

**An example of the « Persian Royal Calendar »
Some chronological data in Aphrahat's Demonstrations**

Aphrahat (Pers. *Frahād*), a Jew before his conversion to Christianity, who lived within the Persian kingdom (*Ērānšahr*) in the fourth century, who expected (and possibly collaborated with) Constantine to be successful in his preparation to invade Persia, who is ironically known to us as the “Persian Sage”, has given, in his *Demonstrations*, these chronological data¹:

XIV.50: “This letter is written in the month of Šebaṭ of the year 655 of the kingship of Alexander son of Philip the Macedonian, and in the year 35 of Šābūr, the Persian king.”

XXII.25: “I have written the first ten (demonstrations) in the year 648 of the kingship of Alexander son of Philip the Macedonian, as it is written at their end. And I have written these last twelve in the year 655 of the kingdom of the Greeks and the Romans, that is the kingship of Alexander, and in the year 35 of the Persian king.”

XXIII.69: “I have written you this letter, my friend, in the month of Ab of the year 656 of the kingship of Alexander son of Philip the Macedonian, and in the year 36 of Šābūr, the Persian king, who caused persecution, and in the fifth year after the churches were uprooted ...”

The first month of the Mesopotamian calendar is Nisan. Then the Seleucid year 655 corresponds to 344/ 345 A. D., and the Seleucid year 656 to 345/ 346 A. D. The calendar used by Aphrahat was a lunisolar calendar; we may even suspect that it was the Hebrew calendar. In Demonstration XII.1 he says: “And the Israelites did thus (as prescribed). They ate the Passover on the 14th of the first month, that is Nisan, the month of flowers, the first month, the month of the year.” Notice that some other churches in Persian and Roman lands believed that the Christian Passover was to be celebrated on the Sunday following the 14th of Nisan. Anyway the Seleucid year began for Aphrahat on the 1st of Nisan.

¹ . J. Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes*, (Patrologia Syriaca, Paris, 1, 1894 ; 2, 1907).

M.-J. Pierre, *Aphraat le sage persan : Les exposés*, I (Exposés I-X), Paris, 1988 ; II (Exposés XI-XXIII), 1989.

The dates mentioned in the text according to Julian and Hebrew calendars are:

14 Nisan 4104 (S.E. 655): 13 April 344 A.D., Friday

1 Šebaṭ 4105 (S.E. 655): 21 January 345, Monday

14 Nisan 4105 (S.E. 656): 3 April 345, Wednesday

1 Ab 4105 (S.E. 656): 17 July 345, Wednesday

If Nisan is the first month of the lunisolar calendar used by Aphrahat, we should determine to which month of the Persian calendar it corresponds. R.W. Burgess has addressed the issue of the Persian equivalents of the above lunisolar months. He correctly states that: “It is the Jewish calendar ... that provides the best parallel for the evidence we have for the Christian calendar in Persia at this time, by which I mean that many of the Christians of Persia, including Aphrahat, appear to have used a lunisolar calendar that most often resembles the reconstructed Jewish calendar.”² He is aware that for Aphrahat Nisan (April) was the first month of the year. Moreover, he correctly argues that Šebaṭ and Ab would be in the same Persian (“moving”) year, since Persian years ran from 1 September, while Aphrahat speaks of Šebaṭ and Ab in two successive Persian years. How does Burgess resolve this problem?

The problem itself shows that we are dealing with another Persian calendar in which the Persian months corresponding to the month of Šebaṭ of S.E. 655 and the month of Ab of S.E. 656 would be in different Persian years. But Burgess believes that “the key to the Persian calendar has been explicated by de Blois.” (12) And what does de Blois say? He claims that Bērōnī’s account of the history of the Persian calendar “is a legend.”³ In another word, the account of the intercalation of one month every 120 years (or, 116 years) is to be regarded as legend, and the “moving” year of 365 days was the only “Persian” year used in the Sasanian period. For this reason, Burgess reckons the Seleucid years six months earlier from 1 Tišrīn. But the lunisolar calendar with the month Tišrī(n) as the first month of the year belonged to the western part of the Seleucid empire, and it was not used in the Persian kingdom. Moreover, as we have seen, Aphrahat clearly states that Nisan was the first month of the year. In the beginning of his article, Burgess wisely says that: “I can think of no case in Late Roman history where a contemporary local witness with no evident bias has been ignored or emended away in favour of

² . R.W. Burgess (& R. Mercier), “The dates of the martyrdom of Simeon bar Sabba’e and the ‘Great Massacre’”, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 117 (1999), 9-66, 12.

