

The Coins of 3rd Century Sasanian Iran and the Formation of Historical Criteria

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Introduction¹

This paper aims to show how a numismatist can isolate a coin type that provides evidence about a particular political situation, whose real nature has to be discovered by the historian.

We show first how, from a corpus of more or less representative coinage (A), the numismatic scholar can identify a series of coinage (B). If the scholar believes that the series has a sufficient number of typological and stylistic characteristics that distinguish it from general coinage production, he/she will attribute it to a specific source, that is, to a specific mint (C1). By addressing the issue of mints, we raise the question of the territorial organization underlying the monetary administration, and how and why a mint was created and subsequently disappeared (C2). Documenting the network of mints located throughout the empire is a subject too vast and complex to be discussed here, and it will be dealt with only insofar as it concerns the monetary series discussed in the paper (C3). The data concerning the mints not only contribute to a better understanding of the history of the institution of Sasanian mint but also provide invaluable information about the political, economic and military history of the empire. Indeed, the decision to locate a mint at a specific location in the empire was necessarily conditioned by the decisions of the central political power. It is for the historian to discover what purposes this centralized power pursued in choosing a particular location. Finally, we demonstrate that, whereas the engravers of this series frequently developed the same types as those of the main mint, they nevertheless chose, during a certain period of the reign of Wahrām II, an iconographic type for

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Touraj Daryaei for having organised the Late Antique Iran Round-table at February 15th, 2011, and for having, on behalf of the Dr. Samuel M. Jordan Center for Persian Studies and Culture, University of California, Irvine, kindly invited me as the keynote speaker.



the reverse that has not yet been documented in any other mint. Such a choice is neither random nor trivial, and therefore must be symptomatic of a local political situation (D).

The paper begins with the consideration of a single coin, then deals with a whole series of coinage. It concludes by discussing issues of a historical nature.

A. AN EXPANDED MONETARY CORPUS

When Raoul Curiel suggested, in the 1990s, the creation of the *Sylloge Nummorum Sasanidarum* (hereafter *SNS*), his first goal was to make available fully illustrated and documented public collections to numismatists. According to him, this would be the necessary condition for the advancement of numismatic and historical research on the Sasanian empire.

In those years, two typologies defined scholarly approaches to the coinage of the third century: that of V. Lukonin,² which was essentially based on the collections of Soviet museums, and that of R. Göbl,³ the corpus of which drew on numerous major public collections in Europe and various private collections.⁴ This coinage of the third century was also the subject of several interpretative studies,⁵ which were unfortunately published with either little or no illustrations.

The first objective of the *SNS* was the publication of the collections in Paris, Berlin and Vienna. However, as it was necessary to integrate them into a framework (i.e., a preferred typology), it had to be determined to what extent the typologies of Göbl and Lukonin were still relevant in relation to the new numismatic materials that had appeared since the 1960s. It soon became apparent that it would be preferable to build a ‘new’ typology instead of trying to accommodate the old ones to new data. The *SNS* thus added the construction of a new typology to its primary objective, and this task strongly influenced the content of the *Sylloge* itself, which originally was only to include the collections of Paris, Berlin and Vienna which, despite their richness, could not provide a sufficiently broad range to establish a typology. Therefore, other coins were added; they came either from the Numismatic Central Card File at the Institute of Numismatics and Monetary History, University of Vienna or from private collections that were recently made available for study.

² Lukonin 1969.

³ Göbl 1968 (in German), then the English translation in 1971.

⁴ Recorded in the Numismatic Central Card File (Numismatische Zentralkartei = NZK) at the Institute of Numismatics and Monetary History, University of Vienna (Austria). The credit for creating the NZK is Göbl’s and, for its continual updates, we thank his successors.

⁵ The most complete on the third century is that of K. Mosig-Walburg 1984.

B. TOWARDS A MORE BALANCED AND FORMALISED NUMISMATIC APPROACH

In their time, the typologies of Göbl and Lukonin pioneered the evolution of the discipline of numismatics. A few years later, the work by R. Göbl, *Münzprägung des Kushānreiches*, which also included a study of the coinage of the Sasanian king Šābuhr II (309-379), marked a new stage in numismatic methodology.⁶ Göbl demonstrated the effectiveness of a method that consisted of using stylistic features to connect coins that lacked a mint name to those that bore the name of a mint. However, in the third century, we find far fewer coins bearing the names of mints than we do for coins from the fourth century, and very few mint names are documented.⁷

To establish the number, and then the locations, of mints in the third century, it was therefore necessary to develop a new method. This method depends on the following premise: the same monetary model, commissioned on the authority of the monetary institution, was not engraved in exactly the same way by all engravers, especially if they belonged to different artistic traditions. Thus, the coins engraved by a local engraver in Marw, Fārs or Mesopotamia are unlikely to have the same stylistic features. It was hypothesized that monetary series with the same stylistic characteristics were the product of one mint and that monetary series with very different styles originated in separate mints. We proposed this approach in *SNS I* for the coinage of Šābuhr I, and it was applied in the second volume of the *SNS*, which was dedicated to the coinages ranging from Ohrmazd I to Ohrmazd II.

