

**THE IDEA OF IRAN:
THE EARLY SASANIAN PERIOD**

A Symposium

Dates

Saturday 10th June 2006

Time

9.30am - 4.30pm

Venue

The Khalili Lecture Theatre
The School of Oriental and African Studies
Russell Square
London WC1H 0XG

Admission

£15.00; conc. £10.00; students £5.00
to include lunch and refreshments

Organised by

The London Middle East Institute, SOAS
and
The British Museum

Supported by

The Soudavar Memorial Foundation

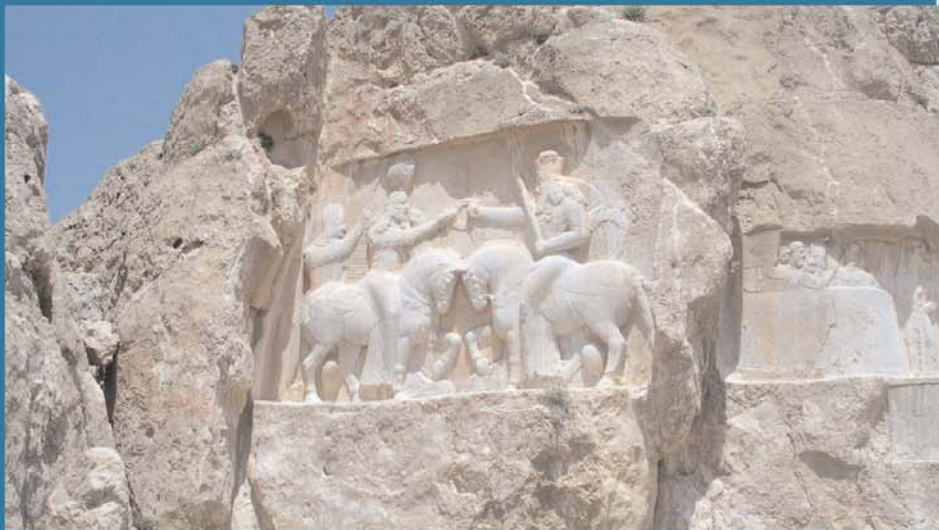


THE
BRITISH
MUSEUM

Enquiries & Bookings

Naomi Massey: 020 7898 4330
Vincenzo Paci: 020 7898 4490
E-mail: lmei@soas.ac.uk

**THE IDEA OF IRAN:
THE EARLY
SASANIAN PERIOD**



**A Symposium
Saturday 10th June 2006**

Organised by
The London Middle East Institute,
SOAS

and

The British Museum

Supported by
The Soudavar Memorial Foundation

**THE IDEA OF IRAN:
THE EARLY SASANIAN PERIOD**

The third in the series 'The Idea of Iran' will be held as a **one day symposium** at which contributions by six eminent scholars will cover aspects of the early to mid-Sasanian period. The Organisers remain indebted to the Soudavar Memorial Foundation for its continued support without which the series would not be possible.

9.30 Registration

9.55 Welcoming remarks

10.00-10.45 Speaker 1

**Image and Identity:
early Sasanian art and iconography**

Dr Prudence Harper, Curator Emerita, Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

A variety of artifacts, national monuments, royal commissions and personal expressions of ownership and identity, have survived from the early Sasanian period. These remains provide clear evidence of the concerns of, and developments in, the new Sasanian state. Certain images and conventions were established at the start of the period, and their appearance in the arts is significant for our understanding of the initial stages in the creation of a Sasanian dynastic identity. In a period in which the population of the Sasanian realm became increasingly diverse and contacts between Iran and the lands to the west and east rapidly increased, the presence of foreign elements in the arts of Iran is also an important factor in the cultural history of the early Sasanian period.

10.45-11.30 Speaker 2

Early Sasanian Coinage

Dr Michael Alram, Vice-Director, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

The paper will deal with the first hundred years of Sasanian coinage, covering the time span from the founder of the dynasty, Ardashir I (AD 224-240) to Ohrmazd II (AD 303-309). It was during this early phase of the Sasanian state that the basic structures of the Sasanian coinage system were established, structures that were preserved almost unchanged until the end of the dynasty in the 7th century. The aim is to demonstrate the value and informative status of the numismatic source material in the interplay with archaeological and epigraphic evidence and the literary record. For the early Sasanian period of minting there remain two major, purely numismatic problems, which are related in many aspects: first, to establish the chronological sequence of the various types issued during the reign of a king; second, the problem of the mints. The object is to determine the number and identification of the mints involved in the production of the coins.

