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The Coinage of Queen Bōrān and Its Significance for Late Sāsānian Imperial Ideology*

T O U R A J D A R Y A E E

Queen Bōrān came to the throne either at the end of 629 (June) or in 630 C.E., after most of the male heirs to Xusrō II (590–628 C.E.) had been killed by their brother Kawād II. Kawād II (628 C.E.) was responsible for the fratricide that secured his position but led to chaos after his rule. After Kawād's son, Ardaxšīr III, was killed in 630 C.E., there were no legitimate male heirs, and now the court and the clergy were able to exert more influence and choose a new ruler from the various distant relatives of the Sāsānians. The idea that only a person from the family of Sāsān would be able to rule *Ērān-šahr* had first been challenged during the conflict between Xusrō II and Wahrām Čōbin in 590–591 C.E. Xusrō II, however, was able to defeat the usurper and again crown himself as the legitimate king.¹ The killing of the young Ardaxšīr III in 630 C.E. by the Sāsānian general Šahrwarāz was the second and more serious challenge to Sāsānian sovereignty. This last revolt was a serious challenge to Sāsānian imperial ideology because the state had always emphasized that the Sāsānians were the only legitimate rulers. They were the justified rulers, since they claimed to be from the origin/race of gods, and were connected to the Kayāniān kings, who possessed the *xwarrah*, or the royal glory.

Thus the chaos in the seventh century may have brought not only anarchy in terms of succession but also the beginning of a weakening of Sāsānian imperial ideology and royal propaganda. From 590 C.E. to 630 C.E. two men (Wahrām Čōbin and Šahrwarāz), who were not from the family of Sāsān, challenged the Sāsānian kings, and a third (Wistahm) minted coins in his

own name in the north. This article discusses some ways in which Queen Bōrān attempted to reestablish the legitimacy of her family as reflected in her coinage, based on a new reading of the legend on her unique gold coin that was struck during her second year of rule in 631 C.E.

When Bōrān ascended the throne, she attempted to bring stability to the empire. This stability, according to Ṭabarī, was brought about by a peace treaty with Byzantium, the revitalizing of the empire through justice, rebuilding of the infrastructure, lowering of taxes, and minting coins.² We know that Bōrān was acknowledged by many provinces, since throughout the empire various mints struck coins in her name. During year one, eleven mints, mostly in Fārs, Xūzestān, Media, and Xwarāsān, struck coins in her name. During year two, the number of mints decreased to six, which was most likely due to the fact that she did not rule for a full year.³

As the daughter of Xusrō II she must have been an important heir to the throne, since other contenders were only nephews or cousins. According to certain sources she is said to have been the sister and wife of Kawād II, attesting to the practice of *xwēdōdāh* "next-of-kin marriage" in the seventh century.⁴ Bōrān was committed to reviving the memory and prestige of her father, when the Sāsānian Empire had grown to its largest territorial extent. Her silver coinage demonstrates this fact: it completely reverted to the coinage type of Xusrō II, while Kawād II and Ardaxšīr III, the successors to Xusrō II, had changed their coinage type. On Bōrān's coins, the winged crown, the slogan *xwarrah abzūd* "increased in the glory," and

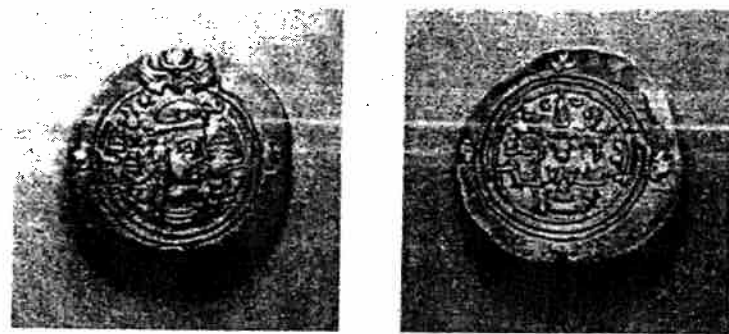


Fig. 1-a, b. Silver coin of Queen Bōrān.

