wahram II's relief at Naqsh-e Rostam (fig. 11) the monarch is depicted opposite a group of figures with an array of different headgear (Soudavar 2012:40). A figure in the group wears a bonnet with a lion's head, a symbol of Mithra, and as a result this figure could have been meant to represent the god (Soudavar 2012:40). A second figure is wearing a bonnet with a horse's head, the symbol of the deity Tishtrya, the god of the seasonal rains and purveyor of *farr* (Skjærvø 2013:551). In front of the group that faces Wahram II, is a female figure wearing a tiara with earflaps that was commonly used to signify the deity Anahita (Soudavar 2012:40). Depicting Anahita closest to the Sassanian monarch and in front of the

group of deities illustrates the importance of Anahita in the Sassanian period (Soudavar 2012:40). This importance in part stemmed from the fact that the Sassanian family had originally been priests at the Anahita temple in Istakhr before their emergence as a royal power (Daryaei 2009:3). In the relief the theme is that the gods are aligned before the kings and greet him so as to show their approval and support for the king (Soudavar 2012:40).

Certain rock reliefs that were carved during Wahram II's reign allude to a new trend in the social structures (Harper 2011:3). A few sculptures in the period depict people other than the monarch (Harper 2011:3). Two sculptures at Barm-e Delak and Tang-e Qandīl depict a female with a male that wears a cap of a prince or noble (Harper 2011:3). It has been suggested that the male figure in the rock art is a royal figure who does not wear the standard Sassanian crown (Harper 2011:3). The priest Kirdir also added his image and his inscriptions to already existing royal rock reliefs and rock faces beside the existing reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam, Sar Mashed, Naqsh-e Rajab and Kirdir Ka'bah of Zardusht at Naqsh-e Rostam (Frye 1984:304). The inscriptions of Kirdir display the account of his social and political rise, his labours for Zoroastrianism and his spiritual journey to the "other world" (Wiesehöfer 2001:155). The self-testimonial rock inscription of Kirdir at Naqsh-e Rajab shows a portrait (fig. 12) of Kirdir in raised relief (Wiesehöfer 2001:154). In addition to stylistic conventions, Sassanian functionaries developed a precise sign language for communication. This was used on the Silk Road (Soudavar 2009:423). On this rock relief Kirdir's portrait seems to show, through the Sassanian number hand sign language, the number 20 which was a sign of greeting between important people (Soudavar 2009:424). The number 20 in sign language was a sign where the thumb was put under the proximal phalange of the index finger and it was also synonymous with victory and excellence (Soudavar 2009:424). The number of rock art commissioned by non-Sassanian royals is indicative of the power that the priestly hierarchy and aristocracy enjoyed (Harper 2011:3). Kirdir and others of high rank were excluded from commissioning such dynastic monuments prior to Wahram II's rule (Harper 2011:3). The non-Sassanian elite groups seem to have gained sufficient influence and authority to gain the previously exclusively royal privilege under Wahram II and possibly under Wahram III (Harper 2011:3).

A lot of Wahram III's resources were directed towards fighting Narseh and as a result no rock reliefs were commissioned in his reign (Daryaee 1998:439). Wahram III's lack of rock reliefs contrasts strongly with his predecessor, Wahram II, who was the most prolific patron of rock reliefs (Canepa 2013:858). Political circumstances prevented Wahram III from participating in a form of propaganda that was very popular in the early Sassanian period (Canepa 2013:858). In the official Sassanian history it is stated that Wahram III died of old age (Daryaee 1998: 439). This indicates a scenario where Wahram III may have been captured by Narseh and lived out his days as a political captive (Daryaee 1998:439). Narseh was still Wahram III's great-uncle and fratricide may have impacted negatively on Narseh's public image (Daryaee 1998:439). The fratricide that Kavad II committed for instance in the succession crisis period, could have impacted negatively on the image of the Sassanian family.

The earliest Sassanian royal image found on a silver vessel is from Wahram II's reign (Harper 2010:78). The image is a medallion portrait of Wahram II that appears on a silver cup (fig. 14) which was found in Sargveshi, Georgia (Harper 2010:78). On the medallion portrait Wahram II is depicted (as on his coins) together with a number of people, among them his wife and son (Harper 2010:78). An approximate contemporary of the aforementioned medallion portrait are scenes on silver plates of equestrian hunters (Harper 2010:78). It can be deduced, from the dress and the equipment, that the people that are depicted in these hunting scenes are of considerable importance in society (Harper 2010:78). Those that are depicted are not the Sassanian monarch though but most probably the Sassanian princes that ruled (under the great king) in the regions of Armenia, Meshan, Guilan, Kerman and Sakastan (Harper 2010:78). By depicting the princes as energetic and effective hunters, an image is created of them as physically vigorous young men, ready to ascend to the Sassanian throne (Harper 2010:78). On a silver cup from Wahram II's reign (from the Tiflis Museum) there are two roundels that depict Wahram II emergence from lotus petals encircled by sunflower petals (Soudavar 2003:55). The duality of the symbolism of the scene is evident when the lotus petals and sunflower petals are analysed (Soudavar 2003:55). The lotus petals conveyed the *farr* (divine glory of kingship) of Apam-Napāt and the sunflower ring depicts the Mithraic radiance similar to the depiction of sunbursts on other Sassanian artworks (Soudavar 2003:55). The fact that Apam-Napāt was a creator-god and that Mithra was the

god of contracts and a sun god made the dual symbolism very powerful to the early Sassanians (Wiesehöfer 2001:98).

Narseh, who ascended the throne in 292 CE, was the son of Shapur I (Bosworth 1999:48 n. 140). Narseh had been overlooked many times in favour of other candidates: Hormizd I, Wahram I, Wahram II and Wahram III (Wiesehöfer 2001:319). At his crowning ceremony Narseh promised: “benevolence and adjured them [nobles and great ones of state] to aid him in the business of ruling,” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 835). This benevolence did not extend to the nobles that supported Wahram III, and who Narseh had executed (Frye 1984:306). The promise of benevolence was aimed at the nobles that supported Narseh or possibly stayed neutral in the succession crisis (Frye 1984:306). Narseh was of the opinion that his legitimate right to the Sassanian throne was usurped by the first three Wahrams after the reign of Hormizd I (Bosworth 1999:48 n. 141). Narseh altered Wahram II’s investiture relief at Bishapur so that the propaganda reflected his opinion (Bosworth 1999:48 n. 141). The changes which Narseh made to the Bishapur V relief substituted his name for that of Wahram II and added the figure of a prostrate foe under the monarch’s horse (Bosworth 1999:48 n. 141). The prostrate figure under the horse was most probably Vahunam, the main political force behind Wahram III’s rise to power in the province of Fars (Bosworth 1999:48 n. 141). Narseh in effect radically changed what was essentially an investiture relief into a victory relief that details a triumph over the son of the original patron of the relief. By altering the Bishapur relief Narseh achieved two aims, he reduced Wahram II’s visual presence on rock reliefs and he added a rock relief to his propaganda campaign with minimum effort (Bosworth 1999:48 n. 141).

Narseh mentions in the Paikuli inscriptions that he owes his success in dethroning Wahram III to “Ohrmazd and all the gods and Anāhīd, the Lady” (Humbach and Skjaervo 1983:24, 33). This inclusive religious passage propagates the message that all the gods sanctioned his rule (Soudavar 2012:40). By giving thanks to all the gods the chance that worshippers of other different gods would be offended, is also minimised (Soudavar 2012:40). A visual depiction of the link that Narseh tried to foster between his reign and the Zoroastrian gods was his relief at Naqsh-e Rostam (Soudavar 2012:40). A Sassanian king, who lacked a decisive victory over a foreign enemy and could not claim an increased *farr*, frequently chose

to promote the support of the gods after a relatively minor victory (Soudavar 2012:39). The Naqsh-e Rostam VIII relief of Narseh (fig. 15) was as a result most probably commissioned in c.296 CE, after his early victories over Galerius and before his defeat in the third battle (Soudavar 2012:43). On the Naqsh-e Rostam relief Narseh is surrounded on all sides by gods with Apam Napat, Anahita on his left (Soudavar 2012:38). The gods Tishtrya and Mithra are on Narseh's right on the relief (Soudavar 2012:38). In the relief Anahita wears a crenelated crown that is a better reflection of the king (Soudavar 2012:41). On the relief Anahita hands Narseh a ring, a popular theme in ancient Near Eastern propaganda (Soudavar 2012:44). In a relief from approximately 2000 BCE of King Anubanini (King of Lullubians in southeastern Kurdistan) at Sar-e pol-e Zahab, there is also an exchange of rings on the occasion of victories (Soudavar 2012:44). The Persian name for such a ring is *yarēh* and this ring was often mentioned in connection with emblems of kingship (Soudavar 2012:44). The *yarēh*, because of its circular shape, signified the support that a king would receive from the deities (Soudavar 2012:44).

Narseh's Paikuli rock inscription states that he overthrew Wahram III and mounted the throne in the name of the gods (Skjærvø 2013:557). The Paikuli inscription also states that Narseh mounted the throne in the name of his father (Shapur I) and his ancestors (Skjærvø 2013:557). It indicates the importance of his father and ancestors as legitimisational factors in that they are mentioned in the same passage as the gods (Skjærvø 2013:557). By mentioning Shapur I the fact was that Narseh sought to connect his rule to this successful forebear (Skjærvø 2013:557). Narseh's conduct was also very similar to Shapur I with both being tolerant towards minority religions, maintaining the importance of traditional Zoroastrian gods like Anahita and Apam Napat (Skjærvø 2013:557). Narseh also sought to replicate the military success of Shapur I against the Romans but in this aspect he could not match Shapur I's achievements. Narseh had declared war on Rome in 296 CE and, though he was initially successful against Galerius, the Sassanian monarch eventually suffered a defeat (Daryaee 2009:13). Narseh did not only proclaim to mount the throne in the name of his father but seems to have modelled his own conduct on that of his father (Skjærvø 2013:557). This is very reminiscent of Buran and Azarmigduxt modelling their conduct on that of their father, Khosrow II (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1065). It was politically advantageous for a Sassanian monarch to link his reign to a successful predecessor, regardless of the period.

Romans were not the only non-Iranian prisoners of war that were deported into the Sassanian Empire so that their skills contribute to the Sassanian economy (Harper 2011:13). “Syrian craftsmen from Antioch, brought east as prisoners of war in the 3rd century CE and 6th century, probably played an important role in the development of this craft within the Sasanian kingdom” (Harper 2011:13). The mosaics were important forms of expression because they regularly adorned the walls and ceilings of the residences of nobles and kings (Harper 2011:13). At the Bishapur site eighteen panels of mosaics have been found that date from the 3rd century CE (Harper 2011:13). The Bishapur mosaics depict Dionysiac motifs (female dancers, musicians, masks etc.) which hints that these mosaics could have been used in a royal banquet hall (Harper 2011:13). The Bishapur mosaics could also have linked thematically with the nearby victory rock reliefs of Shapur I as both depict Dionysiac pomp or victory celebration (Harper 2011:13). The mosaics were as a result created to impress guests and showcase the wealth and artistic proficiency of the Sassanian Empire (Harper 2011:13). At Ctesiphon mosaic cubes have been found that were made of gold glass and this shows the extravagance in Sassanian art that was prevalent at the Sassanian court (Harper 2011:13).

The early Sassanian kings could not expect the unconditional support of the gods and do what they wished (Soudavar 2003:14). On the Paikuli inscription (in Middle Persian and Parthian) for instance, there is a passage that states that Narseh may lose his ancestral glory if he becomes an evildoer against men and gods (Soudavar 2003:14 n. 37). The possession of the *xwarrah* (divine aura or glory) by a Sassanian king was not conceived as being a permanent aspect of their rule (Soudavar 2003:14). The *xwarrah* could be decreased with military defeat and increased with victories by the king (Soudavar 2003:14). A representation of the increase of *xwarrah* was illustrated on the Bishapur rock relief (Soudavar 2003:14). On the Bishapur rock relief an angel carrying a ribbon was added to signify Shapur I’s increased *xwarrah* (Soudavar 2003:14). The specific carving of the Bishapur relief has deep symbolic significance (Soudavar 2003:14). The symbolism elucidated somewhat: “the hand (*dast*) of the angel and its emblem of victory (*dastār*) finds a counterpart in the hand of Shāpur squeezing the wrist of the captive Roman emperor (‘captivity’ and ‘submission’ are termed as *dastgir* in Middle and New Persian)” (Soudavar 2003:14). The relief composition and the use of puns thus emphasise the importance of the flying ribbon in its representation of the victory and glory that Shapur I achieved over the Romans (Soudavar 2003:14). The relief showcases

the advanced understanding which the Sassanians had of maximising the impact a message could have in their propaganda. Narseh's Paikuli inscription and Shapur I's Bishapur rock relief are two contrasting pieces of propaganda. Narseh's Paikuli inscription urges caution and emphasises the transient nature of *xwarrah*. The Bishapur rock relief confidently expounds how Shapur I successfully attained increased *xwarrah*.

4.2 Coinage's role in legitimisation

Ardashir I also initiated changes in the numismatic tradition by minting gold coins very early in his reign (Schindel 2013:826). The Parthians never issued gold coins, but Ardashir I started a tradition of minting gold coins which was also followed by many other Sassanian monarchs (Schindel 2013:826). Zamasp/Jamasp, Hormizd IV and all of Khosrow II's successors except Buran were those Sassanian monarchs who did not mint gold coins (Schindel 2013:826). Minting coins in the precious metal was intended to signify the wealth and legitimacy of the Sassanian dynasty and probably to differentiate themselves from the Parthians. The gold coins did not serve as a way to pay large payments in everyday life but it was rather used as a donative coinage by the king to Iranian elites at festivities (Schindel 2013:827). The gold coins signified, specifically to Iranian elites, that the Sassanian dynasty were legitimate rulers and that serving the dynasty would have financial benefits (Schindel 2013:827). The earliest known dinar of Ardashir I weighed 8.47 grams which is also the heaviest known Sassanian dinar (Schindel 2013:827). The minting of such a heavy coin at the inception of the Sassanian Empire was a way to instil confidence in the capability of the Sassanian dynasty to manage and grow the economy from the beginning (Schindel 2013:827). Ardashir I created a complex system of four different denominations of copper coins which is in contrast to the Parthian dynasty who only minted one denomination of small copper coins (Schindel 2013:828). Ardashir I's smallest copper denomination is comparable in size to the small Parthian coins while the large denomination weighed around ten grams (Schindel 2013:828). The ten grams weight is in contrast to the one and a half gram weight of Kavad I's coinage (Schindel 2013:828). Ardashir I's complex denomination system did not carry over into later Sassanian periods; his ambitious monetary system was perhaps initially impressive to his subjects but it was not particularly practical (Schindel 2013:828).

On Ardashir I's first gold coin (fig. 1) the title is only "King of the Iranians" but with subsequent issues of gold coins the longer title of "King of Kings of the Iranians", which indicates that the Sassanian political ideology was still forming, was used (Afram 2010:18). The new type of coin that Ardashir I minted with the fire altar on the reverse was created so as to emphasise the importance of Zoroastrianism in the new Sassanian state (Afram 2010:18). Ardashir I likely did not want to install the Zoroastrian religion as the state religion of the Sassanian Empire; he rather wanted to cement the relationship between the Sassanian monarchy and the Zoroastrian priesthood (Afram 2010:19). By making Zoroastrian imagery prevalent throughout the Sassanian Empire through its use on coins, Ardashir I wanted to have his political course legitimised by religion (Afram 2010:19). Ardashir I set the precedent that would be followed by other Sassanians by showing the Sassanian dynasty to be closely bound with the Zoroastrian priesthood in state propaganda (Afram 2010:19). Another new addition to the coinage made by Ardashir I was the politically loaded word *Ērān* which was an expression of the ideology that the Sassanian Empire was the "realm of the Iranians" (Afram 2010:19). The political message that the new type of coin propagated served to distinguish the Sassanians ideologically from the Arsacids (Afram 2010:19). This new style coin that Ardashir I minted was kept nearly unchanged for centuries and became a powerful symbol of the Sassanian Empire which would be spread throughout the empire (Afram 2010:19).

The concept of kingship was not a static or monolithic concept in Sassanian history but rather a changing concept with some significant differences between the early Sassanian period and the late Sassanian period (Daryaee 2010:60). In each period the people had a distinct attitude towards kingship and the position of the monarchy (Daryaee 2010:60). In the early period the Sassanian king used Hellenistic and Parthian concepts to legitimise their rule but in later Sassanian periods the Persian concepts came more to the fore (Daryaee 2010:60). The Sassanian kings were also influenced by or reacted to the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy in different ways that affected their legitimacy (Daryaee 2010:60). In the early Sassanian period Ardashir I brought together different traditions of kingship to legitimise his rule, combining the Persian ideology with that of the Hellenistic tradition of the deified king to justify his family's rule over *Ērānšahr* (Daryaee 2010:67). Evidence of the ideology is on Ardashir I's coinage (fig. 1): "The divine Mazda-worshipping Ardashir, king of kings of the Iranians, whose image/seed is from the gods/*yazdān*" (Daryaee 2010:61). The inscription on this

coinage was Ardashir I's first inscription and even at this early stage it emphasises that the divine elements of the Sassanian monarch were present (Daryaee 2010:61). A pretender to the throne could not attempt to bring anymore legitimacy to his rule than to claim that he was descended from the gods (Daryaee 2010:67). The succession crisis period also highlights the importance of being a member of the Sassanian family as even obscure figures like Jushnas Dih and Khurrazādh Khusraw allegedly proclaimed their link to the Sassanian family. The legitimisation practice of Sassanian descent continued to be integral in the early period and late periods.