To distinguish the different monetary styles, we can apply several methods, of which the two extreme forms are: 1) a method that relies on the numismatist's expertise and is relatively intuitive and, 2) a method that originated in archaeology, which relies on defining clear standards. The method that we developed for the coinage of Šābuhr I drew on both these approaches. To identify a monetary series, we followed the following steps:

- 1) Classification of the corpus according to the standards of the expert numismatist;
- 2) Definition of the stylistic features that permit us to distinguish between series;
- 3) Definition of the different styles, which have clearly defined standards;
- 4) Verification of this classification by submitting it for review by another numismatist.

⁶ Göbl 1984.

⁷ For the era of Šābuhr I, only the name of the Marw mint is attested on two gold dinars (*SNS I*, pl. 35, A51 and Gyselen 2004, p. 75, 8). The coinage of Wahrām I and his successors more often bear a mint name, but they are nevertheless too limited to allow us to attribute all the coins to a mint with a known name.

In the case that the conclusion is not verified, the process returns to the second step, and the new classification is again subject to review. For the review at Stage 4, we are indebted to our colleague Michael Alram, co-editor of the *Sylloge Nummorum Sasanidarum*. Although we take full responsibility for the final classification, we consider it a work in progress given the experimental nature of this methodology and the corpus, as yet incomplete, it investigates.

This method proved productive in defining the styles of the coinage of Ohrmazd I, Wahrām I and Wahrām II, and particularly the monetary series investigated here. The above approach made it possible to identify several typological and stylistic features that characterise this monetary series. One of the difficulties — perhaps more related to terminology than fundamental — was defining what is meant by a typological trait and a stylistic trait. Rather than a theoretical discussion, an example can explain this dilemma: should we consider the layout of the legend on a coin as a typological or stylistic trait? We will see that the answer is complex and often ambiguous.

C1. IDENTIFICATION AND DEFINITION OF A CHARACTERISTIC STYLE

Numerous typological and stylistic features allow us to identify a series of coins in a group of coinage. Some of these features are consistently present in the series and never appear in other monetary series. However, other features appear more sporadically. Between these two cases, we can establish a hierarchy of criteria, as the following table shows.

| Feature | | Criterion (nature) | | | |
|------------|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------------------|----|
| Constant | feet (reverse) | stylistic | exclusive | systematic (Š I-W II) | 1 |
| Constant | legend (reverse) | <i>typological</i> | exclusive | systematic | 2 |
| Occasional | ribbons (beard) (obverse) | stylistic | exclusive | systematic | 3 |
| Constant | ribbons (obverse) | stylistic | non-exclusive | occasional | 4a |
| | ribbons (reverse) | stylistic | | | 4b |
| | legend (reverse) | stylistic | | | 4c |
| | feet (reverse) | stylistic | | | 4d |
| Occasional | <i>frawahr</i> (reverse) | <i>typological</i> | non-exclusive | | 5a |
| | heir symbol (reverse) | <i>typological</i> | | | 5b |
| Occasional | <i>frawahr</i> (reverse) | stylistic | non-exclusive | systematic | 6 |

Criterion 1. The location of at least one of the feet of the two figures on either side of the dynastic fire altar above the circle of beads: *A stylistic feature that is exclusive and appears systematically on the reverse from Šābuhr I to Wahrām II.*

Beginning with Šābuhr I, the reverse of the coinage bears a motif consisting of a fire altar flanked on either side by a figure. Usually, the scene on the reverse takes place within the circle of beads (Fig. 4), but several coins do not follow this pattern and go beyond the circle of beads by placing at least one of the figures' feet above it. This feature allowed us to identify two series in the coinage of Šābuhr I (designated as Styles T and U, respectively Fig. 6 and Fig. 7). This same feature is also found on the coins of Style C of Ohrmazd I, Wahrām I and Wahrām II (Fig. 9, 11, 13, 15, 18, 20). However, under Narseh, this criterion was no longer found on coins of style C (Fig. 29), which, on the other hand, exhibit several other characteristics in common with Style C of Ohrmazd I, Wahrām I and Wahrām II.