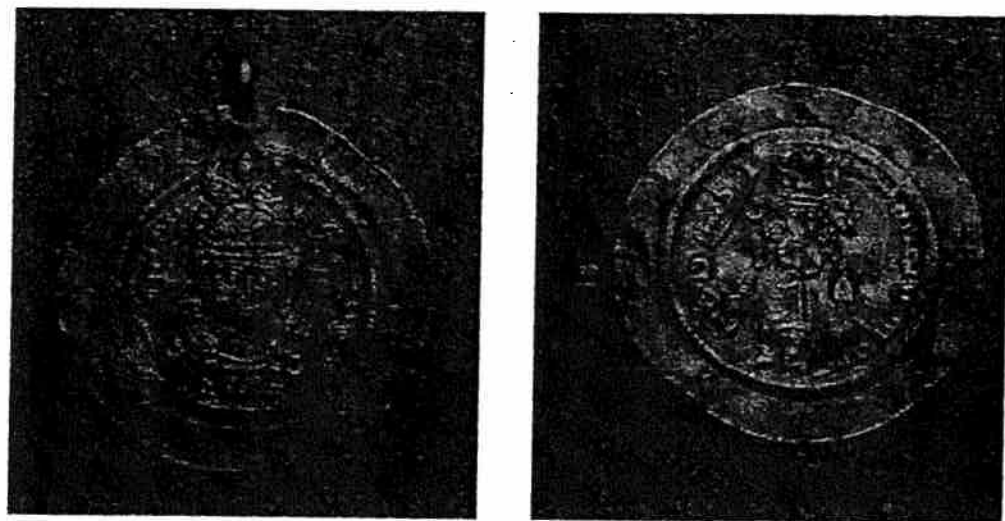


Fig. 2-a, b. Gold coin of Queen Bōrān.

the number of rings were all identical to those elements on the coinage of Xusrō II. Considering the power vacuum and the question of legitimacy, it is no great surprise to see that Bōrān used the imagery and the slogan of her father to portray herself as the legitimate heir to the Sāsānian throne. On her silver coinage the slogan *bōrān xwarrah abzūd* "Bōrān increased in glory" meant at least symbolically that she was able to bring about order to the empire (fig. 1-a, b). A unique gold coin of Bōrān, however, is impor-

tant in portraying her notion of imperial ideology and manifests her ambition (fig. 2-a, b).

I. The Legend

R. Kuntz and W. B. Warden first drew attention to this gold coin, which is housed in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. On the obverse and the reverse, Bōrān is shown in a frontal pose, reminiscent of her father's special issue coinage. The

Middle Persian legend on the obverse is not problematic and can be read as *bōrān abzūn*. The reverse legend, however, has caused a good deal of problems and controversy. On the left side of the standing bust the legend reads *bwl'ṇ* ' *TLYN bōrān dō* "Bōrān two," which confirms that this coin was struck in the second year of her reign. The same scheme can be found on Xusrō II's gold coin, on which the name and regnal year are inscribed on the reverse.⁵ On the right side of the bust there is a longer legend. Kuntz and Warden left the first word untranslated but, based on R. N. Frye's suggestion, read the rest of the legend as:

... GDH new *bwl'ṇ*
xwarrah nēw burdār
"Good-bearer of glory"⁶

While the first word was not read, it should be mentioned that the last word can not have been read as *bwl'ṇ*, since there is clearly no *bēṭ* at the beginning of the word. R. Göbl was the first person to suggest a complete reading of the legend:

gyh'ṇ MN GDH new klt'ṇ
gēhān' az xwarrah nēw kardār
"she who makes the earth strong with her (royal) splendor"⁷

The problem with this reading is that it is difficult to ignore the first character and read the next word as *gēhān*, since it does not portray the regular orthography for *gyh'ṇ gēhān*. The last word can not be read as *klt'ṇ kardār* either, since the word does not begin with *kāp*. Even if we agree with Göbl's reading, the phrase in itself is quite difficult to interpret. A. D. H. Bivar has suggested that the unread word by Kuntz and Warden may be *gyh'ṇt gēhānat* "your world."⁸ Based on this reading, H. M. Malek and V. S. Curtis have read the full legend as:

gyh'ṇt GDH new bwl'ṇ
gēhānat xwarrah nēw burdār
"your world (is the) bringer of brave glory"⁹