Shapur I adopted the pictorial coinage programme, practically unchanged, from his father (Arlam 2010:21). Ardashir I had completely reorganised the monetary system by increasing the number of mints. In the eastern part of the empire he started a mint in Sistan and Marv (Arlam 2010:21). Shapur I did not make changes to the revised coinage design because it spread the propaganda of the Sassanian dynasty effectively while serving as a currency. It was Shapur I who initiated the tradition of each Sassanian monarch being portrayed with their own individual crown on coinage (Arlam 2010:21). The decision was made to portray the Sassanian rulers with their own individual crowns because the crown symbolised the different ruler's *xwarrah*, divine aura (Arlam 2010:21). The fact that the Sassanian dynasty invested the coinage with so much symbolism and gave each ruler their own individual crown on the coins, hints at the importance which the monarchs attached to the coins as vehicles for their ideology and propaganda. The average silver content of Shapur I's drachms was one of the highest in Sassanian history with a fineness of 94% (Arlam 2010:22). To put the figure into context a Roman emperor's antoniniani (which were about the same weight as the drachms), only had a silver content figure of 45% (Arlam 2010:22). Shapur I wanted to project the wealth of the Sassanian Empire around the ancient Near East and instill confidence in his monetary system, and by extension also his rule, as a result of this (Arlam 2010:22).

Shapur I's one gold coin (fig. 20) had a unique inscription on the reverse: "This (was at) that (time) when he placed Philipos, Casear, and the Romans in tribute and servitude" (Arlam 2010:23). This Sassanian gold coin is wholly atypical of traditional Sassanian coinage not only because of the inscription mentioned but also because of the fact that instead of the customary fire altar on the reverse it shows Caesar Phillip standing before Shapur I seated on

a horse (Arlam 2010:23). The specific gold coin was designed in such a unique way, because it was part of Shapur I's programme to commemorate his victories over the Romans. This was also the theme of the rock reliefs Bishapur I-III, Naqsh-e Rostam, Darab and small art objects like the coinage (Arlam 2010:24). Shapur I wanted to craft a glorious image of himself and his rule but he allowed local kings of Marv to mint their own bronze coins (Arlam 2010:24). Shapur I was confident enough in his own perceived legitimacy that he could allow the kings of Marv to mint their own coins in a controlled manner (Arlam 2010:24). The type of coin that the kings of Marv were permitted to mint was also only bronze and not the more valuable gold or silver coins that the Sassanian king minted to increase his legitimacy (Arlam 2010:24). In the reign of Shapur I the Marv mint was also where many of the special types or coins were minted (Schindel 2013:828). From the mid-5th century CE onwards copper based coins and silver drachms followed the same trend of declining in quality. The lettering became smaller and poorer quality striking could indicate that coinage was not such a high priority propaganda tool in the late Sassanian period as in previous eras (Schindel 2013:828).

When Hormizd I became the Sassanian monarch he was confident enough to make two important changes to the iconography in Sassanian silver drachm coinage (Aram 2010:24). The king's title on the obverse (fig. 16) was extended by Hormizd I to "King of Kings of the Iranians and Non-Iranians" (Aram 2010:24). The second change was on the reverse of the coinage where an investiture scene was depicted. On the left side of the fire altar the king is shown with his right hand raised as a sign of reverence to Mithra who is on the right of the fire altar (Aram 2010:24). Mithra is depicted on the reverse of the coinage with a crown that consists of rays and the god is offering the diadem of sovereignty to the Sassanian monarch (Aram 2010:24). The image on the reverse of the silver drachm clearly expresses Hormizd I's divine right to rule to anyone that is viewing the coinage (Aram 2010:24). Mithra is depicted with a radiant crown and dressed in royal regalia on the reverse (Chegini & Nikitin 1996:67). The norm for Sassanian coinage prior to Hormizd I was that on the reverse of the coinage there was only a depiction of a fire altar present or a fire altar flanked by attendants (Van den Boorn 1983:112). Even some Sassanian monarchs that reigned after Hormizd I, like Shapur II for instance, used the traditional image of the fire altar flanked by attendants (Van den Boorn, Vinckesteijn & Bomhof 1983:112). The new style of depicting an investiture scene with a god on the reverse of the coinage was first done to garner more legitimacy for

Hormizd I. The fact that the Sassanian dynasty had been ruling successfully for close to fifty years gave justification and confidence to depict the divine investiture scene on coinage that would be so widely distributed (Afram 2010:24).

A typical feature of Sassanian royal dress was the earring that was shown on the coinage portraits of a number of the monarchs (Schindel 2013:832). On Wahram I's portraits he is shown wearing prominent cheek protection though, which obscures the view of any earrings (Schindel 2013:832). The militarily successful monarchs Ardashir I and Shapur I, both also had cheek protection on their coin portraits (Schindel 2013:832). Wahram I may have wanted to symbolically emphasise the martial aspect of his rule by having armour like the cheek guard featured on his portrait (Schindel 2013:832). A second reason may be that this precedent in numismatic portraits was furthermore set by the respected predecessors Ardashir I and Shapur I so being able to link his reign to these early Sassanian monarchs by using similar symbolism would have increased his legitimacy (Schindel 2013:832). In other aspects Wahram I's coinage design followed the traditional early Sassanian form for the most part (Schindel 2013:832). The diadem was the most important royal emblem on coinage and on Wahram I's coinage it was the Hellenistic plain ribbon diadem (Schindel 2013:832). The Hellenistic plain ribbon diadem was the usual diadem on early Sassanian coinage in contrast to the crown of pearls on late Sassanian portraiture (Schindel 2013:832). Wahram I did not want to take a risk and break with the traditional imagery used by the other early Sassanian monarchs he rather wanted to capitalise on the similarity of symbols by equating his rule to theirs.

The extensive use of propaganda by Wahram II is also reflected in the many different coins he minted (Afram 2010:25). The fact is that no other Sassanian king used as many different obverse and reverse types on his coinage (Afram 2010:25). The different coinage designs reflected the variety of dynastic and domestic issues that Wahram II was preoccupied with at the time the coin was minted (Afram 2010:25). On one type of coinage (fig. 2) of Wahram II the monarch was depicted, in typical manner, alone in a bust portrait on the obverse of the coinage (Afram 2010:25). On a second type of coinage (fig. 17) Wahram II is depicted, together with his queen, facing an unbearded youth wearing a high tiara (Afram 2010:25). Traditionally the young male on the coinage is identified as being a crown prince (Afram

2010:25). Wahram II wanted to increase the legitimacy of the crown prince before he ascended the throne by having him appear with him on the coinage (Afram 2010:25). On a third type of coinage (fig. 19) Wahram II is shown side by side with his queen, Shapurdukhtag, and both are facing a unbearded person who has a diadem in hand (Afram 2010:26). On this type of coinage the queen and the youth wear headgears with animal heads attached (boars, griffin, horse and eagle most frequently) although the exact meaning of the animal heads remains a mystery (Afram 2010:25). The identity of the third unbearded person is also not a certainty as some scholars are of the opinion that the third unbearded portrait represents Anahita and Verethragna, while other scholars are of the opinion that it could be the crown prince that is represented (Afram 2010:26). A fourth type of coinage depicts only Wahram II and his queen (fig. 18), both facing to the right (Afram 2010:26).

On the reverse of his coinage Wahram II also utilised unusual designs (Schindel 2013:834). Wahram II was the first Sassanian monarch to portray a diadem ribbon bound around the altar shaft with its ribbed ends hanging down (Schindel 2013:834). This design became canonical for all reverses late in Narseh I's reign (Schindel 2013:834). On certain coins the signature *hwpy* appears: "it could be the signature of an unknown mint or, as Lukonin has suggested, the word *xūb* = good" (Afram 2010:26). Wahram II did institute new mints with the new mint signature Ray, appearing for the first time in his reign, so the possibility that *hwpy* was a new mint's signature is a valid one (Afram 2010:26). On the reverse an unconventional investiture is also sometimes depicted with the king left of the altar and the goddess Anahita on the right who extends a hand with a diadem to the king (Afram 2010:26). With this scene Wahram II intended to show clearly that his rule was sanctioned by the gods (Afram 2010:26). Some of the principal mints that had been in operation from Shapur I's reign were also in operation under Wahram II's reign and continued into Narseh's reign (Afram 2010:26). This had the effect that there was a certain stylistic continuum that can be observed in Wahram II's coins although he did institute certain changes in some areas of his coinage like the number of figures on the obverse (Afram 2010:26).

No coins are extant of Wahram III's reign as his length lasted only four months (Schindel 2013:815). The group of nobility that supported Narseh was supposedly larger than the group that supported Wahram III (Daryaee 1998:439). On Sassanian numismatic portraits the king's

hair was normally shown in two bundles and the hair at the neck was always uncovered (Schindel 2013:833). On Ardashir I's, Wahram I's and Narseh's coins the monarch's hair is arranged in the form of pearl rows although the traditional depiction of the hair was arranged in globular bundles (Schindel 2013:833). The treatment of the element shows that even though the basic typology of Sassanian coins were quite uniform, development and changes were taking place regularly (Schindel 2013:833). In Narseh's reign an important development occurred for the first time in Sassanian coinage (Aram 2010:27). Narseh is depicted with two different crowns on his coinage that mark two successive stages in the king's coinage (Aram 2010:27). The type 1 Narseh coin was minted relatively early in his reign and depicts Narseh with "the crown with loops and branches" (Aram 2010:28). The type 2 Narseh coin was minted at the end of the Sassanian's reign and depicts the Sassanian monarch with a crown that only has loops (Aram 2010:27).

The two different types of coins of Narseh could be chronologically classified because of the evolution of the bust on the coinage and the symbols on the reverse (Aram 2010:28). On type 1 the folds of the tunic are depicted as triangular strokes at the shoulders (like Wahram I's coinage) whereas on type 2 the folds are depicted as vertical strokes (similar to Hormizd II's coinage) (Aram 2010:28). The second chronological indicator is the fact that the ribbon around the altar on the reverse of the coinage only became canonical late into the "lifetime" of coinage type one (Aram 2010:28). Type 1 of Narseh was a much larger coin in comparison with type 2 (Aram 2010:28). In the second half of Narseh's reign, in 297 CE, he suffered a defeat against the Roman emperor Galerius in the Battle of Erzerum (Aram 2010:28). This defeat may be the reason why there occurred a size reduction in Narseh's coinage with type 2 (Aram 2010:28). Narseh's defeat may also be the motivation for the change of crown on the portraiture on his type 2 coinage as the branches were eliminated from the crown in the second type of coinage (Aram 2010:28). The defeat at the hands of the Romans seems to have had a profound impact on Narseh's propaganda as it became more modest in the face of a defeat against the Sassanian state's archenemy (Aram 2010:28). The Sassanian defeat in 628 CE against the Byzantines also had the effect of hindering the propaganda project of Khosrow II. Three Naqsh-e Rostam rock reliefs and one Terash-e Farhad relief of Khosrow II were left unfinished with no succeeding Sassanian monarch even attempting to finish or alter the unfinished reliefs (Canepa 2013:860).

4.3 *The role played by nobles during two time periods*

Ardashir I's early regnal years are described as being full of "vigorous and incisive measures" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 816). Ardashir I had to act with incisiveness and speed to generate legitimacy for the new Sassanian dynasty (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 816). The first action of Ardashir I as monarch was reportedly to appoint various people to the different offices of government so as to let the government continue to run smoothly (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 816). Ardashir I in particular appointed a man called Abarsām to the position of Chief Minister (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 816). Abarsām was a historical character from Ardashir I's court, but he was not the Chief Minister. This position was held by Bābag in both Ardashir I's and Shapur I's administration (Bosworth 1999:9 n. 29). The Abarsām mentioned was exalted enough and did play an important enough role in administration to be considered the Chief Minister by sources like *The History of Prophets and Kings* (Bosworth 1999:9 n. 29). It was important for the legitimacy of the monarch to promote respected and able candidates to important offices and the case of Abarsām is an example of Ardashir I's awareness of the fact.

Ardashir I's installation of respected people in official positions would not only have had a positive affect on Ardashir I's legitimacy but it could save the early Sassanian monarch in a more direct manner (Daryaee 2009:128). Ardashir I appointed a person named Fāh.r to the office of Chief Mowbed (supreme priest) according to al-Tabari but the title only came into use in the late Sassanian period (Bosworth 1999:9 n. 30). Notwithstanding the title of Fāh.r, the fact is that Sassanian rulers were eager to establish the Zoroastrian priesthood in a leading role whether it was as a result of reasons of state or personal conviction (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 816). The fact that Ardashir I appointed people loyal to him would be beneficial for Ardashir I on certain occasions (Daryaee 2009:128). With loyal key officials around Ardashir I, treachery was easier to detect: "He got wind of a plot on the part of his brothers and some other persons in his entourage to assassinate him, hence he slew a great number of them" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 816). Ardashir I experienced internal dissension against his rule, but trusted and well rewarded people informed him of this treachery at an early stage and the Sassanian dealt with it in a ruthless manner (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 816).

Ardashir I initiated the Sassanian tradition of letting one's sons rule important provinces very early on in his reign (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 817). The Sassanian king entrusted the rule of certain provinces to his male offspring so that they could gain experience and be ready when they had to ascend the throne (Wiesehöfer 2010:137). The princes of the blood, *Wisphuragān*, ruled different regions with a local administration of scribes and priests functioning under the leadership of the prince (Daryaee 2009:102). In other cases, regions, like Armenia for instance, were administrated by Zoroastrian priests and tax collectors (Daryaee 2009:102). Ardashir I could have made the decision to install his sons in governing positions so that he could be more assured that the provinces like Kirmān that he had fought hard to conquer would not betray and attack him (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 817). Ardashir I was in essence a usurper in the Parthian Empire and as such he was well acquainted with the harm a rogue province could do within an empire.

The Sassanian governor was called a *marzban* and he followed direct royal orders and edicts (Foss 2003:160). A *marzban* governed a province with an administrative hierarchy with high officials called *salars* and a garrison of troops where the cavalry were regarded as the elite (Foss 2003:169). Armenia was under military rule for a part of Sassanian history because of its strategic location near Asia Minor but elsewhere normal civil governments were in place (Foss 2003:169). The *marzbans* ruled from the provincial capitals and relied heavily on established elites to maintain order and make it possible for Sassanian rule (Foss 2003:169). Sassanian monarchs as a result had to install trusted and capable individuals to maintain Sassanian authority in the provinces (Foss 2003:169). Shapur I apparently “chose governors over the populace, and kept a watch over them and over the subjects in general” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 826). The Sassanian Empire was still only approximately seventeen years old when Shapur I became the king and as a result Shapur I had to be wary of everyone with political power, even those he had installed himself in positions of power (Wiesehöfer 2001:319). Shapur I had to make it an attractive proposition to support the Sassanian dynasty because the Parthians had recently been toppled from within their empire by disaffected nobles. In the succession crisis period the Sassanian dynasty also had to ensure serving the Sassanian monarch was an attractive proposition, as the central authority of the state was weakened and the support of the nobility was needed. In the succession crisis the nobility had much greater power and nobles influenced the Sassanian monarchs to act in accordance with their wishes (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1058).

On the Ka'ba-I Zardusht inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam, Hormizd I is mentioned: "great king of Armenia" (Wiesehöfer 2001:185). Armenia was an important and contested province (with the Roman Empire) and as such Hormizd's abilities were favourably viewed by Shapur I (Wiesehöfer 2001:185). Hormizd would not have received the important post if there was not the belief that he could maintain Sassanian authority in Armenia (Wiesehöfer 2001:185). The investiture ceremony is described as follows: "It is said that, when Sābūr placed the crown on Hurmuz's head, the great men of state came into his presence and invoked blessing on him" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 833). The fact that Shapur I personally placed the crown on Hormizd I showed the confidence that the incumbent monarch had in Hormizd I (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 833). The fact also that Hormizd I was endorsed by a member of the Sassanian dynasty that had ruled the empire for approximately thirty years would have increased the legitimacy that the new monarch had in the eyes of aristocrats (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 833). The fact that the "great men of state" also had to be present showed a degree of tight control over the aristocrats that was lacking in the era of the succession crisis after Khosrow II's death. The inception of Hormizd I's rule seemed promising as he had the support of the former monarch and seemingly all the aristocrats.

When Ardashir I passed away and Shapur I became the Sassanian monarch he appointed Hormizd governor of Khurāsān (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 833). Hormizd was sent to Khurāsān during Shapur I's reign to accrue experience so that Hormizd would be ready to ascend to the Sassanian throne after Shapur I. Hormizd was an effective governor of Khurāsān, adopted an independent policy and subdued the local rulers in the lands adjacent to his region (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 833). Certain people at Shapur I's court spread rumours though that Hormizd was seeking to seize power from the Sassanian monarch and this rumour reached Shapur I (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 833). When Hormizd heard of this news he allegedly did something extraordinary: "cut into his hand and severed it, placed on the hand some preservative, wrapped it up in a piece of costly clothing, put it in a casket and sent it off to Sābūr." (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 833). Hormizd also wrote a letter for Shapur I describing why he had severed his hand - he wanted to dispel the rumours of his treason by having a bodily defect (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 833). It was reportedly the custom of the Persians that people with physical defects could not become the the king. When Shapur I received the casket and letter he was stricken with grief and named Hormizd his official successor (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 833). Although it

is debatable if the story is based on fact, it illustrates the balancing act which a Sassanian prince would have to maintain between being ambitious and eliciting suspicion from the incumbent monarch and aristocrats.

