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Introducción

El antiguo Irán, Persia, pero también Elam, constituye un ámbito de estudio apasionante del que cada vez tenemos más información. El número vigésimo sexto de nuestra revista hace un repaso por distintos aspectos que son objeto de investigación en la actualidad, y lo hace de la mano de investigadores iraníes, franceses, italianos y españoles.

Solemos recordar que la inscripción de Darío en Behistun fue la llave a partir de la cual se pudo descifrar el cuneiforme. La inscripción estaba escrita en persa antiguo, en babilonio y en elamita. A partir del persa se pudo comenzar a descifrar el babilonio, y el elamita tardaría algo más. Es muy interesante que la inscripción estuviese escrita en la lengua originaria de la zona, y que los aqueménidas lo reconociesen con su inscripción como tal. Visiones exógenas y posteriores no siempre han querido ver esta vinculación.

El trabajo de Silva Balatti sobre materiales inscritos del Irán aqueménida continúa una línea de trabajos sobre la escritura irania que aún hoy nos da alegrías y resultados interesantísimos.

La arquitectura irania es objeto de varios artículos en este volumen. El de Davide Solaris y Roberto Dan sobre el significado y la arqueología de Masjed-e Soleyman, reinterpretando su origen y su contexto socio-cultural, es el primero de ellos. El trasvase cultural que estudia Pierfrancesco Callieri de parte de babilonios en Persépolis nos habla de arquitectura, pero también de arqueología y de la información que obtenemos de ellas.

Carlos Fernández Rodríguez aborda la gestión del agua y de su papel en la habitabilidad en el sur de Irán durante la Edad del Hierro, que debe relacionarse con lo que sucede al otro lado del Golfo. Fernando Escribano Martín indaga en lo que conocemos como “jardín persa”, en sus orígenes y en cómo ha evolucionado, y para eso debe partir de Pasargada en Persia, pero ir también más atrás para comprenderlo.

Sébastien Gondet aborda el desarrollo de la agricultura y la historia de la ocupación de la Persépolis aqueménida, aspecto clave para entender el funcionamiento de la capital persa, y Alireza Khounani los viñedos de la Nisa arsácida parta, un ejemplo concreto de agricultura y de comercio en otro periodo clave de la historia irania.

El ámbito material viene tratado con el trabajo de Giulio Maresca sobre la cerámica de Sistán en la Edad del Hierro, o el estudio más específico de Negin Meri sobre una bulla concreta conservada en una institución museística de Teherán.

Cerramos esta temática tan variada e interesante que hemos ido tratando de agrupar en esta introducción con el trabajo de Zahara Gharenkhani, en el que realiza unas reflexiones sobre criaturas híbridas de la Persia preislámica y recapacita sobre su simbolismo, que va mucho más allá del tiempo en el que fueron concebidas.

La panoplia de estudios de diverso orden que aquí presentamos da cuenta del rico mundo que se está investigando en torno al Irán antiguo, cuyas manifestaciones elamita y persa, cada vez más claramente vinculadas, trascendieron también en el tiempo y en el espacio.

F. Escribano Martín, C. del Cerro Linares, C. Fernández Rodríguez y F. L. Borrego Gallardo

Foreword

Ancient Iran, Persia, and Elam constitute a fascinating field of study about which we have more and more information. The 26th issue of our journal allows a revision through several aspects of the current research along with Iranian, French, Italian and Spanish scholars.

We usually remember that cuneiform was deciphered thanks to the Darius' inscription in Behistun. It was written in Old Persian, Babylonian and Elamite. From Persian, it was possible to start deciphering the Babylonian, even if the Elamite took more time. It is indeed very interesting that the inscription was written in the native language of the region, and that Achaemenids recognised it. Some outside and later views have not understood this correlation.

The study of Silvia Balatti about written materials of Achaemenid Iran continues a line of research about the Iranian writing system that even today provides very interesting results.

The Iranian Architecture is the aim of some papers in this issue. The first one is the contribution of Davide Solaris and Roberto Dan about the signification and the archaeology of Masjed-e Soleyman, reinterpreting its origin and socio-cultural context. In the same way, the cultural transfer on behalf of Babylonians in Persepolis analysed by Pierfrancesco Callieri is related to architecture but also to Archaeology and to the information that we obtain from them.