Besides the impossibility of the reading of the first word as *gyh'ṇ gēhān*, the word *gēhān* rarely

if ever appears as *gēhānat* in Middle Persian. As for the last word, while Göbl had suggested *kāp* for the first letter, Bivar suggested a *bēṭ*, which again is not possible. The sentence does not make much sense as Bivar has translated it, and so this suggestion must be abandoned. Another numismatist who attempted to give a reading was M. I. Mochiri, whose suggestion in reading the legend has opened up other possibilities. He read the entire legend, both on the right side and left side of the bust on the reverse, as a complete sentence:

bwl'ṇ tlwyn ZY yzd'ṇ twhmk W gwhrt'ṇ
bōrān tarwēn ī yazdān tōhmag ud gōhrdār
"Bōrān victorieuse, de race divine et replendissante"¹⁰

As for *bwl'ṇ tlwyn bōrān tarwēn* as mentioned above, it is more probable that the legend to the left of the bust signifies the date and must not be read as *tarwēn*. Mochiri's reading is more plausible, especially for the part Kuntz and Warden left untranslated. Still, one cannot agree with Mochiri's complete reading of the legend on the left side of Bōrān's bust. On the obverse of Sāsānian coinage, it is the norm to find the year of the rule in the quadrant. Furthermore, the number is inscribed, as far as one can tell, in the usual way, i.e., *TLYN*. In order for the word to be read as *tlwyn tarwēn*, which Mochiri has suggested, there needs to be an extra stroke (*waw*) between *tl* and *yn* that is not there. Even if we ignore this problem, *tarwēn* is usually used in a negative sense in the Middle Persian literature,¹¹ and it is implausible that Bōrān would have used such a term to characterize her rule.

As for Mochiri's other suggestion regarding the legend on the right side of the bust, *ZY yzd'ṇ twhmk W gwhrt'ṇ ī yazdān tōhmag ud gōhrdār*, it is quite possible to read the first two words as *ī yazd'ṇ* "of the gods." For the third word, *twhm tōhm* should be preferred over Mochiri's reading of *twhmk*, since there is no *kaf* at the end of the word. As for the last word, Mochiri suggests *W gwhrt'ṇ ud gohārdār*, which is not plausible. The suggestion here is that it should be read as *wyn'ld'ṇ winārdār* "arranger" or "restorer." In fact if we do not take the first letter as the ideogram *W*, together with the next word it can only be read as *winārdār* with the

Papers Read at the 31st International Congress of Human Sciences in Asia and North Africa, ed. H. I. H. Prince T. Mikasa (Wiesbaden, 1984), pp. 72-73.

15. T. Daryaee, "Early Sāsānian Titulature," *Society for Ancient Numismatics* 20.2 (forthcoming).

16. Another possibility is that inside the empire this idea was suppressed and was current in foreign correspondences.

17. W. Sundermann, "Kē ēhr az yazdān: Zur Titulatur der Sasanidenkönige," p. 340.

18. P. Bedjan, ed., *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1891), p. 53,3; also O. Braun, *Aus-*

gewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer (Munich, 1915), p. 2.

19. "A god most manifest," M. and M. Whitby, *The "History" of Theophylact Simocatta: An English Translation with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford, 1986), p. 114.

20. R. C. Blockley, *The History of Menander the Guardsman: Introductory Essay, Text, Translation and Historiographical Notes*, Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs, ARCA (Liverpool, 1985), fragment 6,1, line 182.

21. Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫ al-rusul waʾl-mulūk*, p. 404.



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The Collapse of the Sasanian Power in Fārs/Persis*

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The exact dates for the early Islamic conquest of cities and districts of Iran, the Near East, Eastern Mediterranean, and North Africa are difficult to ascertain. The reason for this difficulty is the contradictory nature of Arabic and Persian *futūh* texts and other literary sources in regard to the dates when a district or city was taken. Another major reason for this confusion as to the exact date of the conquest is that there were so many local uprisings that Muslim historians themselves were at a loss regarding the terminal date of the conquest. Consequently an author or several authors supply several or different dates for conquests which tend to confuse the history of the early Arab Muslim control in the seventh century CE. This confusion can be demonstrated by looking at the accounts of the conquest of Fārs by three important Muslim historians: al-Ṭabarī dealing with universal history, Balādhurī dealing with conquests, and Ibn Balxī dealing with local history. All these authors and others supply different dates and at times different

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