Wahram II seems to have had made an effort to earn the loyalty of the men of state through his actions (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 835). The reason why Wahram II may have behaved in such a courteous manner towards the men of state and actively sought their support may have been the difficult circumstances surrounding Wahram II's reign (Bosworth 1999:46 n. 137). Wahram II's reign (274-291 CE) was a troubled one in comparison with his predecessors (Bosworth 1999:46 n. 137). One contributing factor in making it a troubled reign was Wahram II's brother, Hormizd, leading a lengthy rebellion from Sijistān which started in approximately 283 CE (Bosworth 1999:46 n. 137). This rebellion was a serious challenge to Wahram II's reign as Hormizd had the support of the Sistanis, Gilanis and Kushans (Daryaee 2009:11). In addition, there was religious strife in the province of Khuzistan, led by a Zoroastrian priest (*mowbed*) who was in power there for a period (Daryaee 2009:12). Furthermore the Roman emperor Carus wanted to take advantage of Wahram II's preoccupation in the east and so he launched an invasion of Mesopotamia (Bosworth 1999:46 n. 137). An attack on Ctesiphon was pre-empted by Carus' death in Mesopotamia in 283 CE (Bosworth 1999:46 n. 137). The next Roman Emperor, Diocletian, also had internal problems to deal with and as a result he and Wahram II agreed to a treaty that quelled the conflict between the two major ancient powers (Daryaee 2009:12). By the end of Wahram II's reign (291 CE) Hormizd had been pacified in the east but dynastic squabbling continued into the reign of his immediate successor, Wahram III (Daryaee 2009:12).

The factionalism that was present during Wahram II's reign continued into his successor's reign (Frye 1984:306). A faction of nobles supposedly led by a noble Vahunam, supported Wahram III and his ascension to the Sassanian throne (Frye 1984:306). Kirdir also initially supported Wahram III as he had supported Wahram II (Frye 1984:306). Other nobles objected to Wahram III's ascension to the Sassanian throne and were killed as result of this (Frye 1984:306). A number of nobles decided to send a message to Narseh, Wahram III's great-uncle, in 291/292 CE to urge him to come from Armenia (Narseh was viceroy of

Armenia) to Babylonia to be acclaimed as king (Frye 1984:306). The notable persons that met with Narseh included Shapur the collector of taxes, Raksh the army chief and Kirdir the Zoroastrian priest (Frye 1984:306). The fact that the noble Vahunam had so much influence over Wahram III clearly offended many notable people to such a degree that they offered allegiance to Narseh instead (Frye 1984:306). Wahram III's military forces, with the king of Mesene Aturfarnbag and the forces of Khuzistan, opposed Narseh's group (Frye 1984:306). The possible conclusion of the campaign is described on a transcription of the Narseh's Paikuli inscription: "Finally Narseh was victorious, and Vahunam was captured and cruelly executed and presumably Bahram, the king of Seistan, as well though it is not expressly stated" (Frye 1984:306). Narseh was ultimately victorious against Wahram III's forces as described in the quote and Wahram III himself was presumably executed in 292 CE (Frye 1984:306). Wahram III's reign lasted four months, reminiscent of the length of reign for many monarchs in the succession crisis period (Bosworth 1999:47 n. 139). Vahunam was seen as a threat by many of the men of state that had vested interests in keeping the status quo, like Kirdir (Frye 1984:306).

Sassanian society was broadly hierarchical with the "King of Kings" at the very top of this hierarchy (Karimian 2010:454). Situated beneath the "King of Kings" on the hierarchy was the nobility with the highest of this group being the kings of client states that recognised Sassanian primacy (Karimian 2010:454). In the Paikuli inscription of Narseh it is mentioned that the various petty rulers on the frontiers and in Iraq acknowledged Narseh's right to rule and personally came to his court or sent ambassadors (Frye 1984:306). The kings were frequently rulers of independent or remote regions and as such the title of king (Middle Persian *Shah*) was used for most of them (Karimian 2010:454). The title that the Sassanian kings used, King of Kings (Middle Persian *Shahan Shah*), would largely depend on their ability to control this considerable number of independent rulers (Karimian 2010:454). The main function of the regional kings was to maintain and support the authority of the Sassanian monarch over the country (Karimian 2010:455). The regional kings were also tasked with maintaining dominance and order over their respective regions (Karimian 2010:455). From an administrative view the regional kings were important and this may explain why they were regarded as being important enough to have a section devoted to them on the Paikuli inscription (Karimian 2010:455).

In the Parthian periods feasts and banquets were the most important gatherings at the court (Daryaee 1998:454). At these events important problems of state were discussed and gifts were exchanged (Daryaee 1998:454). The tradition of these important banquets that served as opportunities to discuss political points was continued into the Sassanian period (Daryaee 1998:454). At the gatherings only men of rank were allowed to be present-those who wore the tiaras and belts that denoted their rank and place within the state and court (Daryaee 1998:454). An important person in Sassanian court life was the crown prince who would succeed the incumbent Sassanian monarch (Daryaee 1998:454). What was expected of a prince was as follows: “the basic idea that in ancient Iran certain requirements and training were needed to be accepted as a candidate for the office and tutored in the matters of state and religion” (Daryaee 1998:454). An heir was as a result, not just accepted because of his position, but had to meet the requirements that was expected of a future monarch in Sassanian society (Daryaee 1998:454). The expectations of Sassanian candidates were clearly relaxed during the succession crisis period, as a child king like Ardashir III, who would have had little experience or education, was raised to the throne. The fact that the requirements were not so stringent for possible Sassanian monarchs could have contributed to the instability as less capable and unprepared candidates were raised to the throne, just as the Sassanian state was experiencing internal and external troubles.

For the Sassanian period it has been concluded that there could have been a “King’s Council” although the composition of it is uncertain (Wiesehöfer 2001:170). The council could have functioned very much like the one in the Parthian period that determined the succession (Wiesehöfer 2001:170). For Narseh and his predecessors the assumption can be made that there was only a mock consultation of the high dignitaries of the Sassanian Empire to illustrate the ancient right of confirmation that the nobility held (Wiesehöfer 2001:170). Disputes over succession did break out: “When the provisions were not clear or when alleged prerogatives were ignored, disputes about the throne occurred among the Sassanians as well, offering the aristocracy (and the clergy) an opportunity to exercise their influence” (Wiesehöfer 2001:169). In the early Sassanian period it was more the Zoroastrian priests that readily exerted their influence as illustrated in the period that Kirdir amassed considerable power (Daryaee 1998:438). In the late Sassanian period and succession crisis period the nobility was the class that amassed great influence (Foss 2003:156). In the late Sassanian period the Zoroastrian priest had to compete with a Christian bishop and a prominent Jewish

leader for the Sassanian monarch's attention (Shaked 2010:104). The late Sassanian monarchs had all the religious leaders in their empire under their control so that no activity in the field of religion went unnoticed or unsupervised (Shaked 2010:104). The Sassanians were aware of the fact that when people were assembled together under a religious banner that stood in opposition to the mainstream cult, this could endanger the cult (Shaked 2010:104). Further, this could have serious political implications and endanger the structure of the state (Shaked 2010:104). The importance and respect with which the Sassanians viewed the different religions of the realm was indicative of the Sassanian king's political acumen and political pragmatism (Shaked 2010:104).

4.4 The role played by genealogy in two time periods

Ardashir I was the son of Pabag and the grandson of Sassan (Daryaee 1998:434). According to *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 813, Ardashir I ascended to the throne in 226-227 CE, probably in reference to his crowning in Ctesiphon. The official date of the inception of Sassanian rule is stated as from the calendar year of 27 September 223 CE to 25 September 224 CE according to the Bīshāpūr inscriptions (Bosworth 1999:2 n. 3). Ardashir was born in the rural village of Tīrūdih in the Istakhr region and his grandfather was Sassan, a formidable warrior (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 814). The tradition of identifying Ardashir's birthplace as Tīrūdih may well have truth in it as the Arsacids had continued to venerate their original homeland in northeastern Persia for centuries while they had ruled (Bosworth 1999:4 n. 8). The region of Istakhr was regarded as both the religious and political center of the Sassanian dynasty and it was the region where the family originated from (Bosworth 1999:4 n. 8). The region of Istakhr was north of Persepolis and it may have risen to prominence because of Alexander's destruction of Persepolis (Bosworth 1999:4 n. 8). The Sassanians venerated Persepolis as a sacred site but they regarded the site as being from semilegendary and legendary times (Bosworth 1999:2 n. 1). Daryaee cites the Sassanians' veneration of Persepolis as proof that they considered themselves heirs to the Achaemenids (Bosworth 1999:2 n. 1). The view of Yarshater and Wiesehöfer is that the Sassanians had little or no information on the Achaemenids and as a result they could not have viewed themselves as heirs to the Achaemenids (Bosworth 1999:1 n. 1). The Sassanians regarded themselves as heirs to the Kayanids firstly: "the weight of opinion concurs in the view that the Sāsānids did not regard themselves as heirs to the Achaemenids, but to the Kayānids" (Bosworth 1999:2 n.

1). The constructed link that the Sassanians had with the legendary dynasty was of paramount importance.

Ardashir used imperial propaganda to shape history in order to suit the political needs of the Sassanian dynasty. The projection of glory was essential to Sassanian propaganda and by claiming to be the heirs of a pre-Arsacid state that had built Persepolis would have enhanced the glory and legitimacy of the Sassanian dynasty (Soudavar 2012:39). For Ardashir I, it was a prime concern early on to gather under one ruler all the lands that his “predecessors” had previously ruled (Soudavar 2012:53). A claim to territories that was divided by easily understood boundaries was a useful propaganda tool (Soudavar 2012:53). Ardashir I wanted to ideally conquer all the Near Eastern regions from approximately Bactria to Asia Minor (Soudavar 2012:53). The Roman Empire and subsequently the Byzantine Empire ultimately prevented the Sassanian Empire from reaching this goal (Soudavar 2012:53). Ardashir I’s campaigns did create a significantly large Sassanian state with the capture of Hatra (Mesopotamia) in 239/240 CE and conquests in the east extended the boundary to the settlements of Merv and Herat (Frye 1984:295). Although Ardashir did not meet the standard of conquering the territories of his “predecessors”, he did expand the territory of the Sassanian state and that did increase his legitimacy (Frye 1984:295). In the wars of the first period of the Sassanian era, that Ardashir I and Shapur I took part in, some Roman accounts claim that the Sassanians were motivated by the Achaemenid tradition (Shayegan 2013:806). This view of the Sassanian’s motivation should be regarded with scepticism because this view was most probably influenced by the contemporary Roman views of equating Rome with Alexander (Shayegan 2013:806). The Romans equated themselves with Alexander and this led to them equating the new Persian empire, the Sassanians, with the Achaemenid Empire (Shayegan 2013:806). There is no evidence of the early Sassanians using the Achaemenids as justification for their offensives against the Romans as this view was most certainly a Roman invention (Shayegan 2013:806).

Important events during the reign of the Sassanian kings were written down and put in the imperial archives (Taffazoli & Khromov 1996:86). This practice most probably dated from the beginning of the Sassanian period (Taffazoli & Khromov 1996:86). This practice was important because the official account of the Sassanian monarchs that they used to legitimise

their actions would be preserved so that future generations could have access to them (Taffazoli & Khromov 1996:86). The 6th century Greek historian Agathias gained access to these archives during the reign of Khosrow I for example (Taffazoli & Khromov 1996:86). The Paikuli rock inscription (situated in the Zagros mountains in Iraq) was most probably copied and preserved in the imperial archives (Taffazoli & Khromov 1996:86). By maintaining the imperial archives the Sassanian monarchs also tried to project the image that they were cultured (Taffazoli & Khromov 1996:86). This concern with appearing cultured continued into the late Sassanian period (Taffazoli & Khromov 1996:86). In the *Shanmeh* of Firdausi there is a passage where: “Firdausi suggest that when Hormizd IV (579-590) was imprisoned by his general Bahram Chobin and the nobility in c. 590, he expressed the desire for someone to come with a book and read the stories of the past kings to him.” (Taffazoli & Khromov 1996:86-87). The Sassanian kings also kept official registers in which the events of each king’s reign and portrait were contained (Taffazoli & Khromov 1996:87). The evidence points to the Sassanians being very concerned with how posterity viewed them in both the late Sassanian period and the early Sassanian period (Taffazoli & Khromov 1996:86). Resources were as a result allocated so as to ensure that what was preserved was the official account that they wanted to have for future references.

In *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 831, it is mentioned that when Shapur I was near to death he appointed as ruler his son Hormizd. This continued the precedent set by Ardashir I of appointing the son to the position of power before the death of the monarch (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 820). Shapur I not only appointed Hormizd as ruler though: “he appointed as ruler his son Hurmuz and laid upon him testamentary instructions, ordering him to base his conduct upon them” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 831). The careful preparation for the change of monarch seems to be characteristic of the early Sassanian period which is wholly lacking in the early 7th century CE in the Sassanian Empire because of the chaotic nature of the period. What is telling is that Shapur I “ordered” Hormizd to follow his instructions on how to conduct himself and this shows the importance that Shapur I attached to the successor to continue in the same vein as he ruled, if the account is to be believed (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 831).

A description of Wahram I is as follows: “Bahrām b. Hurmuz was a forebearing and mild person, so that the people rejoiced when he came to power” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 834). Unlike other descriptions of Sassanian monarchs Wahram I’s emphasises his patience and tolerance which indicates possibly that his character was a unique departure from the character makeup of the previous three Sassanian monarchs. Wahram I was experienced by the time he ascended the Sassanian throne as he had been appointed king of Gilan during Shapur I’s reign (Daryaee 2009:10). Various factors point to Wahram I as a legitimate royal candidate, seeing as he was the eldest of Shapur I’s sons and experienced in the ways of government because of his time as king of Gilan (Daryaee 2009:10). Royal candidates who were experienced in governance and who contributed to the relative stability of the early Sassanian period, were rare in the succession crisis period as seventeen eligible candidates were killed by Kavad II.

4.5 The role played by priesthood in legitimisation

The trigger for Ardashir I starting on his way to become the first Sassanian monarch was a dream that repeated what the astrologers and diviners had told Ardashir I: “he saw in a dream an angel sitting by his head who told him that God was going to give him rulership over the lands, so he was to prepare for this” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 815). Prophecy applying to the past, present and future was not a new occurrence, but quite common in ancient literature (Boyce 1984:67). Prophecy played an integral part in Zoroastrianism with Ahura Mazda’s revelations of the end of time being of particular importance to Zoroaster (Boyce 1984:67). Prophecy and omens were tied to Sassanian culture and were used by monarchs to legitimise their rule, because they carried a religious connotation that would appeal to many of their subjects. The Sassanian dynasty used religious prophecy also directly as a way to legitimise their regime. The Sassanians were willing to use established myths and legends like these and adapt them to fit and support the ideological disposition of the incumbent Sassanian monarch (Boyce 1984:73). This is an example of the dynamic use of religious matters by the Sassanian dynasty to benefit the dynasty.

The History of Prophets and Kings, 815 relates that at the time Ardashir I became castellan of Dārājbird, a town in eastern Fars, “A group of astrologers and diviners informed him that he

had been born under an auspicious star and that he would rule the lands (sc., the whole of Iran)” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 815). Omens and superstitions played a large role in the lives of people. There were people in the Sassanian period who read omens and signs professionally (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 815). Rulers would loudly proclaim the omens that foretold success for them so as to instill confidence in his regime. Omens and superstitions continued to play an important part in Sassanian society in the succession crisis period (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1007). Hormizd V for instance reportedly dreamt of sitting on the Sassanian throne and as such it hinted at predestination which would have been a powerful propaganda tool (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1007).

The Zoroastrian priesthood was not as institutionalised and organised at the time of Ardashir’s conquest as it was in the late Sassanian period (Overlaet 2013:331). There were important religious reformations that were parallel with Ardashir’s conquest (Overlaet 2013:331). The destruction of religious sanctuaries and confiscation of their treasures was one way in which Ardashir I obtained the wealth he needed for his political ambitions (Overlaet 2013:331). A lot of the legends that surround Ardashir I’s exploits are also indicative of the temple reorganisation that occurred during his reign (Overlaet 2013:331). In some the legends of Ardashir I fought kings and queens that were depicted as self-styled gods and demons living in wealth (Overlaet 2013:331). There was an aggressive attitude towards idolatry and an attempt to unify the Zoroastrian faith and priesthood during Ardashir I’s reign (Overlaet 2013:331). The attitude of consolidation of the Zoroastrian faith generally continued under Shapur I and his successors (Overlaet 2013:331). Kirdir stated in his Naqsh-e Rostam VI rock inscription (carved during Wahram II’s reign):

“from province to province, place to place, throughout the empire the rites of Ohrmezd and the gods became more important and the Mazdayasnian religion and magians were greatly honoured in the empire...And Jews and Buddhists and Hindus and Nazarenes and Christians and Baptists and Manichaeans were smitten in the empire, and idols were destroyed and the abodes of the demons disrupted” (Overlaet 2013:331).

