



## An Inscribed Capital Dating from the Time of Shapur I

MAHMUD TAVOOSI WITH NOTES BY R N FRYE

### Introduction

Ten kilometers east of Shiraz at a distance of about 4 kilometers from Abu Nasr palace and a few hundred meters from the village of Nasr-Abad, there lies a natural water reservoir known as Barm e-Delak.<sup>1</sup>

Water flows into this pond from the base of a nearby mountain on whose slopes there exist three stone carvings in bas relief dating to the Sasanid dynasty<sup>2</sup> About 200 meters from the reservoir there stands a semiruined shrine called Im-âmzâdeh Ibrâhim by the local people<sup>3</sup> In an attempt to repair the shrine and to expand its courtyard, the villagers recently (since 1986) started to level the land in its vicinity In this operation, a stone capital of a column quite accidentally has been unearthed. Inattentive to the potential value of "the stone," the villagers had rolled it over to the roadside. One of the inhabitants of the village who teaches at the local guidance school and happens to be an acquaintance of mine, having conjectured that "the stone" might be of historical value informed me of the existence of the capital.<sup>4</sup> I left Shiraz for the site on the spot and, having distinguished the real value of the capital, requested the authorities of Shiraz University to let me transfer it to Shiraz. This being granted, I immediately removed the capital to the Naranjistan Museum in the premises of the Department of Linguistics and Iranian Culture, Shiraz University

### Specifications of the Capital

The stone used in the making of the capital is of the variety commonly used in the historical mon-

uments of Fars and is yellowish. The capital is cylindrical with a diameter and height that measure 80 and 60 centimeters respectively. Its weight is approximately 700 kilograms. In the middle of the top circular surface of this cylinder a circular area with a diameter of about 40 centimeters is cut deep by about three centimeters to make room for the joining of stone and wooden beams (fig. i). Ten centimeters from the top edge downwards, the cylindrical shaft of the capital is indented by 2 centimeters all around. The width of this indentation is 10 centimeters, affording adequate space for inscriptions. On this surface two lines of writing in Sasanian Pahlavi script are inscribed. Below this area, the shaft of the capital assumes a quadrilateral shape. The upper section of each of these four surfaces is archlike, on which some writing in Sasanian Pahlavi is engraved. Next to and below each archlike section, within the worn surface which has lost its original convexity, there appears the bas relief of a human head.

On the first surface, the head of Ardashir e-Papakan, founder of the Sasanid dynasty, is carved with his name superscribed in Pahlavi script (fig. ii). The second portrays two heads in bas relief also superscribed by their respective names (fig. iii). Similarly, on the third surface, the head of the second king of the Sasanids, Shapur I is portrayed (fig. iv). And finally, there is another head on the fourth surface whose name is also superscribed (fig. v).

The intervals between adjacent surfaces on the main cylindrical shaft of the capital have been worked decoratively as semi columns with some beautiful incisions on the upper sections. On top of each interval there appears a mythological being with a head and two outstretched wings which spread over almost half of the upper area of



Fig. 1. Stone capital found near Nasr-Abad, Iran.

each archlike surface. Unfortunately, however, the heads being totally damaged, it is difficult to say whether they portrayed human beings or animals. The wings of the creatures display five layers, the uppermost of which is curled at the end (fig. vi).

Archaeologists have nothing to say about the existence of a palace at the Barm-e-Delak area.<sup>5</sup> With the accidental discovery of the capital reported here and judged by the respective inscriptions transcribed and literally translated below, however, there remains little doubt about the ex-

istence of a Sasanian palace and a fire temple in the site of the present Imāmzādeh. After the Arab invasion of the land of Persia and the fall of the Sasanian Empire followed by the extinction of Zoroastrianism, the palace was destroyed and the fire temple extinguished. Subsequently, in order to restore the holy aspect of the site, Iranians have, so to speak, sanctified the place by the burial of a religious person and converted it into a different type of a holy place—an Islamic shrine.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. ii. Face A, inscribed "Ardashir, King of Kings."



Fig. iii. Face B, inscribed "Court Minister, the good-named governor[?!]"



Fig. iv. Face C, inscribed "Shapur, King of Kings"

---



Fig. v. Face D, inscribed "Abnün(ī), the palace table-decker."



Fig. vi. Bust of human or animal with curled-tip wings carved on the engaged column of the Nasr-Abad capital.