Criterion 2. The location of the reverse legend is not circular: *A stylistic feature that is exclusive and appears systematically on the reverse from Šābuhr I to Narseh.*

On the first imperial coins of Ardašīr I,⁸ the first part of the reverse legend *NWRA ZY*, “fire of”, is placed to the left, from 11h to 9h, and the second part, *rthštr* “Ardašīr”, to the right from 3h to 1h (Fig. 3). This arrangement, which is in a way circular, is maintained under Šābuhr I, but the legends are now located more on the sides, respectively, from 10h to 8h and 4h to 2h (Fig. 4).

Then, at some point in the reign of Šābuhr I, this arrangement made a 180 degrees shift. The first part of the legend *NWRA ZY* is relocated to the right, from 4h to 2h, and the second part, *šhpwhry*, is moved to the left, from 10h to 8h (Fig. 5). We considered this change a typological trait — that is, something that was imposed by the central monetary administration and that should affect all the mints. The successors of Šābuhr I in the third century would adopt the same arrangement for the reverse legend, which begins at 4h and finishes at 8h. We can deduce that the coins with the circular legend starting at 10h preceded those with the legend that begins at 4h. However, it remains difficult to determine exactly when in the reign of Šābuhr I this change took place.

The coins that deviated from this pattern were considered by numismatists either as the result of an engraving error or as a significant but occasional phenomenon. Thanks to a more complete

⁸ Alram in *SNS I*.

corpus, we can now confirm that it was a deliberate choice and not an occasional mistake. This is the case for the monetary series examined here, in which the non-circular layout of the reverse legend is invariably associated with a reverse on which the figures' feet are placed on the circle of beads. Also, the inverse was very common — that is, the coins that showed the figures with a foot placed on the circle of beads did not bear a circular legend.

In the era of Šābuhr I, two styles (T and U) include figures who place at least one of their feet on the circle of beads, but each follows a different schema for the arrangement of the reverse legend. In Style T, the legend begins with *NWRA ZY* at 10h and continues on the right, from 2 to 4h (sic), with the name of the king (Fig. 6). The latter appears almost in mirrored writing, a phenomenon that is symptomatic of what must have been the engraver's hesitation in relation to the usual pattern, which placed the king's name between 4h and 2h (Fig. 4). In Style U, the legend contains the name of the king twice, written on the left from 10h to 8h and systematically mirrored on the right from 2h to 4h (Fig. 7).⁹ Although it is impossible to affirm that in this case the legend begins at 10h – which would place this style in the first phase – it is nevertheless likely.

Similar to the coins of the second phase of Šābuhr I's monetary output, the reverse legend on the coins of his successors starts at 4h and continues until 8h. In style C of Wahrām II and Narseh the reverse legend is placed on two lines: the first from 2h to 4h and the second from 10h to 8h (Fig. 18, 22, 24, 25, 27 and 29). On the coins of the two former kings, the reading is sometimes uncertain: on the coins on Style C from Ohrmazd I (Fig. 9 and 11) and Wahrām I (Fig. 13 and 15), most legends are erroneous or written in mirror.

Criterion 3. The shape of the knotted ribbons that tie the beard: *An occasional stylistic feature that is exclusive.*

The knotted beard was a royal prerogative, but not all of the kings wore this type of beard. Thus, on their coinage, Ardašīr I and Wahrām I wore a long beard, but Šābuhr I, Ohrmazd I, Wahrām II and Narseh had a knotted beard. On several coins, we can clearly see that the beard is knotted by a band whose ends float to the side (for Šābuhr I, see Fig. 5 and 6). This detail is rarely visible

⁹ This coin type has been used by Pfeiler 1973, p. 133-134 as an additional argument for identifying the two figures on the reverse as Šābuhr I.

on rock reliefs, but also appears on some silver plates.¹⁰ Insofar as the documentation permits, we can postulate that these small ribbons on the coins in Styles T and U under Šābuhr I (Fig. 6) and in Style C under Ohrmazd I and Wahrām II (Fig. 24 and 25) take a specific form that is not present in any other style.

Criterion 4a. The chequered form of the ribbons for the figures on the reverse: *A stylistic feature that is systematic, but not exclusive.*

On all the types of reverses where both figures have their backs to the fire altar, ribbons float behind their backs. These ribbons may take relatively different forms and often constitute a distinctive element of a style. Although chequered ribbons appeared in multiple styles,¹¹ it should be noted that Style T (and U) of Šābuhr I and Style C under Ohrmazd I (Fig. 9), Wahrām I¹² (Fig. 13 and 15) and Wahrām II¹³ (Fig. 18, 20, 22, 24 and 25) used only this type of chequered ribbon.

Criterion 4b. Legibility due to the palaeographic quality of the reverse legend: *A stylistic feature that is systematic, but not exclusive.*

Although some mints benefited from engravers who employed a careful lapidary writing for the coin legends, this was not usually the case. The majority of styles, and that of the main mint in particular, have legends that are barely legible and that include several letters in cursive writing. On most coins in the series studied here, the legends are engraved in lapidary writing, and the reverse legend is usually legible.