In the 3rd century CE there was for the most part an effort by the Sassanian state to destroy religious opposition as indicated by the quote of Kirdir (Overlaet 2013:331). In the case of the Anahita temple there was an effort to integrate it into the Mazdean belief system because of the temple’s long and illustrious history (Overlaet 2013:330). This Anahita cult could have

been the same one where the Achaemenid Artaxerxes II received a royal initiation, which indicates the enduring importance of the cult (Daryaee 2010:65). In the succession crisis period there was more religious tolerance and fewer persecutions of people from different faiths (Wiesehöfer 2001:213). After the end of the 5th century CE the Christians for example presented hardly any problems to the Sassanian state and these communities were on the whole reliable rather than restless elements (Wiesehöfer 2001:212).

In Shapur I's reign there came a challenge to the traditional religious organisation, where Anahita, Mithra or Ahura Mazda predominated, with the rise of the prophet Mani. In *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 830, Mani is described as "the Zindīq". The term "Zindīq" (Middle Persian *zandīk*) that is used to describe Mani is a term that the Sassanians later applied to heretical sects like the Manichaeans, Mazdakites and was also used in early Islamic times as a term of abuse for religious deviants (Bosworth 1999:38 n. 118). In Shapur I's reign though, Manichaeans were not viewed with such overall negativity, since Mani reportedly had a special relationship with Shapur I. The prophet was received at the Sassanian court on a number of occasions (Frye 1984:300). According to the Manichaean writings Shapur I was impressed with Mani and allowed him to stay in his retinue for some time (Frye 1984:300). Under Shapur I the new religion, Manichaeism, spread widely in the Sassanian Empire and the Sassanian monarch did nothing to hinder Manichaeism's growth (Frye 1984:300). One of Mani's principal writings, the *Shapurakan*, was dedicated to Shapur I and this indicates the extent of the good will between Shapur I and Manichaeism (Frye 1984:300). The motive for Shapur I's connection to Manichaeism may have been more than the idle interest of a ruler (Frye 1984:300). Shapur I may have seen in the eclectic religion of Mani a possible religion for a large empire that encompassed people of various faiths like Christians, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Frye 1984:300). Shapur I may have been as pragmatic as to believe that he could use Manichaeism for his own benefit (Frye 1984:300). The use of Greek in the Bishapur II victory rock inscriptions, the use of prisoners of war in engineering and artistic production and his interest in Mani point to Shapur I being a ruler with pluralistic inclinations (Frye 1984:301). Many of Shapur I's successors did not share his pluralistic view, however, and Manichaeism in particular would be persecuted as a heretical religion (Frye 1984:301).

During Shapur I's reign the prophet Mani and the Zoroastrian priest Kirdir vied for influence with the Sassanian monarch (Pourshariati 2008:331). Shapur I seemingly did not take sides in the competition between the two religious figures and even allowed Mani to proselytise (Pourshariati 2008:331). In Hormizd I's rule (approximately 270 CE until 271 CE) Kirdir's rise to power began with him being promoted from *herbad* (no superiority over subordinates) to *mōbad*, chief of the magi (Pourshariati 2008:331). Hormizd I certainly wanted to garner favour with the Zoroastrians by choosing to support Kirdir and some of Hormizd I coins reflect this shift in that Ahura Mazda replaces Anahita and Mithra on some of the coinage (Pourshariati 2008:331). The beginning of Hormizd I's reign was the start of an approximately 22 year period (270 CE until 292 CE) when the old gods like Anahita and Mithra were consciously reduced in importance in favour of Ahura Mazda and the Zoroastrian clerics (Pourshariati 2008:333). The preceding reigns of Ardashir I and Shapur I were illustrious and Hormizd I felt that to continue the success of his predecessors he had to seek out the assistance of the Zoroastrian priesthood (Pourshariati 2008:333). There is no evidence though that points to the Zoroastrian priesthood having an independent role in the Sassanian state under Ardashir I, Shapur I or Hormizd I (Wiesehöfer 2001:212). In Shapur II's reign the Zoroastrian priests began serving as religious and legal authorities and were as a result significant figures for later Sassanian monarchs to consider (Wiesehöfer 2001:213).

In Hormizd I's reign there was the first instance of the ambitious Zoroastrian priest Kirdir receiving considerable promotion but the monarch did not want to totally alienate the other religious groups either (Daryaee 2009:10). There was no effort made by Hormizd I to hinder Mani's preaching and this hints at a programme of dual containment that was initiated to control both major religions (Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism) that were important in the region at the time (Daryaee 2009:10). By controlling or at least appeasing both major religions it would have been easier to find support from the subjects. Not a lot is known of Hormizd I and his reign was ultimately brief as it was only one year and ten days long, from approximately 270 CE until 271 CE (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 833).

The name Wahram is derived from the name of the Avestan god of victory, Verethraghna (Bosworth 1999:43 n. 131). This clearly shows the intent of the new monarch militarily to have the name Wahram that was linked to the Avestan god of victory, even before a single

military campaign had been launched (Bosworth 1999:43 n. 131). There were important developments during Wahram I's reign regarding Kirdir's career (Daryaee 1998:438). Kirdir most probably initiated a religious hierarchy in Wahram I's reign and a codification of Zoroastrian doctrine by Kirdir also occurred (Daryaee 1998:438). Wahram I's reign signified a cooling of relations with the prophet Mani (Wiesehöfer 2010:141). A Manichaean text from Turfan states that when Wahram I was dining with two very close friends he ordered Mani to wait until after the meal to have an audience with him (Wiesehöfer 2010:141). The Manichaean text goes on to describe that after the end of the meal Wahram I went to the waiting religious prophet and told him in no uncertain terms that he was not welcome (Wiesehöfer 2010:141). To get an audience with the king in early Sassanian times, a subject would have to go through the proper channels, especially if the subject did not have favour with the current regime (Wiesehöfer 2010:141). This was done so as to impart the importance of the monarchy to his subjects. During Khosrow I's reign (531-579 CE) the nuclear court, that previously only consisted of family members and domestic staff, was enlarged to include members of a type of service nobility (Wiesehöfer 2010:141). To gain an audience in the late Sassanian court may as a result have been even more difficult and ritualised in the larger court (Wiesehöfer 2010:141).

One significant event that occurred during Wahram I's rule was the beginning of the persecution of Mani and Manichaeism (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 834). According to *The History of Prophets and Kings* the reason for the persecution was as follows, "Mānī the Zindīq summoned him to his religion. So Bahrām enquired exhaustively into Mānī's beliefs, and found that he was a propagandist for Satan" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 834). Although Wahram I possibly did not personally believe that Mani was evil, the persecution of the prophet was a political move endorsed by the monarch to try and show the new religion in a bad light. The motivation for the persecution of Mani most probably was connected to the growing power of orthodox Zoroastrians in the reign of Wahram I and by extension the leader of this religious group, Kirdir (Frye 1984:303). Wahram I's succession was supported by Kirdir and the Zoroastrian priesthood benefitted from Wahram I's enthronement (Daryaee 2009:10). The Zoroastrian priesthood had in Wahram I a monarch that was more receptive to their demands and pleas, the fact being his succession was in part possible because of the support he enjoyed (Daryaee 2009:10). Kirdir could then influence Wahram I to rid the Zoroastrians of one of their main rivals, the prophet Mani (Daryaee

2009:10). It took time for Wahram I to be persuaded to persecute Mani because only after three years into the Sassanian monarch's reign in 274 CE did Wahram I order for Mani to be executed (Bosworth 1999:45 n. 135). Mani's execution as ordered by Wahram I reportedly happened as follows: "So ordered him to be executed and his body to be skinned and stuffed with straw, and then for it to be hung from one of the city gates of Junday Sābūr, which is [because of this] called Mānī's Gate" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 834). By publicly advertising the aftermath of opposition to the incumbent regime in one of the busiest places, the gate of a city, Wahram I wanted to make it clear to as many people as possible that he was a strong monarch.

Because of the close links that Wahram I's government had with the Zoroastrian priesthood the Manichaeans were not the only religious minority group to be persecuted in the period (Litvinsky & Vorobyova-Desvatoskava 1996:415). In the early Sassanian period the Christians lived in mostly calm conditions (Litvinsky & Vorobyova-Desvatoskava 1996:415). In Wahram I's reign the persecution of Christians were reportedly linked to Kirdir's activities (Litvinsky & Vorobyova-Desvatoskava 1996:415). The specific persecution did not have a catastrophic effect on the Christian communities in the Sassanian Empire though because the persecution did not continue for an overly long period, ending when Narseh became the Sassanian monarch in 293 CE (Litvinsky & Vorobyova-Desvatoskava 1996:415). The influence that the men of state had on monarchs in the late Sassanian period was greater than in the earlier eras. In the early Sassanian period there were prominent figures like the chief Zoroastrian priest Kirdir but their influence was linked with a certain Sassanian monarch (Brosius 2006:147). Kirdir was very important for a period in the Sassanian Empire but his power was specifically linked to Wahram I and his son and when Narseh succeeded them the priest's influence diminished (Brosius 2006:148). In the late Sassanian period more non-Sassanian royals like aristocrats and priests accrued power and influence that was independent of a monarch and they could challenge and influence the monarch. Narseh initiated a cooling of relations with the Zoroastrian priesthood and systematic persecution could only occur when the Zoroastrian priesthood and state took concerted action (Litvinsky & Vorobyova-Desvatoskava 1996:415). Early Sassanian monarchs like Wahram I could persecute the Christians so as to garner favour with the Zoroastrian priesthood because the Christians were a small minority (Litvinsky & Vorobyova-Desvatoskava 1996:415). In the late 6th century CE Christianity grew to such a degree though that it was the predominant

faith in certain areas like the city Junday Sābūr (Foss 2003:153). By this period some Sassanian nobles also converted to Christianity and as a result Christianity had penetrated to the core of Sassanian society (Daryaee 2009:56). The Sassanians in the late period in contrast were forced to recognise the growing importance of Christianity, even within the Sassanian Empire, and as a result took steps to accommodate members (Foss 2003:153). The Sassanian kings of the late period allowed the Christians freedom of worship for the most part and Christian craftsmen enjoyed some economic and social prestige (Wiesehöfer 2001:193). Workers and prisoners-of-war that were recruited by the state were settled with population groups of the same origin, language and religion within the Sassanian Empire (Wiesehöfer 2001:193). This shows on the whole, an effort by the late Sassanian monarchs to placate the Christian population group. This contrasts with the persecutions of Christians by the early Sassanian monarchs (Wiesehöfer 2001:193).

Wahram I's reign lasted approximately from 271 CE until 274 CE but nothing is mentioned in *The History of Prophets and Kings* of what possibly caused Wahram I's rule to end (Bosworth 1999:45 n. 136). Very little is known of Wahram I's rule in general (Bosworth 1999:45 n. 136). Evidence suggests though that Wahram I did not actively seek the support of religious minorities and in actual fact wanted to cow them into submission (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 834). The fact that Mani's flayed skin was allegedly hung on the gates of the city Junday Sābūr, where a significant Christian population was located, could have been intended to give a clear message to the Christians who planned to betray the Sassanian state. Wahram I made a clear effort to appease the Zoroastrian priesthood and to cause certain minority religious groups to fear him through the open persecution of a prominent prophet like Mani. With Shapur I's death in 270 CE there occurred a gradual change in the religious and social landscape (Karimian 2010:457). The "Mazdikiyan rebellion" motivated villagers and farmers to rise up against the more privileged classes (Karimian 2010:457). Wahram I may have felt that to counter this new movement he had to align the Sassanian monarchy even more strongly with the orthodox Zoroastrian religious authorities (Karminian 2010:457).

Wahram II was the son of Wahram I and succeeded his father in 274 CE (Wiesehöfer 2001:175). Kirdir had the most to gain from ensuring that the young and more suggestible

Wahram II succeed rather than other candidates like Narseh, who was Wahram II's uncle and the king of Armenia (Frye 1984:304). Wahram II also needed Kirdir's support to become the Sassanian monarch and as a result a strong symbiotic relationship developed between Kirdir and Wahram II (Frye 1984:304). Wahram II was furthermore a fervent Zoroastrian and Kirdir used the fact that he was pious to further his own career (Bosworth 1999:46 n. 137). Although Wahram II was young and impressionable: "He is said to have been knowledgeable about the affairs [of government]" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 834). It was important that the Sassanian monarch was still seen to be competent as the Sassanian Empire was an absolute monarchy where the monarch was vested with religious, political, judicial and economic powers. The young Wahram II gave away some of the traditional Sassanian powers to Kirdir with the prophet receiving the rank of "supreme judge of the empire" and "overlord of the dynastic shrine at Istakhr" (Frye 1984:304).

Narseh is reported to have said when he was crowned: "We must never lose an opportunity in giving thanks to God for His bountifulness to us" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 835). This quote points to Narseh definitely having an awareness of the importance and usefulness of religion in the Sassanian context. The name Narseh is a reference to Nairyōsanha, the name in the Avesta of the messenger of Ahura Mazda (Bosworth 1999:48 n. 140). During Narseh's reign the priest Kirdir had his influence considerably reduced (Pourshariati 2008:333). Narseh reclaimed the title of Chief of Istakhr temple that had been accorded to Kirdir by Wahram II (Pourshariati 2008:333). Narseh focused on reverting to the traditions of the first Sassanians by concentrating a lot of the spiritual power in the monarchy (Pourshariati 2008:333). Narseh acted tolerantly towards the Christian and Manichaean groups (Bosworth 1999:49 n. 141). Narseh in actual fact re-established contact with the Manichaeans and gave an audience to their current leader, Innaios (Pourshariati 2008:333). Narseh may have instituted this programme of religious tolerance towards these groups to gain the support of their coreligionists in Roman territory (Bosworth 1999:49 n. 141). Prominent Parthian and Persian nobles were among his supporters and this illustrates the drawing together of these two groups, a project begun under Narseh's father Shapur I (Pourshariati 2008:333). Narseh actively searched for support for his regime in groups other than the Zoroastrian priestly class.

One factor that ensured Narseh's successful ascension to the Sassanian throne was the fact that he had secured the support of the Mesopotamian cities (Pourshariati 2008:333). The Mesopotamian cities seem to have not been very fond of Kirdir's theocracy and this was one reason why they supported Narseh (Pourshariati 2008:333). After approximately two decades of Zoroastrian priestly-monarchical cooperation, Narseh initiated a return to the old gods (Pourshariati 2008:333). An example of this is on the Naqsh-e Rostam rock relief where Narseh is shown receiving the symbol of sovereignty from Anahita (Daryae 2009:13). Narseh re-orientated his devotion during his reign at the cost of Kirdir (Daryae 2009:13). Narseh reaffirmed the traditional Sassanian position of rulers like Ardashir I and Shapur I, who began their campaigns around the cult of the deity, Anahita (Daryae 2009:13). In the Paikuli inscription one comes across the notion that "the enemies of the rightful king (Narseh, the follower of Truth/Order) were followers of Lie (Demon/Disorder)" (Daryae 2009:13). The binary system, which was a hallmark of Sassanian Zoroastrianism, worked well for demonising the enemies of the king (Daryae 2009:13). The concept of truth was so central to Zoroastrianism that the prophesied son of Zoroaster, according to tradition established in the World Saviour, has the name *Astvat.ərətā*, "He who embodies the truth" (Boyce 1984:58). To depict the monarch as the embodiment of Truth (his enemies also as followers of falsehood) in the Sassanian Empire had as a result a strong impact because it was one of the central tenets of Sassanian Zoroastrianism (Boyce 1984:58). Narseh instituted a religio-political shakeup that broke from the model of the preceding two decades (Daryae 2009:13).

The empire had been centralised around the core of the Iranian plateau and the area around Ctesiphon (Frye 1984:307). As far as the control or domination of non-Sassanian lands were concerned the strength of the local rulers had strengthened because of the rule of the three Wahrams preceding Narseh's rule (Frye 1984:307). The internal allegiance to Narseh was not overly strong which made it more difficult for the relatively aged Narseh to effectively rule his empire (Frye 1984:307). The difficulty that faced Narseh's rule was probably one of the contributing factors why he initiated the policy of religious tolerance (Frye 1984:307). Narseh desired to enlarge the empire and recover the lands lost by his predecessors and this policy of religious tolerance was intended to stabilise the Sassanian Empire internally so that he could try to achieve these aims. One sidenote: "one source *Tha'ālibī* (*Histoire*, 510) says that Narseh did not visit fire temples during his reign, perhaps an indication of his tolerance of religions, as opposed to the Bahrams" (Frye 1984:308). This passage in *Tha'ālibī* may be a

reference to the fact that Narseh was more tolerant toward religions other than Zoroastrianism and then it became transmitted to the source that he was a less faithful Zoroastrian (Frye 1984:308). This was symptomatic of the difficult balance that Narseh had to strike (Frye 1984:308). Narseh needed the support of the religious minorities in the Sassanian Empire but he ran the risk of alienating the Zoroastrian priesthood by being too welcoming towards the other religions. The risk of alienating the Zoroastrian priestly class was one that the succession crisis period monarchs especially ran because of the changing religious landscape. The changing religious landscape is indicated by the fact that one succession crisis monarch was in fact a Christian (Shahrbaraz) which would have added more stress to the relationship between the Sassanian monarchs and the Zoroastrian priestly class (Wiesehöfer 2010:136).

