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The Commemorative Coin of Wahbarz, the *Fratarak* of Pārs

INTRODUCTION

Soon after the collapse of the Achaemenid Empire in 330 BC and the dominance of the Seleucids over Persia, the land of Pārs, the cradle of Achaemenid civilization, lost its previous splendour and a dark period overshadowed its history up to the rise of the Sasanians in 224 AD. During this dark period, local Persian dynasts ruled Pārs as Seleucid and then Arsacid representatives. These dynasts are known through their coins which were probably struck at Staxr. The first four dynasts called themselves *fratarak* “governor”, but the rulers who followed them adopted the title *šāh* “king”. The *frataraks* are traditionally believed to have ruled in this sequence: 1. Bagdāt, 2. Artaxšahr, 3. Wahbarz, 4. Wātfradāt¹ (Skjærvø 1997: 101; Canepa 2010: 568; Nelson 2011: 272).

The Early Middle Persian title *fratarak* goes back to Old Persian **frataraka-* which was made by the addition of the derivational suffix *-ka-* to

¹ These are the archaic pronunciations of these Middle Persian proper names. The forms given in modern scholarly sources for three of these names (namely Baydād, Arda(x)šēr/Arda(x)šīr, and Wādfradād) reflect, in fact, the early Sasanian (i.e. 3rd-century AD) pronunciation of these names. The language of the *fratarak* rulers was undoubtedly a very early form of Middle Persian, different from the one used in the Sasanian times. The Old Persian proper name **Baga-dāta-*, for example, had become Bagdāt in the time of the *fratarak* rulers, and then developed into Baydād in the Sasanian period. Therefore, all Middle Persian words and names in this paper are transcribed in such a way as to reflect the archaic pronunciation. It should also be added that other sequences have been proposed for the *fratarak* rulers, e.g. 1. Bagdāt, 2. Wahbarz, 3. Artaxšahr, 4. Wātfradāt (de Morgan 1923: 270; Sellwood 1983b: 299-302; Boyce and Grenet 1991: 112-114), 1. Artaxšahr, 2. Wahbarz, 3. Bagdāt, 4. Wātfradāt (Wiesehöfer 2011: 117), and 1. Artaxšahr, 2. Wahbarz, 3. Wātfradāt, 4. Bagdāt (Hoover 2008: 215; Engels 2013: 41).

fratarā- which, in turn, was a combination of *fra-* “forth” plus the comparative suffix *-tara-* (see: Kent 1953: 197; Schmitt 2014: 177; cf. Young Avestan *fratarā-*, Sanskrit *pratara-*, Greek *πρότερος*). Thus, the original meaning of **frataraka-* must have been something like “prior, superior”. Unlike *fratarā-*, the word **frataraka-* has not been attested in Old Persian royal inscriptions, but it has been used several times as an Old Persian loanword in Achaemenid Aramaic documents in the form of *prtrk*. It is now clear that in the Achaemenid period the word **frataraka-* was used as an administrative term to refer to the prefect or governor of a district or province (see also: Briant 1996: 354; Wiesehöfer 2001: 195; Panaino 2003: 265, footnote 1; Olbrycht 2013: 67). Some of these Achaemenid governors are known by name from Egyptian Aramaic papyri dating back to 420–408 BC (see: Cowley 1923: no. 20, line 4; no. 27, line 4; no. 30, line 5; no. 31, line 5) and Aramaic leather documents from ancient Bactria dating back to 353–348/347 BC (see: Naveh and Shaked 2012: A1, line 8; A5, line 4).

There are conflicting opinions as to the starting date of the *frataraks* in Pārs. Some scholars have proposed the beginning of the 3rd century BC (e.g. Herzfeld 1935: 47; Hoover 2008: 215) as the starting date of the *fratarak* dynasty, while others place it in the middle of the 3rd century BC (e.g. Hill 1922: clxi; Boyce and Grenet 1991: 116), sometime around the end of the 3rd century BC (e.g. de Morgan 1923: 270), the beginning of the 2nd century BC (Alram 1986: 163; Skjærvø 1997: 102; Wiesehöfer 2011: 117), or even the middle of the 2nd century BC (see also: Curtis 2010: 385–386; Rezakhani 2013: 775).

THE COINS OF WAHBARZ

The obverse of the silver coins of Wahbarz depicts his portrait head to right, with moustache and earring, wearing an Achaemenid headgear, known by the Greeks as *κυρβάσια*. This headgear is combined with a diadem tied at the back of the head. The reverse of the main type (type 1), of which a number of tetradrachms, drachms, hemidrachms and obols are known (see: Alram 1986: plate 17, coins 526–532), shows Wahbarz standing right in an attitude of reverence with raised hands at the left side of a square building crowned by three battlements.² On the right side of the

² The character of this building is expected to be religious, ceremonial and/or ancestral. It has so far been differently interpreted as a fire altar, a fire temple, a

building is often depicted a standard, very similar to the royal standards of the Achaemenid kings. The legend, when written in full, is: *whwbrz / prtrk' ZY ALHYA / BR prs* (read as: *Wahbarz, fratarak ī bag, pus Pārs*³) “Wahbarz, *fratarak* of the lord,⁴ son of Persia” (fig. 1). On the reverse of his type 2 coin, of which only a sole tetradrachm is attested, there is a Greek monogram under the square building and the legend only reads as: *whwbrz / krny* (i.e. *Wahbarz, kārān*) “Wahbarz, the commander” (fig. 2).