## The Inscriptions, Their Transcriptions and Translations

### *Inscriptions over the Arches*

- |                                    |  |                               |
|------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| A. (fig. ii)                       |  | 'rtštr MLK'n MLK'             |
| Ardashir, King of Kings            |  | Artaxšēr i Šāhān Šāh          |
| B. (fig. iii) line one:            |  | rypyč ZY dlpty                |
| Court Minister                     |  | ! i darpad                    |
| line two:                          |  | whwn'm ZY prmt'r              |
| The good-named governor [?]        |  | Vahunām i fromadār            |
| C. (fig. iv)                       |  | šhpwhr-y MLK'n MLK'           |
| Shapur, King of Kings?             |  | Šāhpuhr i Šāhān Šāh           |
| D. (fig. v)                        |  | 'bnwn(!) ZY PWN špstn 'dnyk   |
| Abnūn(?), the palace table-decker* |  | Abnūn(!) i pad šabistān adnik |

### *Main Inscription. Top Section of the Capital*

The inscription can be read by placing figs. 1–14 consecutively. The second line in all figures is normally worn away, damaged and illegible. The broken parts of the stone may be seen in figs. 3, 10, 11 and 12. I have managed to read the following:

HN	'twrg'h	y'bnw(!)n	ZY	PWN
ēd	ādūrgāh	i Abnūn	i	pad
this	fire-temple	of Abnūn(?)	of	to
špstn	'dnyk	plm't	MNW	kly'p
šabistān	adnik	framād	ke	kard ud
bed-chamber	table-decker	ordered	that	did and

<i>kly</i>	<i>plm'dyn</i>	<sup>YK</sup>			
<i>kār-e</i>	<i>framādēn</i>	<i>kū-m</i>			
some work	ordered(?)	that I			
<sup>DYN</sup>	<i>NWR'n</i>	<i>TNH</i>	<i>YTYBWN'n</i>		<sup>HR</sup>
<i>äg</i>	<i>adūrān</i>	<i>ēdar</i>	<i>nisinān</i>		<i>pas</i>
then	fires	here	started		then
<sup>MT</sup>	<i>YWN</i>	<i>šNT III</i>	<i>šhpwhry</i>		<i>MLK'n MLK'</i>
<i>kā</i>	<i>rōz</i>	<i>sāl 3</i>	<i>Šāhpuhr i</i>		<i>Šāhān Šāh</i>
then	day	year 3	Shapur		King of Kings
<sup>MT</sup>	<i>hlwm'dy</i>	<i>QDM</i>	<i>p'lsy</i>	<sup>P</sup>	<i>plswby</i>
<i>kā</i>	<i>Hrōmāy</i>	<i>apar</i>	<i>pārs</i>	<i>ud</i>	<i>part</i>
since	Romans	to	Pars	and	Parthia
<i>YTWNd</i>	<i>YHWNH</i>	<i>TNH</i>	<i>PWN</i>	<i>wy(?)</i>	
<i>mād</i>	<i>bad(?)</i>	<i>ēdar</i>	<i>pad</i>	?	
came	they were(?)	here	to	?	
<i>š'ty</i>	<i>PWN</i>	<i>šs'šc</i>	<i>yztān</i>	<i>hw</i>	
<i>šādī(h)</i>	<i>pad</i>	?	<i>yazdān</i>	<i>ax</i>	
happiness	with	?	God	friendship	
<sup>YK</sup>	<i>šMWtn</i>	<sup>YK</sup>	<i>hlwm'dy</i>	<i>Y'TWNd</i>	
<i>kū</i>	<i>āsnūd(?)</i>	<i>kū</i>	<i>Hrōmāy mād</i>		
who	heard(?)	who	Romans		came
<sup>HR</sup>	<sup>NH</sup>	<i>zld'n</i>	<i>PWN</i>	<i>TNHy(?)</i>	<i>YHWN</i>
<i>pas</i>	<i>oz</i>	<i>Zardān(?)</i>	<i>pad</i>	<i>edar</i>	<i>būd</i>
then	I	<i>Zardān(?)</i>	to	here	was
<sup>YK</sup>			<i>MLK'n MLK' nly</i>		
<i>kū</i>			<i>Šāhān Šāh</i>		<i>anet(?)</i>
who	?	?	King of Kings	non-Iranians	
	<i>hlwm'dyn</i>	<i>MHYTN</i>	<i>Wn</i>	<i>šlytw</i>	
	<i>Hrōmīg(?)</i>	<i>zad(?)</i>	?	?	
	Roman	defeated	?	?	
	<i>PWN</i>	<i>wb . . wmi</i>		<i>YK'WYMWNd</i>	
	<i>pad</i>			<i>ēstēd</i>	
	in	?		stood	
	D	<i>NWR'n</i>	<i>TNH</i>	<i>YTYBWN'n</i>	
	<i>ta</i>	<i>adurān</i>	<i>ēdar</i>	<i>nisinān</i>	
	to	fire	here	started	
<sup>HR</sup>				<i>hlwm'dy</i>	<sup>T</sup>
<i>pas</i>				<i>Hrōmāy</i>	<i>mād</i>
then				Romans	came
<i>PWN</i>	<i>p(?)</i>	<i>šhpwhry</i>		<i>MLK'n MLK'</i>	
<i>pad</i>	<i>ud(?)</i>	<i>Šāhpuhr</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>Šāhān Šāh</i>	
to	?	Shapur		King of Kings	
<i>māst</i>	<i>y . . n</i>	<i>p . . .</i>			
<i>māhist</i>	<i>ērān(?)</i>	<i>ud</i>			
great	Iran	and			
	<i>MLK'n</i>	<i>šhpwhry</i>			
	<i>Šāhān</i>	<i>Šāhpuhr</i>			
King of Kings		Shapur			