In *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 835, it is mentioned that Narseh ruled for nine years. Estimates on the time of Narseh's reign vary with 292-302 CE being given as one possible period (Bosworth 1999:48 n. 141). Another estimate of 293-302 CE matches the nine years given by *The History of Prophets and Kings* (Wiesehöfer 2001:319). During the reigns of Wahram I-III the Zoroastrian priests made themselves such an important part of the government that they reduced the religious power of the Sassanian king (Daryaee 2009:14). Narseh struck back against the demands of the Zoroastrian priests and attempted to make the Sassanian family the important decision maker (Daryaee 2009:15). As a result of this tug of war between the Zoroastrian priestly class and the Sassanian family an equilibrium had been reached between these two powers finally by the end of the 3rd century CE (Daryaee 2009:15). An elderly Kirdir was still living during Narseh's reign but the equilibrium between the Zoroastrian priests and Sassanian royal family was in part reached by diminishing the influence of the prominent Zoroastrian priest (Kreyenbroek 2010:11). The early Sassanians gradually transformed Zoroastrianism into a state religion that was based upon an ideal of unity and coherence (Kreyenbroek 2010:15). The early Sassanians, inspired by their own propaganda, laid the foundation for a Zoroastrian hierarchical religious organisation (Kreyenbroek 2010:15).

4.6 *The role of construction projects as legitimisation*

One of the very first construction projects that Ardashir I undertook was his palace-fortress of Qaleh Dukhtar (Huff 2010:42). This construction project started when Ardashir I was still at war with the Parthian king Ardawan IV and the style of construction reflects the circumstances (Huff 2010:42). The palace fortress was situated in the Firuzaband gorge, one of the two paths which Parthian armies could use to move into Fars (Huff 2010:42). The palace-fortress stood on a triangular plateau with sheer cliffs on one side and two walls surrounding the fortress which would have made it increasingly difficult to assault (Huff 2010:42). The space between the first and second walls was intended to be able to harbour an army or refugees in time of emergency (Huff 2010:42). Lower fortifications and two outworks make use of every outcrop and cliff to completely control the road into Fars and the fortress had access to two wells (Huff 2010:42). The palace-fortress was an imposing image for anyone entering the home province of Ardashir I and would have acted as a deterrence to anyone hoping to invade Fars (Frye 1984:292). The palace-fortress shows the cautious side of Ardashir I as the fortress was designed to prepare for the worst eventuality and was intended to withstand a long siege in dire circumstances. History proved Ardashir I's actions to be needlessly cautious though as no serious attack was undertaken by the Parthian imperial army and the fortress would mainly serve as a symbol of Sassanian power in Fars (Huff 2010:43).

In the early Sassanian period construction projects initiated by the monarchs were prevalent and intended to showcase their investment in their empire (*The Historical Geography of the Sasanids* 1988:44). Ardashir I in particular apparently constructed many cities: Ardashīr Khurra, Bih Ardashīr, Bahman Ardashīr, Ashā' Ardashīr, Rām Ardashīr, Rām Hormozd Ardashīr, Hormozd Ardashīr, Būd Ardashīr, Vahsht Ardashīr and Bitan Ardashīr. (*The Historical Geography of the Sasanids* 1988:44). Several of the cities that Ardashir I founded were located in his home region of *Fārs* (*The Historical Geography of the Sasanids* 1988:44). Ardashir I clearly wanted to first ensure the support of the home base by building cities in the region and then consolidate his control over the whole region (*The Historical Geography of the Sasanids* 1988:44). In 208/209 CE the Parthian Empire entered into a succession crisis that would last until the end of the empire where two sons of the recently deceased Parthian monarch, Vologases IV, each claimed they were the legitimate rulers (Chegini 1996:40). The one son Ardavan V, ruled in Iran and the other son Vologases V, ruled in Mesopotamia

(Chegini 1996:40). Ardashir I and the other early Sassanians wanted the opposite of what was happening in the late Parthian Empire where power was beginning to be more and more decentralised (Chegini 1996:40). Launching the widespread construction projects was a way of reinforcing his legitimacy with the new cities expounding the monarch's name (*The Historical Geography of the Sasanids* 1988:44).

Urbanisation had a specific importance to Ardashir I (Karimian 2010:456). The importance of urbanisation and cities was partially a continuation of expansionist attempts made by the state in 1st century BCE (Karmian 2010:456). The Sassanian focus on urbanisation was stronger though as cities acted as a focus for external as well as internal policy (Karimian 2010:457). When Sassanian rulers annexed a region for instance a city was frequently founded to symbolise the victory of the Sassanians and physically ensured the security of the conquered area (Karimian 2010:457). Firuzabad was built by Ardashir I and was the seat of his government (Karimian 2010:459). Istakhri, d. AD 961, stated that the city had four clay walls, four main gates and a building called the *Tirbal* (Karimian 2010:459)¹⁸. The *Tirbal* was reportedly a government installation which was in the centre of the city and was built so as to overlook all the villages in the region (Karimian 2010:459). Istakhri further states: "all residential zones were located within the walls" (Karimian 2010:459). All the strategic initiatives in the construction of the city is indicative of careful planning from the start of the Sassanian period (Karimian 2010:459). Firuzabad was circular in shape and initially two kilometres in diameter with the city being divided into 20 sections by concentric and radial streets (Karimian 2010:459). The city was further extended to 7.5 kilometres with an outer wall (Karimian 2010:459). The precision of the city plan was indicative of a major development in a hitherto undeveloped area (Karimian 2010:459). It has been suggested that the reason for Firuzabad being circular was that the city represented a microcosm of the kingdom and universe with the four main gates also signifying the four cardinal directions (cf. Karimian 2010:459).

¹⁸ Karimian quotes the text of Istakhri, I. *Kitab al-Masalik va-l-Mamalik*. Edited from an original manuscript by H. Garbal. Tehran: Ministry of Guidance, 1961.

The fact that Shapur I captured Valerian in 260 CE along with the Praetorian Prefect, senators and the survivors of a 70 000 army, not only gave the Sassanian a propaganda tool but also access to Roman labour (Edwell 2013:844). The Roman captives were deported to purpose-built cities in Sassanian Iran in the provinces of Persis, Parthia, Susiana and Āsōristān (Edwell 2013:844). Shapur I used many of the Roman captives to build the dam at Shustar which was viewed by the 10th century CE Islamic historian Hamza al-Isfahani as “one of the wonders of the East” (Pourshariati 2007:136). Possible evidence of Roman construction is the Band-e Kaisar Bridge at Shustar that bears typical Roman architectural traits (Edwell 2013:844). Mosaics that were unearthed at Shapur I’s Bishapur palace (fig. 24) also display Syrian styles and were most probably also made by Roman captives (Edwell 2013:844). Making use of Roman soldiers and ordering them to build buildings and structures specifically with Roman architectural attributes was a way of advertising the Sassanian monarch’s victory over the Romans in a public, enduring manner (Edwell 2013:844). Shapur I consciously chose to include Roman elements in his Bishapur palace so as to intimidate any powerful guests with the wares of the people that he was victorious over (Edwell 2013:844). By taking the Romans prisoner and compelling them to work on construction projects, Shapur I tried to showcase that he had ultimate power over their lives and used them in civil construction projects that were useful as propaganda as well.

At the palace at Bishapur of Shapur I, by Roman prisoners a temple was also built (Ghanimati 2013:896). It was situated behind the Great Hall and was a semisubterranean building with a square main room (Ghanimati 2013:897). A water channel that led from the nearby river to the temple has been found (Ghanimati 2013:897). There was also an elaborate arrangement of pipes and conduits in the floor and subfloor area of the building that would have flooded the structure (Ghanimati 2013:897). All the factors support the notion that the building could be a temple of Anahita, the goddess of heavenly waters (Chegini & Nikitin 1996:66). According to some tales Shapur I’s grandfather Pabag, was a priest of the fire-temple of Anahita in Istakhr so the Sassanian dynasty was reportedly intimately linked with the cult of the goddess (Daryaee 2009:3). The cult of Anahita was an old one in Fars and her warlike character was a symbiosis of ancient Near Eastern (Ishtar), Hellenic (Athena) and Iranian tradition that provided legitimacy for kingship in the Sassanian period (Daryaee 2009:3). Anahita was also the deity which, along with Ahura Mazda, invested the Sassanians with their sovereignty (Wiesehöfer 2001:166). Some scholars claim that Anahita could be

considered the patron of the Sassanian dynasty because of the importance of the deity in their homeland of Fars and how this is reflected in their propaganda (Chegini & Nikitin 1996:70). The importance of Anahita in Sassanian legitimisation could explain why Shapur I built a temple for Anahita in his new prominent palace complex. Shapur I wanted to draw on the legitimisation which the cult of Anahita could bring by situating the deity's temple right behind the Great Hall (Ghanimati 2013:896).

Shapur I, like Ardashir I before him, chose to found new cities and attach his name to the city (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 830). Shapur I's city building project features prominently in *The History of Prophets and Kings*. One such project is described as follows: "It is also said that Sābūr built in Maysān [the town of] Shādh Sābūr, which is called in Aramaic (*al-nabatiyyah*) Dīma" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 830). It has been mentioned by sources that Shād Sābūr was both a town and an administrative district of Maysān in modern day Iraq (Bosworth 1999:37 n. 117). The place's full name might have been "Ērān-shād Shābuhr" which translates as "the joy of the Iranians [is] Shābūr" (Bosworth 1999:37 n. 117). By founding the town Shapur I could name the place almost anything without opposition and as a result he chose a name that could serve as propaganda for his rule for as long as the town bore the name (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 830). Founding cities in Shapur I's reign was of great practical concern too with all the prisoners of war that were resettled in the Sassanian Empire (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 830). According to *The History of Prophets and Kings* the Roman prisoners that Shapur I caught with Emperor Valerian were settled in a city that the Sassanian founded, Junday Sābūr (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 827). Shapur I established the area surrounding Junday Sābūr as a separate administrative region and he reportedly called it Bih-az-Andīw-i Sābūr which means "the city of Sābūr's which is better than Antioch" (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 831). According to *The History of Prophets and Kings* Shapur I called the administrative region "Bih-az-Andīw-i Sābūr" because Shapur I had besieged Antioch (with Valerian in the city) prior to capturing the Roman emperor (Bosworth 1999:29 n. 92). By having grandiose names attached to the region and city that the Roman prisoners would be deported to would have served as a clear message to all opponents to Shapur I. The Romans would also have rankled at having to live in a city whose name continuously reminded them of their failure against the Sassanian king (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 831). The city of Junday Sābūr as a result not only served the practical purpose of housing the Roman prisoners but

also exuded a propagandistic message by way of the name and the fact that the city was founded by Shapur I (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 831).

Shapur I built the city of Bishapur in a rectangular grid plan measuring 1.5 kilometres by 0.8 kilometres (Karimian 2010:460). The city was originally called *Veh Shapur* that translates as “the Beauty of Shapur” (Karimian 2010:460). The city was located close to the royal road that ran between Istakhr, Firuzabad and Ctesiphon so that it was well located for commerce (Karimian 2010:460). The city of Bishapur was strategically well located because of the fact that it stretched along the south-west bank of a river while its south-eastern and south-western boundaries were protected by walls and ditches (Karimian 2010:460). The result was that the northern side of the city was protected by the Shapur river, the eastern side by a fortified hill and the south and west sides by a deep ditch (Karimian 2010:460). The wall that defended Bishapur was fortified with bastions at intervals with each bastion being 7.3 meters in diameter (Karimian 2010:460). The major crossroads in the centre of the city was decorated with two columns which honoured Shapur I who was the founder of the city (Karimian 2010:462). The north-east quarter of the city was also occupied by monumental structures such as the palace of Shapur I and a temple dedicated to Anahita (Karimian 2010:462). Almost everything regarding the city of Bishapur legitimised Shapur I’s rule from the very name of the city to the monumental structures within that honoured Shapur I for founding the prosperous city (Karimian 2010:462). The layout of Bishapur furthermore mirrored the nature of Sassanian society as the city was built according to a rigid rectangular plan which was further subdivided into divisions (Karimian 2010:464). The Sassanian kingdom was divided into four regions, the people into four classes (priests, warriors, farmers and artisans) and most cities were also divided into four divisions (Karimian 2010:464). The Sassanian city was as a result a microcosm of the Sassanian Empire.

Hormizd I reportedly ruled benevolently, enforcing justice on his subjects and acted kindly towards the aristocrats (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 833). Hormizd I also followed the precedent set by his predecessors by laying out the district for a town of his, Rām Hurmuz, a fact also confirmed in the Pahlavi Town List (Bosworth 1999:43 n. 129). The town of Rām Hurmuz was situated in southeastern Khuzistan and was reportedly a flourishing market town in early Islamic times (Bosworth 1999:43 n. 129). The town of Rām

Hurmuz was as a result a well situated settlement that continued to flourish which shows the careful consideration the Sassanians took when founding a town with their name attached to it (Bosworth 1999:43 n. 129). There was a brief acceleration of urban building activities from Khosrow I's reign onwards but this later urbanisation was not close to the scale of the earlier urbanisation (Karimian 2010:457). Cities acted as a focus for internal and external state policy and as a result were an important part of a growing state (Karimian 2010:456). The fact that the late Sassanian period urbanisation was not extremely expansive gives an indication of the late Sassanian Empire slowing in growth (Karimian 2010:457).

4.7 Political strategies and actions used to legitimise rule

Fars was a vassal kingdom of the Parthian Empire from the first half of the 2nd century BCE until c. 200 CE (Wiesehöfer 2001:319). By the beginning of the 3rd century CE the Parthian control over Fars weakened because of conflict within the Parthian royal family, Parthian Empire's war with the Romans and a weakened central authority (Chegini 1996:40). Gochir of the Bazrangi family reportedly ruled Fars as a vassal of the Parthians until Pabag, the first Sassanian ruler and Ardashir I's father, deposed Gochir and defeated the local governors (Chegini 1996:41). Ardashir I succeeded his father as ruler of Fars and proclaimed himself king in 205 CE according to the Bishapur inscriptions (Chegini 1996:41). Proof for the Sassanian era starting at c.205 CE in the Bishapur inscriptions: "in the year 58 [of the era]; in the year 40 of the Ardashir fire, in the year 24 of the Shapur fire" (Wiesehöfer 2001:166). This substantiates the date of c. 205 CE as the beginning of the "Sassanian Era" (Wiesehöfer 2001:166). Ardashir I proclaiming himself king would have been an affront to the Parthians who clearly regarded themselves as the rightful rulers of the ancient Near East and even going as far as fighting amongst themselves to have the right to rule (Wiesehöfer 2001:145). Ardashir I appropriated the Parthian signs of legitimacy for himself, for example on a series of coins commemorating Ardashir I becoming king the portrait shows Ardashir I wearing a Parthian tiara (Chegini 1996:41). The use of Parthian legitimization tools was a feature of early Sassanian politics as the transition from the Parthian dynasty to the Sassanian dynasty was occurring (Chegini 1996:41). At the battle of Hormizdagan in 224 CE the last Parthian monarch, Ardavan V, was defeated by Ardashir I and the Sassanian dynasty became the dominant political force in the Near East but Parthian symbols were still used by early Sassanian monarchs (Chegini 1996:41). By the late Sassanian period the focus was on

diminishing the Parthian's place in history as the Sassanians viewed the Parthians as an interruption in the history of the unified Persian monarchy and as such Parthian symbols were not used (Bosworth 1999:1 n. 1).

A part of the political symbolism that figured prominently in the early Sassanian period was that of the diadem (Soudavar 2012:53). On the Roman side the diadem was given a negative oriental connotation and abandoned because of this (Soudavar 2012:53). Although Roman sources, like Diodorus and Curtius Rufus, state that the Achaemenid Persians wore diadems there is no proof to substantiate these claims (Soudavar 2012:53). It is more likely that the Achaemenids wore such a thin crenelated gold crown that the Greeks perceived it as being held by a woven headband (Soudavar 2012:53). An example of an Achaemenid wearing a thin crenelated crown is the rock portrait of Darius I at Bisutun (Soudavar 2012:54). The Sassanian crown was not derived from the Achaemenid crown though (Soudavar 2012:54). The Parthians had adopted the Hellenistic diadems as their symbolic royal headpiece (Soudavar 2012:53). The Sassanians had in turn adopted the Parthian diadem and modified it into a more elaborate version to distinguish themselves more clearly from the Parthians (Soudavar 2012:53). The Sassanians' diadem was a modified Greek design because the Sassanians most probably did not have enough information to on what headpieces the pre-Arsacid dynasty wore (Soudavar 2012:53).

Shapur I's reign began in 240 CE, while Ardashir I was still alive (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 821). Ardashir I died relatively shortly after standing down as sole ruler-somewhere in 241 CE or early 242 CE (Frye 1984:294). In the time between Ardashir I standing down as sole ruler, and his death a period would have occurred where Ardashir I would have been able to give advice to his son and successor Shapur I (Frye 1984:294). This time of tutelage would have ensured that precious lessons and knowledge that Ardashir I would have procured in his lengthy political career would not be lost and could be transmitted to Shapur I in real time (Frye 1984:295). The chain of transmission of knowledge was broken in the succession crisis period as the Sassanian monarchs only had an approximate average reign of one year and as a result did not have the time to accrue experience and transmit it to a possible successor (Bosworth 1999:xxvi).