Carlos Fernández Rodríguez explores water management and its function in the habitability of Southern Iran during the Iron Age, showing that it is to the situation on the other side of the Gulf. Fernando Escribano Martín investigates what we know as the 'Persian garden', as well as its origins and development. To do this, he should start from Pasargadae in Persia, but also from more ancient times.

Sébastien Gondet analyses agriculture's development and history of the Achaemenid Persepolis' occupation, which is a key aspect for understanding the functioning of this Persian capital. On the other hand, Alireza Khounani presents the vineyards of the Arsacid-Partian Nisa, a concrete example of agriculture and trade in another important period of Iranian history.

In terms of material culture, Giulio Maresca presented a paper about the Sistan pottery in the Iron Age, and Negin Meri developed specific research of an example of a bulla kept in a Museum of Teheran.

We close this wide ranging and interesting theme that we group in this foreword with the studies of Zahara Gharenkhani reflects on some hybrid creatures of the Pre-Islamic Persia, reconsidering their symbolism, which goes beyond the time when they were conceived.

The array of studies of different kind that we present in this issue accounts for the rich world that is under investigation around Ancient Iran, whose Elamite and Persian manifestations, progressively more related, transcend both in time and space.

F. Escribano Martín, C. del Cerro Linares, C. Fernández Rodríguez and F. L. Borrego Gallardo

ANOTHER BULLA OF WEH-ŠĀPUR, ĒRĀN-SPĀHBED OF KUST-I-NĒMRŌZ FROM THE TREASURY OF MOSTAZAFAN FOUNDATION'S CULTURAL INSTITUTION OF MUSEUMS IN TEHRAN¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces a newly-found Sasanian bulla that has two seal impressions, the major of which belongs to Wēh-šāpur, military chief or Ērān-spāhbed of kust-ī-nēmrōz or the south-southeast side of the Sasanian Empire during the reign of Kōsrow I (539-579 AD). Since 2001 a number of spāhbed bullae have been identified and published. These significant objects confirmed the validity of historical narrations regarding quadripartition of military organization of the Sasanian Empire recorded in late and post-Sasanian literary sources. This sealing is part of a bullae collection kept in the treasury of Mostazafan Foundation's Cultural Institution of Museums in Tehran and offers the fifth example of spāhbed Wēh-šābuhr seal impression so far known and published.

KEYWORDS

Sasanian, Bullae, Sealing, spāhbed, nēmrōz.

RESUMEN

En este artículo se presenta una bulla sasánida recientemente encontrada que tiene dos impresiones de sello, la mayor pertenece a Wēh-šāpur, jefe militar o Ērān-spāhbed de kust-ī-nēmrōz o de la parte sur-sureste del Imperio sasánida durante el reinado de Cosroes I (539-579 d.C.). Desde 2001 se han identificado y publicado varias bullae spāhbed. Estos objetos significativos confirmaron la validez de las narraciones históricas relativas a la cuatripartición de la organización militar del Imperio sasánida registradas en las fuentes literarias tardías y postsasánidas. Este sello forma parte de una colección de bullae conservada en el tesoro de la Institución Cultural de Museos de la Fundación Mostazafan en Teherán y ofrece el quinto ejemplo de impresión del sello spāhbed Wēh-šābuhr conocido y publicado hasta la fecha.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Sasánida, Bullae, Sellado, spāhbed, nēmrōz.

Before Kisra became king, the office of *Isbahbadh*— that is, the supreme commander of the armed forces— was held by one man, who was responsible for this supreme command over all the land. Kisra now divided this office and rank between four *Isbahbadhs*, namely, the *Isbahbadh* of the East, comprising Khurasan and its adjoining regions; the *Isbahbadh* of the West; the *Isbahbadh* of Nimruz, that is, the land of Yemen; and the *Isbahbadh* of Azerbaijan and its adjoining regions, that is, the Khazar lands. He saw in this new arrangement a way of improving the good ordering of his kingdom⁴.

¹ This research has been made possible thanks to the permission granted by Head of Office of Treasuries at Mostazafan Foundation's Cultural Institution of Museums to access and study the bullae collection kept in the treasury in Tehran. Authors would like to express their gratitude for this kind support.

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⁴ Tabari, Vol. V: 149-150.