Free Translation

This [is] by Abnūn (?) a fire temple which was ordered to be built by the table decker(?) of the bedchamber And [this] he ordered [to be done by] me Then he kindled fire here. And it was the third anniversary of [the reign of] Shapur, King of

Kings Since the Romans(?) had invaded Pars and Parthia, [the King of Kings] happy with/by . . . [and] God's blessing [they were here] when he heard that the Romans had attacked. Then, I, Zardān, was here . . . the King of Kings defeated the

Romans who were non-Iranians . . . stood . . . in . . . to start fire here. Then . . . the Romans came to . . . Shapur, King of Kings of the great [land of] Iran and the lands beyond and . . . King of [Kings] Shapur . . .

### Notes by R. N. Frye

Some words I would read differently from Dr. Tavooosi. In the inscriptions above the figures, presumably identifying them, B (fig. iii), one might also read the words as thus: 'spyč ZY dzpty 'Aspič the fortress lord' and compare Parthian Pāpic in SKZ as well as the Nisa name 'spyk.' In C (fig. iv), I would read šhpwhry and not šhpwhr-y; D (fig. v), read 'gnwn ZY PWN špstn 'dnyk. The name also could be read 'znwn as well as Tavooosi's 'bnwn and is strange, but his title should mean he who is in charge of the regulations of the harem or inner household (*andarūn*), a title which appears in SKZ in the courts of Papak, Ardashir and Shapur.

In the main inscription the first word is undecipherable, but conceivably could also be read as ZNH: *ēn*, 'this,' or BYN 'in.' After the verb *framād* I would read the next word as *mn'* and interpret it as the archaic form of the 1st pers., personal *manā* 'by me,' thus: 'ordered me to make.' The next phrase is strange; one might read 'P KZY plm'dt 'YKm: *ūd has framayēd kū-m* and translate 'and (it was) formerly ordered that by me.' The use of 'P for *ud* 'and' is unique, but perhaps the writer forgot to add a personal pronoun rather than reading this as Iranian *apī-* as Nyberg suggested. What follows is also enigmatic and most tentatively I suggest a reading *hm ZNH nḥwp 'DYN NWR'n TNH YTYBWN'a: ham ēn nihuf-(i) adak ātaxsān ēdar nīśānān* 'even (in) this "secluded spot" then I should establish fires.' The reading *nḥwp* is fairly certain, the meaning not, but perhaps the word is related to *nihūftan* 'to conceal,' even though it is unattested as far as I know. Another possibility would be to interpret it as 'firstly,' but this is unlikely. Then we continue: 'HR 'MT MDM ŠNT III šhpwhry MLK'n MLK' 'mt ḥlwm'dy MDM p'lsy 'P plswby Y'TWNd: *pas ka abar sāl 3 Šāhpuhr Šāhān Šāh āmad Hrōmāy abar Pārs u# Pārsav āmadend* 'then when the year 3 of Shapur King of Kings happened, the Romans came over Persis and Parthia.' I can find no satisfactory explanation of the first MDM . . . 'mt other than NP *bar āmad*, and the 'P is quite clear and hardly to be read as