Criterion 4c. The specific shape of the ribbons of the diadem in the king's portrait on the obverse: *A stylistic feature that is almost systematic but not entirely exclusive.*

On the obverse, the royal diadem ends with ribbons that float behind the head. The shape of these ribbons is often specific to a style. This is the case on coinage in Style T (and U) under Šābuhr I and Style C from Ohrmazd I to Narseh (Fig. 9, 11, 13, 18, 22, 25, 27, 29).

¹⁰ Harper / Meyers 1981, pl. 10 and pl. 13.

¹¹ SNS I, p. 232, fig. 33: the checkered ribbons are also attested on several groups in Style A and very rarely in Style P. Both these styles are thought to belong to the main mint.

¹² SNS II, Wahrām I, fig. 14: checkered ribbons are also common in Style B.

¹³ SNS II, Wahrām II, fig. 10: this type of ribbons remains common in Style B and is exclusive to Style I bis.



Criterion 4d. **The elongated shape of the feet and the marking at the edge of the trousers:** *A stylistic feature that is almost systematic but not entirely exclusive.*

In the series investigated here, the feet are always narrow and elongated, and the ankle is marked by a band that probably indicates a decorative edging. In contrast, in many other styles under Wahrām I (Fig. 12) and Wahram II (Fig. 16 and 21) the end of the foot is represented by a kind of ball.

The two following criteria are occasional and are shared by some other coins, but exclusively those issued by the main mint.

Criterion 5a. **The presence of the *frawahr* on the column of the fire altar:** *A typological feature of an occasional element that is not entirely exclusive.*

Under Šābuhr I, only Style T places the *frawahr* symbol on the column of the fire altar (Group a) (Fig. 6), but not systematically; in Group b of the same style, the column never bears a *frawahr*.¹⁴

The relief by Ardašīr I in Fīrūzābād (I) conclusively demonstrates that the *frawahr* is the royal symbol par excellence. The king's horse is covered with a caparison that is decorated with *frawahrs*.¹⁵ In any case, on rock reliefs, the *frawahr* is always associated with the king as an equestrian. Other than the equestrian-king of the Fīrūzābād relief, we only find the *frawahr* in the cave of Taq-i Bustān, where the royal horse has the *frawahr* symbol branded on the thigh and wears a saddle girth decorated with at least four *frawahr* symbols.¹⁶

The act of placing the *frawahr* on the column of the dynastic altar is significant. This symbol underscores not only the royal character of the altar, but also refers to the royal character of the site where the mint is located.

On the two coins in Style C that we know of from the reign of Ohrmazd I, the fire altar bears no symbol. However, it appears on a coin in Style A and Type I/1 (Fig. 10) thought to have been struck in the main mint.¹⁷

¹⁴ SNS I, p. 256, fig. 49a.

¹⁵ Vanden Berge 1983, p. 63, fig. 8.

¹⁶ Fukai / Horiuchi 1972, respectively pl. LVI and LV.

¹⁷ SNS II, pl. 2, A1 and pl. 2, A11.

Under Wahrām I and Wahrām II, the *frawahr* on the column of the fire altar is only attested in Styles A (Fig. 14), Abis (Fig. 17) and C (Fig. 15 and 20). This common feature thus connects the mint that engraved the coins in Style C to the main mint (Style A and probably Abis).

Criterion 5b. The presence on the reverse of the symbol of the heir to the throne: *A typological feature of an occasional and non-exclusive element.*

Under Wahrām II, a second element links the main mint to that of Style C: the presence of the symbol of the heir on the reverse to the left¹⁸ of the altar's flames (Fig. 25). Elsewhere, the symbol of the heir only appears on coins of Šābuhr I,¹⁹ Wahrām I²⁰ and Wahrām II²¹ that were engraved in the main mint.

Criterion 6. The specific shape of the *frawahr*: *A systematic stylistic feature of an occasional but non-exclusive element.*

In Style C, the presence of the *frawahr* on the reverse is limited to a few series — on the fire altar (Šābuhr I, Wahrām I and Wahrām II) and in the field at 11h (Wahrām II). Its form is very specific: the two horizontal arms are replaced by large ball-shaped spheres.²² However, this kind of *frawahr* is also sometimes present in other styles: on some coins from Šābuhr I (in the Style Q/e)²³ and Wahrām II (Style D)²⁴.

7. Several other stylistic features are often unique to a single reign.

Šābuhr I. The garment of the royal bust in Style T differs from that of the other coinage under Šābuhr I²⁵ (compare Fig. 5 and Fig. 6).