According to Tabari, following Kōsrow I (539-579 AD) military reforms, he replaced the office of *Isfahbadh al-Bilad* (اصفهبذ البلاد) or *Ērān-spāhbed* i.e., supreme military commander of the entire empire's army, with four generals and put them in charge of each region or side —*kust*— of the territory that were established according to cardinal points. Although the term *Ērān-spāhbed* is not recorded in Sasanian primary sources, the title *spāhbed* (MP. *sp'hpt*, Pth. *spdpty*) is attested in the 3rd century inscriptions of Šāpūr I (240-272 AD) on the walls of Ka'be-ye Zardošt (ŠKZ. 42)⁵ and of Narseh (293-303 AD) at Paikuli (NPi. 16)⁶. It is not however known if this title matched *Ērān-spāhbed* mentioned in later Pahlavi and post-Sasanian Arabic literary sources or it simply designated a military rank in a smaller scale but at the same time very connected and close to the court⁷.

The title *spāhbed-ī-Ērān* is recorded once in the Pahlavi treatise *Kārnāmag-ī-Ardašīr-ī-Pābagān*⁸ and there are references to four generals of each side as *spāhbed-ī-xwarāsān* (military chief of the east-northeast), *spāhbed-ī-nēmrōz* (military chief of the south-southeast), *spāhbed-ī-xwarbarān* (military chief of the west-southwest), and *spāhbed-ī-ādurbādagān* (military chief of the north-northwest) in *Bundahišn* and *Sūr-Saxwan*⁹. Nevertheless, due to lack of primary evidence, the validity of these narrations in predominantly post-Sasanian literary sources —Pahlavi, Arabic and Persian— the reality and nature of such military quadripartition and the appointment of four general were subject of scholarly debate and discussion¹⁰.

Discovery and publication of a number of bullae impressed with seals of *spāhbeds* in 2001 however, provided us with indisputable primary evidence that not only confirmed the historical reality of this military quadripartition but offered us names and titles of some of the generals as well¹¹.

Since 2001, forty-six examples of *spāhbed* bullae have been known and published. This paper aims to introduce a recently identified *spāhbed* bulla from the time of Kōsrow I that is kept in the treasury of Mostazafan Foundation's Cultural Institution of Museums in Tehran.

1. *Spāhbed* Bullae; a concise review

In 1991, Ph. Gignoux published a seal fragment with an incomplete inscription read as *nēmrōz spāhbed*¹². This inscription offered a fundamental sigillographic evidence as to the historical reality of military quadripartition of the Sasanian Empire and the existence of several *spāhbeds*. Ten years later R. Gyselen published eleven bullae from Ahmad Saedi Collection that were impressed with seals of *spāhbeds* of four regions or sides of the Sasanian Empire¹³. Saedi collection bullae and seals were fully published in 2007 and a complete set of thirty-one *spāhbed* bullae were introduced there (III/1-III/31). Other examples of *spāhbed* bullae were since came to light and published by other scholars¹⁴. Accordingly, today we have a considerable knowledge about iconographic and epigraphic characteristics of late Sasanian *spāhbed* seals.

Sasanian *spāhbed* bullae belong to *Ērān-spāhbed* of the east-northeast side or the *kust-ī-xwarāsān*, *Ērān-spāhbed* of the south-southeast side or *kust-ī-nēmrōz*, *Ērān-spāhbed* of the

⁵ Huyse 1999: 55.

⁶ Cereti and Terribili 2014: 361.

⁷ Gyselen 2019: 271.

⁸ Sanjana 1896: 43.

⁹ West 1897: 12; Daryaei 2007: 2, 4-5.

¹⁰ Lukonin 1983; Gnoli 1985.

¹¹ Gyselen 2001; 2007.

¹² Gignoux 1991.

¹³ Gyselen 2001.

¹⁴ Akbarzadeh, Cereti and Sinisi 2009: 20-21, 24; Daryaei and Safdari 2010; 2012; Qasemi 2022; Abdulrahman and Ahmed 2023: 19-20.

of the west-southwest side or *kust-ī-xwarbarān* and *Ērān-spāhbed* of the north-northwest side or *kust-ī-ādurbādagān*. Chronologically they all belong to the reign of two late Sasanian kings Kōsrow I and Hormozd IV (579-590 AD). In addition to historical evidence, attribution of *spāhbeds* bullae to the reign of Kōsrow I and Hormozd IV is based on two honorific titles of *hujadag-husraw* and *hujadag-ohrmezd* meaning “well-omened Kōsrow” and “well-omened Hormozd” on the seals that show the relationship between these generals and their patron kings. Since all known *spāhbeds* bullae belong late 6th century AD, there is not much knowledge regarding the status and titles of generals prior to this time. No sigillographic evidence is also available as regards the conditions concerned this after the time of Hormozd IV, although literary sources indicate the continuity of this status up to the end of Sasanian period¹⁵. Geographical sphere of each side, their changes through time and comparative studies with descriptions and terminology given in Pahlavi, Armenian and Arabic sources have been subject of several investigations by Gyselen¹⁶.