³ . F. de Blois, « The Persian Calendar », *Iran*, 34, 1996, 39.

later martyr acts, especially ones that are so obviously inconsistent and contradictory in their narratives and chronology.” (11)
 Nevertheless, he himself abandons Aphrahat’s testimony in favour of de Blois’ claim. Indeed de Blois’ paper marks the current decline of Western studies of the history of calendars.

The Persian calendars appear in two varieties: religious and royal. The religious year is a “vague” year of 365 days, divided into 12 months of 30 days each plus 5 additional days. The royal calendar intercalates a month at regular intervals in a lunar calendar (lunisolar calendar) or in the year of 365 days (solar calendar). In the Sasanian period this later form was used for civil affairs, and it will be judicious to suppose that the Persian calendar used in the above-mentioned dates was in fact “royal” (or, civil) and not “religious” (Mazdayasnian). In the following table we show the religious-royal equivalents at the time of Šābūr son of Ohrmazd, after 242 A. M.

Royal	Religious
Day	Mihr
Vahman	Ābān
Spendārmed	Ādur
Fravardīn	Day
Urdvahišt	Vahman
Hurdād	Spendarmed
Tīr	Panzag
6 Tīr	Fravardīn
6 Amurdad	Urdvahišt
Panzag	
Šahrever	Hurdad
Mihr	Tīr
Ābān	Amurdad
Ādur	Šahrever

According to the ^{royal}Persian and Mesopotamian calendars, the dates in Aphrahat’s book are:

- 14 Nisan, S.E. 655: 16 Vahman, Šābuhr 34
- 1 Šebaṭ, S.E. 655: 4 Ābān, Šābuhr 35
- 14 Nisan, S.E. 656: 6 Vahman, Šābuhr 35
- 1 Ab, S.E. 656: 15 Urdvahišt, Šābuhr 36

As we see, if the Seleucid year is reckoned from 1 Nisan, Šebaṭ and Ab would be both in different Seleucid and ^{royal}Persian years, since that ^{royal}Persian year ran from 3 June. Then, there is no reason to distort Aphrahat’s words.

As the thirty-fifth year of Šābuhr began on 1 Fravardīn S.E. 655 (religious: 1 September 344 A.D.; royal: 3 June 344), then his regnal year began with 1 Fravardīn, S.E. 621 (religious: 10 September 310; royal: 12 June 310).

Raham Asha

"اسرائیلزادگان ایدون کردند. و فصیح خوردند به چهاردهم روزِ نخست ماه، ای نیشان، ماهِ گلها، ماهِ نخست، ماهِ سال."

افرهات چه سالنامهٔ پارسی به دست داشت؟

اگر آن سالِ دینی به گیریم، آن گاه شباط ۶۵۵ و اب ۶۵۶ هر دو به یک سالِ دینی افتند کی از ۱ سپتمبر ۳۴۴ سالِ خدای بود تا ۱ سپتمبر ۳۴۵. بی، هم چون افرهات گوید، آن دو ماه به دو سالِ پارسی افتند: سال ۳۵ و سال ۳۶ شابور. پس این جای سخن از سالِ شاهی است، ای سالِ نهنزه مند ("کبیسه دار"). به زمانِ شابورِ هرمزدان این سال آغازد از سوم روزِ ماهِ یونِ سال ۳۴۴ تا سومِ یونِ ۳۴۵. از سخنِ افرهات بُنِ خداییِ شابور نیز شاید دانستن: شابور به ۶۲۱ "سلوکی" ابر تخت نشست. نوروزِ دینیِ آن سال به ۱۰ سپتمبر ۳۱۰ افتد، و نوروزِ شاهی به ۱۲ یون ۳۱۰.