Wahrām II. On the coins of Types VIa and VIIa, the animal head that tops the queen's *kulāf* in Style C is either different or engraved in a different way to what is found in the other styles (Fig. 24, 25 and 27, compare with Fig. 23 and 26).²⁶

¹⁸ This symbol's presence on the coinage of Narseh no longer has a definite meaning because, on the reverse of Narseh's coins, the symbols of the king and crown prince are quite usual.

¹⁹ SNS I, p. 258, fig. 50b.

²⁰ SNS II, Wahrām I, fig. 3b.

²¹ SNS II, Wahrām II, fig. 3b.

²² SNS I, p. 257, fig. 49b. SNS II, Wahrām II, fig. 15.

²³ SNS I, p. 257, fig. 49b.

²⁴ SNS II, Wahrām II, fig. 15.

²⁵ SNS I, p. 229, fig. 28.

²⁶ SNS II, Wahrām II, fig. 8a.

8. *A few additional comments.*

A definition of this style is incomplete without some attention to the types of denominations it produced. No gold coin has been documented for this style. If this lack of gold coins is not accidental, it could be indicative of the mint's status. However, for the moment, our data remain incomplete, and it would be better not to draw hasty conclusions.

We only know of silver coins in this style, and especially drahms. For certain reigns, we have evidence of divisional silver coins: $\frac{1}{2}$ drahms (Ohrmazd I, Wahrām I) and $\frac{1}{6}$ drahms (Wahrām II, Types VIa and VIIa). For the moment, too few coins have been the subject of an elementary analysis, and the scarce results that we have cannot be used to characterize this series.

To the present, no copper or lead coins have been found during excavations and, unfortunately, have not even been documented. Indeed, knowing where a copper or lead coin is found provides useful information. As these coins were used for local exchanges, the location of their discovery can indicate the radius of their circulation and can potentially be used to identify the centre of their production.

This numismatic review thus demonstrates that the placement of a foot on the beads is a criterion that allows us to distinguish a school of engravers who became active under Šābuhr I. This very distinctive feature continues until the reign of Wahrām II. Under this king, this stylistic feature appears together with a legend on two parallel lines, which are read from top to bottom, a feature that is still found under Narseh. This deviation from the usual circular legend is also found under Šābuhr I, Ohrmazd I and Wahrām I. However, on their coins, the legend is not always precisely arranged in two parallel lines.

Both criteria show that we are dealing with a homogenous production that is distinct from that of all the other mints. However, this centre of die-engraving and minting is also characterised by other typological and stylistic features. Some of these features are known from a limited number of other mints. However, in certain cases, the same feature is only present on coins struck in the main mint, which was under direct royal control. This emphasises the royal character of our specific mint for the Styles T and U under Šābuhr I and Style C under his four successors.

C2. PLACE AND DATE OF THE CREATION OF THE MINT PRODUCING STYLES T AND U UNDER ŠĀBUHR I

The questions that the numismatic scholar faces are as follows: where was the mint located, and when did it appear? Without the answers to these questions, we cannot address other important questions: why was this mint created and what was its role in the apparatus of the mint network?

Location of the mint

To locate the mint that struck Style T under Šābuhr I, we took into account several different considerations. One was based on the assumption that the creation of a new mint is not an isolated act, but that it is necessarily linked to other initiatives, whether of an administrative nature or related to dynastic propaganda. The other consideration was directly related to stylistic characteristics, particularly those that are exclusive.

In Volume *SNS I*, we connected the emergence of this new mint under Šābuhr I with the founding of a new city. Among the towns founded by Šābuhr I, the best known are undoubtedly Bišābuhr in western Fārs and Weh-az-Andiyōk-Šābuhr in northern Khuzistān. The foundation of the latter served — as its name indicates, “Šābuhr made [this city] better than Antioch” to settle the Syrian Antioch population deported by Šābuhr I. Historians usually believe that there were two deportations: the first following Šābuhr I’s victory over Gordianus III (244 A.D.), and the second after the defeat of the Roman army of Emperor Valerianus (260 A.D.). At first glance, there is no specific, known event that might have motivated the founding of Bišābuhr other than Šābuhr I’s desire to follow in his father Ardašīr I’s footsteps and to found, like he did, a royal city in his own name in Fārs, the region in which the dynasty originated. Nevertheless, we cannot rule out the possibility that the founding of this city followed the Sasanian victory over Valerianus in 260 A.D. All three of Šābuhr I’s rock reliefs at Bišābuhr commemorate the victories over the Romans, particularly over Valerianus. However, in the 24th year of Šābuhr I’s reign (\pm 262/3 A.D.),²⁷ the city of Bišābuhr was already a regional centre that was sufficiently important to be chosen as the site for a column erected to the glory of the sovereign.²⁸

²⁷ Alram in *SNS I*, p. 22.