Shapur I not only fought wars against the Roman Empire but also against the Kushan Empire who had its homeland to the north of Bactria (Frye 1984:258). Shapur I was reportedly able to defeat the Kushans in c. 265 CE and annex the northern part of the Kushan kingdom (Frye 1984:262). The northern part of the Kushan Empire was the core of the empire and by making this region a province of the Sassanian Empire, Shapur I strengthened his own kingdom while greatly reducing the strength of a rival kingdom (Chegini 1996:43). To be able to conquer new territory of a rival empire would boost the legitimacy of a Sassanian monarch, because there is then something to show for all the wars that the monarch ordered the army to fight in. Shapur I did loudly proclaim the territorial extent of the Sassanian Empire in propaganda like in the inscription on the face of the Ka'be-ye Zardosht (in Persis) which proclaims that Shapur I expanded Sassanian control in the east (Chegini 1996:42). The inscription goes on to mention that Shapur I's possessions were Merv, Herat, Abarshahr, Kerman, Seistan, Turan, Makran, Paradan, Hind (Sind), Kushanshahr stretching as far as Peshawar (Chegini 1996:42). The Ka'be-ye Zardosht lists all the eastern provinces as well and shows the importance that territories played in reinforcing the legitimacy and increase the prestige of the Sassanian monarchy (Chegini 1996:43). The first two Sassanian monarchs, Ardashir I and Shapur I, enlarged the Sassanian Empire and this would have ensured that there would be political support for their rule.

Shapur I's rule was approximately from 240 CE (when he began his reign as co-ruler with Ardashir I) until 270 CE (Daryaee 2009:223). In Shapur I's reign there were many significant events that occurred that would have an effect on the Sassanian Empire in the future (Daryaee 1998:449). The deportations that Shapur I initiated for example was done so as to initiate urbanization process by moving the newly acquired skilled labour to the new centres in the Sassanian Empire (Daryaee 1998:449). The unintended consequence of the deportation of population groups from the West though was that by the late Sassanian period there was a rapid conversion rate to Christianity in the Sassanian Empire and that the number of Christians rose in the empire (Daryaee 1998:449). The rise of the popularity of Christianity within the Sassanian Empire would of course lead to antagonism between the Christians and the Sassanian monarchy in various periods of Sassanian history (Foster & Foster 2009:186). In Shapur I's reign the eastern frontier from Indus to Bactria was secured also and in the west Shapur I humiliated three Roman emperors and tried to use these victories in propaganda to portray himself as the ideal warrior-king (Foster & Foster 2009:186). In Shapur I's reign

there were also intellectual works commissioned though: “as well as translations of Greek and Indian works on astrology, agriculture, philosophy, natural sciences, and physics” (Foster & Foster 2009:186). Shapur I not only wanted to portray himself as the ideal warrior-king but also as a king that was learned and wise (Foster & Foster 2009:186). The image of the scholar king that Shapur I tried to cultivate is very reminiscent of the image that is prevalent in propaganda of Khosrow I (Litvinsky & Guang-Da 1996:25). The Sassanian king embodied the happiness and destiny of the royal dynasty and the entire state and as such he had to be seen to be an expert in many disciplines such as intellectual disciplines, martial disciplines, religious matters etc. (Litvinsky & Guang-Da 1996:25). Shapur I tried to represent himself in various to be the ideal Sassanian king in all disciplines and all aspects but especially in martial matters (Litvinsky & Guang-Da 1996:25).

Hormizd I was reportedly called “the Bold” because of his prowess in battle, indicating an urge to replicate the military feats of his successful father Shapur I (Bosworth 1999:40 n. 124). Hormizd I reportedly did not have his predecessor’s skill or judgement although he did have some military skill (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 831). The period of forty years after Shapur I’s death has been termed a period of comparative weakness and decline in the Sassanian Empire though (Bosworth 1999:40 n. 125). The period’s weakness and decline was not equal to that of the succession crisis period that started in 628 CE but it was the first decline that the Sassanian Empire would experience after the reigns of Ardashir I and Shapur I. Hormizd I did allegedly resemble Ardashir I in appearance although he did not have the political acumen of his grandfather according to *The History of Prophets and Kings* and this could have been a contributing factor to the decline after Shapur I’s reign (Bosworth 1999:40 n. 125).

According to the legend, Hormizd was still young when Ardashir I noticed the youth: “[He] became aware of the resemblance in the youth to his own family, because the qualities of Persian kingship (*al-kayiyah*) characteristic of the Ardashir’s house could not be concealed” (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 832). The Persian qualities of kingship (*al-kayiyah*) refer to semilegendary dynasty of the Kayanids that the Sassanians regularly looked to for legitimacy (Bosworth 1999:41 n. 127). In the legend the qualities of kingship manifested themselves in the physical characteristics of Hormizd, namely a handsome face and stout

physique (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 832). When Ardashir I found out the whole truth from Shapur he was actually overjoyed to hear that the prophecy of the astrologers was linked to Hormizd I and not a usurper (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 832). What is significant about the genealogical tradition is not the the historical veracity of it but that early Sassanians could, to some degree, only gain legitimacy from a connection to the Parthians (Pourshariati 2008:47). The belief circulated in the late Sassanian period also as evidenced by the survival of the story into the Islamic era (Pourshariati 2008:47). What is certain is that the support of the Parthian nobles was needed if the Sassanian king was to ensure legitimacy for their rule (Pourshariati 2008:47). This important fact continued to be true in the succession crisis period as the general Shahrbaraz was a member of one of the important Parthian families, the Mihrans (Pourshariati 2008:177).

Hormizd I was most probably the youngest of Shapur I's sons and as a result there must have been a reason why he was chosen by Shapur I to succeed him over all of the other older candidates (Daryaee 2009:10). Hormizd I was most probably chosen because of his military talent and loyalty (Daryaee 2009:10). Hormizd I's positive characteristics as described in *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 831: "he was outstanding for his fortitude in battle, boldness, and massive build." Hormizd I may have shown a military talent in Shapur I's campaign in the 260s CE that uncovered the youngest son's talents and catapulted him to the front of the line (Daryaee 2009:10). It shows the importance of military prowess (especially in the formative years of the Sassanian Empire) that the youngest son could go ahead in the line of succession primarily because of his martial talent (Daryaee 2009:10).

In the 3rd century CE the Sassanian Empire's one main economic aim was to secure dominance over the silk trade (Feltham 2010:15). The Sassanian Empire did rapidly establish dominance over the silk trade and it gave not only economic benefits but also prestige to the Sassanian monarchy (Feltham 2010:15). Raw silk transported along the Silk Road from China found its way to Persia and Byzantine Syria where it was then dyed and woven (Feltham 2010:17). The "processed" silk was then transported from the Near East to Europe or to Japan and China (Feltham 2010:17). The region of Sogdiana was also a hub for raw silk trade between China, the Sassanians, and the Byzantines (Feltham 2010:17). The advantage for the Sassanian monarchs was that Sogdiana was part of the Sassanian Empire until

approximately the mid-6th century CE (Feltham 2010:17). The economic advantage that the direct control of Sogdiana brought was as a result not one that the late Sassanian monarchs enjoyed (Feltham 2010:17). The control of Sogdiana was one of the stark economic contrasts between the late Sassanian period and the early Sassanian period (Feltham 2010:17). In approximately 550 CE the Byzantine Empire had learnt the secret of silk production and this fact also damaged the profit the Sassanian Empire could make from the silk trade (Feltham 2010:15). After 550 CE the Sassanian Empire had lost certain key economical assets that would have weakened the state in comparison with the situation in the early Sassanian period.

After Wahram II died in 291 CE under unknown circumstances his son, Wahram III, ascended to the Sassanian throne (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 835). Wahram III had the honorific title of Sakānshāh (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 835). The honorific title literally means “king of the Sakas, i.e. of the people controlling or inhabiting Sakāstan/Sagastān, Islamic Sijistān, Sīstān” (Bosworth 1999:47 n. 138). Wahram III had acquired this post during his predecessors’ reign because of the early Sassanian practice of granting titles to royal princes (Bosworth 1999:47 n. 138). Wahram III was appointed as ruler of Sistan specifically because of the importance of the region as a buffer against the people of the eastern fringes (Bosworth 1999:47 n. 138). Wahram II had also conquered Sistan after Hormizd’s revolt and as a result it was of great importance to consolidate Sassanian power in the region (Bosworth 1999:47 n. 138). There was enough confidence in Wahram III’s abilities to the extent that he was appointed to the difficult provincial post of Sistan (Bosworth 1999:47 n. 138).

The relative internal stability of the early Sassanian Empire was possible through continuity in personnel and organization that Narseh also tried to sustain (Wiesehöfer 2001:169). The renewal of the vanguard position against Rome was also intended to foster internal stability (Wiesehöfer 2001:169). The wars against Rome were largely motivated by political calculation (Wiesehöfer 2001:169). The wars primarily served as a source for consolidation and legitimisation in the Sassanian Empire (Wiesehöfer 2001:169). Narseh could not rely on the wars against Rome for legitimisation though as he did not achieve the level of success against the Romans that Ardashir I and Shapur I had enjoyed (Bosworth 1999:49 n. 141). During Narseh’s reign the Romans were able to install the Armenian Arsacid royal Tiridates I

as the king of Armenia (Bosworth 1999:49 n. 141). The Persians had to furthermore cede a little part of Armenia to the Romans (Bosworth 1999:49 n. 141). Although Narseh was not successful militarily the fact was that the peace that he negotiated with Diocletian in 298 CE lasted for approximately 40 years in the Sassanian Empire (Bosworth 1999:49 n. 141). The fact that the Sassanian Empire was forced to negotiate from a position of weakness militarily had the effect that a relatively lengthy peace was initiated between the two ancient empires (Bosworth 1999:49 n. 141).

The inequity of the peace treaty of Nisibis in 298 CE between Narseh I, Diocletian and Galerius laid the foundation for more wars between the Roman Empire and Sassanian Empire (Shayegan 2013:806). Narseh I had to acquiesce to unfavourable peace terms because the fate of the entire Sassanian imperial train hung in the balance after the battle of Satala in Armenia (Shayegan 2013:806). The peace of Nisibis made Armenia a Roman vassal state and the trans-Tigris territories in Upper Mesopotamia were yielded to Rome (Shayegan, 2013:807). The peace that Narseh I made was not intended to be lasting and as a result when Shapur II's reign had been consolidated he aimed to regain the territories lost by Narseh (Shayegan 2013: 807). The peace of Nisibis in essence set up the wars between the Byzantines and Sassanians that occurred after the first period of Sassanian history (Shayegan 2013:807).

4.8 Summary

With the comparison between the succession crisis monarchs and the early Sassanian monarchs, certain key differences in legitimisation have been identified. After 550 CE the economic prestige of the Sassanians was weakened with the loss of the region of Sogdiana and the Byzantines learning the secrets of silk production (Feltham 2010:15). Territorial integrity was important in legitimising the rule of the early Sassanian monarchs as it was used on propaganda like the inscriptions on the face of the Ka'be-ye Zardosht (Chegini 1996:42). The monarchs from the succession monarchs did not have the option of loudly proclaiming the territorial extent of their empire because they had lost territory to the Byzantine Empire as a result of the recent Sassanian-Byzantine war of approximately 602-628 CE (Daryaee 2009:33). A constant was that the Parthian aristocratic families remained important from the early Sassanian era right until the demise of the Sassanian Empire (Pourshariati 2008:177).

Urbanisation seemingly slowed and as a result the succession crisis monarchs could not construct and attach their names to cities with the same effect that the early Sassanians did (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 830). This brings to conclusion the comparison between the succession crisis monarchs and the early monarchs and in the following chapter the question will be answered as to why the legitimisation of the succession crisis monarchs failed.

Chapter 5: Reasons why legitimisation failed in the Sassanian state between 628-632 CE

Important reasons why the monarchs of the succession crisis period could not legitimise their rule can be found in the preceding period. Khosrow II overextended the Sassanian Empire and suffered a defeat at the hands of the Byzantine Empire in 628 CE. This damaged the legitimacy of the Sassanian royal family (Foster & Foster 2009:189). What is telling is that Khosrow II could have been imprisoned and starved to death by his generals following the Sassanian Empire's defeat (Foster & Foster 2009:189). This is indicative of the power that generals, like Shahrbaraz, had accrued so that they could challenge the power of the monarch successfully (Foster & Foster 2009:189). The defeat also left the Sassanians in military disarray as they had to withdraw from the provinces which they had recently conquered: Turkey, Syria, the southern Levant and Egypt (Foster & Foster 2009:189). Military prestige was also an important part of Sassanian political legitimisation as evidenced by Shapur I's Bishapur II victory rock relief (Canepa 2013:866). The defeat after an approximately 25 year long war against a non-Iranian enemy like the Byzantine Empire, would have the result that victory propaganda similar to that of Shapur I, would not have been a viable option (Daryaee 2009:33).

The internal conflict in the Sassanian Empire during the succession crisis period also had the effect of weakening the state and decreasing the legitimacy of the royal family (Pourshariati 2008:199). The mutiny of Shahrbaraz against Ardashir III in c. 630 CE for example had the effect that the Iranian defence against the Arabs was seriously compromised (Pourshariati 2008:199). The defence of the Sassanian realm was disrupted in the succession crisis period by factionalism that was prevalent during the period (Pourshariati 2008:199). In 630 CE the factionalism preoccupied three armies of the Sassanian Empire: the army of Azerbaijan, of Shahrbaraz and of Nimruz (Pourshariati 2008:199). The Sassanians were unable to wholly protect their subjects yet this was an important duty of the Sassanian king (Pourshariati 2008:199). The Arabs were furthermore able to conquer the region of Hira from the Sassanians and as a result the territorial integrity, which was an important part of imperial propaganda, was threatened (Pourshariati 2008:199). Propaganda that loudly proclaimed the

territorial extent of the empire like Shapur I's Ka'be-ye Zardosht rock inscription was not a realistic option if control over the territories was not even a certainty. Narseh I for instance in his royal title of *šāhān šāh Ērān ud An-ērān* ("king of kings of Iran and non-Iranians") omitted the section *ud An-ērān* ("and non-Iranians") most probably because of territory that was ceded to Rome (Shayegan 2013:805). The territorial extent did as a result play a factor in propaganda in the early Sassanian period as well as the late Sassanian period.

Private interests of the high aristocracy hindered the Sassanian royal house's efforts to legitimise their rule (Wiesehöfer 2001:244). The politically ambitious aristocrats of the Sassanian succession crisis period were powerful enough to raise royal candidates of their choosing to the throne. The administration of the Sassanian Empire changed in the late Sassanian period (Miri 2013:914). The office of *marzbān* was, until the mid 6th century CE, the military governor of the frontiers of the four quadrants of the empire (Miri 2013:914). In the mid 6th century CE the function of the *marzbān* seems to have changed as the term was applied to a provincial governor who was previously called *šahrab* (Miri 2013:914). Only some offices are known to have existed in the early Sassanian period- *framādār* (provincial commander-in-chief), *handarzbed* (provincial court councillor), *šahrab* (provincial governor) and *dādwār* (judge) (Miri 2013:915). The absence of other offices in 3rd century CE does not necessarily mean that they did not exist in the early Sassanian period because the inscriptions were tools of royal propaganda (Miri 2013:915). If the early Sassanian inscriptions are indicative of the amount of offices then there was a clear proliferation of administrative positions as the positions increased from four to sixteen (Miri 2013:915). The territorial extent of the Sassanian Empire did not dramatically increase from the 3rd century CE until the mid 6th century CE although power over the regions became parcelled to a larger number of people (Miri 2013:915). With a larger administrative structure it would have been harder to monitor the activities of all the officials and treason would have been theoretically easier (Miri 2013:915).

By the succession crisis period the Zoroastrian priesthood had again gained more power (Emrani 2009:3). The involvement of religious representatives in administrative functions and their authority increased over time so that by the end of the 6th century CE the priests performed specific functions within each provincial administration (Emrani 2009:4). For

example in *Mādyān ī Hazār Dādestān* an extensive list of religious titles and people are represented (Emrani 2009:4). Emrani (2009:4) goes on to state:

“This rise of the political authority of the Mazdean institution not only limited the power of the king, but at the same time spread some of the burden of the preservation of kingship to the religious representatives and the nobles who had a vested interest in the continuation of the dynasty.”

Nobles and priests in the late Sassanian period as a result felt that it was their duty to be involved in the Sassanian monarchy so as to preserve the status quo (Emrani 2009:4). The influence of the Zoroastrian priests could not be wholly dismantled because religion was important in legitimising the rule of Sassanian monarchs (Emrani 2009:7). The monarch for example had to be worthy of *xwarrah*, Divine Glory (Emrani 2009:7). There were various ways in which the succession crisis monarch could be worthy of *xwarrah* for example by having the crown and coinage depicted with religious symbolism (Emrani 2009:5). Another way: “One way to accomplish this was through the revival of the early Sassanian political ideology of divinized king” (Emrani 2009:5). By depicting themselves as the protector of the Zoroastrian establishment, this could also alleviate some of the pressure on the monarchs and win the support of this specific religious establishment (Emrani 2009:7).

A general movement towards consolidation and orthodoxy in Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism arose in the late Sassanian period (Frye 1984:322). During the period 488 CE until 496 CE the Mazdakite social and religious movement came to the fore whose effect would be felt by every late Sassanian period (Frye 1984:322). The founder of the religion, Mazdak, supposedly had Manichaean leanings and an extreme socialist ideology embedded in his religious teachings (Frye 1984:323). The communal practices caused great upheaval in Iran and had the effect that the status quo was challenged (Frye 1984:323). Mazdak allegedly supported the poor and hungry in time of famine and secured consent from Kavad I to let the poor take what they needed from the rich (Frye 1984:323). Mazdak also preached the breakdown of the traditional family unit and upheld polygamous relationships where women could have several male partners (Frye 1984:323). The nobility and clergy reacted against this social movement and as a result Kavad I was deposed in 496 CE but the Mazdakite movement nevertheless had a definite effect on the social outlook of the Sassanians (Frye 1984:323). With the experience of the Mazdakite movement the poor had a

template for upsetting the status quo and as a result it would be more difficult to legitimise the Sassanian regime to these people (Frye 1984:323). Khosrow I as a result had to directly address the issues through tax reforms that were not solely based on land but also based on the type of product produced (Dayaee 2009:30). Late Sassanian monarchs as a result, had to please the poor though not to the extent of alienating the aristocracy and clergy (Daryaee 2009:30).