'č 'from.' Perhaps again the writer forgot to add a pronoun after it. Then follows: 'HR 'NH TNH PWN krpš'ty P[WN?], *pas az ēdar pad kirb šādih* 'afterwards I here in bodily satisfaction' . . . The next two words are illegible to me, but after *ysyt* I discern *ḥwp*—[non *liquet*]. Then I read: 'HR 'zd Y'TWNd [sic] 'YK ḥlwm'dy Y'TWNd 'HR 'NH yzd'n p't[w]yht 'YK[HT] [š]hpwhry M[LK'n MLK' c]ygnw]. . . : *pas azd āmadend kū Hrōmāy āyend pas az yazdān padwahēd kū [agar] Šāhpuhr Šāhān Šāh čīgōn*, 'afterwards the news arrived that the Romans were coming. Then I implored the gods that if Shapur King of Kings in such a manner—.' For Y'TWNd should one read YHMTWNd *rasēdand* 'arrived' [pl.]? From the traces on the stone I prefer to think the writer or engraver of the inscription made another mistake. For p'twyht one should expect metathesis for normal *ptwḥyt* with a lengthened first vowel. The verb forms in present or aorist are puzzling.

The next few words are illegible and then follows [ḥ]lwm'dyn MHYTN 'Pśn slytk 'BYDWN: *Hrōmāyēn zad ū-sān sritak kard*, 'he struck (defeated) the Romans and did them harm.'

Then follow many illegible words followed by YK'YMWNd 'DYN nḥyl'n 'D NWR'n TNH YTYBWN'n: *ēstend ēg nahīrān ō ātaxsān ēdarnī-śānān*, 'are done[?]', then dedications to the fires here I should put. I have no idea what the clear and unambiguous reading *nḥyl'n* means and have only made a guess which others hopefully will correct. After this comes 'HR; *pas* 'then' followed by a gap, then: *ḥlwm'dy Y'TWNT [sic] ḤWHNd 'P šhpwhry MLK'n MLK' MHYTN ḤWHNd 'Pś(n) slytk kity [ḤWHNd]: Hrōmāy āmad bēndud Šāhpuhr Šāhān Šāh zad hēnd ū-sān sritak kard [hēnd]*, 'the Romans had come and Shapur King of Kings had defeated them, and harm had been done to them.' I cannot believe that Y'TWNT means *ayēd* 'he comes,' but this must be a mistake for *āmad*. The 'P and 'Pś are noteworthy and probably show that some writers did not follow what we would call standard practice or spelling.

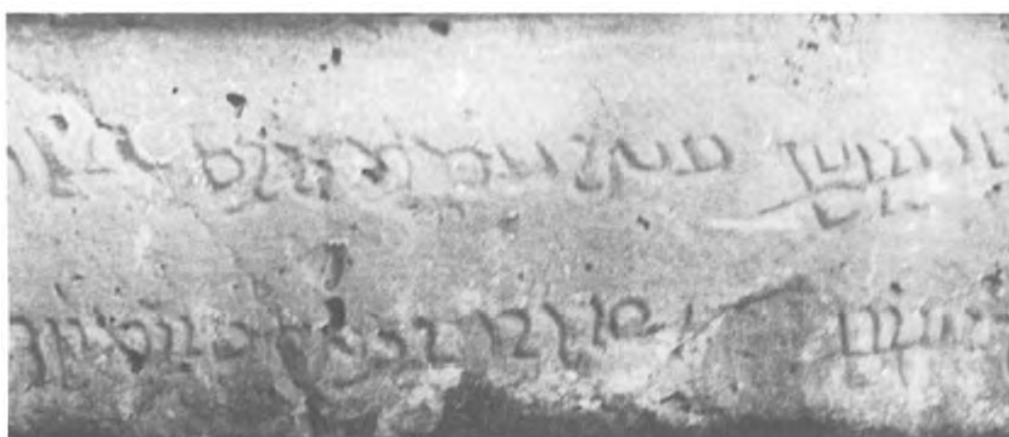
Another gap follows and then YTYBWN't 'P n'y šhpwhry 'bnwn 'mn yz[d]n': *nīśāst ud—Šāhpuhr Abnūn amān yazdān?* The ending is enigmatic and I hesitate to give a reading or translation, since I cannot connect the name Shapur and Abnūn.