To this point ten, twenty-five, six and five seal impression is respectively published for *Ērān-spāhbed* of *kust-ī-xwarāsān*, *Ērān-spāhbed* of *kust-ī-nēmrōz*, *Ērān-spāhbed* of *kust-ī-xwarbarān* and *Ērān-spāhbed* of *kust-ī-ādurbādagān*¹⁷.

Seal of *Ērān-spāhbed* of *kust-ī-xwarāsān* introduce them as Čīhr-burzēn and Dād-burz-mihr who held this office under Kōsrow I and Hormozd IV respectively¹⁸.

Seals of *kust-ī-nēmrōz spāhbeds* belong to three generals named Pīrag, Wēh-šābuhr and Wahrām-ī-nām-xwāst-husraw ādurmahān. The first two held the office under Kōsrow I while the third general served under both Kōsrow I and Hormozd IV¹⁹. We find reference to some of these characters in literary sources. A certain Pīrag from Mihran family is named by Dīnavarī (recorded as Fīrak فیرک) while narrating Yazdgerd I (438-457 AD) reign events²⁰. Although this might be a homonymy, it is most likely a chronological mistake by Dīnavarī. References to Bahrām-e Māhāzar or Bahrām-e Āzarmāhām are found in Shahnameh²¹. There he is mentioned as one of the dignitaries in the court of Hormozd IV who also held a high rank in his father's court, a report that completely matches with seals of Wahrām-ī-nām-xwāst-husraw ādurmahān. Furthermore, we find numerous references to a certain Āzarmāhām, *marzbān* and/or army commander of Sasanian-Roman wars during the time of Kōsrow I and Hormozd IV in various sources on Sasanian-Roman wars such as Evagrius (c. 536-594 AD), John of Ephesus (c. 507-586/8 AD), John of Epiphania (6th/7th century AD), Theophylact Simocata (1st half of the 7th century)²². Since all these reports point to his high rank and critical role during the military operations under both Kōsrow I and Hormozd IV, there would be little doubt that is must be identified with Wahrām-ī-nām-xwāst-husraw ādurmahān, *spāhbed* of *nēmrōz*.

Sealings of *spāhbeds* of *kust-ī-xwarbarān* introduce this general as Wistaxm, whose seals indicate he held the office under both Kōsrow I and Hormozd IV²³. Again, we find reference to a certain Bastām, *spāhbed* of Sawād region (السواد اصْبُهَيْد) who hold the rank of *hazaruft* (هزارافت) and is named along with the aforementioned Fīrak in the context of Yazdgerd I reign in Ketāb al-aḳbār al-ṭewāl²⁴. Contemporality of Bastām and Fīrak in

¹⁵ Gyselen 2004.

¹⁶ Gyselen 2001; 2019: 270-277.

¹⁷ Akbarzadeh, Cereti and Sinisi 2009: 20-21, 24, No. 116; Daryaei and Safdari 2010, 2012; Gyselen 2001; 2007; 2019: 450-452; Qasemi 2022: 85-86; Abdulrahman and Ahmed 2023: 19-20.

¹⁸ Gyselen 2004; 2007: 248-254; 2019: 272.

¹⁹ Gyselen 2004; 2007: 254-267; 2019: 272.

²⁰ Dīnavarī Vol. 1: 55.

²¹ Ferdowsi, Vol. 8: 319-326.

²² Greatrex and Liue 2002: 143,146-147, 150, 164-165.

²³ Gyselen 2004; 2007: 268-272; 2019: 272-273.

²⁴ Dīnavarī Vol. 1: 55.

Dīnavarī's account that is consistent with sigillographic evidence showing they both held the office during Kōsrow I, indicates these characters are more likely identifiable with Pīrag and Wistaxm and we face a chronological mistake by Dīnavarī²⁵. Furthermore, Dīnavarī mentions his rank of *hazaruft* recorded as *hazārbed* on Wistaxm seals (see Table 1).