THE COMMEMORATIVE COIN OF WAHBARZ

Polyainos (7.40), the 2nd-century Macedonian author, records that Ὀβόρζος (i.e. Wahbarz), was a commander of 3000 *κατοίκοι* (i.e. Greek and Macedonian immigrant soldiers) in Pārs, but since they were suspected of rebellion, he ordered them to be assassinated. An extraordinary drachm of Wahbarz (type 3) is known which seems to have been issued to commemorate his victory over the rebellious *κατοίκοι*. The first specimen of this drachm came to light in 1986, said to be found in the neighbourhood of Kermān.

sanctuary, a shrine, a sacred repository, a coronation tower, or a tomb (see also: Goldman 1965; Potts 2007; Haerinck and Overlaet 2008).

³ Skjærvø (1997: 102) believes that the legends on *fratarak* coins should be taken as Irano-Aramaic, but, as it will be shown in this paper, these legends in Aramaic script were meant to be read as Middle Persian. Therefore, in this paper the second, the third, and the fourth word in the formula *prtrk' zy 'lhy' br prs* have been transliterated in the upper case, i.e. *prtrk' ZY ALHYA BR prs*. The Aramaic heterograms *ALHYA* and *BR* came to be written as *ORHYA* and *BRE* in Late Middle Persian.

⁴ The recurrent formula *prtrk' ZY ALHYA*, which appears on the reverse of the coins of all the four *frataraks* after their names, has been variously translated and interpreted by different scholars. According to Humbach (1988: 101-103) the Aramaic *'lhy'* in this phrase is *pluralis majestatis* and it refers to the *fratarak's* overlord, whom he identifies as the reigning Arsacid king. On the other hand, Wiesehöfer (2001: 195) believes that the divine or semi-divine beings that the *frataraks* served cannot be identified with certainty. According to him, they might have been *Ahuramazdā* and other Persian gods, or perhaps Achaemenid or Seleucid kings. Panaino (2003: 283) prefers to take these gods as the ancient gods of Pārs mentioned in Achaemenid royal inscriptions, namely *Ahuramazdā*, *Miθra/Mitra*, *Anāhitā* and the other gods (*aniyāha bagāha*). Daryaee (2010: 239), however, believes that these gods are none other than the Achaemenid kings who were deified after their demise. I take *ALHYA* as a heterogram for Early Middle Persian *bag* “lord” who, as shown in this paper, must have been the reigning Seleucid king.

In my opinion, the legend of this coin should be read clockwise from the bottom as:

transliteration: *wnt ZY whwbrz krny*
transcription: *wanat ī Wahbarz kārān*
translation: The victory of Wahbarz, the commander.

⁶ The change of Old Persian **vanati-* to Early Middle Persian *wanat* is comparable to the change of Old Persian **navati-* (cf. Av. *nauua'ti-ti*) to Early Middle Persian *nawat* (later *nawad*) “ninety”. It should be noted that *wnt* can also be read as */want/*

later Zoroastrian and Manichaean Middle Persian texts is due to its gradual displacement by the verbal derivatives of the same root, such as *wānišn* and *wānīdārīh* in Zoroastrian Middle Persian (e.g. in: Tafazzoli 1966: 285; from *wānīdan/wān-* “to conquer”, MacKenzie 1986: 86), and *wānišn* in Manichaean Middle Persian (from *wānistan/wān-* “to conquer”, Durkin-Meisterernst 2004: 335).

The second word which needs explanation is Early Middle Persian *krny* /*kārān*/ “commander”, which also appears on the reverse of Wahbarz type 2 coin. This word represents Old Persian **kārāna-*, from *kāra-* “army” and the suffix *-na-* (from Proto-Iranian **-Hna-*) which forms secondary derivatives (see also: Schmitt 2003: 296; Rung 2015: 336).⁷ Contrary to the prevailing opinion that the Old Persian word **kārāna-* designated “a regional commander-in-chief of the army”, it is now clear that **kārāna-* was a generic word for a military commander at any level (see: Rung 2015: 334, 336, 340, 352).⁸ Two officials with the same title are attested from the Achaemenid period. We know from the report of Xenophon (*Hellenica* I.4.3) that Darius II, the Achaemenid king (reign: c. 424-405 BC), had given his second son Cyrus, known as Cyrus the Younger, the title *κάρωνος*. Since the same author uses the Greek word *στρατηγός* “leader of an army, commander” for Cyrus the Younger in a similar context (*Anabasis* I.1.1., I.9.7), there is no doubt that *κάρωνος* represents Old Persian **kārāna-*. The second attestation of this title from the Achaemenid period is in the form of *krny* in an Aramaic document from Bactria dating back to 330/329 BC where it is given to

“victor, conqueror”, going back to Old Persian **vantā*, the nominative singular of the agent noun **vantar-*; however, this reading would not fit the context.