²⁸ For details on this inscription, see Back 1978, p. 378-383 : “Im Monat Frawardin, im Jahre 58; im Jahre 40 des Ardašīr-Feuers; im Jahre 24 des Šāpūr-Feuers, des Königs der Feuer. Dies ist das Bild Seiner Zoroastrischen Majestät Šāpūr, des Königs der Könige von Ērān und Anērān, dessen Herkunft von den Göttern ist, des Sohnes Seiner Zoroastrischen Majestät Ardašīr, des Königs der Könige von Ērān, dessen Herkunft von den Göttern ist, des Enkel Seiner Majestät Pāpak, des Königs. Und angefertigt has es Abasā (?), der Schreiber, der aus der Stadt Karrhae



As noted above, one of the characteristics of this monetary series is the layout of the reverse legend, which is never circular, as it is on the other coins. We might consider that the model for the die specified an arrangement on two parallel lines although this model, which was too different to the general standard, was not always followed precisely. It was not until the mint was well established, under Wahrām II, that all the coins followed the model with two parallel lines. If the establishment of this mint was accompanied by the idea of arranging the legend in two lines to be read in the same direction, we might think that it was inspired by a monetary type still in circulation. The only example is that of the first coins that Ardašīr I had struck in Fārs before his ascension to the imperial throne around 224 A.D. (Fig. 2).²⁹ Typologically, we can link these coins to those that were issued under his brother Šābuhr, which have a reverse legend in two parallel lines (Fig. 1).³⁰ These coins are thought to have been struck at Stakhr, the capital of the kingdom of Fārs. After Ardašīr's ascension to the imperial throne, this mint seems to have been abandoned in favour of the two major traditional Parthian mints in Hamadan and Ctesiphon. However, Ardašīr I remained very attached to his home region, as his choice of the sites for rock reliefs attests. Certainly, he erected the relief commemorating his victory over the Arsacid king and one of his three investiture reliefs near his new city in Fārs, Ardašīr-xwarrah. However, for the other two investiture reliefs he chose the traditional sites of Naqš-i Rostam and Naqš-i Rostam, which are not far from Stakhr, the traditional capital of the kings of Fārs. Also Šābuhr I commissioned multiple reliefs there, and it is significant that about three years into his reign a certain Abnūn founded an *ādurgāh* (fire altar) in the region of Stakhr to thank the gods for Šābuhr I's victory over the Romans.³¹ Thus, the choice of Stakhr for the location of the mint that made Style T (and U) is feasible.

Date of the mint's creation

From a purely numismatic perspective, it is tempting to place the creation of the mint of Styles T and U in the first part of the reign of Šābuhr I.³² On the monetary type T, the reverse legend

ist, auf eigene Kosten. Und er (machte dieses Bild?) für Seine Zoroastrische Majestät Šāpur, den König der Könige von Ērān und Anērān, dessen Herkunft von den Göttern ist. Und als der König der Könige dieses Bild sah, da schenkte er Abasā, dem Schreiber, Gold und Silver, Sklaven und Mädchen, einen Garten und ein Landgut."

²⁹ See in this regard Alam in *SNS* I, p. 135-138, pl. 1, No. 1-7.

³⁰ *SNS* I, pl. 40, No. E36.

³¹ Editio princeps: Tavoosi / Frye 1989. For a new interpretation: Gignoux 1991, Skjærvø 1992 and MacKenzie 1993.

³² See in this regard Gyselen in *SNS* I.

begins at 10h, a feature that seems to belong to the first phase of Šābuhr I's coinage, whereas during the second phase, it begins at 4h. This could indicate that the mint that issued Styles T and U became active fairly early in the reign of Šābuhr I, in any case before the second coinage phase started.³³

A coin hoard of Cilicia provides another chronological index: it contains two drahms in Style U (type IIc/1d).³⁴ This hoard probably dates to the time of the Sasanian invasion that followed the victory over Valerianus in 260 A.D. Therefore, the issue of the coins of style U must precede the year 260.

In the SNS I, we proposed the dates 251-258 A.D. as a hypothesis for the period of emission of Styles T and U.³⁵ Obviously, this does not mean that after 258 A.D. no more coins of these styles were issued because Style T evidently continues under Ohrmazd I as Style C.

* * *

If we consider that the thirty years that separate Type I/1 of Ardašīr I (between 205/6 and 223-224 A.D.) from the beginning of Style T of Šābuhr I (circa 251 A.D.?) did not eliminate the idea of arranging the reverse legend on two lines, then the engraver who designed the model of Style T could have drawn on the coinage of Šābuhr and Ardašīr, which were struck at Stakhr, as the kings of Fārs. Is this reason enough to place the mint of Styles T and U at Stakhr rather than at Bišābuhr? Regardless, we can designate the mint that struck coins in Styles T and U, then in Style C, as the Fārs mint.