There are many problems with this non-imperial, non-religious inscription, but the general meaning seems clear, that Abnūn was to establish a fire temple in this spot and the victory

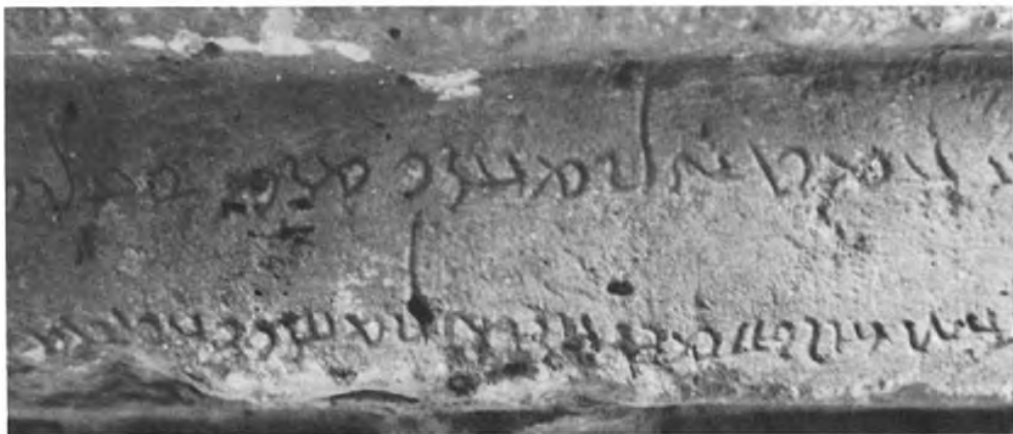


Figs. 1, 2, 3. Main inscription, Nasr-Abad capital. top section.

---



Figs 4, 5-a, 5-b. Main inscription, Nasr-Abad capital, top section.



Figs 6, 7, 8-a. Main inscription, Nasr-Abad capital, top section.

---



Figs. 8-b, 9, 10. Main inscription, Nasr-Abad capital, top section.



Figs. 11, 12. Main inscription, Nasr-Abad capital, top section.

---



Figs. 13, 14. Main inscription, Nasr-Abad capital, top section.

---

of his monarch over the Romans caused him to make dedications and perhaps put the fire temple in service. Whether this stone is a capital or a stone altar itself may be determined by excavation at the site. In any case, the material is presented here for further investigation and commentary.

It should be noted that the third year of Shapur I when the Romans attacked Iran probably is the year 243-244 of our era when the emperor Gordian moved against the Sasanians. This would put the accession year of Shapur at 240-241 and not later, as some scholars have thought.

### Notes

1. Barm, in the Shirazi dialect, means 'spring.' The word is also listed in Persian dictionaries meaning 'a low ground where rain-water is accumulated' (R. Afifi, ed., *Farhang-e-Sahāngīrī*, Meshed, 1972, vol. I, p. 861). As for Delak, no reliable etymology is available. It may be a variation of *delang*, 'an embankment of twigs, grass and earth,' in which, over time periods, *-ang* is changed to *-ag* and finally to *-ak*.

2. For further information about these reliefs see: A. N. Bchrūzi, *The Historical Buildings and Works of*

*Art of Fars Plateau*. Department of Art and Culture, Fars Province Office (Shiraz, 1975), p. 11, and L. Vanden Berghe, *Archéologie de l'Iran ancien* (Leiden, 1959).

3. This Imāmzādch or shrine is not listed anywhere among the historical places of Iran. See N. A. Meshkati, *List of Historical Buildings and Ancient Places of Iran*. The National Institute for the Protection of Ancient Buildings of Iran and the Ministry of Arts and Culture (Tehran, 1970).

4. I hereby acknowledge the valuable keen-sightedness of 'Ali Rezā Safā'i, a native of Naṣr-Ābād village, who is well read in Iranian history and culture.

5. Vanden Berghe, *Archéologie de l'Iran ancien*, 51.

6. The practice of converting a holy place of a particular period into that of a new one is well known throughout the history of man's civilization. In the post-Islamic era, for instance, the conversion of churches in Byzantium into mosques, and vice versa in Spain, provides evidence.

7. Shapur I, the Sasanian king (A. D. 241-272), son of Ardashir-2. Papakan.

8. This word may be read *Abmān* or *Abnān* which is an extremely unfamiliar name. The writer has never encountered such a word in old texts. The name as will be seen later, also appears in the main inscription of the capital and seems to be the owner of the palace.

9. SKZ = the inscription of Shapur on the Ka'bah of Zoroaster at Naqsh-e Rostam.