Bullae of *spāhbeds* of *kust-ī-ādurbādagān* belong to three generals named Gōrgōn, Sēd-ōš and -husraw. The first two acted under Kōsrow I and -husraw held the office under Hormozd IV²⁶. In literary sources he is mentioned as Gōrgōn Mehran *spāhbed* of *ādurbādagān*²⁷.

Examples of personal seals of some these generals have been known and published as well including personal seals of Dād-burz-mihr, Wēh-šābuhr, Wahrām-ī-nām-xwāst-husraw ādurmāhān and probably Čīhr-burzēn²⁸.

2. *Spāhbeds* Sealings Inscriptions

Sasanian seals and sealing are conventionally grouped into two general categories of personal and official-administrative seals/sealing. Seal impressions of late Sasanian *spāhbeds* can be considered official-administrative in terms of their inclusion of *spāhbeds* official position and the territorial sphere under their control. Nevertheless, since these sealings contain *spāhbeds* personal names as well as their honorific and other formal and/or personal titles they can be considered personal seals of these *spāhbeds*. Hence, they are included in a certain category as “personal seals of a dignitary” by Gyselen²⁹.

The rather long inscription on *spāhbeds* sealings is commonly composed of three parts: *spāhbeds* names, their titles and the geographical domain under their control. Three titles follows *spāhbed* name: a title pointing to his other official positions including *šahr-aspbed* (chief of the cavalry of the entire empire), *aspbed-ī-pārsīg* (Persian chief of the cavalry), *aspbed-ī-pahlaw pārsīg* (Parthian chief of cavalry), *šahr-warāz* (boar of the empire), *šahr-hazāruf* (empire's chief of the thousand), *šahr-hazārbed* (empire's chief of the thousand), *hazārbed* (chief of the thousand) and *nēwānbed ud šābestan* (chief of the brave and eunuch)³⁰. It is not known with certainty whether these were honorary titles or designated other official positions which *spāhbeds* might have held prior to their appointment as generals or in addition to it³¹. As mentioned above, apart from their *spāhbed* seals, Dād-burz-mihr, Wēh-šābuhr, Wahrām-ī-nām-xwāst-husraw ādurmāhān are also known through their other personal seals/sealings that contain their names and the same titles of *aspbed-ī-pahlaw*, *aspbed-ī-pārsīg* and *nēwānbed ud šābestan* recorded on their *spāhbed* seals³².

Following these titles, comes the honorific title of *hujadag-husraw* and *hujadag-ohrmezd* meaning respectively “well-omened Kōsrow” and “well-omened Hormozd”. And at the final part we find reference to complete title of these generals as *Ērān-spāhbeds* of each four quarters of the territory, i.e. *ērān kust-ī-..... spāhbed*. The word *mihrān* on seal impressions of Pīrag, Gōrgōn and Sēd-ōš refers to their lineage from the noble Mihrān family.

A comprehensive review of *spāhbeds* sealing inscriptions including their transcription, transliteration and translation is given in Table 1 based on Gyselen readings with few minor corrections³³.

²⁵ Gyselen 2004.

²⁶ Gyselen 2004; 2007: 51, 272-277; 2019: 273.

²⁷ Howard-Johnston 2010, p. 56, n. 60 in Gyselen 2019: 273.

²⁸ Gyselen 2007: 284-286, 288-290; 2019: 273-274; Qasemi 2022: 85-89.

²⁹ Gyselen 2007: 46-47.

³⁰ Gyselen 2001: 20-28; 2004; 2007: 52; 2019: 272. For more information regarding these titles see Chaumont 1987; Gyselen 2004; 2007: 57-62; Shayegan 2003.

³¹ Gyselen 2004.

³² Gyselen 2007: 284-286, 288-290; 2019: 273-274; Qasemi 2022: 85-89.

³³ Gyselen 2019: 2019: 450-452.