C3. THE ROLE OF THE FĀRS MINT IN THE NETWORK OF MINTS

Under the last Arsacid kings, Hamadān on the Iranian plateau and Ctesiphon, the capital of the empire in Mesopotamia, were the two major production centres for coinage. The first of Adashir's coins were minted in Stakhr in Fars, but beginning with Phase 2b-c, the number of

³³ Gyselen in SNS I, p. 207. Hypothetically, a date between 255 and 259 A.D. can be proposed.

³⁴ Pfeiler 1973, 14/II and 15/II.

³⁵ SNS I, p. 281 and p. 279-288.

mints in the interior of Ērānšahr were probably limited to those in Ctesiphon and in Hamadān. In Phase 3, we can add the Marw mint in eastern Iran,³⁶ then the mint in Sakastān in Phase 4.³⁷ Under Šābuhr I, new mints were created.³⁸ Logically, we would be tempted to locate these new mints in the regions that were important for the empire's administrative and political apparatus or that had a particular significance for its dynastic propaganda. This leads us to think of Fars, the dynasty's homeland, first. However, it remains unclear whether the creation of the mint in Fārs, which struck Styles T and U, was in response to a real economic need for monetary production in the region or to a desire to relocate a mint in the Fārs.³⁹ Although this mint's output never equalled the production of the main mint, Style C guaranteed the mint a regular and substantial output under the first three successors of Šābuhr I. The closure of the mint quite quickly after Narseh's ascension to the throne must have been for a reason, which as yet remains to be discovered. Since it is unlikely that Fārs would have been deprived of a mint, the mint that produced Style C was most likely replaced by another mint, also located in the Fārs region in a town which may have had a different artistic tradition to that of Mint C.⁴⁰

D. SIMILARITIES AND RUPTURES WITH THE LEADING ICONOGRAPHIC TYPOLOGY

According to current documentation, under Ardašīr I and Šābuhr I, the two traditional mints at Ctesiphon and Hamadan provided the majority of coin production.⁴¹ However, after Šābuhr I, one main mint undertook the majority of coin production.

This predominance was often accompanied with a range of monetary types that were more important than on the coinage produced by the other mints. Hypothetically, the main mint was located in the capital of the empire and is believed to have been under the tight supervision of the central authorities. The monetary types — iconographic as well as epigraphic — that were

³⁶ Alram in *SNS I*, p. 171-179. Marw was one of the few places where intensive excavations have unearthed coins; some of these, which are of a distinctive type, were locally produced. The first mint name to appear on the coinage is that of Marw at the time of Šābuhr I.

³⁷ However it was not before Wahrām I's reign that some coins bore the mint signature of Sakastān.

³⁸ See in this regard *SNS I*, p. 284, fig. 65. Mints in the late stages of Ardashir I and the various phases of Shapur I.

³⁹ The idea that, under Šābuhr I, a mint was active in Fārs has been advanced by I. Pfeiffer 1973. Nevertheless, it is not the mint that produced Styles T et U, and she locates this mint at Ardašīr-xwarrah. Her study, which includes detailed typological and stylistic discussions, is exemplary for the time period it investigates. However, the growth in the monetary corpus raises new questions, as *SNS I* showed.

⁴⁰ Hypothetically, we might suggest that it is the mint that struck under Narseh style G, which continued to be produced under Šābuhr II. It has been suggested that at that time, this mint could be located in Fārs (Alram in *SNS II*, Narseh, 6. Münzstätten).

⁴¹ *SNS I*, p. 253, fig. 46.

developed in this mint were imposed by the central political power and serve as reference for the general typological evolution of its coinage.

The coins that do not follow the iconographic models of the main mint deserve our attention because they were the result of either an engraving error or a decision not to follow the general type. If the deviation from the typological norm affects a whole series we are obviously dealing with the latter interpretation.

The mint that produced styles T and U (under Šābuhr I) and style C (from Ohrmazd I to Narseh) followed the monetary iconography of the main mint. It was only under Wahrām II that Style C deviated from the monetary types struck by the main mint. This break with the general pattern is fairly well defined chronologically because it was on monetary types from the first and second periods of the reign of Wahrām II that the coin's reverse no longer adhered to the general model (reverse type 1). The coins that deviated from the general model had an obverse of either Type I (with the royal bust) or Type VI (with the busts of the king, queen and their son) and a reverse that showed two figures whose royal character is indicated by the *korymbos* above the crown. However, as they wear different crowns, the figures are not identical: one wears the royal winged crown of Wahrām II, while the other wears a mural crown identical to that of Šābuhr I (reverse type 3). This iconographic choice by Wahrām II seems to have been dictated by a powerful need to reclaim the lineage of Šābuhr I, his grandfather.