⁷ A less probable etymology for Early Middle Persian *kārān* has been suggested by Sekunda (1988: 74) who derives it from Old Persian **kāra-naya-* “leader of an army”, from *kāra-* “army” and the verbal root *nay-* “to lead”.

⁸ A similar Middle Persian word which should not be mistaken for *kārān* “commander”, is the proper name *k’lhy* /*Kārin*/ which goes back to Old Persian **Kārīna-*, from *kāra-* “army” and the hypocoristic suffix *-ina-*. The other forms of this proper name are: Elamite *Kārīna* (written as *Ka₄-ri-na/Kar-ri-na*), Parthian *krny* /*Kārin*/; Greek *Καρινᾶς/Καρινῆς*; Latin *Carenēs*; Armenian *Karēn*; Arabic/New Persian *Qāran* (Gignoux 1972: 25, 55; Mayrhofer 1973: 177; Tavernier 2007: 228; Schmitt 2016: 115). This was also the name of a famous noble family of the Arsacid and Sasanian periods.

a certain Vištāspa (see: Naveh and Shaked 2012: 189-190, text C2; see also: Hyland 2013).⁹

Another important occurrence of the title *krny* in Aramaic script can be seen on the reverse of some of the drachms of Arsaces I, the founder of the Arsacid dynasty (reign: c. 247-217 or 211 BC; types 3 and 4 in Sellwood 1980: 23-24), where it has replaced its Greek equivalent *αὐτοκράτωρ* on his earlier coins (types 1 and 2 in Sellwood 1980: 21-22; Sinisi 2014: 12). The Greek title *αὐτοκράτωρ*, which literally means “one’s own master” (Liddell and Scott 1897: 252), designated the status of a pro-Seleucid military commander and ruler (cf. Sellwood 1980: 20; Sellwood 1983a: 279). The use of the titles *αὐτοκράτωρ* and *krny* on the coins of Arsaces I might suggest that he was initially appointed by the Seleucids as the military commander of Parthia to succeed Andragoras, the rebellious Seleucid satrap of the region (see also: Rezakhani 2013: 767).

In the same way, it seems that the title *krny* was conferred to Wahbarz by a Seleucid king who could have been Antiochus I (reign: 281-261 BC), Antiochus II (reign: 261-246 BC), or Seleucus II (reign: 246-226 BC). This also means that “lord” in the phrase “*fratarak* of the lord” on the reverse of the coins of all the *frataraks* has no religious connotation and it simply refers to the contemporary Seleucid king.¹⁰ Therefore, there is no reason to consider Wahbarz an anti-Seleucid rebel struggling for independence (as in e.g. Klose and Müseler 2008: 26), rather he should be considered as loyal to his Seleucid overlord. On the other hand, all existing archaeological and textual evidence indicates that Pārs had been loyal to the Seleucids in the 3rd century BC (see also: Wiesehöfer 2011: 110-111). The warrior on the reverse of Wahbarz type 3 coins is, in fact, not a Seleucid soldier, but rather a Greek or Macedonian enemy of the Seleucids who may have belonged to Ptolemaic, Andragorid or Bactrian troops (see also: Engels 2013: 69).

⁹ The association between this “Vištāspa, the commander (i.e. *krny*)” and the *Kārin* noble family who appeared later in the Arsacid and Sasanian periods, as proposed by Naveh and Shaked (2012: 191), is far from probable.

¹⁰ Therefore, the Aramaic heterogram *ALHYA* in *prtrk’ ZY ALHYA* should not be taken as plural and transcribed as *bayān* (as in: Daryaei 2010: 238) or *yazdān* (as in: Wiesehöfer 2001: 195).

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FIGURES (PLATES LI-LII)

- Fig. 1. Wahbarz type 1 coins (<www.acsearch.info/image.html?id=2464409>; Engels 2013: plate I, coin b).
- Fig. 2. Wahbarz type 2 coin (Engels 2013: plate I, coin d).
- Fig. 3. Wahbarz type 3 coins (enlarged thrice) (Nelson 2011: 272, no. 567, 4.24 gm, 15 mm; Engels 2013: plate I, coin c, 4.24 gm, 20 mm).



Fig. 1. Wahbarz type 1 coins (<www.acsearch.info/image.html?id=2464409>; Engels 2013: plate I, coin b).



Fig. 2. Wahbarz type 2 coin (Engels 2013: plate I, coin d).



Fig. 3. Wahbarz type 3 coins (enlarged thrice) (Nelson 2011: 272, no. 567, 4.24 gm, 15 mm; Engels 2013: plate I, coin c, 4.24 gm, 20 mm).

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