11.30-12.00 coffee

12.00-12.45 Speaker 3

The Layout of Ardashir Khurreh and the Manifestation of Ardashir Pāpākan's State Ideology.

Dr Dietrich Huff, formerly Eurasia Department, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin

The foundation of Ardashir Khurreh by Ardashir Pāpākan was closely connected with Ardashir's rise to power in the early 3rd cent. A.D. and the choice of its circular city plan instead of a more practical checkerboard grid, must certainly be seen in this context. Archaeological surveys have shown that the city is only the integral nucleus of a concentric system of land division, which covered the whole plain. The system with its central tower, 'Tirbal', strictly aims at the drainage of the plain. This was not a colonized swamp, as reported in ancient chronicles. Apart from this practical aspect, the layout, together with other considerations, may give insights into Ardashir's political intentions and his ideas on society, religion and government.

12.45-1.30 Speaker 4

Interrelations between Iranian Religious Traditions and Christian Heterodoxies in the Late Parthian and Early Sasanian Periods

Dr Yuri Stoyanov, Director of the British School of Archaeology (The Kenyon Institute), Jerusalem.

Discussing briefly the controversial problem of Iranian religious influences on the New Testament and early Christianity, the paper will revisit and reassess the evidence of such influences on Christian heterodoxies in the late Parthian and early Sasanian periods. These heterodoxies range from Gnostic syncretistic theologies (in addition to the obvious case of Manichaeism) to Christian and Christianized pseudigraphical works from Late Antiquity and their derivative traditions. The paper will highlight the main points of distinction and similarity between these Christian heterodoxies and Iranian religious traditions, exploring also the implications of these interrelations for the transmission of Christian heterodoxy in the Sasanian period, which still poses a number of religious and historical problems.

1.30-2.30 Lunch

2.30-3.15 Speaker 5

How Pious was Shahpur I? On the Role of Religion under the Early Sasanians

Professor Philip Kreyenbroek, Professor of Iranian Studies, University of Göttingen

It is widely supposed that the early Sasanians were particularly staunch and traditional Zoroastrians, who restored the religion, if not to its former purity then at least to a state widely held to be Zoroastrian orthodoxy. Nevertheless Shapur I accorded Mani, whom he could hardly have believed to be a traditional Zoroastrian, considerable privileges at court and in the country, while the position of the Zoroastrian prelate Kirder was initially a modest one. The implications of this state of affairs have not been given due attention. One reason for this is that the available sources offer a more or less coherent picture of early Sasanian religious policies. These sources have long been taken primarily as descriptions of fact, rather than as representing an attempt to provide the country with a version of history that would support the Sasanians' claims to power, while furthering the cause of the Zoroastrian clergy. If the sources are understood in this way, they cast a different light on certain aspects of the dynamics of religious life in Sasanian Iran.

3.15-4.00 Speaker 6

The "King of Kings" who is from the "Race of Gods": the Idea of kingship in the early Sasanian period

Dr Touraj Daryaee, Dept. of History, California State University, Fullerton

From the reign of Ardashir I (AD 224-240) the Sasanian kings adopted and held several important titles and epithets. These included *Sāhān Sāh* "King of Kings"; Māzdēsān Bay "Mazda-worshipping God/Lord"; and *kē čīhr az yazdān* "from the Seed/Race of Gods." This essay attempts to delineate and explain the creation and origins of these titles which were in use from the time of Ardashir to the early fourth century. It is contended that the early Sasanian idea of kingship was a mélange of old Persian ideas of royalty, i.e. Achaemenid via the local rulers of Persis (King of Kings), as well as the Zoroastrian religious tradition (Mazda-worshipping God), and the Hellenic idea of monarchy (Race of Gods). It is important to note that the Sasanians were not simply reviving the old Persian tradition from the Achaemenid period, but rather using and adopting all the existing traditions on the Iranian Plateau which created a tripartite (Persian, Zoroastrian, and Hellenic) notion of kingship.

4.00-4.10 Closing remarks

4.10-4.30 Tea

Cover: Ardashir receiving the diadem of kingship from Ahura Mazda, Naqsh-e Rostam, Iran, 3rd century AD. Photograph by S. Saito/Corbis.