<p>čtl bwlcyny ZY (...)pty W hwjtk hwslwdy [LBA] 'yl'n kwsty ZY hwl's'n sp'hpty</p> <p>čïhr-burzēn ī ... bed ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-xwarāsān spāhbed</p> <p>Čïhr-burzēn, chief of (?) and well-omened Ƙosrow, grandee, Ērān-spāhbed of the side of the East</p>	Čïhr-burzēn	Erān kust-ī-xwarāsān spāhbed
<p>d't bwlcmtly ZY '[s]ppty ZY p'hlwby W hwjtk 'whlmzdy LB[A] 'yl'n kwst' ZY hwl's'n sp'hpty 'pzwn' (?)</p> <p>dād-burz-mihr aspbed-ī-pahlaw ud hujadag-ohrmezd wuzurg ērān kust-ī-xwarāsān spāhbed abzōn</p> <p>Dād-burz-mihr, Parthian Aspbed and well-omened Homozd, grandee, Ērān-spāhbed of the side of the East, increase</p>	Dād-burz-mihr	
<p>pylky ZY štlwl'c W hwjtk hwslwdy LBAy 'yl'n kwsty [ZY] nymlywey sp'hpty</p> <p>pīrag ī šahr-warāz ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-nēmroz spāhbed</p> <p>Pīrag, boar of the empire and well-omened Ƙosrow, grandee, Ērān-spāhbed of the side of the South</p>	Pīrag	Erān kust-ī-nēmroz spāhbed
<p>pylky ZY štlwl'c W hwjtk hwslwdy LBAy 'yl'n kwsty [ZY] nymlywey sp'hpty mtr'n</p> <p>pīrag ī šahr-warāz ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-nēmroz spāhbed mihrān</p> <p>Pīrag, Boar of the Empire and well-omened Ƙosrow, grandee, Ērān-spāhbed of the side of the South, from Mihrān family</p>		
<p>wyd šhpwhly ZY 'sppty ZY p'lsyk k štl(?)...pty W hwjtk hwslwdy LBAy 'yl'n kwsty ZY nymlywey sp'hpty</p> <p>wēh-šābuhr ī aspbed-ī-pārsīg (ud šahr-hazārbed ?) ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-nēmroz spāhbed</p> <p>Wēh-šābuhr, Persian Aspbed, chief of the thousand of the empire (?) and well-omened Ƙosrow, grandee, Erān-spāhbed of the side of the South</p>	Wēh-šābuhr	
<p>wlhl'n ZY n'm hw[']st hwslwdy 'twlm'h'n (nyw'n?)pt W š'pstn W hwjtk hwslwdy LBA 'yl'n kwsty ZY nymlywey sp'hpty</p> <p>wahrām ī nām-xwāst-husraw ādurmahān (nēwān)bed ud šābestan ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-nēmroz spāhbed</p> <p>Wahrām ī nām-xwāst-husraw ādurmahān chief of the brave and eunuch and well-omened Ƙosrow, grandee, Ērān-spāhbed of the side of the South</p>	Wahrām ī nām-xwāst-husraw ādurmahān	
<p>wlhl'n ZY n'mhhw['st hw](slwdy) ['twl]m'h'n ...pty [š]'pstny štl hc'lwpt W hwjtk 'whlmzdy LBAy 'yl'n kwsty ZY nymlywey 't sp'hpty</p> <p>wahrām ī nām-xwāst-husraw ādurmahān (nēwān ?)bed ud šābestan šahr-hazāruft ud hujadag-ohrmezd wuzurg ērān kust-ī-nēmroz spāhbed</p> <p>Wahrām ī nām-xwāst-husraw ādurmahān, chief of the brave and eunuch, chief of the thousand of the empire and well-omened Hormozd, grandee, Ērān-spāhbed of the side of the South</p>		

<p>wsthm ZY hc'lpty W hwjtk hwslwdy LBAy 'yl'n kwsty ZY hwl'l'n sp'hpty</p> <p>wistaxm ī hazārbed ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-xwarārān spāhbed</p> <p>Wistaxm, chief of the thousand and well-omened Kōsrow, grandee, Ērān-spāhbed of the side of the West</p>	Wistaxm	Erān kust-ī-xwarbarān spāhbed
<p>[ws]thm [ZY] hc'lpty ... W hwjtk 'whlm[zdy] LBAy 'yl'n kwsty ZY hwlpl'n sp'hpty plhw'</p> <p>wistaxm ī hazārbed ...ud hujadag-ohrmezd wuzurg ērān kust-ī-xwarfarān spāhbed farrox</p> <p>Wistaxm chief of the thousand and well-omened Hormozd, grandee, Ērān-spāhbed of the side of the West, blessed</p>		
<p>gwlgnw ZY mtl'ny ... W hwjtk hwslwdy L[BA] 'yl'n kwsty ZY 'twlp'tk'n sp'hpty</p> <p>gōrgōn ī mihrān ... ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-ādurbādagān spāhbed</p> <p>Gōrgōn of Mihrān family and well-omened Kōsrow, grandee, Ērān-spāhbed of the side of the North</p>	Gōrgōn	Erān kust-ī-ādurbādagān spāhbed
<p>sydhwšy ZY mtl'n štl '[s]ppty W hwjtk hwslwdy L[BA 'yl'n] kwsty ZY 'twlp'tk'n sp'hpty</p> <p>sēd-ōš ī mihrān šahr-asped ud hujadag-husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-ādurbādagān spāhbed</p> <p>Sēd-ōš of Mihrān family, Asped of the Empire and well-omened Kōsrow, grandee, Ērān-spāhbed of the side of the North</p>	Sēd-ōš	
<p>...p[...]hwslwd ... (štl)... [st]'n ..? W hwjtk 'whrmzdy LBA 'yl'n kwsty ZY 'twlp'tk'ny sp'hpty</p> <p>...-husraw ... (šahr)...(st)ān ... ud hujadag-ohrmezd wuzurg ērān kust-ī-ādurbādagān spāhbed</p> <p>...-husraw, ... of the empire ... and well-omened Hormozd, grandee, Ērān-spāhbed of the side of the North</p>	...-husraw	