An important reason that made it difficult for Sassanian monarchs in the succession crisis period to legitimise their respective regime was Kavad II's fratricide (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1061). The effect of Kavad II killing seventeen Sassanian candidates was that Sassanians who came to the throne in the succession crisis period, like Jushnas Dih, only had tenuous links to the Sassanian royal family (Bosworth 1999:405 n. 1000). Their lack of an illustrious heritage made it more difficult to legitimise their reign. The genealogy of the Sassanian monarchs was an important part of their propaganda and legitimisation. The name of the Sassanian dynasty in itself links with the ephemeral figure, Sassan who could have been Ardashir I's grandfather (Bosworth 1999:3 n. 5). The Ardashir I genealogy in *The History of Prophets and Kings*, 813, goes as far back as the Achaemenids, who had descended into a legendary haze by then. Darius III is said to be Ardashir I's paternal cousin and this would have lent him legitimacy (Bosworth 1999:3 n. 5). With Sassanians coming to the throne in the succession crisis period, which were not directly related to the previous monarchs, the genealogical chain was broken. As a result propaganda that expounded the monarch's descent would not have the same immediate impact as if it had been an unbroken line of descent.

The factors that hindered the legitimisation projects of Sassanian monarchs, specifically the monarchs from the late Sassanian period, can be divided into internal and external factors. One of the important external factors that had a detrimental effect on the legitimacy of the succession crisis period monarchs was the military defeat the Sassanian Empire suffered at the hands of the Byzantine Empire in 628 CE (Daryaee 2009:33). The defeat had the effect that by 630 CE all the territories that the Sassanians had conquered in the period between 602 CE and 628 CE were returned to the Romans (Daryaee 2009:33). The fact that defeat was the result of a war that taxed Sassanian resources and manpower, was damaging to Sassanian

legitimacy (Daryaei 2009:33). During the war, in 624 CE, the sacred Adur Farroday temple at Ganzak in the heart of the Sassanian Empire was sacked by the Byzantines (Daryaei 2009:33). The fact that the Sassanians were unable to protect the sacred Zoroastrian fire-temple would have been especially damaging to Sassanian legitimacy, as Sassanian propaganda and ideology were to a large degree rooted in the Zoroastrian faith.

An internal factor that hindered legitimacy was the growing independence and power of the nobility and priests. Khosrow II's death came about as a result of the nobility and priests' dissatisfaction and the overthrow of the Sassanian kings. After the death of Khosrow II the institution of kingship increasingly became a tool for the nobility to use so as to gain greater power (Wiesehöfer 2010:139). The second internal factor that hindered Sassanian legitimisation was the fratricide that Kavad II committed in 628 CE (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1061). By killing seventeen male Sassanian family members Kavad II not only shrunk the pool of eligible candidates but also sent out a negative image (*The History of Prophets and Kings*, 1061). Opposition to the Sassanian family could cite the fratricide incident as an example of the negative aspects of the family.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The aim of the study was to gain a better understanding of the legitimisation practices of Sassanian monarchs in the succession crisis period (628-632 CE) and by extension the political aspect of this period. To gauge what aspects were unique to the late Sassanian period the legitimisation practices of the succession crisis period were compared to the early Sassanian practices. The legitimisation of the Sassanian monarchs in the succession crisis period was distinct from the 3rd century CE in respect that different symbols were used for instance, and the specific role of the priests (Litvinsky & Guang-Da 1996:24). How the Sassanian monarchs wanted to be seen and the techniques with which this propagandistic image was conveyed, remained remarkably similar. In the succession crisis period the Sassanian dynasty had a shrinking pool of resources at their disposal though and they had to legitimise their regimes quickly in the face of internal opposition (Brosius 2006:158). As a result of the circumstances the late Sassanians focused on coinage as an art form that could legitimise their regime. Almost all of the historically verifiable Sassanian monarchs from the succession crisis period did mint coinage although many of their reigns were short and disputed by other candidates (Schindel 2013:816). With coinage a large number of pieces of propaganda could be produced in a relatively short period and could be widely circulated. The late Sassanians also legitimised their rule through the nature of their court (Wiesehöfer 2001:221). The aim of the late Sassanian monarchs was to have a court of good breeding: “Obedience, elegant manners, culture, games and hunting were expected and practised” (Wiesehöfer 2001:220). The specific image of the late Sassanian court was also diffused by late Sassanian literature (Wiesehöfer 2001:220). The reigns of many of the 3rd century CE Sassanian monarchs were quite lengthy though so they could initiate time consuming projects like rock reliefs and the founding of new cities (Canepa 2013:857). Because these early Sassanian projects were sizeable and permanent fixtures in their environment they legitimised the patron monarch of these projects. Another feature of early Sassanian politics was the appropriation of Parthian legitimisation tools (like the Parthian tiara and the use of ribbons on art) to facilitate the transition from the Parthian dynasty to the Sassanian dynasty (Chegini 1996:41; Huff 2010:33). In the study the political actions of each succession crisis monarch to legitimise their regime was individually analysed so as to chronologically track the developments that occurred during the period. The coinage of each individual monarch was analysed and the legitimisation and identity markers identified. The actions of previous monarchs also had an influence on legitimisation. In the succession crisis period for example

monarchs like Buran, Shahrbaraz and Azarmigduxt regularly referred to Khosrow II as justification for their actions. The study showed that the succession crisis Sassanian monarchs focused on legitimisation that was not resource heavy or time consuming to complete. As a result succession crisis monarchs focused on issuing coinage, literature (like public letters, scientific texts and works of fiction) and making their genealogy known. This was because Sassanian resources were diverted to a large degree to quashing internal political resistance. The political legitimisation that the succession crisis monarchs launched failed because of a combination of factors. The factors were the result of the long war against the Byzantines, fratricide in the Sassanian family and internal opposition from the Sassanian Empire. The circumstances dictated to a large degree how Sassanian monarchs legitimised their rule. The Sassanian Empire of the 7th century CE differed significantly from the early Sassanian Empire. In terms of enemies, religions and the social structure within the Late Sassanian Empire, the monarchs required a different, distinct set of legitimisation techniques. Not one of the monarchs from the succession crisis period could react to the circumstances and effectively legitimise their regime.

Illustrations



FIGS. 1, 2, 3. Ardashir I.



FIG. 4. Shapur I.

FIG. 5. Hormizd I.

FIG. 6. Bahram I.

Fig. 1 Coinage from Ardashir I to Wahram I (Chegini 1996:50 fig. 1-6)



FIGS. 7, 8. Bahram II.

FIG. 9. Narseh.



FIG. 10. Narseh.

FIG. 11. Hormizd II.

FIG. 12. Shapur II
(gold dinar).

Fig. 2 Coinage from Wahram II to Shapur II (Chegini 1996:51 fig. 7-12)



FIG. 13. Ardashir II.



FIG. 14. Shapur III.



FIG. 15. Bahram IV.



FIG. 16. Yazdgird I.



FIG. 17. Bahram V.



FIG. 18. Yazdgird II.



Fig. 3 Coinage from Ardashir II to Yazdgird II (Chegini 1996:52 fig. 13-18)



FIG. 19. Peroz.



FIG. 20. Valash.



FIG. 21. Kavad I.



FIG. 22. Jamasp.



FIG. 23. Khusrau I.



FIG. 24. Hormizd IV.



Fig. 4 Coinage from Peroz to Hormizd IV (Chegini 1996:53 fig. 19-24)



Fig. 5 Coinage from Wahram VI to Khosrow II (Chegini 1996:54 fig. 25-30)



FIG. 31. Kavad II.

FIGS. 32, 33. Ardashir III.



FIG. 34. Khusrau III.

FIG. 35. Queen Boran.

FIG. 36. Queen Azarmigdukht.

Fig. 6 Coinage from Kavad II to Azarmiduxt (Chegini 1996:55 fig. 31-36)



FIG. 37. Hormizd VI.

FIG. 38. Khusrau IV.



FIGS. 39, 40, 41. Yazdgird III.

Fig. 7 Coinage from Hormizd VI/Hormizd V to Yazdgird III (Chegini 1996:56 fig.37-41)



Fig. 8 Silver plate (4th century CE) from Touroucheva of Shapur II hunting lions (Feltham 2010:1 fig. 1)



Fig. 9 Shapur I's victory scene on Bishapur II relief (Soudavar 2012:32 fig. 1 names inserted in original)

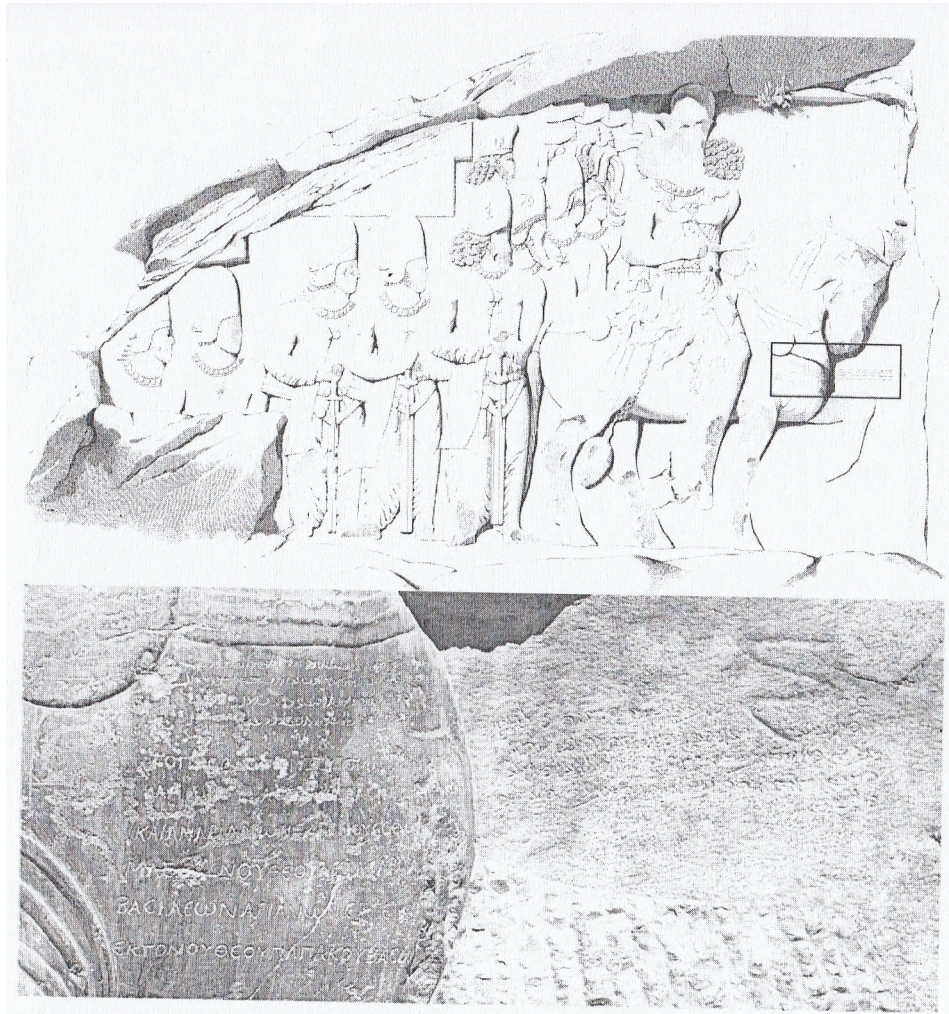


Fig. 10 The relief of Shapur I at Naqsh-e Rajab with the trilingual inscription (Parthian, Middle Persian and Greek) shown below (Overlaet 2013:319 fig. 2).

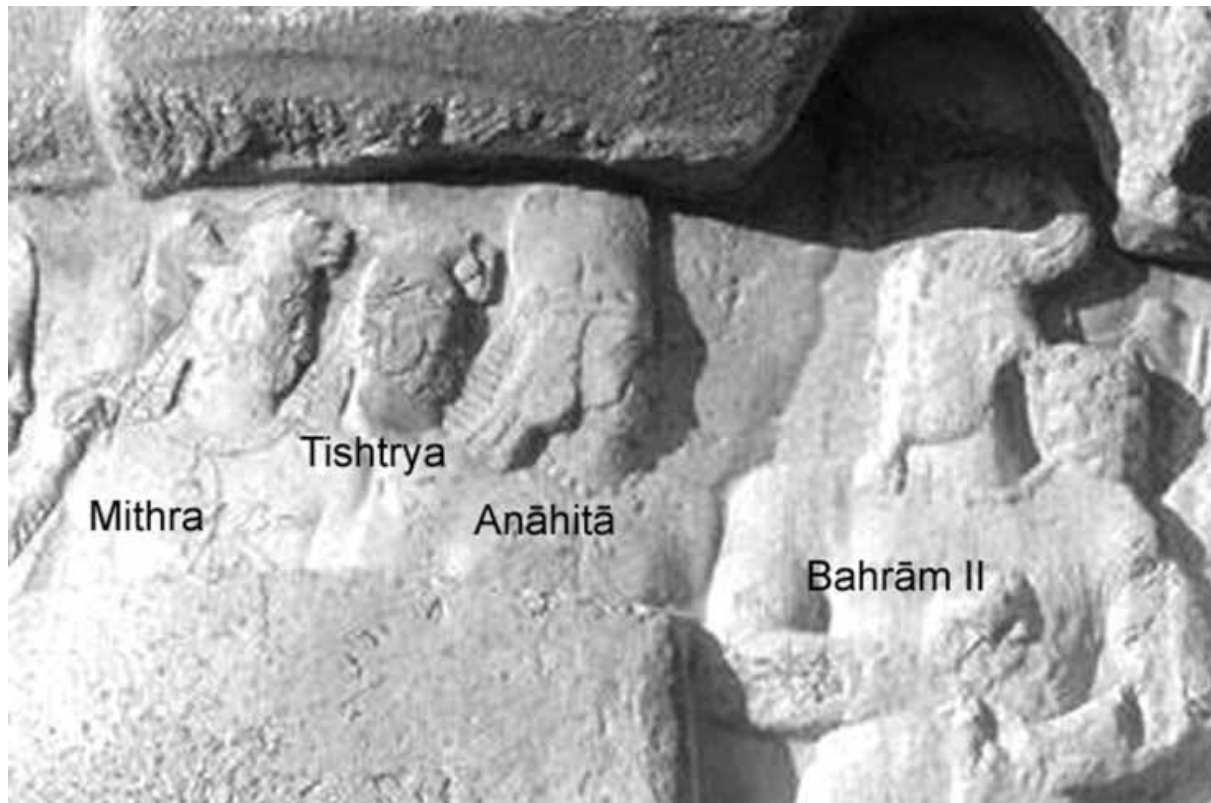


Fig. 11 Deities facing Wahram II on his relief at Naqsh-e Rostam (Soudavar 2012:43 fig. 13 names inserted in original)



Fig. 12 Rock portrait of Kirdir at Naqsh-e Rajab (Chegini & Nikitin 1996:69 fig. 10)



Fig. 13 A silver plate from Krasnoya Polyana (Abkhazia) of a prince, presumably Wahram I, hunting bears (Harper & Meyers 1981:210 plate 9)



Fig. 14 A silver cup from Sargveshi (Georgia) bearing a medallion portrait of Wahram II
(Harper & Meyers 1981:203 plate 2)

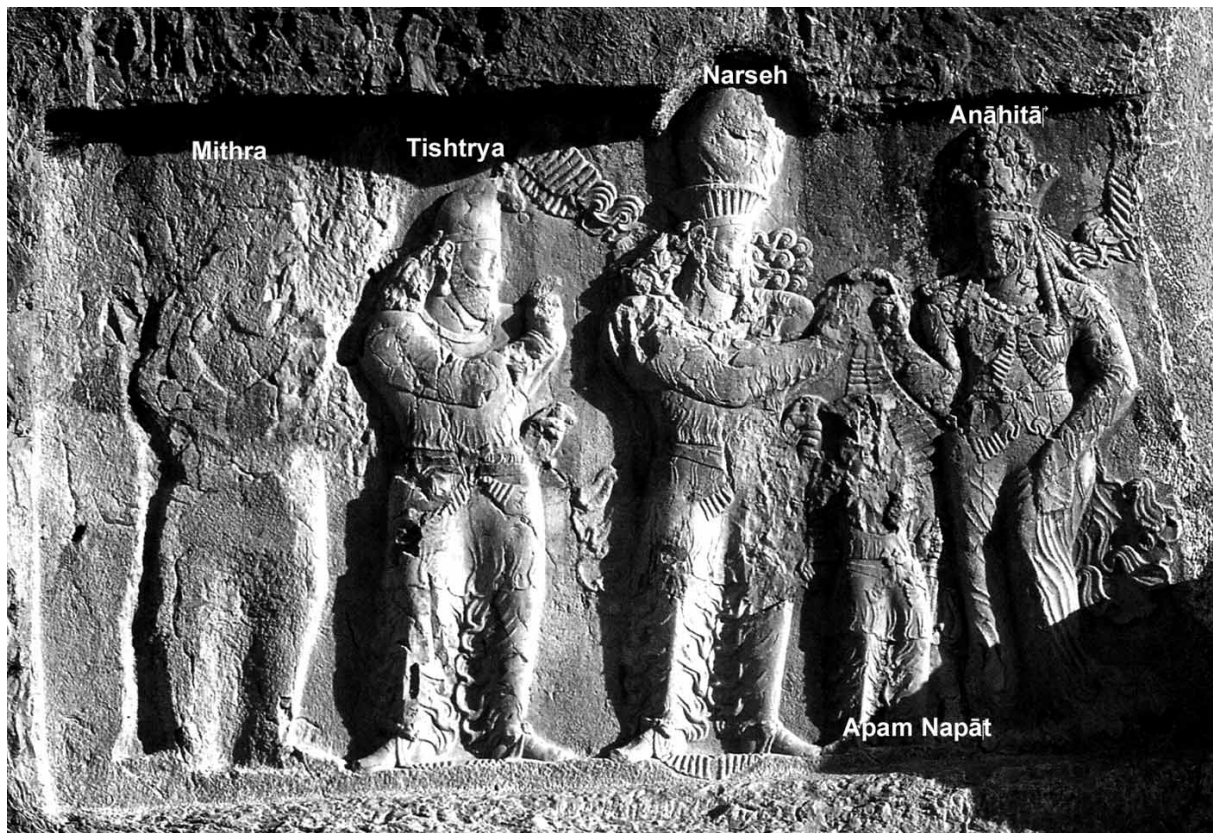


Fig. 15 An investiture rock relief of Narseh at Naqsh-e Rostam (Soudavar 2012:38 fig.8)