Such a reaction is not surprising because several factors indicate that Ohrmazd I's succession by Wahrām I, the father of Wahrām II, was not unanimously supported. Regardless, Wahrām I who only reigned for three years, must have enjoyed the support of a substantial part of the Iranian nobility to take the throne, and one of his strengths must have been the special relationship he built in his role as the *Gēlān-šāh*, with the Gelae, a population that lived on the edge of the Kushan kingdom.⁴² In any case, Wahrām I gained enough support to designate his son Wahrām as his successor. It is likely that this succession was orchestrated by Wahrām II as a victory, to which his choice of a crown adorned with wings alludes.

However, a few coins engraved in the same mint in Fārs during the first phase under Wahrām II do not have a Type 3 reverse. They follow the reverse type 1 that was typical of the coins produced by the main mint that bear an image of the late King Wahrām II on one side of the altar and a figure that embodies the principle of the protector of the dynastic fire on the other (Fig. 9-

⁴² For the references see Huyse 1999, II, p. 118 et n. 199.

10 and 11-12). In fact, these two distinct coins have not been documented elsewhere, to the present. One has a Type II obverse (busts of the king and a prince wearing a *kulāf*) (Fig. 20), and the other has a Type IV obverse (busts of the king and his queen) (Fig. 22). It is difficult to explain why these two coins follow the general pattern (Fig. 19 and 21) and not the Type 3 of the Fārs mint, especially since a recent study of the coinage of the first period in the reign of Wahrām demonstrated that Types I, II and IV were contemporaneous.⁴³ The case would obviously be clearer if we assumed that the obverse Types II and IV predated Type I. In this case, the mint of Fārs would have started to follow the reverse Type 1 that was standard in the main mint, and then modified it for the reverse Type 3. However, if we follow this assumption, then how can we explain that the first coins commissioned under Wahrām II did not adhere to the typical obverse schema, which comprised one royal bust, not two – either the king and his queen (Type IV) or the king and a prince wearing a *kulāf* (Type II).

In the third monetary phase of Wahrām II, the Fārs mint would once again follow the typological model implemented by the main mint (Fig. 25 and 26). This third period is characterized by the creation of the obverse Type VII and the reverse Type 5. Obverse Type VII is distinguished from obverse Type VI, which characterizes the second phase of Wahrām II's coinage, by the presence of a ribboned ring in the prince's hand. Although the obverse in Style C maintains Types VI and VII, which were propagated by the main mint, these coins nevertheless exhibit several differences. However, it remains difficult to determine if they are stylistic or typological differences. The first case involves a single motif that was implemented in a number of different styles, and the second case involves two different motifs. In Style C, the animal on top of the *kulāf* has a very different appearance to that in Style A (Fig. 30). While the latter resembles a horse's head, the former is sometimes taken for a boar's head.⁴⁴ However, the different appearance of the animal could be purely stylistic and the expression of a local style of a horse's head (see Fig. 29). Regardless, both the horse and the boar were avatars of the god Wahrām.

Reverse Type 5, with two figures facing the dynastic altar, is not at all similar to the reverse types of the first two phases. In the latter, the figures turned their backs to the dynastic fire, with one rare exception (reverse Type 4) on which two royal figures, identifiable as Wahrām II, turn to the fire altar in homage. In reverse Type 5 they turn towards the fire altar, and although one of

⁴³ This is incontestable with regard to Style B, and very likely for Style A.

⁴⁴ Musche 1987.

the figures is still the king himself, the female figure has a complex symbolism that combines the abstract idea of victory with several other notions.⁴⁵ Overall, this new coin type (VII/5) celebrated the sovereignty of Wahrām II, who had successfully crushed the rebellion in eastern Iran under Ohrmazd, probably one of his brothers, and stabilized this area by installing a dynasty loyal to the Sasanian line, which we know as the Kushano-Sasanian dynasty. At that time, there was no longer any need for Wahrām II to insist on the legality of his royal lineage.

It remains to be seen why it is only on the coinage of Fārs that Wahrām II put so much emphasis on his descent from Šābuhr I. Did he have, in the early years of his reign, difficulties with the Iranian nobility who may have been less than satisfied with his lineage? Regardless, this deviation from the general type is not the result of an engraver's whim. Undoubtedly, it was a royal decision that was provoked by a specific political situation in Fārs during the first half of Wahrām's II reign, and it is the historian's responsibility to discover in other, non-numismatic sources the true nature of this situation.

⁴⁵ Gyselen 2010

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Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20