Table 1. Transcription, Transliteration and Translation of *spāhbed* Bullae Inscriptions (Gyselen 2019: 450-452 with minor corrections).

3. Newly-found Bulla of wēh-šābuhr, asped-ī-pārsīg, ērān kust-ī-nēmrōz spāhbed

Mostazafan Foundation's Cultural Institution of Museums holds a collection of about seventy bullae, gathered from private collections with unknown archaeological provenance³⁴. The collection includes one *spāhbed* bulla with two seal impressions. Like other *spāhbed* bullae published so far, this one is also rather large in size (67x60x21 mm). It is made of grey baked clay of fine quality. Trace of a cord is visible on the slightly concave back of the bulla and slits through which the document or parcel's binding leather or fabric cord once passed are also observable on the sides of the bulla (Figs. 1-2).

³⁴ The collection is currently under study by the authors and will be published.



Fig. 1. Bulla of Wēh-šābuhr, aspbed-ī-pārsīg, ērān kust-ī-nēm-rōz spāhbed from Mostazafan Foundation's Cultural Institution of Museums Collection in Tehran.



Fig. 2. Seal Impression B on Bulla of Wēh-šābuhr, aspbed-ī-pārsīg, ērān kust-ī-nēm-rōz spāhbed from Mostazafan Foundation's Cultural Institution of Museums Collection in Tehran.

The bulla is comparable with sealing III/13-15 from A. Saeedi collection³⁵ (Fig. 3) and bulla 08 from a bullae collection in the National Museum of Iran returned to Iran from the United States³⁶. Hence our bulla is the fifth example of *spāhbed* Wēh-šābuhr seal impression.



Fig. 3. Bullae III/13-14 from A. Saeedi Collection bearing the seal impression of Wēhšābuhr, aspbed-ī-pārsīg, ērān kust-ī-nēmrōz spāhbed from the Time of Ƙosrow I (Gyselen 2007: 261).



Fig. 4. Drawing of Bulla III/13 from A. Saeedi Collection bearing the seal impression of Wēh-šābuhr, aspbed-ī-pārsīg, ērān kust-ī-nēmrōz spāhbed from the Time of Ƙosrow I (Gyselen 2007: 260).

³⁵ Gyselen 2007: 260-262.

³⁶ Qasemi 2022: 85-86.

3.1. Seal Impression A

This sealing belongs to a slightly concave and almost round seal (39x34 mm). It depicts an equestrian in full armour holding a lance and moving toward the right. A crescent is visible behind the rider. The seal has a 3 mm thick margin with a small round depression at near 3h that is imprint of projecting knob probably used to hold the seal fix on the clay or its correct positioning on the clay³⁷. An inscription in three unequal lengths in lapidary script is engraved around the seal (Figs. 1, 4). The first line starts at 5h and ends at 6h. the second and their line start respectively at 4h and 11h and end at 9h.