Fig. 16 Silver drachm of Hormizd I currently in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

(Afram 2010:24 fig. 17)



Fig. 17 Silver drachm of Wahram II with his queen facing a youth who wears a high tiara from the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Aram 2010:25 fig. 20)



Fig. 18 Silver drachm of Wahram II depicted together with his queen from the British Museum (Aram 2010:26 fig. 21)

Fig. 19 Silver drachm of Wahram II depicting him and his queen facing an unbearded figure who has a diadem in hand from the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Aram 2010:26 fig. 22)



Fig. 20 Gold double dinar of Shapur I with the Roman emperor Philip and Shapur I represented on the reverse (Alram 2010:23 fig. 15)

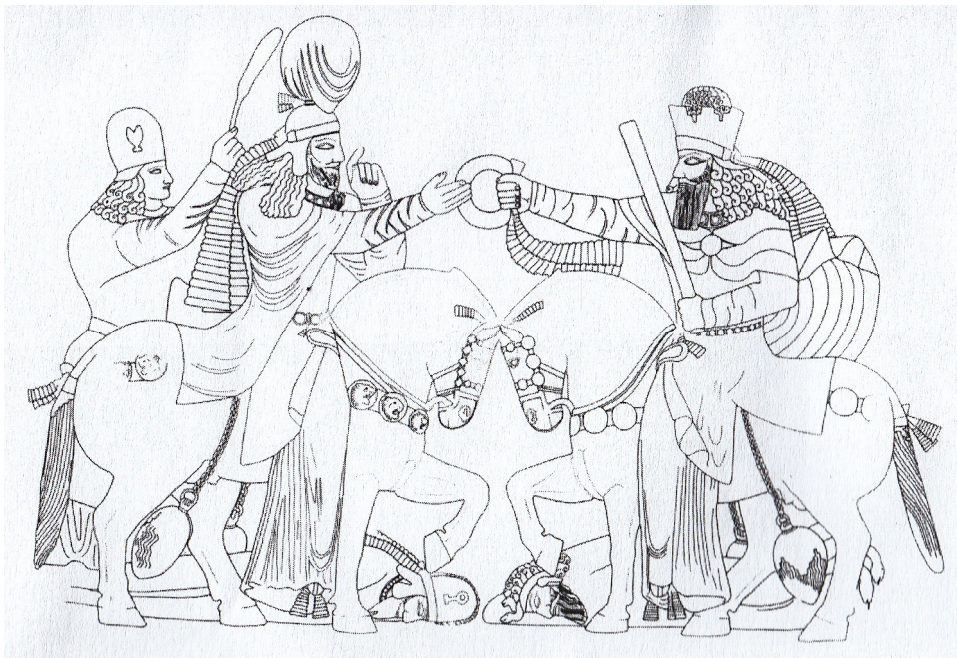


Fig. 21 Ardashir I's investiture rock relief at Naqsh-e Rostam (Overlaet 2013:341 Pl.2)



Fig. 22 Heracles depicted on a Sassanian silver plate (C.5th-7th CE) returning Eurystheus with the Erymanthean boar (Feltham 2010:25 Figure 15).

Monarch	Reign
Kavad II	628 CE
Ardashir III	628 CE-629 CE
Shahrbaraz	629 CE or 629 CE-630 CE
Buran	630-631 CE
Jushnas Dih	c.631 CE
Azarmigduxt	631-632 CE
Khosrow III	Between 630 CE and 632 CE
Khurrazādh Khusraw	Between 631 CE and 637 CE
Peroz II	Between 631 CE and 637 CE
Farrukzādh Khusraw	Between 631CE and 637 CE
Hormozd V	Between 630 CE and 632 CE
Yazdgird III	632-651 CE

Fig. 23 The different approximate reigns of each individual monarch

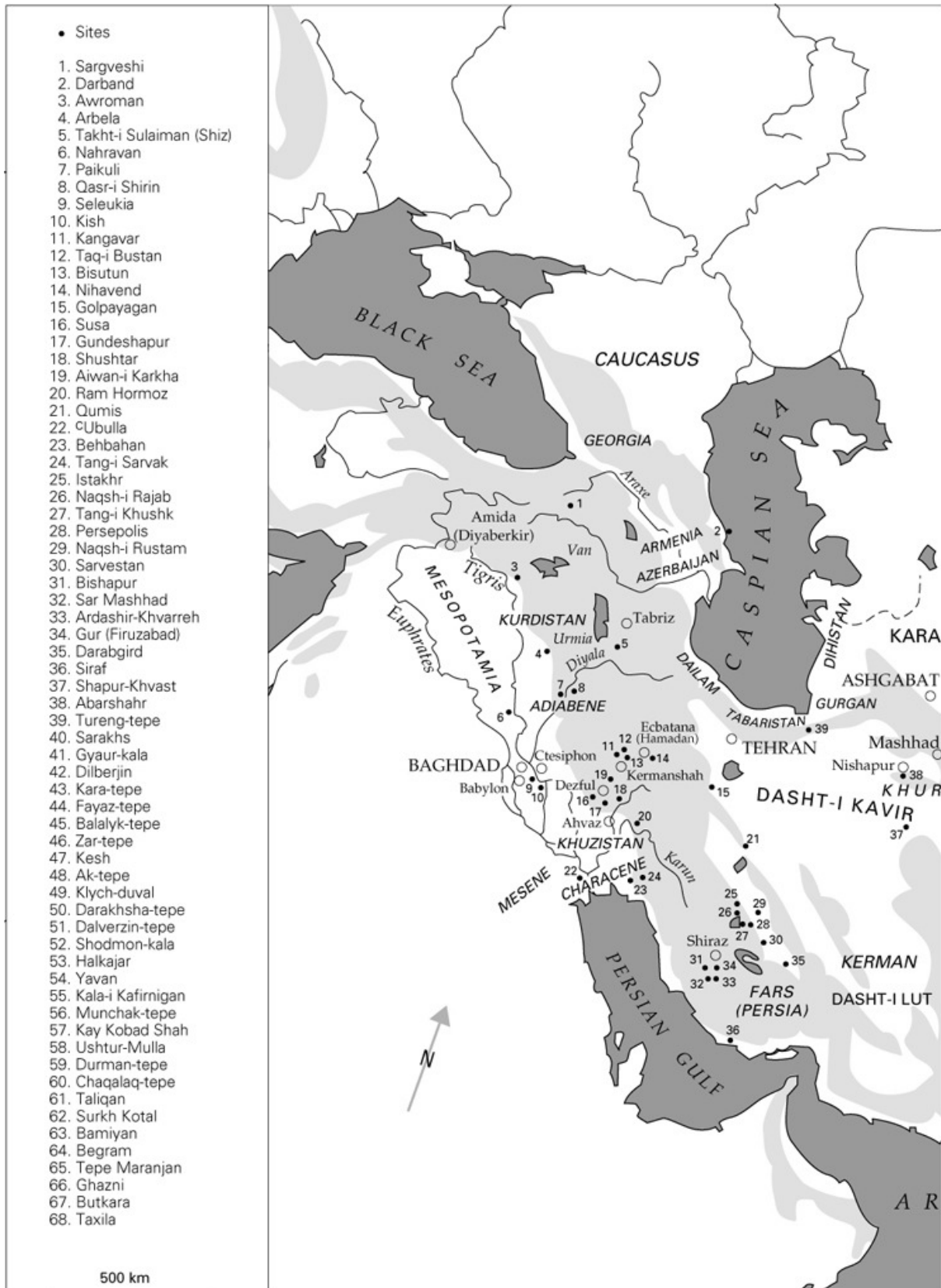


Fig. 24 Map of Sassanian Iran and important locations (Litvinsky, B.A., Guang-Da, Z. & Shabani Samghabadi, R. (eds.) 1996:490 MAP 2a)

Bibliography:

Aram, M. 2010. Early Sasanian Coinage. In Curtis, V. S. & Stewart, S. (eds.). *The Sasanian Era*. London: I.B. Tauris.17-29.

Bosworth, C.E. (trans.). 1999. *The History of al-Ṭabari Volume V: The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Boyce, M. 1984. On the Antiquity of Zoroastrian Apocalyptic. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 47/ 1: 57-75.

Brosius, M. 2006. *The Persians*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Canepa, M. 2013. Sassanian Rock Reliefs. In Potts, D. T. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*. New York: Oxford University Press, 856-878.

Canepa, M. 2010. Distant Displays of Power: Understanding the Cross-Cultural Interaction among the Elites of Rome, Sassanian Iran and Sui-Tang China. *Ars Orientalis* 38: 121-154.

Chegini, N.N. 1996. Political History, Economy, and Society. In Litvinsky, B. A. , Guang-Da, Z. & Shabani Samghabadi, R. (eds.). *History of Civilisations of Central Asia-The Crossroads of Civilisation: A.D. 250-750*. Paris: UNESCO, 40-57.

Chegini, N. N. & Nikitin, A. V. 1996. Sasanian Iran – Economy, Arts and Crafts. In Litvinsky, B.A., Guang-Da, Z. & Shabani Samghabadi, R. (eds.). *History of Civilisations of Central Asia. Vol.3: The Crossroads of Civilisation: A.D. 250-750*. Paris: UNESCO, 35-77.

Daryaee, T. 2010. Kingship in Early Sasanian Iran. In Curtis, V.S. & Stewart, S. (eds.). *The Sasanian Era*. London: I.B. Tauris, 60-68.

Daryaee, T. 2009. *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Daryaee, T. 1998. Sāsānian Persia (224-651 A.D.). *The Journal of Society for Iranian Studies* 31/3/4: 431-461.

Edwell, P. 2013. Sasanian Interactions with Rome and Byzantium. In Potts, D.T. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*. New York: Oxford University Press, 840-856.

Emrani, H. 2009. Like Father, Like Daughter: Late Sasanian Imperial Ideology & the Rise of Bōrān to Power. *e-Sasanika* 5: 1-16.

Feltham, H. 2010. Lions, Silks and Silver: The Influence of Sasanian Persia. *Sino-Platonic Papers* 206: 1-47.

Fishbein, M (trans.). 1992. *Jarīr al-Tabari. The History of al-Tabari Volume XXXI: The War between Brothers*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Foss, C. 2003. The Persians in the Roman Near East (602-630 AD). *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13/2: 149-170.

Foster, B. R. & Foster, K. P. 2009. *Civilisations of Ancient Iraq*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Frye, R.N. 1984. *The History of Ancient Iran*. Munich: C. H. Beck Verlag.

Ghanimati, S. 2013. Kuh-e Khwaja and the Religious Structure of Sasanian Iran. In Potts, D. T. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*. New York: Oxford University Press, 878-909.

Gignoux, P & Litvinsky, B. A. 1996. Religions and Religious Movements – I. In Litvinsky, B. A., Guang-Da, Z. & Shabani Samghabadi, R (eds.). *History of Civilisations of Central Asia-The Crossroads of Civilisation. Vol.3: A.D. 250-750*. Paris: UNESCO, 403-420.

Harper, P.O. 2011. Art in Iran v. Sasanian Art. Online: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/art-in-iran-v-sasanian> (accessed: 11 July 2014).

Harper, P.O. 2010. Image and Identity: Art of the Early Sasanian Dynasty. In Curtis, V. S. & Stewart, S. (eds.). *The Sasanian Era*. London: I.B. Tauris, 71-85.

Harper, P.O. & Meyers, P. 1981. *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period Volume One: Royal Imagery*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Howard-Johnston, J. 2010. State and Society in Late Antique Iran. In Curtis, V. S. & Stewart, S. (eds.). *The Sasanian Era*. London: I.B. Tauris, 118-132.

Huff, D. 2010. Formation and Ideology of the Sasanian State in the Context of the Archaeological Evidence. In Curtis, V. S. & Stewart, S. (ed.). *The Sasanian Era*. London: I.B. Tauris, 31-54.

Humbach, H. H. & Skjærvø, P.O. 1983. The Sassanian Inscription of Paikuli Part 3.1. *Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden*: 1-55.

Karimian, H. 2010. Cities and Social Order in Sasanian Iran - The Archaeological Potential. *Antiquity* 84: 453-466.

Kreyenbroek, P.G. 2010. How Pious was Shapur I: Religion, Church, and Propaganda under the Early Sasanians. In Curtis, V. S. & Stewart, S. (eds.). *The Sasanian Era*. London: I.B. Tauris, 7-15.

Litvinsky, B.A. & Guang-Da, Z. 1996. Historical Introduction. In Litvinsky, B.A., Guang-Da Z. & Shabani Samghabadi, R. (eds.). *History of Civilisations of Central Asia. Vol.3: The Crossroads of Civilisation: A.D. 250-750*. Paris: UNESCO, 24-26.

Litvinsky, B. A., Jalilov, A.H. & Kolesnikov, A. I. 1996. The Arab Conquest. In Litvinsky, B.A., Guang-Da, Z. & Shabani Samghabadi, R. (eds.). *History of Civilisations of Central Asia-The Crossroads of Civilisation: A.D. 250-750*. Paris: UNESCO, 443-471.

Litvinsky, B. A. & Vorobyova-Desvatoskava, M. I. 1996. Religions and Religious Movements II. In Litvinsky, B. A., Guang-Da, Z. & Shabani Samghabadi (eds.). *History of Civilisations of Central Asia. Vol.3: The Crossroads of Civilisation: A.D. 250-750*. Paris: UNESCO, 413-442.

Miri, N. 2013. Sasanian Administration and Sealing Practices. In Potts, D. T. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*. New York: Oxford University Press, 909-920.

Overlaet, B. 2013. And Man Created God? Kings, Priests, and Gods on Sassanian Investiture Reliefs. *Iranica Antiqua* 48: 313-354.

Pourshariati, P. 2008. *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Pourshariati, P. 2007. Hamzah al-Isfahānī and Sāsānid Historical Geography of Sinī Mulūk al-'Ardw'al-Anbīyā. *Res Orientales* 17: 111-138.

Schindel, N. 2013. Sasanian Coinage. In Potts, D. T. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*. New York: Oxford University Press, 814-840.

Shaki, M. 2011. Class System iii. In the Parthian and Sasanian Periods. Online: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/class-system-iii> (Accessed: 11 July 2014).

Shaked, S. 2010. Religion in the Late Sasanian Period: Eran, Aneran and Other Religious Designations. In Curtis, V. S. & Stewart, S. (eds.). *The Sasanian Era*. London: I.B. Tauris, 103-112.

Shayegan, M.R. 2013. Sasanian political ideology. In Potts, D.T. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*. New York: Oxford University Press. 805-814.

Skjærvø, P. O. 2013. Avesta and Zoroastrianism under the Achaemenids and Early Sasanians. In Potts, D. T. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*. New York: Oxford University Press, 547-566.

Soudavar, A. 2012. Looking through the Two Eyes of the Earth: A Reassessment of Sassanian Rock Reliefs. *Iranian Studies* 45/1: 29-58.

Soudavar, A. 2009. The Vocabulary and Syntax of Iconography in Sasanian Iran. *Iranica Antiqua* 44: 417-460.

Soudavar, A. 2003. *The Aura of Kings: Legitimacy and Divine Sanction in Iranian Kingship*. Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers.

Tafazzoli, A. & Khromov, A. L. 1996. Sasanian Iran – Intellectual Life. In Litvinsky, B.A., Guang-Da, Z. & Shabani Samghabadi, R. (ed.). *History of Civilisations of Central Asia. Vol.3:The Crossroads of Civilisation: A.D. 250-750*. Paris: UNESCO, 79-102.

Van den Boorn, G.P.F., Vinkesteijn, M.J. & Bomhof, P.J. 1983. *Oud Iran:Pre-Islamitische kunst en voorwerpen in het Rijksmuseum van oudheden te Leiden*. Zutphen: Terra.

Wiesehöfer, J. 2001. *Ancient Persia*. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers.

Wiesehöfer, J. 2010. King and Kingship in the Sassanian Empire. In Lanfranchi, G. B. & Rollinger, R. (eds.). *Concepts of Kingship in Antiquity: Proceedings of the European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop*. Padova: S.A.R.G.O.N. 135–153.