Transcription, transliteration and translation of the inscription is given below following Gyselen's reading³⁸:

- 1) wyd šhpwhly ZY 'sppty ZY p'lsyk k štl(?)...pty W hwjtk
wēh-šābuhr ī aspbed-ī-pārsīg (ud šahr-hazārbēd ?) ud hujadag
- 2) hwslwdy LBAy 'yl'n kwsty ZY nymlwc
husraw wuzurg ērān kust-ī-nēmrož
- 3) sp'hpty
spāhbed

Wēh-šāpur, Persian Aspbed, chief of of the empire (?) and well-omened Ḳosrow, grandee, Erān-spāhbed of the side of the south

Aspbed was the chief of Sasanian cavalry. The phrase wēh-šābuhr ī aspbed ī pārsīg can be interpreted both as the “Wēh-šābuhr Persian Chief of Cavalry” or “Wēh-šābuhr, Chief of the Cavalry, the Persian”³⁹. The term *hujadag-husraw* literary meaning “well-omened Ḳosrow” and *hujadag-ohrmazd* on *spāhbed* bullae were honorific titles showing the relationship between the *spāhbed* and the patron king by whom the general was appointed to this position. Therefore, this title has been used to date the *spāhbed* bullae to the reigns of Ḳosrow I and Hormozd IV and their chronological order⁴⁰. Following this title, the word *wuzurg* i.e., grandee, written as ideogrammatic form of LBA points to a specific social rank in Sasanian aristocracy in the third place after landholders and princes. The most important military and administrative positions were bestowed to high-ranking nobility including *wuzurgān*⁴¹. *Wuzurg* was both a hereditary as well as an earned status but it is not known whether *spāhbeds* were chosen from among *wuzurgān* or this rank were bestowed to them following their appointment as generals.

The term *kust* has been interpreted as “region” and “side” and refers to each of the four quarters of the Sasanian territory already mentioned in the introduction. On the basis of literary and sigillographic evince, Gyselen has defined *kust-ī-nēmrož* as the region covering the southern part of Iranian plateau that included Spāhaān, Huzestān, Pārs, Kermān and Sakastān⁴².

³⁷ Gyselen 2001: 10.

³⁸ Gyselen 2007: 260; 2019: 451.

³⁹ Gyselen 2001: 23; 2007: 57-58; 2019: 169, 175.

⁴⁰ Gyselen 2001: 18-20; 2004; 2007: 48- 52; 2019: 275.

⁴¹ Tafazzoli 1989.

⁴² Gyselen 2019: 130-133.

3.2. Seal Impression B

A second seal is impressed on the side of the bulla almost near 12h (d. 9 mm). It shows a sign or monogram (Fig. 2). Monograms were one of the most common motifs in Sasanian sigillography although their true meaning and function is still to be identified⁴³.

The same seal is impressed on twelve bullae in A. Saeedi collection (III/9b-14b, III/18b, III/39b-40b, III/52b and IVD/43b, VC/19a). Among these, bullae III/9-12 belong to Pīrag and bulla III/18 bears the seal impression of Wahrām-ī-nām-xwāst-husraw ādurmahān, other *spāhbeds* of *kust-ī-nēmrōz*. Bullae III/13 and III/14 are completely identical with our bulla and belong to Wēh-šābuhr (Figs. 1-3). On bullae III/39-40 we find this same seal impression along with wēh-šābuhr ī aspbed-ī-pārsīg seal impression while on III/52 this seal is impressed together with Wahrām-ī-nām-xwāst-husraw ādurmahān seal imprint. Bulla IVD/43 bear a seal impression that belongs to a certain xwarrah-pīrag decorated by a boar head that reminds us of title of *šahr-warāz*, i.e. boar of the empire, inscribed on Pīrag seals (see Table 1). All these show that there existed a relationship between the monogram seal and seals of *spāhbeds* of *kust-ī-nēmrōz*, although we unfortunately cannot know the nature of which. Gyselen believes sealings that bear the common monogram seal, might have belonged to a single archive⁴⁴.

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⁴³ For a novel study on these signs and their probable function and meaning see Gyselen and Monsef 2012.

⁴⁴ Gyselen 2007: 10-11.

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Book

Dolce, R., 2017, *Losing One's Head in the Ancient Near East: Interpretation and Meaning of Decapitation*, London.

Article in scientific journal

Dolce, R., 2010, "The Structure and Significance of the Topography of Cult Places in Early Syrian Ebla. An Examination of Urban and Ideological Routes in the Mega-City", *Mesopotamia* 45, pp. 13-30.

Chapter in a collective work

Dolce, R., 2012, "On Urban and Ideological Routes at Ebla. A look at the Topography of Cult Places in the Early Syrian City", in R. Matthews *et al.* (eds.), *Proceedings of the 7 ICAANE*, Vol. 1, London, pp. 35-52.

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